

T H E
W O R K S

Of the Most Reverend

Dr. John Tillotson,

L A T E

Lord Archbishop of *Canterbury*:

C O N T A I N I N G

Two Hundred Sermons and Discourses,

O n S E V E R A L O C C A S I O N S.

To which are Annexed,

P R A Y E R S Composed by him for his own Use;
A D I S C O U R S E to his Servants before the S A C R A M E N T;
And a F O R M of P R A Y E R Composed by him, for
the Use of King *William*:

Being A L L that were Printed after his G R A C E's Decease;
now collected into T W O V O L U M E S.

Together with T A B L E S *to the Whole:*

One, of the Texts Preached upon;

Another, of the Places of Scripture, occasionally Explain'd;

A Third, An Alphabetical Table of Matter.

Published from the Originals

By R A L P H B A R K E R, D. D. Chaplain to his Grace.

V O L U M E *the* F I R S T.

The T H I R D E D I T I O N.

L O N D O N:

Printed for Benjamin Tooke, John Pemberton, and Edward Valentine
in Fleetstreet; Jacob Tonson in the Strand, and James Round
in Exchange-Alley. MDCCXXII.

IMPRIMATUR.

Febr. 16.
1697

Tho. Cantuar.

T O

HIS SACRED MAJESTY

King WILLIAM,

T H E S E

S E R M O N S

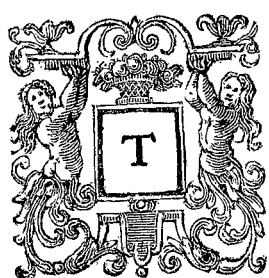
A R E

Most humbly Dedicated,

By the Author's Relict,

ELIZ. TILLOTSON.

THE
PUBLISHER
TO THE
READER.



THE AUTHOR of these Sermons was so well known, particularly for his most excellent and useful discourses from the Pulpit, that I shall not attempt, by any thing I can say, to recommend them to the publick. I know very well, they have already that credit in the world, which will render any apology needless; especially when, by this publication of them, they shall speak for themselves.

I think it requisite, only to assure the reader, that they are what they pretend to be, the genuine works of that great man.

Whilst I had the happiness of conversing with him, he was pleas'd (at my request) to instruct me in the Character in which he wrote all his Sermons: and some of these now published, having been transcribed by me some years since, were found amongst his papers, corrected with his own hand.

By what he had been pleas'd to say, that I was master of his character, and by the few Errata he observ'd in my first performance, I was encouraged to set about this work; in which I can solemnly profess, that I have observed a religious care and strictness, neither to omit nor add any thing, but an of, a the, or the like, when the Sense plainly required it; and of that too I have given notice, by affixing this mark (") upon the word which I did not find in the original; so that the Reader is left to judge of the fitness of such additions; which, after all, are so very few and inconsiderable, as scarcely to deserve this notice; only that he might be satisfied (in

P R E F A C E.

(in case the Printer do his part) that he hath here, what he expects, a perfect transcript of these Sermons; and in them a true and lively strain of christian piety and eloquence, so fitted to all capacities, that I cannot but hope, all that shall read them will be the better for them, even those not excepted (if there be any such) who may have entertain'd any unreasonable prejudices against them, or their most reverend author.

I have always thought, and often said it, that if any were leaven'd with prejudice against him, they were, to be sure, such as did not know him; and the farther I go in his writings, the more I am assured that it must be so. But because the Sermons themselves, to which I refer, are not yet all of them published, I must leave this to the judgment of the impartial reader, when the whole shall be finish'd, which is design'd with all convenient speed.

Lambeth,
April 2. 1695.

Ra. Barker.

The BOOKSELLERS to the READER.

THE foregoing preface was prefix'd by Dr. Barker to the first of the fourteen volumes in octavo; and the reception they have all met with in the world, shews he was very just in his character. The whole two hundred Sermons and Discourses are included in these two volumes in folio; And all the Indexes have been carefully examin'd and fitted to the pages, which were defective in some of the octavo volumes, especially the eleventh. These, with fifty four Sermons and Discourses, and the rule of faith, in answer to Mr. Serjeant's sure footing, published in his Grace's life-time, and since eight times reprinted in folio, make three volumes; and compleat his works.

T H E

THE
T E X T S
 OF EACH
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** We have plac'd the whole in the same order as Dr. Barker published them.



S E R M O N I.

Of SINCERITY towards GOD and MAN.

*Preach'd
at King-
ston, July
29, 1694.
The last
his Grace
preach'd.*

J O H N i. 47.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.



HO this *Nathanael* was, upon whom our Saviour bestows this extraordinary character, doth not certainly appear, his Name being but once more mention'd in the whole history of the Gospel: For certain, he was a good man, who deserv'd this extraordinary commendation; and none but our Saviour, who knew what was in man, and needed not that any should tell him, could have given it, especially of one whom he had ne-

ver seen before that time; for when *Jesus saw him coming to him, he saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed.*

The whole nation of the *Jews* were *Israelites* by natural descent, being the seed of *Jacob* or *Israel*; but in a special and more excellent sense, none are esteem'd the true posterity of *Israel*, but those who resembled this father of their nation in true piety and goodness; for (as the Apostle reasons) *they are not all Israel, who are of Israel*; they only are *Israelites* indeed, who resemble good old *Jacob*, in the sincerity of his piety, and the simplicity of his temper and disposition; for our Saviour seems here to allude to that character which is given of *Jacob*, (Gen. 25. 27.) That *he was a plain man*, or, as the Hebrew word signifies, *a perfect and sincere man*, in opposition to his brother *Esau*, who is said to be *cunning*; so that to be an *Israelite indeed*, is to be a downright honest man, without fraud and guile, without any arts of hypocrisy and deceit.

In speaking of this virtue of sincerity, which is the highest character and commendation of a good man, I shall consider it, as it respects God and man. As it respects God, so it imports the truth and sincerity of our piety and devotion towards him. As it regards men, so it signifies a simplicity of mind and manners, in our carriage and conversation, one towards another: Both these are included, and very probably were intended, in the character which our Saviour here gives *Nathanael*.

I. I shall consider this grace, or virtue of sincerity, as it respects God, and so it imports the truth and sincerity of our piety towards him, that we heartily believe, and fear, and honour him, and that the outward expressions of our piety and obedience to him are the genuine issue of our inward apprehensions of him, and affections towards him; and this, no doubt, our Saviour intended, in the first place, in the character of this good man, that he was a man of a real and substantial and unaffected piety, and in truth, what he appear'd to be; that he did sincerely love God and his truth, and was ready to embrace it, whenever it was fairly proposed to him, as did plainly appear in his carriage towards our Saviour; for when *Philip* invited him to *come and see him*, he did not conceal the prejudice and objection he had against him, grounded upon a common, but

uncharitable proverb, that *out of Nazareth ariseth no Prophet*; but having an honest and sincere mind, he was not so carried away by a popular prejudice, as not to have patience to be better inform'd, and therefore was easily persuaded to *go and see* our Saviour, and to discourse with him himself, and being satisfied that he was the *Messias*, he presently owns him for such, calling him *the Son of God, and the King of Israel*. And because sincerity is the very heart and substance of Religion, it concerns us not only to endeavour after this temper and disposition, but to enquire into the nature and properties of it, that we may know when we have it, and may have the comfort of it. I shall mention *five* or *six* properties of a sincere piety, by which men may sufficiently know the integrity of their hearts towards God.

1. Our piety is then sincere, when the chief reasons and predominant motives of it are religious; and I call *that* a religious or rational motive, which regards God and another world, in opposition to men, and to our present temporal advantages; when the principal and swaying motives of our piety, are a sense of God's authority over us, and of our duty and obligation to him; a fear of his displeasure and threatnings, and the hopes of the glorious reward which he hath promised to obedience; these motives are properly religious, because they respect God, and are the arguments to obedience, which he himself offers to us, to persuade us to our duty; and *that* is a sincere piety, which is wrought in us by these considerations, how unequally soever mixed; for even in the most of men, fear does many times prevail more than love, and, in case of great temptation, may preserve men from sin, when perhaps no other consideration will do it. On the contrary, that is an unsincere piety, to which we are moved merely by the regard of men, and the consideration of some temporal advantages. And when these have the chief influence upon us, it is easy for any man to discern in himself; for he that will carefully observe himself, can hardly be ignorant of the true spring and motive of his own actions: But there is one sign whereby a man may certainly know that his heart is not right towards God, and that is, if when these motives are absent, our piety and zeal for the true Religion doth either cease, or is sensibly cooled and abated; as if impiety, or popery, or any thing else that is bad, begin to be in fashion, and to have the countenance of great examples; if those whom we fear, and upon whom we depend, do discover any inclination that way; if the garb of Religion cease to be for our interest, or, in the revolution of things, happen to be contrary to it: If in any of these cases, we let fall the profession of our Religion, or neglect the practice of it, this is a plain and undeniable demonstration of the insincerity of our former piety.

2. A sincere piety must be rooted in the heart, and be a living principle within us; for, as the Apostle reasons in another case, *he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he who is one inwardly, and in the heart*; and without this, all outward acts of piety and devotion are hypocrisy, a picture of Religion, and *a form of godliness*, without the life and *power* of it.

3. A third evidence of a sincere piety is, when men are religious in private and in secret, as well as in publick and in the open view of men. He is truly devout, who is so in his family, and in his closet, where he hath no witnesses, but God, and his own soul, as well as in the church. He is a downright honest man, who will make good his word, and perform his promise, when no proof can be made of it, and no law compel him to it, as readily as if there had been an hundred witnesses of it. He is sincerely just, who will not detain from another his right, though he be ignorant of it; nor wrong any man, though he could do it with all the secrecy and safety in the world; who will not impose upon others ignorance or unskilfulness, tho' never so much to his own benefit and advantage. He is truly charitable, who would not only as soon, but rather sooner give his alms in secret, than in the sight of men: And he is truly grateful, who when there is occasion and opportunity, will acknowledge a kindness and requite
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a benefit to the relations of his deceased friend, though he be sure that all memory of the obligation dyed with him, and that none are conscious of it, but God and his own conscience. And indeed there is scarce any act of piety and virtue, the sincerity of which may not by this evidence be known by us: As on the contrary a man may for certain conclude himself a hypocrite, if he be not the same in the presence of God, and his own conscience, that he is in the sight of men.

4. Another evidence of a sincere piety is a constant tenour of goodness in the general course of our lives. I do not now speak of the first beginnings of piety; in new converts, which are many times very imperfect, and such as afford little or no evidence of a man's sincerity; but in those who have made any considerable progress in goodness; the habits of any known sin, and the wilful and deliberate neglect of our duties, and even the single acts of more heinous crimes; will bring in question our sincerity, and are by no means to be shelter'd under the name of infirmity; for these the grace of God, if we be not wanting to our selves, will enable us to subdue; and he is not sincerely good, who doth not seriously endeavour to be as good as he can, and does not make use of that grace which God is ready to afford to all the purposes, tho' not of a perfect, yet of a sincere obedience to the laws of God.

5. Another evidence of a sincere piety is, that our obedience to God be uniform and universal, equally respecting all the laws of God, and every part of our duty; that it do not content it self with an especial regard to some precepts of the law though never so considerable, and allow it self in the breach, or neglect of the rest; no nor with observing the duties of one table of the law, if it overlook the other; no nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. *James* puts this case, and determines, that *he that keeps the whole law, saving that he offends in one point, is guilty of all*, that is, is not sincere in his obedience to the rest. And therefore we must take great heed that we do not set the commandments of God at odds; and dash the two tables of the law against one another, lest, at St. *James* says, we *break the whole law*: And yet I fear this is too common a fault, even amongst those who make a great profession of piety, that they are not sufficiently sensible of the obligation and necessity of the duties of the second table, and of the excellency of those graces and virtues, which respect our carriage and conversation with one another. Men do not seem to consider, that God did not give laws to us, for his own sake, but ours; and therefore that he did not only design that we should honour him, but that we should be happy in one another; for which reason he joyns with our humble and dutiful deportment towards himself, the offices of justice and charity towards others, Mich. 6. 8. *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* And 1 John 4. 21. *this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also.* And yet it is too visible that many, who make a great profession of piety towards God, are very defective in moral duties; very unpeaceable, and turbulent in their spirits, very peevish and passionate, very conceited and censorious, as if their profession of godliness did exempt them from the care and practice of christian virtues; But we must not so fix our eye upon heaven, as to forget that we walk upon the earth, and to neglect the ordering of our steps and conversation among men, lest while we are gazing upon the stars, we fall into the ditch of gross and foul immorality.

It is very possible, that men may be devout and zealous in religion, very nice and scrupulous about the worship and service of God; and yet because of their palpable defect in points of justice and honesty, of meekness and humility, of peace and charity, may be gross and odious hypocrites. For men must not think for some acts, either of outward or inward piety, to compound with God for the neglect of mercy and judgment, or to demand it as a right from
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men to be excused from the great duties and virtues of humane conversation; or pretend to be above them, because they relate chiefly to this world, and to the temporal happiness of men; as if it were the privilege of great devotion, to give a license to men to be peevish and froward, sour and morose, supercilious and censorious in their behaviour towards others. Men must have a great care, that they be not intent upon the outward parts of religion, to the prejudice of inward and real goodness, and that they do not so use the means of religion, as to neglect and lose the main end of it; that they do not place all religion in fasting and outward mortification: For though these things be very useful and necessary in their place, if they be discreetly managed, and made subservient to the great ends of religion; yet it is often seen that men have so unequal a respect to the several parts of their duty, that fasting and corporal severity, those meager and lean duties of piety, in comparison, do like *Pharaoh's lean kine*, devour and eat up almost all the goodly and well favoured, the great and substantial duties of the christian life; and therefore men must take great heed, lest whilst they are so intent upon mortifying themselves, they do not mortify virtue and good nature, humility and meekness and charity, things highly valuable in themselves, and amiable in the eyes of men, and in the sight of God of great price.

For the neglect of the moral duties of the second table is not only a mighty scandal to religion, but of pernicious consequence many other ways. A fierce and ill governed, an ignorant and injudicious zeal for the honour of God, and something or other belonging necessarily, as they think, to his true worship and service, hath made many men do many unreasonable, immoral and impious things, of which history will furnish us with innumerable instances, in the practice of the *Jesuits*, and other zealots of the church of *Rome*; and there are not wanting too many examples of this kind amongst our selves: For men that are not sober, and considerate in their religion, but give themselves up to the conduct of blind prejudice, and furious zeal, do easily persuade themselves that any thing is lawful, which they strongly fancy to tend to the honour of God, and to the advancement of the cause of religion. Hence some have proceeded to that height of absurdity, in their zeal for their religion and church, as to think it not only lawful but highly commendable and meritorious, to equivocate upon oaths, and break faith with hereticks, and to destroy all those that differ from them; as if it were piety in some cases to lie for the truth, and to kill men for God's sake.

So that if we would approve the integrity of our hearts to God, and evidence to our selves the sincerity of our obedience, we ought impartially to regard all the laws of God, and every part of our duty: And if we do not, our heart is not upright with God. 'Tis observable that sincerity in scripture is often called by the name of integrity, and perfection, because it is integrated and made up of all the parts of our duty.

6. The last evidence I shall mention of the sincerity of our religion is, if it hold out against persecution, and endure the fiery trial. This is the utmost proof of our integrity, when we are called to bear the cross, to be willing then to expose all our worldly interest, and even life it self, for the cause of God and religion. This is a trial which God doth not always call his faithful servants to; but they are always to be prepared for it, in the purpose and resolution of their minds. This our Saviour makes the great mark of a true disciple, if any man (saith he) will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. This is a certain sign, that men have received the word into good ground, and are well rooted in their religion when they are not shaken by these fierce assaults; for many (as our Saviour tells us) bear the word, and with joy receive it; but having not root in themselves, they endure but for a while, and when persecution, or tribulation ariseth, because of the word, presently they are offended; nay some, when they see persecution coming at a distance, wheel off
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and bethink themselves of making their retreat in time, and of *agreeing with their adversary, whilst he is yet in the way.*

So that constancy to our religion in case of danger, and suffering for it, is the best proof of our sincerity. This is *the fiery tryal*, as the scripture calls it, which will try what materials we are made of, and whether we love God and his Truth in sincerity.

And thus I have considered sincerity as it respects God, and imports true piety and religion towards him; and I proceed to the *second* consideration,

II. Of sincerity as it regards men; and so it signifies a simplicity of mind and manners in our conversation, and carriage one towards another; singleness of heart, discovering it self in a constant plainness and honest openness of behaviour, free from all insidious devices, and little tricks, and fetches of craft and cunning; from all false appearances and deceitful disguises of our selves in word or action; or yet more plainly, it is to speak as we think, and do what we pretend and profess, to perform and make good what we promise, and, in a word, really to be, what we would seem and appear to be.

Not that we are obliged to tell every man all our mind; but we are never to declare any thing contrary to it: We may be silent, and conceal as much of our selves, as prudence, or any other good reason requires; but we must not put on a disguise, and make a false appearance and empty shew of what we are not, either by word or action. Contrary to this virtue is (I fear) most of that compliment, which is current in conversation, and which for the most part is nothing but words, to fill up the gaps, and supply the emptiness of discourse; and a pretence to that kindness and esteem for persons, which either in truth we have not, or not to that degree which our expressions seem to import; which if done with design, is that which we call flattery, a very odious sort of insincerity, and so much the worse, because it abuseth men into a vain and foolish opinion of themselves, and an ill-grounded confidence of the kindness and good-will of others towards them; and so much the more dangerous, because it hath a party within us, which is ready to let it in; it plays upon our self-love, which greedily catcheth at any thing that tends to magnifie and advance us; for God knows, we are all too apt to think and make the best of our bad selves, so that very few tempers have wisdom and firmness enough to be proof against flattery; it requires great consideration and a resolute modesty and humility, to resist the insinuations of this serpent; yea, a little rudeness and moroseness of nature, a prudent distrust and infidelity in mankind, to make a man in good earnest to reject and despise it.

Now besides, that all hypocrisie and insincerity is mean in it self, having falshood at the bottom; it is also often made use of, to the prejudice of others, in their rights and interests. For not only dissimulation is contrary to sincerity, because it consists in a vain shew of what we are not, in a false muster of our virtues and good qualities, in a deceitful representation and undue character of our lives: But there are likewise other qualities and actions more inconsistent with integrity, which are of a more injurious and mischievous consequence to our nature, as falshood, and fraud, and perfidiousness, and infinite little crafts and arts of deceit, which men practise upon one another in their ordinary conversation and intercourse. The former is great vanity: But this is gross iniquity.

And yet these qualities dexterously managed, so as not to lie too plain and open to discovery, are look'd upon by many, as signs of great depth and shrewdness, admirable instruments of business, and necessary means for the compassing our own ends and designs; and though in those that have suffered by them, and felt the mischief of them, they are always accounted dishonest, yet among the generality of lookers on, they pass for great policy; as if the very skill of governing and managing human affairs, did consist in these little tricks and devices: But he that looks more narrowly into them, and will but have the patience to observe the end of them, will find them to be great follies, and that

it is only for want of true wisdom and understanding, that men *turn aside to tricks*, and *make dissimulation and lies their refuge*. It is Solomon's observation, that *he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely; but the folly of fools is deceit*. The folly of fools, that is, the most egregious piece of folly that any man can be guilty of, is to play the knave: The vulgar translation renders this clause a little otherwise, but yet towards the same sense, *sed stultus divertit ad dolos, but the fool turns aside to tricks*; to make use of these, is a sign the man wants understanding to see the plain and direct way to his end. I will not deny but these little arts may serve a present turn, and perhaps successfully enough; but true wisdom goes deep, and reacheth a great way farther, looking to the end of things, and regarding the future as well as the present, and, by judging upon the whole matter and sum of affairs, doth clearly discern that craft and cunning are only useful for the present occasion; whereas integrity is of a lasting use, and will be serviceable to us upon all occasions, and in the whole course of our lives; and that dissimulation and deceit, tho' they may do some present execution in business, yet they recoil upon a man terribly afterwards, so as to make him stagger, and by degrees to weaken, and at last to destroy his reputation, which is a much more useful and substantial and lasting instrument of prosperity and success in humane affairs, than any tricks and devices whatsoever. Thus have I considered this great virtue of sincerity, both as it regards God, and the mutual conversation and intercourse of men one with another.

And now having explain'd the nature of sincerity to God and man, by declaring the properties of it, and in what instances we ought chiefly to practise it, and what things are contrary to it; that which remains, is to persuade men to endeavour after this excellent quality, and to practise it in all the words and actions of their lives.

Let us then, in the first place, be sincere in our religion, and serve God in truth and uprightness of heart, out of conscience of our duty and obligations to him, and not with sinister respects to our private interest or passion, to the publick approbation or censure of men. Let us never make use of religion to serve any base and unworthy ends, cloaking our designs of covetousness, or ambition, or revenge, with pretences of conscience and zeal for God; and let us endeavour after the reality of religion, always remembering that a sincere piety doth not consist in shew, but substance, not in appearance, but in effect; that the spirit of true religion is still and calm, charitable and peaceable, making as little shew and stir as is possible; that a truly and sincerely good man does not affect vain ostentation, and an unseasonable discovery of his good qualities, but endeavours rather really to be, than to seem religious, and, of the two, rather seeks to conceal his piety, than to set it out with pomp; gives his alms privately; prays to God in secret, and makes no appearance of religion, but in such fruits and effects as cannot be hid, in the quiet and silent virtues of humility, and meekness, and patience, of peace and charity, in governing his passions, and taking heed not to offend with his tongue, by slander and calumny, by envious detraction or rash censure, or by any word or action that may be to the hurt and prejudice of his neighbour: But, on the contrary, it is a very ill sign, if a man affect to make a great noise and bustle about religion; if he blow a trumpet before his good works, and by extraordinary shews of devotion summon the eyes of men to behold him, and do, as it were, call aloud to them to take notice of his piety, *and to come and see his zeal for the Lord of Hosts*. It is not impossible but such a man, with all his vanity and ostentation, may have some real goodness in him; but he is *as the hypocrites are*, and does as like one as is possible; and by the mighty shew that he makes, to wise and considerate men, greatly brings in question the sincerity of his religion.

And with the sincerity of our piety towards God, let us joyn the simplicity and integrity of manners in our conversation with Men. Let us strictly charge our selves to use truth and plainness in all our words and doings; let our tongue be ever the true interpreter of our mind, and our expressions the lively image of our thoughts and affections, and our outward actions exactly agreeable to our inward purposes and intentions.

Amongst too many other instances of the great corruption and degeneracy of the age wherein we live, the great and general want of sincerity in conversation is none of the least. The world is grown so full of dissimulation and complement, that men's words are hardly any signification of their thoughts; and if any man measure his words by his heart, and speak as he thinks, and do not express more kindness to every man, than men usually have for any man, he can hardly escape the censure of rudeness and want of breeding. The old *English* plainness and sincerity, that generous integrity of nature and honesty of disposition, which always argues true greatness of mind, and is usually accompanied with undaunted courage and resolution, is in a great measure lost among us; there hath been a long endeavour to transform us into foreign manners and fashions, and to bring us to a servile imitation of none of the best of our neighbours, in some of the worst of their qualities. The dialect of conversation is now-a-days so swell'd with vanity and complement, and so surfeited (as I may say) with expressions of kindness and respect, that if a man that lived an age or two ago, should return into the world again, he would really want a dictionary to help him to understand his own language, and to know the true intrinsic value of the phrase in fashion, and would hardly, at first, believe at what a low rate the highest strains and expressions of kindness imaginable do commonly pass in current payment; and when he should come to understand it, it would be a great while before he could bring himself, with a good countenance and a good conscience, to converse with men upon equal terms, and in their own way.

And, in truth, it is hard to say, whether it should more provoke our contempt or our pity, to hear what solemn expressions of respect and kindness will pass between men, almost upon no occasion; how great honour and esteem they will declare for one whom perhaps they never heard of or saw before, and how entirely they are all on the sudden devoted to his service and interest, for no reason; how infinitely and eternally obliged to him, for no benefit; and how extremely they will be concern'd for him, yea, and afflicted too, for no cause. I know it is said, in justification of this hollow kind of conversation, that there is no harm, no real deceit in complement, but the matter is well enough, so long as we understand one another, *Et verba valeant ut nummi*, words are like money, and when the current value of them is generally understood, no man is cheated by them. This is something, if such words were any thing; but being brought into the account, they are mere cyphers. However, it is still a just matter of complaint, that sincerity and plainness are out of fashion, and that our language is running into a lie, that men have almost quite perverted the use of speech, and made words to signify nothing; that the greatest part of the conversation of mankind, and of their intercourse with one another, is little else but driving a trade of dissimulation; insomuch that it would make a man heartily sick and weary of the world, to see the little sincerity that is in use and practice among men, and tempt him to break out into that melancholy complaint and wish of the Prophet, Jer. 9. *O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of way-faring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them: for they are all adulterers, and an assembly of treacherous men; and they bend their tongue like their bow for lies, but have no courage for the truth upon earth. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders. Thine habitation is in the midst of deceit; one speak-*
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eth peaceably to his neighbour, but in his heart he lieth in wait. Shall not I visit for these things, saith the Lord? and shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this?

Such were the manners of the people of *Israel* at that time, which were both the forerunner and the cause of those terrible calamities which befel them afterwards; and this character agrees but too well to the present age, which is so wretchedly void of truth and sincerity; for which reason there is the greater need to recommend this virtue to us, which seems to be fled from us, that *truth and righteousness may return, and glory may dwell in our land, and God may shew his mercy upon us, and grant us his salvation, and righteousness and peace may kiss each other.* To this end give me leave to offer these following considerations.

First, That sincerity is the highest commendation, and the very best character, that can be given of any man; it is the solid foundation of all virtue, the heart and soul of all piety and goodness; it is in Scripture called *perfection*, and frequently joyned with it; and throughout the Bible, there is the greatest stress and weight laid upon it; it is spoken of as the sum and comprehension of all Religion. *Only fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and truth,* says *Joshua* to the people of *Israel*, *Jos. 24. 14.* God takes great pleasure in it; so *David* assures us, *1 Chron. 29. 17.* *I know, my God, that thou tryest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness:* And again, *Thou lovest truth in the inward parts.*

To this disposition of mind the promises of divine favour and blessing are particularly made, *Psal. 15. 1, 2.* *Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? he that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth from his heart.* *Psal. 32. 2.* *Blessed is the man, unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

And 'tis observable that this character of our Saviour here given of *Nathanael*, is the only full and perfect commendation that we read was ever given by him of any particular person. He commends some particular acts of piety and virtue in others, as *St. Peter's* confession of him, the faith of the *Centurion*, and of the woman that was healed by touching the hem of his garment, the charity of the woman that cast her two mites into the treasury, and the bounty of that other devout woman who poured upon him a box of precious ointment: But here he gives the particular character of a good man, when he says of *Nathanael*, that he was an *Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile.* And the Apostle mentions this quality, as the chief ingredient into the character of the best man that ever was, our blessed Saviour, *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*

Secondly, The rarity of this virtue is a farther commendation of it. A sincerely pious and good man, without any guile or disguise, is not a sight to be seen every day. Our Saviour in the text speaks of it, as a thing very extraordinary and of special remark and observation, and breaks out into some kind of wonder upon the occasion, as if to see a man of perfect integrity and simplicity were an occurrence very rare and unusual, and such as calls for our more special attention and regard, *Behold (saith he) an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.*

Thirdly, The want of sincerity will quite spoil the virtue and acceptance of all our piety and obedience, and certainly deprive us of the reward of it. All that we do in the service of God, all our external obedience to his laws, if not animated by sincerity, is like a sacrifice without a heart, which is an abomination to the Lord.

Fourthly, Hypocrisy and insincerity is a very vain and foolish thing; it is designed to cheat others, but is in truth a deceiving of our selves. No man would flatter or dissemble, did he believe he were seen and discovered; an open knave is a great fool, who destroys at once both his design and his reputation; And

And this is the case of every hypocrite; all the disagreement which is between his tongue and his thoughts, his actions and his heart, is open to that eye, from which nothing can be hid; *for the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he seeth all his goings; there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves.*

Fifthly, Truth and reality have all the advantages of appearance, and many more. If the shew of any thing be good for any thing, I am sure sincerity is better; for why does any man dissemble, or seem to be that which he is not, but because he thinks it good to have such a quality as he pretends to? for to counterfeit and dissemble, is to put on the appearance of some real excellency. Now the best way in the world for a man to seem to be anything, is really to be what he would seem to be. Besides, that it is many times as troublesome to make good the pretence of a good quality, as to have it; and if a man have it not, it is ten to one, but he is discovered to want it, and then all his pains and labour to seem to have it is lost. There is something unnatural in painting, which a skilful eye will easily discern from native beauty and complexion.

It is hard to personate and act a part long; for where truth is not at the bottom, nature will always be endeavouring to return, and will peep out and betray herself one time or other. Therefore if any man think it convenient to seem good, let him be so indeed, and then his goodness will appear to every body's satisfaction; for truth is convincing, and carries its own light and evidence along with it, and will not only commend us to every man's conscience, but which is much more, to God, who searcheth and seeth our hearts; so that upon all accounts sincerity is true wisdom. Particularly as to the affairs of this world, integrity hath many advantages over all the fine and artificial ways of dissimulation and deceit; it is much the plainer and easier, much the safer and more secure way of dealing in the world; it hath less of trouble and difficulty, of entanglement and perplexity, of danger and hazard in it; it is the shortest and nearest way to our end, carrying us thither in a straight line, and will hold out and last longest. The arts of deceit and cunning do continually grow weaker, and less effectual and serviceable to them that use them; whereas integrity gains strength by use, and the more and longer any man practiseth it, the greater service it does him, by confirming his reputation, and encouraging those with whom he hath to do, to repose the greater trust and confidence in him, which is an unspeakable advantage in the business and affairs of life.

But a dissembler must always be upon his guard, and watch himself carefully, that he do not contradict his own pretense; for he acts an unnatural part, and therefore must put a continual force and restraint upon himself. Truth always lies uppermost, and if a man do not carefully attend, he will be apt to bolt it out; whereas he that acts sincerely hath the easiest task in the world; because he follows nature, and so is put to no trouble and care about his words and actions; he needs not invent any pretenses before-hand, nor make excuses afterwards, for any thing he hath said or done.

But insincerity is very troublesome to manage; a man hath so many things to attend to, so many ends to bring together, as make his life a very perplexed and intricate thing. *Oportet mendacem esse memorem, A lyar had need of a good memory*, lest he contradict at one time what he said at another: but truth is always consistent with it self, and needs nothing to help it out; it is always near at hand, and sits upon our lips, and is ready to drop out before we are aware; whereas a lye is troublesome, and sets a man's invention upon the rack, and one trick needs a great many more to make it good. It is like building upon a false foundation, which continually stands in need of props to shoar it up, and proves at last more chargeable, than to have raised a substantial building at first upon a true and solid foundation; for sincerity is firm and substantial, and there is nothing hollow and unsound in it, and because it is plain and open, fears no discovery, of which the crafty man is always in danger, and when he thinks he

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walks in the dark, all his pretences are so transparent, that he that runs may read them; he is the last man that finds himself to be found out, and whilst he takes it for granted that he makes fools of others, he renders himself ridiculous.

Add to all this, that sincerity is the most compendious wisdom, and an excellent instrument for the speedy dispatch of business; it creates confidence in those we have to deal with, saves the labour of many enquiries, and brings things to an issue in few words; It is like travelling in a plain beaten road, which commonly brings a man sooner to his journey's end, than by-ways, in which men often lose themselves. In a word, whatsoever convenience may be thought to be in falshood and dissimulation, it is soon over; but the inconvenience of it is perpetual, because it brings a man under an everlasting jealousy and suspicion, so that he is not believed when he speaks truth, nor trusted, when perhaps he means honestly: When a man hath once forfeited the reputation of his integrity, he is set fast, and nothing will then serve his turn, neither truth nor falshood.

And I have often thought, that God hath in great wisdom hid from men of false and dishonest minds the wonderful advantages of truth and integrity to the prosperity even of our worldly affairs; these men are so blinded by their covetousness and ambition, that they cannot look beyond a present advantage, nor forbear to seize upon it, tho' by ways never so indirect; they cannot see so far, as to the remote consequences of a steady integrity, and the vast benefit and advantages which it will bring a man at last. Were but this sort of men wise and clear-sighted enough to discern this, they would be honest, out of very knavery, not out of any love to honesty or virtue, but with a crafty design to promote and advance more effectually their own interests; and therefore the justice of the divine providence hath hid this truest point of wisdom from their eyes, that bad men might not be upon equal terms with the just and upright, and serve their own wicked designs by honest and lawful means.

Indeed, if a man were only to deal in the world for a day, and should never have occasion to converse more with mankind, never more need their good opinion, or good word, it were then no great matter (speaking as to the concerns of this world) if a man spent his reputation all at once, and ventured it at one throw: But if he be to continue in the world, and would have the advantage of conversation whilst he is in it, let him make use of truth and sincerity in all his words and actions, for nothing but this will last and hold out to the end, all other arts will fail, but truth and integrity will carry a man through, and bear him out to the last.

'Tis the observation of Solomon, Prov 12. 19. *The lip of truth is established for ever: but a lying tongue is but for a moment.* And the wiser any man is, the more clearly will he discern, how serviceable sincerity is to all the great ends and purposes of humane life; and that man hath made a good progress, and profited much in the school of wisdom, who valueth truth and sincerity according to their worth. Every man will readily grant them to be great virtues, and arguments of a generous mind, but that there is so much of true wisdom in them, and that they really serve to profit our interest in this world, seems a great paradox to the generality of men; and yet I doubt not but it is undoubtedly true, and generally found to be so, in the experience of mankind.

Lastly, Consider that it is not worth our while to dissemble, considering the shortness and especially the uncertainty of our lives. To what purpose should we be so cunning, when our abode in this world is so short and uncertain? Why should any man by dissembling his judgment, or acting contrary to it, incur at once the displeasure of God, and the discontent of his own mind? Especially if we consider, that all our dissimulation shall one day be made manifest and published on the open theatre of the world, before God, Angels and men, to our everlasting shame and confusion; all disguise and vizards shall then be pluckt off, and every man shall appear in his true colours. For *then the secrets of men shall be judged, and God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing,*

whether

whether it be good or whether it be evil. Nothing is now covered, which shall not then be revealed, nor hid which shall not then be known.

Let us then be now what we would be glad to be found in that day, when all pretences shall be examined, and the closest hypocrisie of men shall be laid open and dashed out of countenance; when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, and all the hidden works of darkness shall be revealed, and all our thoughts, words, and actions shall be brought to a strict and severe tryal, and be censured, by that impartial and infallible judgment of God, which is according to truth; *In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, by Jesus Christ.*

To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be glory now and for ever. Amen,

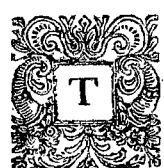
S E R M O N II.

The Excellency of *Abraham's* Faith and Obedience.

*Preach'd
at White-
Hall, 1686,
before the
Princess
Anne.*

H E B. xi. 17, 18, 19.

By Faith Abraham, when he was tryed, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son: of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.



THE design of this Epistle to the *Hebrews* is to recommend to them the christian religion, to which they were but newly converted, and to encourage them to constancy in the profession of it, notwithstanding the sufferings which attended it. He sets before them in this chapter several examples in the old Testament of those, who, tho' they were under a much more imperfect dispensation, yet by a stedfast belief in God and his promises, had performed such wonderful acts of obedience and self-denial.

He begins with the patriarchs before the flood; but insists chiefly upon the examples of two eminent persons of their own nation, as nearest to them, and most likely to prevail upon them, the examples of *Abraham* and *Moses*, the one the father of their nation, the other their great law-giver, and both of them the greatest patterns of faith, and obedience, and self-denial, that the history of all former ages, from the beginning of the world, had afforded.

I shall at this time, by God's assistance, treat of the first of these, the example of *Abraham*, the constancy of whose faith, and the chearfulness of whose obedience, even in the difficultest cases, is so remarkable above all the other examples mentioned in this chapter. For *at the command of God, he left his kindred and his countrey, not knowing whither he should go*; by which eminent act of obedience, he declared himself to be wholly at God's disposal, and ready to follow him: But this was no tryal in comparison of that here in my text, when God commanded him *to offer up his only son*: But such was the immutable stedfastness of his faith, and the perfect submission of his obedience, that it does not appear that he made the least check at it; but out of perfect

fect reverence and obedience to the authority of the divine command, he went about it as readily and chearfully, as if God had bid him do some small thing: *By Faith Abraham, when he was tryed, offer'd up Isaac.*

For the explication of which words, it will be requisite to consider *Two* things.

First, The tryal or temptation in general.

Secondly, The excellency of *Abraham's* faith and obedience upon his tryal.

First, The tryal or temptation in general: It is said that *Abraham when he was tryed*, the word is *πειρασμῶν*, *being tempted*: that is, God intending to make tryal of his faith and obedience; and so it is exprest, *Gen. 22. 1.* where it is said, that *God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, take now thy son, thine only son.*

Now there are two difficulties concerning this matter. It seems contrary to Scripture, that God should tempt any man; and contrary to reason; because God who knows what every man will do, needed not to make tryal of any man's faith and obedience.

First, It seems contrary to Scripture, which says, *God tempts no man*: And 'tis most true, that God tempts no man, with a design to draw him into sin; but this doth not hinder, but he may try their faith and obedience with great difficulties, to make them the more illustrious. Thus God tempted *Abraham*; and he permitted *Job*, and even our blessed Saviour himself, to be thus tempted.

Secondly, It seems contrary to reason, that God, who knows what any man will do in any circumstances, should go to make tryal of it. But God does not try men for his own information; but to give an illustrious proof and example to others of faith and obedience: And tho' after this tryal of *Abraham*, God says to him, *Now I know that thou lovest me, because thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me*; yet we are to understand this as spoken after the manner of men; as God elsewhere speaks to *Abraham* concerning *Sodom*; *I will go down now to see whether they have done altogether according to the cry which is come up unto me; and if not, I will know.*

I proceed to the *Second* thing I propos'd, the excellency of *Abraham's* Faith and obedience upon this tryal: *By Faith Abraham, when he was tryed, offered up Isaac.* God accepts of it, as if he had done it; because he had done it in part, and was ready to have performed the rest, if God had not countermanded him.

And this act of faith and obedience in *Abraham* will appear the more illustrious, if we consider these *three* things.

I. The firmness and stedfastness of his faith, notwithstanding the objections against it.

II. The constancy of his resolution, notwithstanding the difficulty of the thing.

III. The reasonableness of his faith, in that he gave satisfaction to himself in so hard and perplext a case.

I. The firmness and stedfastness of his faith will appear, if we consider what objections there were in the case, enough to shake a very strong faith. There were three great objections against this command, and such as might in reason make a wise and good man doubtful whether this command were from God.

The horrid nature of the thing commanded.

The grievous scandal that might seem almost unavoidably to follow upon it.

And the horrible consequence of it, which seemed to make the former promise of God to *Abraham* void.

First, The horrid nature of the thing commanded, which was for a father to kill his own child. This must needs appear very barbarous and unnatural, and look liker a sacrifice to an idol, than to the true God.

It seemed to be against the law of nature, and directly contrary to that kindness and affection which God himself had planted in the hearts of parents towards their children.

And

And there is no affection more natural and strong than this; for there are many persons that would redeem the lives of their children with the hazard of their own. Now that God hath planted such an affection in nature, is an argument that it is good, and therefore it could not but seem strange that he should command any thing contrary to it: And in this case, there were two circumstances that encreased the horror of the fact; that his son was innocent; and that he was to slay him with his own hands.

1. That his son was innocent. It would grieve the heart of any father to give up his son to death, tho' he were never so undutiful and disobedient.

So passionately was *David* affected with the death of his son *Absalom*, as to wish he had died for him, tho' he died in the very act of rebellion, and tho' the saving of his life had been inconsistent with the peace of his government.

How deep then must it sink into the heart of a father, to give up his innocent son to death? and such a son was *Isaac*, for any thing that appeared to the contrary. God himself gave him this testimony, that he was *the son whom his father loved*, and there is no intimation of any thing to the contrary. Now this could not but appear strange to a good man, that God should command an innocent person to be put to death. But,

2. That a father should be commanded, not only to give up his son to death, but to slay him with his own hands; not only to be a spectator, but to be the actor in this tragedy. What father would not shrink, and start back at such a command? What good man, especially in such a case, and where nature was so hard prest, would not have been apt to have looked upon such a revelation as this, rather as the suggestion and illusion of an evil spirit, than a command of God? And yet *Abraham's* faith was not staggered, so as to call this revelation of God in question.

Secondly, The grievous scandal that might seem almost unavoidably to follow upon it, was another great objection against it. The report of such an action would in all appearance blemish the reputation, even of so good a man, amongst all sober and considerate persons, who could hardly forbear to censure him, as a wicked and unnatural man.

And this was a hard case, for a man to be put to sacrifice at once two of the dearest things in the world, his reputation and his son: Nor could he have easily defended himself from this imputation, by alledging an express revelation and command of God for it; for who would give credit to it?

A revelation to another man is nothing to me, unless I be assured that he had such a revelation, which I cannot be, but either by another immediate revelation, or by some miracle to confirm it.

The act had an appearance of so much horror, that it was not easily credible that God should command it; and if every man's confident pretense to revelation be admitted, the worst actions may plead this in their excuse. So that this pretense would have been so far from excusing his fault, that it must rather have been esteemed an high aggravation of it, by adding the boldest impiety to the most barbarous inhumanity.

But *Abraham* was not stumbled at this, nor at the advantage which the enemies of his religion would make of such an occasion, who would be ready to say, *here is your excellent good man, and likely to be a friend of God, who was so cruel an enemy to his own son!* All this 'tis probable he might consider: But it did not move him, being resolved to obey God, and to leave it to his wisdom to provide against all the inconveniences that might follow upon it.

Thirdly, The strongest objection of all was the horrible consequence of the thing, which seemed to clash with former revelations, and to make void the promise which God had before made to *Abraham*, that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed, which promise was expressly limited to *Isaac* and his posterity, who had then no son.

And of this difficulty the apostle takes express notice in the text, that *he that had received the promises* (that is, was persuaded of the truth and faithfulness of them) *offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called.*

And this objection is really so strong, that if *Abraham* could not have given himself satisfaction about it, he might justly have questioned the truth of the revelation. For no man can possibly entertain two contradictory revelations as from God, but he must of necessity question one or both of them: But so strong was *Abraham's* faith, as not to be shaken by the seeming contradiction of these two revelations.

II. We will consider the constancy of his resolution to obey God, notwithstanding the harshness and difficulty of the thing. Tho' *Abraham* were firmly persuaded, that this command to kill his son was really from God; yet it is no easie matter for a man to bring himself to obey God in so difficult a case, and out of mere reverence to the divine authority, to divest himself of his nature, and to thwart the strongest inclinations of it; a man would be very apt to confer with flesh and blood in such a case. Let but any man, that knows what it is to be a father, lay his hand upon his heart, and consider his own bowels; and he will be astonished at *Abraham's* obedience as well as his faith.

To take *his son, his only son, his son whom he loved*, and in whom he placed all his hopes of a happy posterity, and with his own hands to destroy him and all his hopes together! It must be a strong faith that will engage a man to obedience in so difficult an instance.

There is one circumstance more especially, which renders *Abraham's* obedience very remarkable; the deliberateness of the action. It had not been so much if so soon as he had received this command from God, he had upon a sudden impulse and transport of zeal done this.

But that his obedience might be the more glorious, and have all the circumstances of advantage given to it, God would have it done deliberately, and upon full consideration; and therefore he bad him go to the mountain three days journey from the place where he was, and there to offer up his son.

It is in acts of virtue and obedience, as in acts of sin and vice; the more deliberate the sin is, and the more calm and sedate temper the man is in when he commits it, the greater is the fault; whereas what is done by surprize, in the heat of temptation, or transport of passion, hath some excuse from the suddenness and undeliberateness of it.

So it is in acts of virtue and obedience, especially if they be attended with considerable difficulty, the more deliberately they are done, the more virtuous they are, and the greater praise is due to them.

Now that *Abraham's* obedience might want nothing to heighten it, God seems on purpose to have put so long a space betwixt the command and the performance of it; he gives him time to cool upon it, to weigh the command, and to look on every side of this difficult duty; he gives scope for his reason to argue and debate the case, and opportunity for natural affection to play its part, and for flesh and blood to raise all its batteries against the resolution which he had taken up.

And now we may easily imagine, what conflict this good man had within himself, during those three days that he was travelling to the mountain in *Moriah*; and how his heart was ready to be rent in pieces, betwixt his duty to God, and his affection to his child; so that every step of this unwelcome and wearisome journey, he did as it were lay violent hands upon himself.

He was to offer up his son but once; but he sacrificed himself and his own will every moment for three days together; and when he came thither, and all things were ready, the altar, the wood, and the fire, and the knife, it must needs be a stabbing question, and wound him to the heart, which his innocent son so innocently askt him, *where is the lamb, for a burnt-offering?*

It must be a strong faith indeed, and a mighty resolution, that could make him to hold out three days against the violent assaults of his own nature, and the charming presence of his son, enough to melt his heart, as often as he cast his eyes upon him: And yet nothing of all this made him to stagger in his duty, but *being strong in faith he gave glory to God*, by one of the most miraculous acts of obedience that ever was exacted from any of the sons of men.

III. In the *third* and last place, I come to consider the reasonableness of his faith, in that he was able to give satisfaction to himself in so intricate and perplex a case. The constancy of *Abraham's* faith, was not an obstinate and stubborn persuasion, but the result of the wisest reasoning, and soberest consideration.

So the Text says, that *he counted*, the word is λογισάμενος, *he reasoned with himself, that God was able to raise him up from the dead*; so that he debated the matter with himself, and gave himself satisfaction, concerning the objections and difficulties in the case; and being fully satisfied that it was a divine command, he resolved to obey it.

As for the *objections* I have mentioned :

1. The horrid appearance of the thing, that a father should slay his innocent son. Why should *Abraham* scruple the doing this, at the command of God, who being the author of life, hath power over it, and may resume what he hath given, and take away the life of any of his creatures when he will, and make whom he pleaseth instruments in the execution of his command?

It was indeed a hard case, considering natural affection; and therefore God did not permit it to be executed.

But the question of God's right over the lives of men; and of his authority to command any man to be the instrument of his pleasure in such a case, admits of no dispute.

And tho' God hath planted strong affections in parents towards their children; yet he hath written no law in any man's heart to the prejudice of his own sovereign right. This is a case always excepted, and this takes away the objection of injustice.

2. As to the scandal of it, *that* could be no great objection in those times, when the absolute power of parents over their children was in its full force, and they might put them to death without being accountable for it. So that then it was no such startling matter, to hear of a father putting his child to death. Nay, in much later times we find that in the most ancient laws of the *Romans*, (I mean those of the *XII tables*) children are absolutely put in the power of their parents, to whom is given, *jus vitæ & necis*, a power of life and death over them; and likewise to sell them for slaves.

And tho' amongst the *Jews* this paternal power was limited by the law of *Moses*; and the judgment of life and death was taken out of the father's hands, except in case of contumacy and rebellion; (and even in that case the process was to be before the elders of the city) yet it is certain, that in elder times the paternal power was more absolute and unaccountable, which takes off much from the horror and scandal of the thing, as it appears now to us who have no such power.

And therefore we do not find in the history, that this objection did much stick with *Abraham*; it being then no unusual thing for a father to put his child to death upon a just account.

And the command of God, who hath absolute dominion over the lives of his creatures, is certainly a just reason; and no man can reasonably scruple the doing of that, upon the command of God, which he might have done by his own authority, without being accountable for the action, to any but God only.

3. As to the objection from the horrible consequence of the thing commanded, that the slaying of *Isaac* seemed to overthrow *the promise, which God had made before to Abraham, That in Isaac his seed should be called*: This seems

seems to him to be the great difficulty, and here he makes use of reason, to reconcile the seeming contradiction of this command of God, to his former promise. So the Text tells us, that *he offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; reasoning that God was able to raise him up from the dead.* So that tho' Isaac were put to death, yet he saw how the promise of God might still be made good by his being raised from the dead, and living afterwards to have a numerous posterity.

There had then indeed been no instance, or example of any such thing in the world, as the resurrection of one from the dead, which makes *Abraham's* faith the more wonderful: But he confirmed himself in this belief, by an example as near the case as might be; *he reasoned, that God was able to raise him from the dead, from whence also he had received him in a figure.*

This I know is by interpreters generally understood of *Isaac's* being delivered from the jaws of death, when he was laid upon the altar, and ready to be slain. But the Text seems not to speak of what happened after; but of something that had passed before, by which *Abraham* confirmed himself in this persuasion, that if he were slain, God would raise him up again.

And so the words *ὅθεν ἐνομιόσατο* ought to be rendred, in the past time, *from whence also he had received him in a figure.* So that this expression plainly refers to the miraculous birth of *Isaac*, when his parents were past the age of having children; which was little less than a resurrection from the dead.

And so the Scripture speaks of it, *Rom. 4. 17.* *Abraham believed God, who quickened the dead, and calleth the things which are not, as if they were; and not being weak in faith, he considered not his own body which was dead; (and a little before the Text, speaking of the miraculous birth of Isaac) and therefore sprang there of one, and him as good as dead, as many as the stars of heaven.*

From whence (as the Apostle tells us,) *Abraham* reasoned thus; that God, who gave him *Isaac* at first in so miraculous a manner, was able by another miracle to restore him to life again, after he was dead, and to make him the father of many nations. *He reasoned that God was able to raise him up from the dead, from whence also he had received him in a figure.*

Thus you see the reasonableness of *Abraham's* faith; he pitched upon the main difficulty in the case, and he answered it, as well as was possible: And in his reasoning about this matter he gives the utmost weight to every thing that might tend to vindicate the truth and faithfulness of God's promise, and to make the revelations of God consistent with one another; and this, tho' he had a great interest and a very tender concernment of his own, to have biased him.

For he might have argued with great appearance and probability the other way: But as every pious and good man should do, he reasoned on God's side, and favoured that part. Rather than disobey a command of God, or believe that his promise should be frustrate, he will believe any thing that is credible and possible, how improbable soever. Thus far faith will go; but no farther. From the believing of plain contradictions and impossibilities, it always desires to be excused.

Thus much for explication of the words; which I hope hath not been altogether unprofitable, because it tends to clear a point which hath something of difficulty and obscurity in it, and to vindicate the holy Scripture, and the divine revelation therein contained, from one of the most specious objections of infidelity.

But I had a farther design in this Text; and that is to make some *observations* and *inferences* from it, that may be of use to us. As,

First, That humane nature is capable of clear and full satisfaction, concerning a divine revelation. For if *Abraham* had not been fully and past all doubt assured that this was a command from God, he would certainly have spared his son. And nothing is more reasonable, than to believe that those, to whom God

God is pleased to make immediate revelations of his will, are some way or other assured that they are divine; otherwise they would be in vain, and to no purpose.

But how men are assured concerning divine revelations made to them, is not so easie to make out to others; only these two things we are sure of.

1. That God can work in the mind of man, a firm persuasion of the truth of what he reveals, and that such a revelation is from him. This no man can doubt of, that considers the great power and influence which God, who made us, and perfectly knows our frame, must needs have upon our minds and understandings.

2. That God never offers any thing to any man's belief, that plainly contradicts the natural and essential notions of his mind; because this would be for God to destroy his own workmanship, and to impose that upon the understanding of man, which whilst it remains what it is, it cannot possibly admit.

For instance, we cannot imagine, that God should reveal to any man any thing that plainly contradicts the essential perfections of the divine nature; for such a revelation can no more be supposed to be from God, than a revelation from God, that there is no God; which is a downright contradiction.

Now to apply this to the revelation which God made to *Abraham* concerning the sacrificing of his son: This was made to him by an audible voice, and he was fully satisfied by the evidence which it carried along with it, that it was from God.

For this was not the first of many revelations that had been made to him, so that he knew the manner of them, and had found by manifold experience, that he was not deceived, and upon this experience was grown to a great confidence in the truth and goodness of God. And it is very probable the first time God appeared to *Abraham*, because it was a new thing, that to make way for the credit of future revelations, God did shew himself to him in so glorious a manner, as was abundantly to his conviction.

And this *St. Stephen* does seem to intimate *Acts 7. 2. The God of Glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia.* Now by this glorious appearance of God to him at first, he was so prepared for the entertainment of after-revelations, that he was not staggered even at this, concerning the sacrificing of his son, being both by the manner of it, and the assurance that accompanied it, fully satisfied that it was from God.

Secondly, I observe from hence the great and necessary use of reason in matters of faith. For we see here that *Abraham's* reason was a mighty strengthening and help to his faith. Here were two revelations made to *Abraham*, which seemed to clash with one another; and if *Abraham's* reason could not have reconciled the repugnancy of them, he could not possibly have believed them both to be from God; because this natural notion or principle, that *God cannot contradict himself*, every man does first, and more firmly believe, than any revelation whatsoever.

Now *Abraham's* reason relieved him in this strait. So the text expressly tells us, *he reasoned with himself, that God was able to raise him from the dead.*

And this being admitted, the command of God, concerning the slaying of *Isaac*, was very well consistent with his former Promise, That *in Isaac his seed should be called.*

I know there hath a very rude clamour been raised by some persons, (but of more zeal I think than judgment) against the use of reason in matters of faith: But how very unreasonable this is, will appear to any one that will but have patience to consider these following particulars.

1. The nature of divine revelation; that it doth not endow men with new faculties, but propoundeth new objects to the faculties, which they had before. Reason is the faculty whereby revelation is to be discerned; for when God reveals any thing to us, he reveals it to our understanding, and by that we are to judge of it. Therefore *St. John* cautions us, *i Job. 4. 1. Not to believe every spirit; but to try the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world;* that is, there are many that falsely pretend to inspiration: But how can these pretenders be tryed and discerned from those that are truly inspired, but by using our reason, in comparing the evidence for the one and the other?

2. This will farther appear, if we consider the nature of faith. Faith (as we are now speaking of it) is an assent of the mind to something as revealed by God: Now all assent must be grounded upon evidence; that is, no man can believe any thing, unless he have, or thinks he hath some reason to do so. For to be confident of a thing without reason, is not faith; but a presumptuous persuasion, and obstinacy of mind.

3. This will yet be more evident, if we consider the method, that must of necessity be used to convince any man of the truth of Religion. Suppose we had to deal with one that is a stranger, and enemy to Christianity, what means are proper to be used to gain him over to it? The most natural method surely were this, to acquaint him with the holy Scriptures, which are the rule of our faith and practice. He would ask us, *Why we believe that book?* The proper answer would be, *Because it is the word of God*; this he could not but acknowledge to be a very good reason, if it were true: But then he would ask, *Why we believed it to be the word of God, rather than Mahomet's Alchoran, which pretends no less to be of divine inspiration?*

If any man now should answer, that *he could give no reason why he believed it to be the word of God, only he believed it to be so, and so every man else ought to do without enquiring after any farther reason, because reason is to be laid aside in matters of faith*; would not the man presently reply, that *he had just as much reason as this comes to, to believe the Alchoran, or any thing else*; that is, none at all?

But certainly the better way would be to satisfy this man's reason by proper arguments, that the Scriptures are a divine revelation, and that no other book in the world, can with equal reason pretend to be so: And if this be a good way, then we do and must call in the assistance of reason for the proof of our Religion.

4. Let it be considered farther, that the highest commendations that are given in Scripture to any one's faith, are given upon account of the reasonableness of it. *Abraham's* faith is famous, and made a pattern to all generations, because he reasoned himself into it, notwithstanding the Objections to the contrary, and he did not blindly break through these objections, and wink hard at them; but he looked them in the face, and gave himself reasonable satisfaction concerning them.

The *Centurion's* faith is commended by our Saviour, *Matth. 8. 9.* because when his Servant was sick, he did not desire him to come to his house, but to *speake the word only, and his servant should be healed*: For he reasoned thus, *I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man go, and he goeth; and to another come, and he cometh; and to my servant do this, and he doth it.* Now if he that was himself under authority, could thus command those that were under him; much more could he that had a divine power and commission, do what he pleased by his word. And our Saviour is so far from reprehending him for reasoning himself into this belief, that he admires his faith so much the more for the reasonableness of it, *v. 10. When Jesus heard this, he marvelled, and said to them that followed him, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel.*

In like manner our Saviour commends the woman of *Canaan's* faith, because she enforced it so reasonably. *Matthew 15. 22.* She sued him to help her daughter; *but he answered her not a word*; and when his Disciples could not prevail with him to mind her, yet still she pressed him, *saying, Lord help me*; and when he repulsed her with this severe answer, *It is not meet to take the childrens meat and cast it to dogs*; she made this quick and modest reply, *Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters table.* She acknowledgeth her own unworthiness; but yet believes his goodness to be such, that he will not utterly reject those who humbly seek to him; upon which he gives her this testimony, *O woman, great is thy faith!*

The Apostles were divinely inspired; and yet the *Bereans* are commended, because they inquired and satisfied themselves in the reasons of their belief, before they assented to the doctrine which was delivered to them, even by teachers that certainly were infallible.

5. None are reprov'd in Scripture for their unbelief, but where sufficient reason and evidence was offer'd to them. The *Israelites* were generally blamed for their infidelity; but then it was after such mighty wonders had been wrought for their conviction.

The Jews in our Saviour's time are not condemn'd simply for their unbelief; but for not believing when there was such clear evidence offer'd to them. So our Saviour himself says, *if I had not done amongst them the works which no other man did, they had not had sin.*

Thomas indeed is blamed for the perverseness of his unbelief, because he would believe nothing but what he himself saw.

Lastly, To shew this yet more plainly, let us consider the great inconvenience and absurdity of declining the use of reason in matters of Religion. There can be no greater prejudice to Religion, than to decline this trial.

To say we have no reason for our Religion, is to say it is unreasonable. Indeed it is reason enough for any article of our faith, that God hath revealed it; because this is one of the strongest and most cogent reasons for the belief of any thing. But when we say God hath revealed any thing, we must be ready to prove it, or else we say nothing. If we turn off reason here, we level the best Religion in the world with the wildest and most absurd enthusiasms.

And it does not alter the case much, to give reason ill names, to call it *blind*, and *carnal reason*. Our best reason is but very short and imperfect: But since it is no better, we must make use of it as it is, and make the best of it.

Before I pass from this argument, I cannot but observe, that both the extremes of those who differ from our church, are generally great declaimers against the use of reason in matters of faith. If they find *their* account in it, 'tis well; for *our parts* we apprehend no manner of inconvenience, in having reason on our side; nor need we to desire a better evidence, that any man is in the wrong, than to hear him declare against reason, and thereby to acknowledge that reason is against him. Men may vilifie reason as much as they please; and tho' *being reviled she reviles not again*, yet in a more still and gentle way, she commonly hath her full revenge upon all those that rail at her.

I have often wonder'd that people can with patience endure to hear their teachers and guides talk against reason; and not only so, but they pay them the greater submission and veneration for it. One would think this but an odd way to gain authority over the minds of men: But some skilful and designing men have found by experience, that it is a very good way to recommend them to the ignorant; as nurses use to endear themselves to children, by perpetual noise and nonsense.

Thirdly, I observe that God obligeth no man to believe plain and evident contradictions, as matters of faith. *Abraham* could not reasonably have believed this second revelation to have been from God, if he had not found some way to reconcile it with the first. For tho' a man were never so much disposed to submit his reason to divine revelation; yet it is not possible for any man to believe God against God himself.

Some men seem to think that they oblige God mightily, by believing plain contradictions. But the matter is quite otherwise. He that made man a *reasonable* creature, cannot take it kindly from any man to debase his workmanship, by making himself *unreasonable*. And therefore, as no service or obedience; so no faith is acceptable unto God, but what is reasonable: If it be not so, it may be confidence or presumption; but it is not faith. For he that can believe plain contradictions, may believe any thing how absurd soever; because nothing can be more absurd, than the belief of a plain contradiction; and he that can believe any thing, believes nothing upon good grounds, because to him truth and falsehood are all one.

Fourthly, I observe, that the great cause of the defect of men's obedience is the weakness of their faith. Did we believe the commands of God in the Gospel, and his promises and threatnings, as firmly as *Abraham* believed God in this case; what should we not be ready to do, or suffer, in obedience to him?

If our faith were but as strong and vigorous as his was, the effects of it would be as great and conspicuous. Were we verily persuaded, that all the precepts of our Religion are the express laws of God, and that all the promises and threatenings of the Gospel will one day be verified and made good; *what manner of persons should we be in all holy conversation and godliness?* How would the lively thoughts of another world, raise us above the vanities of this present life; and set us out of the reach of the most powerful temptations that this world can assault us withall; and make us to do all things with regard to eternity, and to that solemn and dreadful account which we must one day make to God the judge of all?

It is nothing but the want of a firm and steady belief of these things that makes our devotion so dead and heartless, and our resolutions of doing better so weak and inconstant. This it is that makes us so easie a prey to every temptation; and the things of this world to look so much bigger than they are, the enjoyments of it more tempting, and the evils of it more terrible than in truth they are; and in all disputes betwixt our conscience and our interest, this makes us hold the balance so unequally, and to put our foot upon the lighter scale, that it may seem to weigh down the other.

In a word, in proportion to the strength or weakness of our faith, our obedience to God will be more or less constant, uniform, and perfect; because faith is the great source and spring of all the virtues of a good life.

Fifthly, We have great reason to submit to the ordinary strokes of God's providence upon our selves, or near relations, or any thing that is dear to us. Most of these are easie, compared with *Abraham's* case; it requires a prodigious strength of faith to perform so miraculous an act of obedience.

Sixthly, and lastly, We are utterly inexcusable, if we disobey the easy precepts of the Gospel. *The yoke of Christ is easie, and his burthen light*, in comparison of God's former dispensations. This was a grievous commandment which God gave to *Abraham*, to sacrifice his only son: It was a hard saying indeed; and *which of us could have been able to bear it?*

But if God think fit to call us to the more difficult duties of self-denial, and suffering for his truth and righteousness sake, we must, after the example of faithful *Abraham*, not think much to deny, or part with any thing for him, no not life it self. But even this which is the hardest part of Religion, is easier than what God put upon *Abraham*.

For it doth not offer near the violence to nature, to lay down our life in a good cause, as it would do to put a child to death with our own hands. Besides the consideration of the extraordinary comfort and support, and the glorious rewards that are expressly promised to our obedience and self-denial in such a case; encouragement enough to make a very difficult duty easie.

And whilst I am persuading you and my self to resolution and constancy in our holy Religion, notwithstanding all hazards and hardships that may attend it, I have a just sense of the frailty of humane nature, and of humane resolution: But withall, a most firm persuasion of the goodness of God, that *he will not suffer* those who sincerely love him and his truth, *to be tempted above what they are able*.

I will add but one consideration more, to shew the difference betwixt *Abraham's* case and ours. God commanded him to do the hardest thing in the world, to sacrifice his only son; but he hath given us an easie commandment; and that he might effectually oblige us to our duty, he hath done that for us which he required *Abraham* to do for him; *he hath not spared his own son, his only son; but hath given him up to death for us all: And hereby we know that he loveth us, that he hath given his son for us*.

What God required of *Abraham*, he did not intend should be executed; but one great design of it was to be a type and figure of that immense love and kindness which he intended to all mankind in the sacrifice of his Son, as a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

And as the most clear and exprefs promise of the Messias was made to *Abraham*; so the most exprefs and lively type of the Messias that we meet with in all the old Testament, was *Abraham's* offering up his son. And as *St. Hierom* tells us (from an ancient and constant tradition of the *Jews*) the mountain in *Moriah*, where *Abraham* was commanded to sacrifice *Isaac*, was mount *Calvary*, where our Lord also was crucified and offered up, *that by this one sacrifice of himself once offered, he might perfect for ever them that are sanctified, and obtain eternal redemption for us.*

Now to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb that was slain; to God even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead; to the Prince of the kings of the earth; to him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; to him be glory, and honour, thanksgiving and power, now and for ever, Amen.

S E R M O N III.

*Preach'd at
White-
Hall, 1687.
before the
Princess
Anne.*

Moses's Choice of afflicted Piety, rather than a Kingdom.

H E B. ii. 24, 25.

By Faith Moses when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; chusing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.



THE text sets before us a great pattern of self-denial: for our better understanding whereof I will give a brief account of the history of *Moses*, to which our Apostle in this passage doth refer.

When *Moses* was born, his parents (for fear of the cruel law which *Pharaoh* had made, *that all the male children of the Hebrews, so soon as they were born, should be put to death*) after they had hid him three months, did at last expose him in an ark of bulrushes, upon the river *Nile*, and committed him to the providence of God, whom they despair'd to conceal any longer by their own care.

Pharaoh's daughter, coming by the river side, espied him, and had compassion on him; and guessing him to be one of the *Hebrew* children, called for an *Hebrew* nurse, to take care of him, who, as the providence of God had ordered it, proved to be the child's own mother. As he grew up, *Pharaoh's* daughter took care of his education in all princely qualities, and adopted him for her son; and *Pharaoh* (as *Josephus* tells us) being without son, designed him heir of his kingdom.

Moses refused this great offer. But why did he refuse it, when it seem'd to be presented to him by the providence of God, and was brought about in so strange a manner; and when by this means he might probably have had it in his power to have eased the *Israelites* of their cruel bondage, and perhaps have had the opportunity of reducing that great kingdom from the worship of idols to the true God? Why would he refuse a kingdom which was offered to him with so fair an opportunity of doing so much good?

That which seems to have prevailed with *Moses*, was this, that he could not accept the offer without forsaking God, and renouncing his Religion; for considering how strangely the *Egyptians* were addicted to idolatry, he could never hope to

be

be accepted for heir of that Kingdom, unless he would violate his conscience, either by abandoning or dissembling his Religion.

And how unlikely it was that he should prevail with them to change their religion, he might easily judge by the example of *Joseph*, who tho' he had so much authority and esteem amongst them, by having been so great a benefactor to their nation; yet he could never move them in the least, in that matter.

Now seeing he had no hopes of attaining, or enjoying that dignity, without sinning grievously against God, he would not purchase a kingdom at so unconscionable a price. And as for the deliverance of his people, he was content to trust the providence and promise of God for that; and in the mean time was resolved rather to take a part in the afflictions of God's people, *than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.*

From the words thus explained, I shall take occasion to consider these *four* things.

I. *Moses's* self-denial, in preferring and chusing a state of afflicted piety, before any sinful enjoyments whatsoever, before the greatest earthly happiness and prosperity, when it was not to be attained and enjoyed upon other terms than of sinning against God.

II. I shall consider those circumstances of this self-denial of *Moses*, which do very much commend and set off the virtue of it.

III. The prudence and reasonableness of this choice, in preferring a state of afflicted piety and virtue, before the greatest prosperity and pleasure of a sinful course.

IV. Supposing this choice to be reasonable, I shall enquire how it comes to pass that so many make another choice.

I. We will consider *Moses* his self-denial, in preferring a state of afflicted piety, before the greatest earthly happiness and prosperity, when it is not to be enjoyed upon other terms, than of sinning against God. He was adopted heir of the kingdom of *Egypt*, (one of the greatest and most flourishing kingdoms then in the world;) but he could not hope to attain to this dignity, and to secure himself in the possession of it, upon other terms than of complying with that nation, in their idolatrous religion and worship.

Now being brought up in the belief of the true God, the God of *Israel*, by his mother, to whom *Pharaoh's* daughter had committed him, he could not without great violence to his conscience, and the principles of his education, renounce the true God, and fall off to the idolatry of the *Egyptians*: And for this reason *he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, chusing rather to suffer affliction with the worshippers of the true God, than to have the temporary enjoyment of any thing that was not to be had without sin; for so the word ought to be render'd, ἢ πρὸς καιρὸν ἔχειν ἀμαρτίας ἀπόλαυσιν, than to have the temporary enjoyment of sin.* So here was *Moses* his self-denial, that he chose rather to suffer affliction with the worshippers of the true God, than to gain a kingdom, by the renouncing of God and religion.

II. We will consider those circumstances of his self-denial, which do very much commend and set off the virtue of it.

1. What it was he refused to be called; *the son of Pharaoh's daughter*; that is, to be heir of one of the greatest and most flourishing kingdoms in the world: A temptation so great, that the Devil himself could not find out one much greater, when he set upon the Son of God to tempt him to fall down and worship him.

And when we consider for what inconsiderable things some men sell their Religion and their consciences, we shall think it no small temptation which *Moses* here resisted. *Si violandum est jus, regnandi causâ violandum est; if a man would do any unjust thing, and violate his Religion and conscience, he would not do it for less than a Kingdom;* and it would be a very hard bargain, even upon those terms.

2. Consider not only what he refused, but what he chose in the place of it; a state of great affliction and suffering. Had he refused a kingdom, and chosen the quiet condition of a subject of middle rank (beneath envy and above contempt,) his

his self-denial had not been so great; nay, perhaps he had made a wise choice, in the account of the wisest men, in preferring a plentiful and quiet retirement, before the cares of a Crown, and the burthen of publick government.

But it is very rare to find a man that would chuse rather to be oppressed and persecuted, than to be a Prince, and to have the sweet power to use others as he pleased.

3. Consider how fair a prospect he had of enjoying this kingdom, if he could but have come up to the terms of it. He did not reject it, because he despaired of attaining it: For he had all the right that a good title could give him, being adopted heir to it; and yet he refused it.

To which I may add, that his breeding was such as might easily kindle ambitious thoughts in him. He was brought up in *Pharaoh's Court*, and was the darling and favourite of it; exceeding beautiful (as *Josephus* tells us) and *learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians*; than which, no two qualities are more apt to puff up and swell a man with big thoughts of himself.

They that are bred in a low condition, never think of a kingdom; men not being apt to aspire to things which are remote, and at a great distance from them.

But nothing is more rare in persons of great and generous minds, than such a self-denial as this.

4. Let it be considered, in the last place, that this was a deliberate choice, not any rash and sudden determination made by him when he was of incompetent age to make a true judgment of things. And this the Apostle takes notice of in the text, as a very memorable circumstance, that *when he was come to years, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*. And St. Stephen tells us that he was *full forty years old* when he made this choice, *Acts 7.23. When he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel*. When he was of ripest judgment; and in the height of his prosperity and reputation, he made this choice; for it is said in the verse before, that *Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in word and deed*; that is, he was in great reputation for his wisdom and valour.

This seems to refer to other passages of his life, which are not recorded in the Scripture history, but related at large by *Josephus*, out of historians extant in his time. For he tells, that when the *Ethiopians* had invaded *Egypt*, and almost over-run it, *Pharaoh* was directed by the Oracle at *Memphis*, to make *Moses* his General, who, by his extraordinary conduct and courage overthrew the *Ethiopians*, and drove them out of *Egypt*.

This *Moses* did not think fit to relate of himself; but St. Stephen seems to allude to it, when he says, that *he was mighty in word and deed*: And then it follows; *and when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel*; that is, when he was at full maturity of judgment, and in the height of his prosperity and reputation, he quitted the Court of *Egypt*, and went to visit his afflicted brethren, and chose rather to take part with them in their sufferings, than to accept those great offers that were made to him.

There is likewise another passage in *Josephus* concerning *Moses*, which seems to be a fore-runner of the contempt which he shewed afterwards of the Crown of *Egypt*; That when *Moses* was about three years old, *Thermusis*, the daughter of *Pharaoh*, brought the child to him, who took him in his arms, and put his Diadem upon his head: But *Moses* took it off, and cast it to the ground, and trampled it under his feet. This was but a childish act, and they who saw it would easily believe, that, for all his childish contempt of it then, if it were put upon his head in good earnest, when he came to be a man, he would hold it on faster, and use it with more respect.

And it is not improbable, but that the Apostle might have some regard to this, when he says, that *Moses when he came to years*; intimating that he did not only trample upon the Diadem of *Pharaoh*, when he was a child; but when he was come to years, and was capable of judging better of those things, *he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter*.

But

But before I proceed any farther, I cannot but take notice of an objection, which may seem to reflect greatly upon the integrity of *Moses*. Can we think him so very conscientious a man, who persuaded the people of *Israel*, and pretended God's direction in the case, to cheat the *Egyptians* of their jewels, under a fraudulent pretense of borrowing them? There is some difficulty in the thing, as at first sight it appears: And yet I doubt not, with your favourable attention, and free from prejudice, to vindicate *Moses* clearly in this matter.

And I shall not insist upon that which is commonly and truly said in this case; that God who is the supreme Lord of all things, may transfer the rights of men from one to another: Because the objection doth not lie against God's right to take away from any man what he hath given him; but against the fraudulent manner of doing it, which seems unworthy of God to command or encourage.

Now this matter, I think, is capable of another and much clearer answer; which, in short is this, and grounded upon the history, as we find it related, *Exod. 12*. The providence of God did, it seems, design by this way to make some reparation to the *Israelites*, for the tyrannical usage which they had received from the *Egyptians*; and that first (as the text expressly tells us) *in giving them favour with the Egyptians*; who, in truth, for their own ends, and to get rid of such troublesome guests, were disposed to lend them any thing they had.

Thus far all is right; here is nothing but fair borrowing and lending: And if the *Israelites* acquir'd a right to those things afterwards, there was then no obligation to restitution.

Let us see then how the providence of God brought this about: Namely, by permitting the *Egyptians* afterwards, without cause, and after leave given them to depart, to pursue them, with a design to have destroyed them; by which hostility and perfidiousness they plainly forfeited their right to what they had only lent before. For this hostile attempt, which would have warranted the *Israelites* to have spoiled them of their jewels, if they had been in the possession of the *Egyptians*, did certainly warrant them to keep them when they had them; and by this means they became rightful possessors of what they had only by loan before, and could not have detained without fraud and injustice, if this hostility of the *Egyptians* had not given them a new title and clear right to them.

But I proceed to the *third* thing I propos'd, which was to vindicate the prudence and reasonableness of this choice. And in speaking to this, I shall abstract from the particular case of *Moses*, and shew in general, that it is a prudent and reasonable thing, to prefer even an afflicted state of piety and virtue, before the greatest pleasures and prosperity of a sinful course; and this will appear, if we consider these *two* things.

I. The sufferings of good men upon account of Religion, together with the reward of them.

II. The temporary enjoyment of sin, with the mischiefs and inconveniencies consequent upon them.

I. The sufferings of good men upon the account of Religion, together with the reward of them. This *Moses* had in his eye, when he made this choice; for therefore *he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin which are but for a season*, because *he had respect to the recompence of reward*. And tho' he had but a very imperfect discovery in comparison of the future state; yet, it seems, he had so much assurance of the goodness of God, as firmly to believe that he should be no loser at the last, by any thing that he suffered for God and Religion.

Indeed, if there were no life after this, and we had no expectation beyond this world, the wisest thing we could do, would be to enjoy as much of the present contentment of this world, as we could make our selves matters of. But if we be designed for immortality, and shall be unspeakably happy, or intolerably miserable in another world, according as we have demeaned our selves in this life; then certainly it is reasonable that we should take the greatest care of the longest duration, and be content to dispense with some present inconveniencies for

an eternal felicity; and be willing to labour and take pains for a little while, that we may be happy for ever. And this is accounted prudence in the account of the wisest men, to part with a little in present, for a far greater future advantage.

But the disproportion betwixt time and eternity is so vast, that did we but firmly believe, that we shall live for ever, nothing in this world could reasonably be thought too good to part withal, or too grievous to suffer, for the obtaining of a blessed immortality. And upon this belief and persuasion of a mighty reward, beyond all their present sufferings, and that they should be infinite gainers at the last, the primitive christians were kept from sinking under their present sufferings, and fortified against all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do unto them. And if we would consider all things together, and mind the invisible things of another world, as well as the things which are seen, we should easily discern, that he who suffers for God and Religion does not renounce his happiness, but put it out to interest upon terms of greatest advantage, and does wisely consider his own best and most lasting interest. This is the *First*.

II. This will yet more evidently appear, if we consider the temporary enjoyments of sin, together with the mischiefs and inconveniences attending, and consequent upon them; that as to the nature of them, they are mix'd and imperfect; as to the duration of them, they are short, and but for a season; and as to the final issue and consequence of them, that they end in misery and sorrow.

1. As to the nature of them, all the pleasures and enjoyments of sin are mix'd and imperfect. A wicked man may make a shew of mirth and pleasure, *but even in laughter his heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness*. There can be no true and sincere pleasure in any sinful and vicious course, tho' it be attended with all the pomp and splendor of outward happiness and prosperity; for wherever sin and vice is, there must be guilt; and wherever guilt is, the mind will be restless and unquiet.

For there are two very troublesome and tormenting passions, which are naturally consequent upon guilt; shame and fear: Shame arising from the apprehension of the danger of being discovered; and fear, from the apprehension of the danger of being punished: And these do continually haunt the sinner, and fill him with inward horror and confusion in his most secret retirements. And if sin were attended with no other trouble but the guilt of it, a wise man would not commit it, if it were for no other reason, but merely for the peace and quiet of his own mind.

2. The enjoyments of sin, as to the duration of them, are but short. Upon this consideration, *Moses* set no great price and value upon them, but preferred affliction and suffering in good company, and in a good cause, before *the temporary enjoyments of sin*.

If the enjoyments of this world were perfect in their nature, and had no mixture of trouble and sorrow in them; yet this would be a great abatement of them, that they are of so short and uncertain a continuance. The pleasure of most sins expires with the act of them; and when that is done, the delight vanissheth.

I cannot deny but that there are several worldly advantages to be purchased by sin, which may perhaps be of a longer continuance; as riches and honours, the common purchase of covetousness and ambition, and of that long train of inferior vices which attend upon them, and minister unto them: But even those enjoyments are, in their own nature, of an uncertain continuance, and much more uncertain for being purchased by indirect and ill means. But if the enjoyment of these things were sure to be of the same date with our lives; yet how short a duration is that, compared with eternity? Make the utmost allowance to these things, that can be, yet we can but enjoy them whilst we are in this world. When we come into the world of spirits, it will signify nothing to us to have been rich or great in this world. When we shall stand before that highest tribunal, it will not avail us in the least to have been princes, and great men, and judges on the earth; the poorest man that ever lived in this world will then be upon equal terms with the biggest of us all.

For all mankind shall then stand upon a level, and those civil distinctions of rich and poor, of base and honourable, which seem now so considerable, and make such a glaring difference amongst men in this world, shall all then be laid aside, and moral differences shall only take place. All the distinctions which will then be made, will be betwixt the good and the bad, the righteous and the wicked; and the difference betwixt a good and bad man, will be really much greater, than ever it seemed to be betwixt the highest and meanest persons in this world.

And if this be so, why should we value the enjoyments of sin at so high a rate, which, at the best, are only considerable (and that only in the imagination of vain men) during our abode in this world; but bear no price at all in that countrey where we must live for ever: Or if they did, we cannot carry them along with us. The guilt of them, indeed, will follow us with a vengeance; the injustice and all the ill arts we have used for the getting or keeping of them, especially, if at once we have *made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience*.

If we have changed our Religion, or, which is much worse, if continuing in the profession of it, we have betrayed it, and the interest of it, for the gaining or securing of any of these things; we shall find to our sorrow, that tho' *the enjoyments of sin* were *but for a season*, the guilt of it will never leave us nor forsake us; but will stick close to us, and make us miserable for ever. But this belongs to the

III^d Thing I propos'd to speak to, namely, the final issue and consequence of a sinful course; which is misery and sorrow, many times in this world; but most certainly in the next.

1. In this world, the very best issue and consequence of a sinful course, that we can imagine, is repentance: And even this hath a great deal of sensible pain and trouble in it; for it is many times (especially after great sins, and a long continuance in them) accompanied with much regret and horror; with deep and piercing sorrow; with dismal and despairing thoughts of God's mercy; and with fearful apprehensions of his wrath and vengeance. So that if this were the worst consequence of sin (which indeed is the best) no man that considers and calculates things wisely, would purchase the pleasure of any sin, at the price of so much anguish and sorrow as a true and deep repentance will cost him; especially, since a true repentance does, in many cases, oblige men to the restitution of that which hath been gained by sin, if it hath been got by the injury of another.

And this consideration quite takes away the pleasure and profit of an ill-gotten estate. Better never to have had it, than to be obliged to refund it. A wise man will forbear the most pleasant meats, if he know before-hand that they will make him deadly sick, and that he shall never be at ease, till he have brought them up again.

No man that believes the threatnings of God, and the judgments of another world, would ever sin, but that he hopes to retrieve all again by repentance. But it is the greatest folly in the world to commit any sin upon this hope: For that is to please ones self for the present, in hopes to have more trouble afterwards than the pleasure comes to. But, especially no man would be guilty of an act of injustice and oppression, in hopes to repent of it afterwards; because there can be no repentance for such sins without restitution; and 'tis perfect madness for a man to run the hazard of his soul to get an estate, in hopes of restoring it again; for so he must do that truly repents of such a sin. But,

2. In the other world, the final issue and consequence of all the pleasures of sin unrepented of, will certainly be misery and sorrow. How quietly soever a sinner may pass through this world, or out of it, misery will certainly overtake him in the next, unspeakable and eternal misery, arising from an apprehension of the greatest loss, and a sense of the sharpest pain; and those sadly aggravated by the remembrance of past pleasure, and the despair of future ease.

From a sad apprehension and melancholy reflection upon his inestimable loss. In the other world, the sinner shall be eternally separated from God, who is the fountain of happiness. This is the first part of that miserable sentence which shall be past upon the wicked; *depart from me*.

Sinners are not now sensible of the joys of heaven, and the happiness of that state, and therefore are not capable of estimating the greatness of such a loss: But this stupidity and insensibleness of sinners, continues only during this present state, which affords men variety of objects and pleasures to divert and entertain them: But when they are once enter'd upon the other world, they will then have nothing else to take up their thoughts, but the sad condition, into which by their own wilful negligence and folly they have plunged themselves. They shall then *lift up their eyes*, and with the rich man in the parable, at once *see the happiness of others, and feel their own misery and torment*.

But this is not all. Besides the apprehension of so great a loss, they shall be sensible of the sorest and sharpest pains; and how grievous those shall be, we may conjecture by what the Scripture says of them in general; that they are the effects of a mighty displeasure, of anger and Omnipotence met together, far greater than can be described by any pains and sufferings which we are acquainted withal in this world: *For who knows the power of God's anger, and the utmost of what Omnipotent justice can do to sinners? It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

One would think this were misery enough, and needed no farther aggravation: But yet it hath two terrible ones; from the remembrance of past pleasures, and the despair of any future ease and remedy.

The remembrance of past pleasure makes present sufferings more sharp and sensible. For as nothing commends pleasure more, and gives a quicker relish to happiness, than precedent pain and suffering: (for perhaps there is not a greater pleasure in the world, than in the sudden ease which a man finds after a sharp fit of the stone) so nothing enrageth affliction more, and sets a keener edge upon misery than to pass into great pain immediately out of a state of ease and pleasure. This was the stinging aggravation of the rich man's torment, that *in his life time he had received his good things, and had fared so deliciously every day.*

But the greatest aggravation of all is, the despair of any future ease and remedy. The duration of this misery is set forth to us in Scripture, by such expressions as do signify the longest and most interminable duration. *Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire*, Matth. 25. and Mark 9. 43. *Where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.* And in the *Revel.* it is said, that *the wicked shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever*, without intermission, and without end. And this surely is the perfection of misery, for a man to lye under the greatest torments, and to be in despair of ever finding the least ease.

Let us now compare things together; on the one hand, the sufferings of good men, for a good conscience, and the reward that follows them; and on the other hand, the enjoyments of sin, with the mischief and misery that attends them, and will certainly overtake them in this world, or in the next: And then we shall easily discern which of these is to be preferred in a wise man's choice.

And indeed the choice is so very plain, that a man must be very strangely forsaken of his reason, and blinded by sense, who does not prefer that course of life, which will probably make him happier in this world, but most certainly in the next.

IV. There remains now only the *fourth* and last particular to be spoken to; *viz.* supposing this choice to be reasonable, to enquire whence it comes to pass that so many make a quite contrary choice. How is it that the greatest part of mankind are so widely mistaken, as to prefer the temporary enjoyments of sin before Conscience and Religion; especially, if it be attended with great afflictions and sufferings? and of this, I shall give you as brief an account as I can, and so conclude this discourse.

This wrong choice generally proceeds from one or both of these two causes; from want of faith; or from want of consideration; or of both.

I. One great reason why men make so imprudent a choice, is unbelief; either the want of faith, or the weakness of it. Either men do not believe the recompenses of another life, or they are not so firmly persuaded of the reality of them.

if men do not at all believe these things, there is no foundation for Religion; for *he that cometh unto God* (that is, he that thinks of being religious) *must believe that God is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, as the Apostle reasons in the beginning of this chapter.

But I hope there are but few that are, or can be infidels, as to these great and fundamental principles of Religion. But it is to be feared, that the faith of a great many is but weak and wavering; their faith is rather negative; they do not disbelieve these things, but they are not firmly persuaded of them; their faith is rather an opinion, than a rooted and well grounded persuasion; and therefore no wonder if it be not so strong and vigorous a principle of action, like the faith of *Abraham* and *Moses*, and other Worthies mentioned in this chapter. For where faith is in its full strength and vigour, it will have proportionable effects upon the resolutions and wills of men: But where it is but weak, it is of little or no efficacy. And this is the true reason why so many forsake Religion, and cleave to this present world; and when it comes to the push, chuse rather to sin, than to suffer; and will rather quit the truth, than endure persecution for it.

These are they whom our Saviour describes, *who receive the word with joy, and endure for a while; but when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the word, presently they are offended*: Not that they did not believe the word; but their faith had taken no deep root, and therefore it withered. The weakness and wavering of men's faith, makes them unstable and inconstant in their course; because they are not of one mind, but divided betwixt two interests, that of this world, and the other; and *the double-minded man* (as St. James tells us) *is unstable in all his ways*.

It is generally a true rule; so much wavering as we see in the actions and lives of men, so much weakness there is in their faith; and therefore he that would know what any man firmly believes, let him attend to his actions more than to his professions.

If any man live so as no man that heartily believes the Christian Religion can live, it is not credible that such a man doth firmly believe the Christian Religion. He says he does; but there is a greater evidence in the case than words; there is *Testimonium rei*, the man's actions are to the contrary, and they do best declare the inward sense of the man. Did men firmly believe that there is a God that governs the world, and that *he hath appointed a day, wherein he will judge it in righteousness*; and that all mankind shall shortly appear before him, and give an account of themselves, and all their actions to him; and that those who have kept the faith and a good conscience, and have lived soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, shall be unspeakably and eternally happy; but *the fearful and unbelieving*, those who out of fear or interest, have deserted the faith, or lived wicked lives, *shall have their portion in the lake, which burns with fire and brimstone*; I say, were men firmly persuaded of these things, it is hardly credible that any man should make a wrong choice, and forsake the ways of truth and righteousness, upon any temptation whatsoever.

Faith, even in temporal matters, is a mighty principle of action, and will make men to attempt and undergo strange and difficult things. The faith of the Gospel ought to be much more operative and powerful, because the objects of hope and fear, which it presents to us, are far greater, and more considerable, than any thing that this world can tempt or terrifie us withal.

Would we but by faith make present to our minds, the invisible things of another world, the happiness of Heaven, and the terrors of Hell; and were we as verily persuaded of them, as if they were in our view, how should we despise all the pleasures and terrors of this world; and with what ease should we resist and repel all those temptations, which would seduce us from our duty, or draw us into sin!

A firm and unshaken belief of these things, would effectually remove all those mountains of difficulty and discouragement, which men fancy to themselves in the ways of Religion. *To him that believeth all things are possible*, and most things would be easie.

2. Another reason of this wrong choice is want of consideration; for this would strengthen our faith, and make it more vigorous and powerful: And indeed a faith which is well rooted and established doth suppose a wise and deep consideration of things; and the want of this is a great cause of the fatal miscarriage of men; that they do not sit down and consider with themselves seriously, how much Religion is their interest, and how much it will cost them to be true to it, and to persevere in it to the end.

We suffer our selves to be governed by sense, and to be transported with present things; but do not consider our future and lasting interest, and the whole duration of an immortal soul. And this is the reason why so many men are hurried away by the present and sensible delights of this world, because they will not take time to think of what will be hereafter.

For it is not to be imagined, but that the man who hath seriously considered what sin is, the shortness of its pleasure, and the eternity of its punishment, should resolve to forsake sin, and to live a holy and virtuous life.

To conclude this whole discourse. If men did but seriously believe the great principles of Religion; the being and the providence of God; the immortality of their souls; the glorious rewards, and the dreadful punishments of another world, they could not possibly make so imprudent a choice, as we see a great part of mankind to do, they could not be induced to forsake God and Religion for any temporal interest and advantage; to renounce the favour of heaven, and all their hopes of happiness in another world, for any thing that this world can afford; nay not for the whole world, if it were offered to them. For as our Saviour reasons in this very case, of forsaking our Religion for any temporal interest, or consideration; *What is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

Whenever any of us are tempted in this kind; let that solemn declaration of our Saviour and our judge be continually in our minds; *he that confesseth me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven: but whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in the glory of his Father, with his holy angels.*

And we have great cause to thank God, to see so many in this day of trial, and hour of temptation, to adhere with so much resolution and constancy to their holy religion, and to prefer *the keeping of faith, and a good conscience*, to all earthly considerations and advantages.

And this very thing, that so many hold their religion so fast, and are so loath to part with it, gives great hopes that they intend to make good use of it, and to frame their lives according to the holy rules and precepts of it; which alone can give us peace, whilst we live, and comfort when we come to die; and after death secure to us the possession of a happiness large as our wishes, and lasting as our souls.

To which, God of his infinite goodness bring us all, for his mercy's sake, in Jesus Christ: To whom, with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

The first
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N IV.

Of Constancy in the Profession of the true Religion.

H E B. X. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that hath promised.



THE main scope and design of this Epistle to the *Hebrews* is to persuade the *Jews*, who were newly converted to christianity to continue stedfast in the profession of that holy and excellent religion which they had embraced; and not to be removed from it, either by the subtle insinuations of their brethren the *Jews*, who pretended that they were in possession of the true ancient Religion, and the only true church of God upon earth; or by the terrour of the heathen persecution, which was so hot against them at that time. And to this end the author of this epistle doth by great variety of arguments demonstrate the excellency of the christian Religion above the *Jewish* dispensation; and shews at large, that in all those respects upon which the *Jews* valued themselves and their Religion (as namely upon the account of their law-giver, their high-priests, and their sacrifices) the christian religion had every way the advantage of them.

And having made this clear, he concludes this with an earnest exhortation to them to continue stedfast in the profession of this excellent Religion, which was revealed to them by *the Son of God*, the true propitiatory sacrifice, and the great high-priest of their profession, and into which they had solemnly been initiated and admitted by baptism; *vers. 19, 20, 21, 22. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high-priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, that is, let us sincerely serve God with a firm persuasion of the truth and excellency of this holy religion, into the profession whereof we were solemnly admitted by baptism; for that is undoubtedly the meaning of the following words; having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washt with pure water; the water, with which our bodies are washt in baptism, signifying our spiritual regeneration, and the purging of our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God. From all which he concludes, let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. This refers to that solemn profession of faith, which was made by all christians at their baptism, and which is contained in the ancient creed of the christian church, called by the ancient fathers, the rule of faith.*

Let us hold fast, κατέχωμεν, let us firmly retain; the same with κατέχωμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας, Chap. 4. 14. Seeing then we have a great high-priest which is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us take fast hold of our profession. So here in the text, the apostle upon the same consideration exhorts christians to retain, or hold fast, τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος, the confession, or profession of their hope; that is, the hope of the resurrection of the dead, and everlasting life, which was the conclusion of that faith or creed, whereof in baptism they made a solemn profession. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith or hope, without wavering; the word is ἀκλινῶς, inflexible, unmoveable, steady, and not apt to waver and be shaken by every wind of contrary doctrine, nor by the blasts and storms of persecution. For he is faithful that hath promised. If we

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continue faithful and steady to God, he will be *faithful*, to make good all the promises which he hath made to us.

In the words thus explained, there are *two* things which I shall distinctly consider.

First, The exhortation: *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering*: And,

Secondly, The argument or encouragement used to enforce it; *He is faithful that promised*. I begin with the

First, The exhortation to be constant and steady in the profession of the Christian Religion; *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*. In the handling of this, and that we may the better understand the true meaning of this exhortation here in the text, I shall do these *two* things.

I. I shall shew negatively, wherein this constancy and steadiness in the profession of the true Religion does not consist. And here I shall remove one or two things, which are thought by some to be inconsistent with constancy and steadfastness in Religion.

II. I shall shew positively what is implied in a constant and steady profession of the true Religion.

I. I shall shew negatively, what constancy and steadfastness in the profession of the true Religion does not imply. And there are two things which are thought by some to be imply'd, in *holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering*.

First, That men should not take the liberty to examine their Religion, and enquire into the grounds and reasons of it.

Secondly, That men should obstinately refuse to hear any reasons that can be brought against the true Religion as they think, which they have once entertained.

First, That men should not take the liberty to examine their religion, and to enquire into the grounds and reasons of it. This, I think, is so far from being forbidden in this exhortation, that, on the contrary, I doubt not to make it appear, that a free and impartial enquiry into the grounds and reasons of our Religion, and a thorough trial and examination of them, is one of the best means to confirm and establish us in the profession of it: I mean, that all persons that are capable of it, should do it, and that they will find great benefit and advantage by it. For I do not think that this is a duty equally and indifferently incumbent upon all; nor indeed fit and proper for all Persons; because all are not equally capable of doing it. There are two sorts of persons that are in a great measure incapable of doing it.

1. Children.

2. Such grown persons as are of a very mean and low capacity, and improvement of understanding.

Children are not fit to examine, but only to learn and believe what is taught them by their parents and teachers. They are fit to have the fear of God, and the principles of the true Religion, instilled into them; but they are by no means fit to discern between a true and false Religion, and to chuse for themselves, and to make a change of their Religion; as hath of late been allowed to them in a nation not far from us, and by publick edict declared, that children at *seven* years old, are fit to chuse and to change their Religion: Which is the first law I ever heard of, that allows children at that age to do any act for themselves, that is of consequence and importance to them, for the remaining parts of their lives, and which they shall stand obliged to perform and make good. They are indeed baptized, according to the custom and usage of the christian church, in their infancy: But they do not enter into this obligation themselves; but their sureties undertake for them, that when they come to age, they shall take this promise upon themselves, and confirm and make it good. But surely, they can do no act for themselves, and in their own name, at that age, which can be obligatory. They can neither make any contracts that shall be valid, nor incur any debt, nor oblige themselves by any promise, nor chuse themselves a guardian, nor do any act that may bring them under an inconvenience, when they shall come at age. And can we think them of discretion sufficient at that time, to do a thing

of

of the greatest moment and consequence of all other; and which will concern them to all eternity; namely, to chuse their Religion? There is indeed one part of one Religion (which we all know) which children at *seven* years of age are fit (I do not say to judge of, but) to be as fond of, and to practise to as good purpose, as those of riper years; and that is, to worship images, to tell their beads, to say their prayers, and to be present at the service of God in an unknown tongue; and this they are more likely to chuse at that age, than those who are of riper and more improv'd understandings; and if they do not chuse it at that time, it is ten to one they will not chuse it afterwards. I shall say no more of this, but that it is a very extraordinary law, and such as perhaps was never thought of before, from the beginning of the world. Thus much for children.

As for grown persons, who are of a very low and mean capacity of understanding, and either by reason of the weakness of their faculties, or other disadvantages which they lie under, are in little or no probability of improving themselves; These are always to be considered as in the condition of children, and learners, and therefore must of necessity, in things which are not plain and obvious to the meanest capacities, trust and rely upon the judgment of others. And it is really much wiser and safer for them so to do, than to depend upon their own judgments, and to lean to their own understandings; and such persons, if they be modest and humble, and pray earnestly to God for his assistance and direction, and are careful to practise what they know, and to live up to the best light and knowledge which they have, shall not miscarry merely for want of those farther degrees of knowledge which they had no capacity nor opportunity to attain; because their ignorance is unavoidable, and God will require no more of them than he hath given them, and will not call them to account for the improvement of those talents, which he never committed to them. And if they be led into any dangerous error, by the negligence or ill conduct of those, under whose care and instruction the providence of God permitted them to be placed, God will not impute it to them as a fault; because in the circumstances in which they were, they took the best and wisest course that they could, to come to the knowledge of the truth, by being willing to learn what they could of those whom they took to be wiser than themselves.

But for such persons, who by the maturity of their age, and by the natural strength and clearness of their understandings, or by the due exercise and improvement of them, are capable of enquiring into, and understanding the grounds of their Religion, and discerning the difference betwixt truth and error (I do not mean in unnecessary points, and matters of deepest learning and speculation, but in matters necessary to salvation) it is certainly very reasonable, that such persons should examine their Religion, and understand the reasons and grounds of it.

And this must either be granted to be reasonable, or else every man must continue in that Religion in which he happens to be fixed by education, or for any other reason to pitch upon, when he comes to years, and makes his free choice. For if this be a good principle, that no man is to examine his Religion, but take it as it is, and to believe it, and rest satisfied with it; then every man is to remain in the Religion which he first lights upon, whether by choice or the chance of his education. For he ought not to change but upon reason; and reason he can have none, unless he be allowed to examine his Religion, and to compare it with others, that by the comparison he may discern which is best, and ought in reason to be preferred in his choice. For to him that will not, or is not permitted to search into the grounds of any Religion, all Religions are alike; as all things are of the same colour to him that is always kept in the dark; or if he happens to come into the light, dares not open his eyes, and make use of them to discern the different colours of things.

But this is evidently and at first sight unreasonable; because at this rate, every man that hath once entertained an error, and a false Religion, must for ever continue in it. For if he be not allowed to examine it, he can never have reason to change; and to make a change without reason, is certainly unreasonable, and mere vanity and inconstancy.

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And yet, for ought I can see, this is the principle which the church of *Rome* doth, with great zeal and earnestness inculcate upon their people; discouraging all doubts and enquiries about their Religion, as temptations of the Devil; and all examinations of the grounds and reasons of their Religion, as an inclination and dangerous step towards heresy. For what else can they mean, by taking the Scriptures out of the hands of the people, and locking them up from them in an unknown tongue; by requiring them absolutely to submit their judgments, and to resign them up to that which they are pleased to call the catholick church, and implicitly to believe as she believes, tho' they know not what that is? This is, in truth, to believe as their priest tells them; for that is all the teaching part of the church, and all the rule of faith that the common people are acquainted with.

And it is not sufficient to say in this matter, that when men are in the truth, and of the right Religion, and in the bosom of the true church, they ought to rest satisfied, and to examine and enquire no farther. For this is manifestly unreasonable, and that upon these *three* accounts.

1. Because this is a plain and shameful begging of the thing in question; and that which every church, and every Religion doth almost with equal confidence pretend to; that theirs is the only right Religion, and the only true church. And these pretences are all alike reasonable to him that never examined the grounds of any of them, nor hath compared them together. And therefore it is the vainest thing in the world, for the church of *Rome* to pretend, that all Religions in the world ought to be examined, but theirs; because theirs, and none else, is the true Religion. For this which they say so confidently of it, that it is the true Religion, no man can know till he have examined it, and searched into the grounds of it, and hath considered the objections which are against it. So that it is fond partiality to say, that their Religion is not to be examined by the people that profess it, but that all other Religions ought to be examined, or rather, because they are different from that which they presume to be the only true Religion, ought to be condemned at all adventures, without any farther enquiry: This, I say, is fond partiality; because every Religion, and every church, may (for ought that appears to any man that is not permitted to examine things impartially) say the same for themselves, and with as much reason; and if so, then either every religion ought to permit it self to be examined; or else no man ought to examine his own Religion, whatever it be; and consequently *Jews*, and *Turks*, and *Heathens*, and *Hereticks*, ought all to continue as they are, and none of them to change; because they cannot reasonably change, without examining both that Religion which they leave, and that which they embrace instead of it.

2. Admitting this pretence were true, that they are the true church, and have the true Religion; this is so far from being a reason why they should not permit it to be examined, that, on the contrary, it is one of the best reasons in the world why they should allow it to be examined, and why they may safely suffer it to be so. They should permit it to be tried, that men may upon good reason be satisfied that it is the true Religion: And they may safely suffer it to be done; because, if they be sure that the grounds of their Religion be firm and good, I am sure they will be never the worse for being examined and looked into. But I appeal to every man's reason, whether it be not an ill sign that they are not so sure that the grounds of their Religion are solid and firm, and such as will abide the trial; that they are so very loath to have them searched into and examined? This cannot but tempt a wise man to suspect, that their church is not founded upon a rock; and that they themselves know something that is amiss in their Religion, which makes them so loath to have it try'd, and brought to the touch.

3. It is certain among all christians, that the doctrine preached by the Apostles was the true faith of Christ; and yet they never forbade the christians to examine whether it was so or not: Nay, on the contrary, they frequently exhort them to try and examine their Religion, and whether that doctrine which they had delivered to them was the true faith of Christ. So *St. Paul*, *2 Corinth.* 13. 5. *examine your selves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.* And

again, 1 *Thess.* 5. 21. *prove all things, hold fast that which is good*; intimating to us, that in order to the holding fast the profession of our faith, it is requisite to prove and try it. And so likewise St. *John's* Ep. 1. 4. 1. *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false Prophets are gone out into the world.* And he gives a very notable mark whereby we may know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. The spirit of error carries on a worldly interest and design; and the doctrines of it tend to secular power and greatness; verse 5. *they are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world beareth them.* Acts 17. 11. St. *Luke* commends it, as an argument of a more noble and generous spirit in the *Bereans*, that they examined the doctrine which the Apostles preached, *whether it were agreeable to the Scriptures*; and this without disparagement to their infallibility: *These, saith he, were more noble than those of Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so.* They were ready to receive the word; but not blindly, and with an implicit faith, but using due care to examine the doctrines which they were taught, and to see if they were agreeable to that divine revelation of the holy Scriptures which they had before received. It seems they were not willing to admit and swallow contradictions in their faith. And we desire no more of the church of *Rome*, than that they would encourage the people to *search the Scriptures daily*, and to *examine whether their doctrines be according to them.* We would be glad to hear the Pope and a general Council commend to the people *the searching of the Scriptures*, and to try their definitions of faith and decrees of worship by that rule, to see whether what they have defined, and decreed to be believed and practised, be agreeable to it; their worship of images; their solemn invocation of Angels, and of the blessed Virgin, and the saints departed; the Sacrament under one kind only; the publick prayers and service of God in an unknown tongue; the frequent repetition of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ's body and blood in the mass. Had the *Bereans* been at the Council of *Trent*, and pleaded their right to *search the Scriptures, whether these things were so*, I doubt they would have been thought very troublesome and impertinent, and would not have been praised by the Pope and Council for their pains, as they are by St. *Luke*.

You see then, upon the whole matter, that it is a very groundless and suspicious pretense of the church of *Rome*, that because they are infallibly in the right, and theirs is the true Religion, therefore their people must not be permitted to examine it. The doctrine of the Apostles was undoubtedly the true faith of Christ; and yet they not only permitted the people to examine it, but exhorted and encouraged them so to do, and commended them for it: And any man that hath the spirit of a man, must abhor to submit to this slavery, not to be allowed to examine his Religion, and to enquire freely into the grounds and reasons of it; and would break with any church in the world upon this single point; and would tell them plainly, if your Religion be too good to be examined, I doubt it is too bad to be believed.

If it be said that the allowing of this liberty is the way to make people perpetually doubting and unsettled; I do utterly deny this, and do on the contrary with good reason affirm, that it is apt to have the contrary effect; there being in reason no better way to establish any man in the belief of any thing, than to let him see that there are very good grounds and reasons for what he believes; which no man can ever see, that is not permitted to examine whether there be such reasons or not. So that besides the reasonableness of the thing, it is of great benefit and advantage to us; and that upon these accounts.

1. To arm us against seducers. He that hath examined his Religion, and tried the grounds of it, is most able to maintain them, and make them good against all assaults that may be made upon us, to move us from our steadfastness: Whereas he that hath not examined, and consequently does not understand the reasons of his Religion, is liable to be *tossed to and fro, and to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those that lie*
in

in wait to deceive. For when he is attempted, he will either defend his Religion, or not: If he undertake the defense of it, before he hath examined the grounds of it, he makes himself an easie prey to every crafty man that will set upon him; he exposeth at once himself to danger, and his Religion to disgrace: If he decline the defense of it, he must be forced to take sanctuary in that ignorant and obstinate principle, that because he is of an infallible Church, and sure that he is in the right, therefore he never did nor will examine whether he be so or not. But how is he, or can he be sure that he is in the right, if he have no other reason for it, but his confidence, and his being *wiser in his own conceit, than seven men that can render a reason?* It is a shameful thing in a wise man, who is able to give a good reason of all other actions and parts of his life, to be able to say nothing for his Religion, which concerns him more than all the rest.

2. To examine and understand the grounds of our Religion, will be a good means (by the assistance of God's grace) to keep us constant to it, even under the fiery tryal. When it comes to this, that a man must suffer for his Religion, he had need to be well established in the belief of it; which no man can so well be, as he that in some good measure understands the grounds and reasons of his belief. A man would be well assured of the truth and goodness of that, for which he would lay down his life; otherwise *he dies as a fool dies*, he knows not for what. A man would be loath to set such a seal to a blank, I mean to that which he hath no sufficient ground and reason to believe to be true; which, whether he hath or not, no man that hath not examined the grounds of his Religion can be well assured of. This St. Peter prescribes, as the best preparative for suffering for righteousness sake, the 1st Ep. of Peter, 3. 14, 15. *But if ye suffer for righteousness sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctifie the Lord God in your hearts; (that is, make him the great object of your dread and trust) and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.*

Secondly, *The holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, doth not imply, that men should obstinately refuse to hear any reason against that Religion, which they have embraced, and think to be the true Religion. As men should examine before they chuse; so after they have chosen, they should be ready to be better informed, if better reason can be offered. No man ought to think himself so infallible as to be privileged from hearing reason, and from having his doctrines and dictates try'd by that test.

Our blessed Saviour himself, the most infallible person that ever was in the world, and who *declared the truth which he had heard of God*, yet he offered himself and his doctrine to this tryal. John 8. 46. *Which of you convinceth me of sin? that is of falshood and error? And if I speak the truth, why do ye not believe me?* He was sure he spake the truth; and yet for all that, if they could convince him of error and mistake, he was ready to hear any reason they could bring to that purpose. Though a man be never so sure that he is in the true Religion, and never so resolved to continue constant and stedfast in it; yet reason is always to be heard, when it is fairly offered. And as we ought always to be *ready to give an answer to those who ask a reason of the hope and faith that is in us*, so ought we likewise to be ready to hear the reasons which others do fairly offer against our opinion and persuasion in Religion, and to debate the matter with them; that if we be in the right, and they in the ~~wrong~~, we may rectifie their mistakes, and *instruct them in meekness, if God peradventure may give them repentance to the acknowledgment of the truth.*

We are not only to examine our Religion, before we peremptorily fix upon it; but after we are, as we think upon the best reason, established and settled in it. Tho' we ought not to doubt and waver in our Religion upon every slight and trifling objection that can be brought against it; yet we ought always to have an ear open to hear reason, and consider any thing of weight and moment that can be offered to us about it. For it is a great disparagement to truth, and ar-

gues a distrust of the goodness of our cause and Religion, to be afraid to hear what can be said against it; as if truth were so weak, that in every conflict it were in danger to be baffled and run down, and go by the worst; and as if the reasons that could be brought against it, were too hard for it, and not to be encounter'd by those forces which truth has on its side.

We have that honest confidence of the goodness of our cause and Religion, that we do not fear what can be said against it; and therefore we do not forbid our people to examine the objections of our adversaries, and to read the best books they can write against it. But the Church of *Rome* are so *wise in their generation*, that they will not permit those of their Communion to hear or read what can be said against them: Nay, they will not permit the people the use of the holy Scriptures, which they, with us, acknowledge to be at least an essential part of the rule of faith. They tell their people, that after they are once of their Church and Religion, they ought not to hear any reasons against it; and though they be never so strong, they ought not to entertain any doubt concerning it; because all doubting is a temptation of the devil, and a mortal sin. But surely that Church is not to be heard, which will not hear reason; nor that Religion to be much admired, which will not allow those that have once embrac'd it, to hear it ever after debated and examined. This is a very suspicious business, and argues that either they have not truth on their side; or that truth is a weak, and pitiful, and sneaking thing, and not able to make its party good against error.

I should now have proceeded in the *second* place, to shew *positively* what is implied in *holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering*; and then to have considered the argument and encouragement hereto, *Because he is faithful that promised*. But I shall proceed no farther at this time.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N V.

Of Constancy in the Profession of the true Religion.

H E B. X. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.



Have already made entrance into these words, which I told you do contain in them,

First, An Exhortation to *hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering*.

Secondly, An argument or encouragement thereto; *because he is faithful that promised*. If we continue steadfast and faithful to God, we shall find him faithful to us, in making good all the promises which he hath made to us, whether of aid and support, or of recompense and reward of our fidelity to him.

I have begun to handle the *first* part of the text, *viz.* The Apostle's exhortation to Christians to be constant and steady in their Religion: *Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering*. The word ἀκλινῆ, which we render *without wavering*, signifies inflexible and unmoveable, not apt to waver and to be *shaken with every wind of contrary doctrine*, nor by the blasts and storms of persecution. And that we might the better comprehend the full and true meaning of this exhortation, I propounded to do these *two* things.

I. To

I. To shew *negatively*, wherein this constancy and steadiness in the profession of the true Religion doth not consist. And,

II. To shew *positively*, what is implied and intended here by the Apostle in *holding fast the profession of our Faith without wavering*.

I. To shew *negatively*, wherein this constancy and steadiness in the profession of the true Religion doth not consist. This I spake to the last day; and shewed at large, that there are *two* things which are not contained and intended in this exhortation.

1. That men should not have the liberty to examine their religion, and to enquire into the grounds and reasons of it; such I mean as are capable of this examination and enquiry; which some, I shewed, are not; as children, who while they are in that state, are only fit to learn and believe what is taught them by their parents and teachers: And likewise such grown persons, as either by the natural weakness of their faculties, or by some great disadvantage of education, are of a very low and mean capacity and improvement of understanding. These are to be considered, as in the condition of children and learners; and therefore must of necessity trust and rely upon the judgment of others.

2. This *holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, does not imply, that when men upon examination and enquiry are settled, as they think and verily believe, in the true Religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that can be offered against them. Both these principles I shewed to be unreasonable, and arguments of a bad cause and Religion.

I shall now proceed to explain the meaning of this exhortation, to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, by shewing in the

Second place, what it is that is implied in the constant and steady profession of the true faith and Religion; namely, that when upon due search and examination, we are fully satisfied, that it is the true Religion which we have embraced, or as St. Peter expresses it, *1st Epistle, 5. 12.* that *this is the true grace of God, wherein we stand*; that then we should adhere stedfastly to it, and *hold it fast*, and not suffer it to be wrested from us, nor our selves to be moved from it, by any pretences, or insinuations, or temptations whatsoever: For there is a great deal of difference between the confidence and stedfastness of an ignorant man, who hath never considered things, and enquired into the grounds of them; and the assurance and settlement of one, who hath been well instructed in his Religion, and hath taken pains to search and examine to the bottom, the grounds and reasons of what he holds and professeth to believe. The first is mere wilfulness and obstinacy. A man hath entertained, and drank in such principles of Religion by education, or hath taken them up by chance; but he hath no reason for them: And yet, however he came by them, he is resolved to hold them fast, and not to part with them. The other is the resolution and constancy of a wise man. He hath embraced his Religion upon good grounds, and he sees no reason to alter it: and therefore is resolved to stick to it, and to *hold fast the profession of it* stedfastly to the end. And to this purpose there are many exhortations and Cautions scatter'd up and down the writings of the holy Apostles; as that we should be *stedfast and unmoveable, established in the truth, rooted and grounded in the faith*, and that we should *hold fast that which is good*, and not suffer our selves to be carried to and fro with every wind of doctrine, through the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those that lye in wait to deceive; that we should not be removed from him that hath called us unto the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel; that we should stand fast in one spirit and one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel, and be in nothing terrified by our adversaries; and that if occasion be, we should contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints; and here in the text, that we should *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*. For the explaining of this, I shall do *two* things;

I. Consider *what* it is that we are to *hold fast*; namely, *the profession of our Faith*; And,

II. *How we are to hold it fast, or what is implied in holding fast the profession of our faith, without wavering.*

I. *What it is that we are to hold fast; namely, the profession of our faith; i. e. of the christian faith or Religion: For, I told you before, that this profession or confession of our faith, or hope (as the word properly signifies) is an allusion to that profession of faith which was made by all those who were admitted members of the christian church by baptism; of which the Apostle makes mention immediately before the text, when he says, let us draw near in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water: And then it follows, let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering. The profession of faith which we made in our baptism, and which by the ancient fathers is called the rule of faith, and which is now contain'd in that which we call the Apostles creed, and which is called by St. Paul, Rom. 6. 17. the form of doctrine which was delivered to them; i. e. to all christians; and 2 Tim. 1. 13. the form of sound words; Hold fast, faith he, the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus; and by St. Jude, the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*

So that it is the first and ancient faith of the christian church delivered to them by Christ and his Apostles, which we are here exhorted to *hold fast*; the necessary and fundamental articles of the christian faith; and by consequence all those truths which have a necessary connexion with those articles, and are implied in them, and by plain consequence are to be deduced from them. It is not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men; nor the partial dictates and doctrines of any church, since the primitive times, which are not contained in the holy Scriptures and the ancient creeds of the christian church, but have been since declared and imposed upon the christian world, though with never so confident a pretense of antiquity in the doctrines, and of infallibility in the proposers of them: These are no part of *that faith* which we are either to *profess*, or to *hold fast*; because we have no reason to admit the pretenses, by virtue whereof those doctrines or practices are imposed; being able to make it good, and having effectually done it, that those doctrines are not of primitive antiquity; and that the church which proposeth them, hath no more claim to infallibility, than all other parts of the christian church; which since the Apostles time is none at all.

In a word; no other doctrines which are not sufficiently revealed in Scripture, either in express terms or by plain and necessary consequence; nor any rites of worship, nor matters of practice, which are not commanded in Scripture, are to be esteemed any part of *that faith* in Religion, the *profession* whereof the Apostle here commands all christians to *hold fast without wavering*; much less any doctrines or practices, which are repugnant to the word of God, and to the faith and practice of the first ages of christianity; of which kind I shall have occasion in my following discourse to instance in several particulars. In the mean time I shall only observe, that *that faith* and Religion which we *profess*, and which by God's grace, we have ever *held fast*, is *that which* hath been acknowledged by all christian churches in all ages, to have been *the ancient Catholic and Apostolick faith*, and cannot (as to any part or tittle of it) be denied to be so, even by the church of Rome her self.

I proceed to the

II. Thing which I proposed to consider; namely, *how we are to hold fast the profession of our faith, or what is implied by the Apostle, in this exhortation, to hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering.* And I think these following particulars may very well be supposed to be implied in it:

1. That we should *hold fast the profession of our faith*, against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support their confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to Scripture, and reason, and the common sense of mankind.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Against

4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition and groundless hopes of getting to Heaven upon easier terms in another Religion.

5. Against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busy and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their Religion, and to gain profelytes to their own party and faction. I shall go over these with as much clearness and brevity as I can.

1. We should *hold fast the profession of our faith*, against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence. All Religion is either natural or instituted. The rule of natural Religion is the common reason of mankind: The rule of instituted Religion is divine revelation, or the word of God; which all Christians before the Council of *Trent* did agree to be contained in the holy Scriptures. So that nothing can pretend to be Religion, but what can be proved to be so, one or both of those ways; either by Scripture, or by reason, or by both. And how confident soever men may be of opinions destitute of this proof, any man that understands the grounds of Religion, will without any more ado reject them, for want of this proof; and notwithstanding any pretended authority or infallibility of the church that imposeth them, will have no more consideration and regard of them, than of the confident dictates and assertions of any Enthusiast whatsoever; because there is no reason to have regard to any man's confidence, if the arguments and reasons which he brings, bear no proportion to it. We see in experience, that confidence is generally ill grounded, and is a kind of passion in the understanding, and is commonly made use of, like fury and force, to supply for the weakness and want of argument. If a man can prove what he says by good argument, there is no need of confidence to back and support it. We may at any time trust a plain and substantial reason, and leave it to make its own way, and to bear out itself. But if the man's reasons and arguments be not good, his confidence adds nothing of real force to them, in the opinion of wise men, and tends only to its own confusion. Arguments are like powder, which will carry and do execution according to its true strength; and all the rest is but noise. And generally none are so much to be suspected of error, or a design to deceive, as those that pretend most confidently to inspiration and infallibility: as we see in all sorts of Enthusiasts, who pretend to inspiration, although we have nothing but their own word for it; for they work no miracles; and all pretence to inspiration and infallibility, without miracle, whether it be in particular persons, or in whole Churches, is Enthusiastical; *i. e.* a pretence to inspiration, without any proof of it.

And therefore St. *Paul* was not moved by the boasting and confidence of the false Apostles; because they gave no proof and evidence of their divine inspiration and commission, as he had done; for which he appeals to the sense of men, whether he had not wrought great miracles; which the false Apostles had not done, though they had the confidence to give out themselves to be Apostles as well as he; 2 Cor. 12. 11, 12. *I am (says he) become a fool in glorying, ye have compelled me. And truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs and wonders, and mighty deeds.* And Rev. 2. 2. Christ there commends the Church of *Ephesus*, because *she had tried them which said they were Apostles, but were not; and had found them liars.* And as we are not to believe every one that says he is an Apostle, so neither every one that pretends to be a successor of the Apostles, and to be endued with the same spirit of infallibility that they were: For these also, when they are tried whether they be the successors of the Apostles or not, may be found liars. And therefore St. *John* cautions Christians *not to believe every spirit*, (that is, every one that pretends to divine inspiration, and the spirit of God,) *but to try the spirits whether they be of God; because many false Prophets are gone out into the world*, 1 John 4. 1. And therefore the confidence of men in this kind ought not to move us, when their pretence to infallibility is destitute of the proper proof and evidence of it, which is a power of miracles; and when their doctrines and practices have neither the evidence of reason or Scripture on their side.

For instance; *that the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches*; which is one of the new articles of Pope Pius the IVth's creed; and yet there is not one syllable in Scripture tending to this purpose. And in reason it cannot be, that any but that which was the first christian church, should be the mother of all churches; and *that the church of Rome*, certainly, was not, and the church of *Jerusalem* undoubtedly was.

And then *that the Bishop of Rome, as successor of St. Peter there, is the supreme and universal pastor of Christ's church by divine appointment*, as he assumes to himself; and *that it is necessary to salvation, for every human creature to be subject to the Bishop of Rome*, as is declared in their canon-law by a constitution of Pope Boniface the VIIIth, which constitution is confirm'd in the last *Lateran* council; of all which there is not the least mention in Scripture, nor any divine appointment to that purpose to be found there. And it is against reason, that all the world should be obliged to trudge to *Rome* for the decision of causes and differences, which in many, and the most weighty matters, are reserved to the decision of that see, and can be determined no where else. And against reason likewise it is to found this universal supremacy in his being successor of St. Peter; and to fix it in the Bishop of *Rome*, rather than at *Antioch*; when it is certain, and granted by themselves, that St. Peter was first Bishop of *Antioch*, and out of all question, that he was Bishop of *Antioch*; but not so, that he was Bishop of *Rome*.

Nor is there any thing in Scripture for *the deliverance of souls out of purgatory by the prayers and masses of the living*. The whole thing is groundless, and not agreeable to the constant suppositions of Scripture concerning a future state. Nor is there any reason for it besides that which is not fit to be given, the wealth and profit which it brings in.

The invocation and worship of the blessed virgin, and of all the saints departed, is destitute of all Scripture-warrant or example, and confessed by themselves not to have been owned or practised in the *three first* ages of the church, because it looked too like the heathen idolatry; which deserves to be well considered by those who pretend to derive their whole religion from Christ and his Apostles by a continued and uninterrupted succession. And this practice is likewise destitute of all colour of reason; unless we be assured, that they hear our prayers in all places; which we cannot be, unless they be present in all places, which they themselves do not believe; or that God doth some way or other reveal and make known to them the prayers which are made to them, which we cannot possibly be assured of, but by some revelation of God to that purpose; which we no where find, nor doth the church of *Rome* pretend to it.

But I proceed to the

2^d Thing; namely, that we should much more *hold fast the profession of our faith* and Religion, against the confidence of men, contrary to Scripture, and reason, and the common sense of mankind. For these are the chief grounds of certainty, which we can have for or against any thing; and if these be clearly on our side, we ought not to be much moved by the confidence of men, concerning any doctrines or practices of Religion, which are plainly contrary to these. If in points wherein we have this advantage on our side, we do not *hold fast the profession* of our Religion, our error and folly are capable of no excuse. And this advantage we plainly have in several points and controversies betwixt us and the church of *Rome*.

As in *the worship of images*; which is as expressly and clearly forbidden in the second commandment, and that without any distinction, as any other thing is forbidden in the whole Bible. And that it is so forbidden in this commandment, and that this commandment is still in force among christians, was the universal sense of the ancient christian church.

Prayers and the service of God in an unknown tongue are directly contrary to the very nature and end of religious worship, which ought to be a reasonable service; which it cannot be, if it be not directed by our understandings, and accompanied with our hearts and affections: But if it be performed in an unknown

known tongue, our understanding can have no part in it; and if we do not understand it, it cannot move our affections. And this likewise is plainly contrary to Scripture; namely, to a large discourse of St. Paul's almost throughout a whole *chapter*, where he purposely sets himself to shew the unprofitableness and gross absurdity of praying, or celebrating any other part of religious worship, in an unknown tongue. If any part of *our Religion* had been half so clearly condemned in Scripture, as this is, (which yet is the constant and general practice of the church of *Rome*) we must have *lain down in our shame, and confusion would have covered us*; and we must either have rejected the authority of the bible, or have renounced that point of our Religion, whatever it had been; tho' it had been dear to us as our *right hand*, and our *right eye*, we must, upon such plain evidence of Scripture against it, have *cut it off, and plucked it out, and cast it from us*.

The like may be said of *locking up the Scriptures from the people in an unknown tongue*; contrary to the command of the Scriptures themselves, and to the great end and design of almighty God in the writing and publishing of them; and contrary to the perpetual exhortations and councils of all the ancient fathers of the christian church for a great many ages, not one excepted: They are hardly more frequent, and copious, and earnest in any argument, than in persuading people of all ranks and conditions to the constant and careful reading of the holy Scriptures: And contrary to the common reason and sense of mankind. For what should men be persuaded to be acquainted withal, if not with that which is the great instrument of our salvation? That book which was written on purpose to reveal and convey to men the knowledge of God, and of his will, and their duty? What should men be allowed to know, if not that which is the best and most effectual means to direct and bring them to heaven, or turn them from sin, and to preserve them from eternal misery? When our Saviour would represent the best and most effectual means of bringing men to happiness, and saving them from the eternal torments of hell, in the parable of the rich man and *Lazarus*, he brings in *Abraham*, giving the best advice he could to the rich man who was in hell, concerning his brethren that were upon earth, how they might prevent their *coming into that place of torment*; and he directs them to the Scriptures, as the best and most effectual means to that purpose: *They have* (says he) *Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them*.

Now if in the church of God, among the *Jews*, the same course had been taken that is now in the church of *Rome*; the rich man might, and in all reason ought to have reply'd, *nay, father Abraham, but they have not Moses and the Prophets, nor are they permitted to read them in a language that they can understand; and therefore this advice is of no use to them*: And then he might with reason have press'd him, as he did, that *one might be sent to them from the dead, to testify unto them*. But it appears that *Abraham* was very positive and peremptory in this advice; and that he prefers the knowledge of the Scriptures to any other way and means that could be thought of; and that if this had not its effect to persuade men to repentance, and to preserve them from hell, he did not know any thing else that was so likely to do it: For he concludes; *if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead*. And this is the conclusion of the parable; which plainly shews what was the main scope and design of our Saviour in it; namely, to recommend to us the use of the holy Scriptures, as the best and most effectual means which the wisdom of God hath provided for the salvation of mankind.

And now any man would be apt to think, that the declared Judgment of our Saviour in the case, should go a great way, even with the most infallible church in the world. However, this we must say, that it is in truth a very hard case, to which the church of *Rome* hath reduced men; that it will neither allow them salvation out of their church, nor the best and most effectual means of salvation when they are in it. I might say much more upon this head; but this I hope may be sufficient.

The next instance shall be in the doctrine of *transubstantiation*; which is contrary to the Scriptures, which after consecration so frequently call the elements *bread and wine*; and which, without reason or necessity, puts an absurd and impossible sense upon those words of our Saviour, *this is my body*; which do no more prove *transubstantiation*, than those words, *this cup is the new testament*, do prove that the material cup which was used in the sacrament was substantially changed into the new testament; and no more, than those texts which affirm God to have eyes, and ears, and hands, do prove that he really hath so. But besides the contrariety of this doctrine to Scripture, nothing can be more repugnant to reason. It is so big with contradictions, and so surfeited of impossibilities, that it would be endless to reckon them up. And besides all this, it plainly contradicts the clear and constant evidence of *four* of our *five* senses; which, whoever contradicts, undermines the foundation of all certainty.

And then *the communion in one kind* is plainly contrary to our Saviour's institution of the sacrament in both kinds, as they themselves acknowledge. And therefore the Council of *Constance*, being sensible of this, was forced to decree it with an express *non obstante* to the institution of Christ, and the practice of the Apostles and the primitive church. And their doctrine of *concomitancy* (as if the blood were in the flesh, and together with it) will not help the matter: Because in the sacrament Christ's body is represented as broken, and pierced, and exhausted, and drain'd of its blood; and his blood is represented as shed and poured out; so that one kind can by no means contain and exhibit both.

The next instance is, *the repetition of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice in the mass*, so often as that is celebrated: Against all reason: because the sacrifice of Christ once offered upon the cross, was a full and perfect propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and therefore ought not, because it needs not, to be again repeated for that end, in any manner whatsoever. And it is directly contrary to the main scope of a great part of this Epistle to the *Hebrews*, which shews the excellency of the Gospel above the law in this respect, that the expiatory sacrifice of the Gospel was offered *once for all*; whereas the sacrifices of the law were perpetually repeated. Chap. 7. 27. speaking of Christ; *who needs not daily, as those high-priests, to offer up sacrifices; first for his own sins, and then for the peoples: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.* chap. 9. 26. *But once in the end of the world hath he appeared, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself: And as it is appointed for all men once to die; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.* And chap. 10. 10. *By the which will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* And verse the 12th, *But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.* And verse the 14th; *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* There cannot be plainer texts for any thing in the bible, than that this propitiatory sacrifice was never to be repeated.

And whereas they say, that the *sacrifice of the mass is an unbloody sacrifice*: This, instead of bringing them off, doth but entangle the matter more. For if blood be offered in the sacrifice of the mass, how is it an unbloody sacrifice? What can be more bloody than blood? And if blood be not offered, how is it propitiatory? Since the Apostle lays it down for a certain rule, that *without shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins; i. e.* There can be no propitiation for the sins of the living or the dead; which the church of *Rome* affirms there is.

I might have added one or two instances more; and then should have proceeded to shew, in the *third* place, that we are to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, against all the temptations and terrors of the world; which is more especially and principally here intended by the Apostle in this exhortation.

But I shall proceed no farther at present.

S E R M O N VI.

The Third
Sermon on
this Text.

Of Constancy in the Profession of the true Religion.

H E B. X. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.



IN these words, I have told you, are contained,

First, An exhortation to *hold fast the profession of our faith, or hope, without wavering.*

Secondly, An argument or encouragement thereto; *because he is faithful that promised.* I am yet upon the first of these; the exhortation to christians, to be constant and steady in the profession of their Religion: *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.* And that we might the better comprehend the true and full meaning of this exhortation, I shewed,

First, Negatively, what is not meant and intended by it. And I mentioned these *two* particulars.

1. The Apostle doth not hereby intend, that those who are capable of enquiring into, and examining the grounds of their Religion, should not have the liberty to do it. Nor,

2. That when upon due enquiry and examination, men are settled, as they think and verily believe, in the true faith and Religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that can be offered against their present persuasion. Both these I shewed to be unreasonable, and arguments of a bad cause and Religion: And therefore neither of them can be intended by the Apostle in this exhortation.

Secondly, I proceeded *positively* to explain the meaning of this exhortation. And to this purpose I proposed,

I. To consider *what* it is, that we are to *hold fast*, viz. *the confession or profession of our faith.* The ancient christian faith, of which every christian makes *profession* in his baptism: For of that the Apostle here speaks, as appears by the context; not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men, nor the impious dictates and doctrines of any church not contained in the holy Scriptures, imposed upon the christian church; tho' with never so confident a pretense of the antiquity of the doctrines proposed, or of the infallibility of the proposers of them. And then I proceeded in the

IId. Place, to shew *how* we are to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.* And I mentioned these following particulars, as probably implied in the Apostle's exhortation.

1. That we should *hold fast the profession of our faith*, against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support their confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, against Scripture and reason, and the common sense of mankind.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to heaven upon easier terms, in another religion.

5. Against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busie and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their religion, and to gain profelytes to their party and faction.

1. We are to hold fast the profession of our faith, against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support their confidence. And of this I gave several instances. As in the pretense of the church of Rome to *infallibility*, without any proof or evidence of it, either by Scripture or miracles: I mean such miracles, as are sufficiently attested. For as for their legends, since the wisest among themselves give no credit to them, I hope, they do not expect that we should believe them, or be moved by them. And then their pretense that *the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches*; which is now made an article of their creed. And that *the bishop of Rome, as successor of Saint Peter there, is by divine appointment the supreme and universal Pastor of Christ's church*. And that *it is necessary to salvation, for every human creature to be subject to him*. And lastly, *their invocation and worship of the blessed Virgin, and Saints departed*; without any warrant or example of any such thing, either in Scripture, or in the practice of the first ages of the christian Religion; and without sufficient ground to believe that they hear the prayers which are put up to them.

2. Much more are we to hold fast the profession of our faith, against the confidence of men, contrary to Scripture and reason and the common sense of mankind. And here I instanced in *the worship of images*; *the locking up of the Scriptures from the people*; *and celebrating the publick prayers and service of God in an unknown tongue*; in their doctrine of *transubstantiation*; *their communion in one kind*; and their *daily repetition, in the sacrifice of the mass, of the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ*: which was offered *once for all*, and is of eternal virtue and efficacy, and therefore ought not, because it needs not, like *Jewish sacrifices* under the law, to be repeated.

To these instances, which I have already spoken to, I shall add *one or two* more; as namely, That *to the due administration of the sacraments, an intention in the minister at least to do what the church does, is requisite*. This is expressly defined, and under an *anathema* upon all that shall say otherwise, by the Council of Trent, *Seff. the seventh, Can. 11th*; which is to make the validity and virtue of the sacraments to depend upon the intention of the priest or minister. So that if in the administration of baptism, he do not intend to baptize the party he pretends to baptize, then it is no baptism, and consequently the person baptized is not made a member of Christ's church; nor is any grace or special benefit conferred upon him; nor is he a christian. So likewise in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, if the priest do not intend to consecrate the host, then is it no sacrament; and they that receive it, receive no benefit by it; and (which according to their opinion is a dreadful consequence) by the words of consecration, there is no change made of the elements into the body and blood of Christ, and consequently they that give adoration to the sacrament in such cases, worship bread and wine, for God; which is idolatry. And so likewise in their sacrament of penance, though the priest pronounce the words of absolution; yet if he do not intend to absolve the penitent; though he be never so truly penitent, and God on his part is ready to forgive him; yet if the priest do not intend to do so, there is nothing done, and the man is still in his sin. So likewise in ordination, (which is another of their sacraments) if the bishop do not intend to ordain the man, he is no priest, and all that he does as a priest afterwards, either in administration of baptism, or the Lord's supper, or the absolution of penitents, all is vain, and of no effect. Nay, in marriage, (which they will needs have to be a sacrament too) if the intention of the priest be wanting, there is nothing done, the contract is null'd, and they that are so married do really live in adultery, though they do not know it, nor have any suspicion of it.

Now this is contrary to Scripture and the whole tenour of the Gospel, which promiseth the benefit and efficacy of the sacraments, to all those that perform the conditions of the covenant which are required on their parts, and declares forgiveness of sins to those who confess them to God, and truly repent of them.

And there is not the least intimation given in the bible, that the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments does depend upon the intention of him that administers them;

them; or that the forgiveness of sins is suspended upon the intention or absolution of the priest; but only upon the sincere resolution of the penitent. And surely nothing can be more absurd, and contrary to reason, than that when men have performed all the conditions which the Gospel requires; yet they should notwithstanding this be deprived of all the blessings and benefits which God hath promised, and intends to confer upon them; because the priest hath not the same intention. So that when a man hath done all he can *to work out his own salvation*, he shall be never the nearer; only for want of that which is wholly out of his power; the right intention of the priest.

Besides, that after all their boasts of the safe condition of men in their church, and the most certain and infallible means of salvation to be had in it; this one principle (that the intention of the priest is necessary to the validity and virtue of the sacraments) puts the salvation of men upon the greatest hazard and uncertainty; and such as it is impossible for any man either to discover or prevent, unless he had some certain way to know the heart and intention of the priest. For upon these terms, who can know whether any man be a priest, and really ordained; or not? Nay whether he be a christian, and have been truly baptized; or not? And consequently whether any of his administrations be valid, and we have any benefit and advantage by them? Because all this depends upon the knowledge of that, which we neither do nor can know.

So that when a man hath conscientiously done all that God requires of any man to make him capable of salvation; yet without any fault of his, the want of intention in an idle minded man may frustrate all: And though the man have been baptized, and do truly believe the Gospel, and hath sincerely repented of his sins, and lived a most holy life; yet all this may signify nothing, and after all he may be no christian; because his baptism was invalid: And all the promises of God to the means of salvation which his goodness and wisdom hath prescribed, may be of no efficacy; if the priest do not intend in the administration of the Sacraments to do that which God and the church intend.

Now if this be true, there is certainly no church in the world, in which the salvation of men runs so many hazards; and yet all this hazard and uncertainty has its rise from a scholastical point, which is directly contrary to all the notions of mankind concerning the goodness of God, and to the clear reason of the thing, and to the constant tenor of the Gospel; and which was never asserted by any of the ancient fathers; much less defined by any Council before that of *Trent*: So that it is a doctrine new and needless, and in the necessary consequences of it unreasonable and absurd to the utmost degree.

The last instance I shall mention, is *their rule of faith*. The rule of faith universally received and acknowledged by the christian church in all ages, before the Council of *Trent*, was the word of God, contained in the canonical books of holy Scripture; which were therefore by the church called *canonical*, because they were the rule of faith and manners, of the doctrines to be believed, and the duties to be practised by all christians. But when the errors and corruptions of the *Romish* church were grown to the height, and the Pope and his Council at *Trent* were resolved not to retrench and reform them, they saw it necessary to enlarge and lengthen out their rule; because the ancient rule of the holy Scriptures would by no means reach several of the doctrines and practices of that church, which they were resolved to maintain and make good by one means or other: As namely, the doctrine of *transubstantiation*; of *purgatory*; and of *the seven sacraments*: And the practice of *the worship of Saints*, and *images*; of *the Scriptures*, and *the service of God*, in an *unknown tongue*; of *indulgences*; and *the communion in one kind*; and several other superstitious practices in use among them.

Now to enlarge the rule to the best advantage for the justification of these doctrines and practices, they took these *two* ways.

First, They have added to the *canonical* books of the old Testament, which were received by the *Jewish* church (to whom were committed the Oracles of God)

God) I say to these they have added several *Apocryphal* books, not warranted by divine inspiration, because they were written after prophecy and divine inspiration was ceased in the *Jewish* Church; *Malachi* being the last of their Prophets, according to the general tradition of that Church. But because the addition of these Books did not make a rule of faith and practice large enough for their purpose; in imitation of the *Jews*, in the time of the greatest confusion and degeneracy of that Church, they added in the

Second place to their books of Scripture, which they call *the written Word*, an *unwritten Word*, which they call *Oral Tradition* from Christ and his Apostles; which they declare to be of equal authority with the holy Scriptures themselves; and that it ought to be received with the same pious veneration and affection: Of which traditions, they being the keepers and judges, they may extend them to what they please, and having them in their own breasts, they may declare whatever they have a mind to, to have been a constant and universal tradition of their Church; tho' it is evident to common sense, that nothing can be more uncertain, and more liable to alteration and mistake, than *tradition*, at the distance of so many ages, brought down by word of mouth, without writing, and passing through so many hands. He that can think these to be of equal certainty and authority with what is delivered by writing and brought down by books, undertakes the defense of a strange *paradox*, viz. That *general rumour and report of things said and done 1500 years ago, is of equal authority and credit with a record, and a written history.*

By which proceeding of the Council of *Trent*, concerning the rule of faith and practice, it is very evident that they had no mind to bring their faith to the ancient rule, the holy Scriptures. That they knew could not be done; and therefore they were resolved to fit their rule to their faith. And this foundation being laid in their first decree, all the rest would afterwards go on very smoothly. For do but give men the making of their rule, and they can make good any thing by it. And accordingly the Council of *Trent* having thus fixt and fitted a rule to their own purpose; in the conclusion of that decree, they give the world fair warning, upon what grounds, and in what ways they intend to proceed in their following decrees of practice and definitions of faith. *Omnes itaque intelligent, quo ordine & via ipsa Synodus post jactum fidei confessionis fundamentum sit progressura, &c.* Be it known therefore to all men, in what order and way the synod, after having laid this foundation of the confession of faith, will proceed; and what testimonies and proofs she chiefly intends to make use of, for the confirmation of doctrines, and reformation of manners in the Church. And no doubt all men do see very plainly to what purpose this foundation is laid of so large a rule of faith. And this being admitted, how easie is it for them to confirm and prove whatever doctrines and practices they have a mind to establish.

But if this be a *new, and another foundation*, than *that* which the great author and founder of our Religion, hath laid and built his Church upon, (viz.) *the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles*; it is no matter what they build upon it. And if they go about to prove any thing by the new parts of this rule; by the *Apocryphal* books which they have added to the ancient *Canon* of the Scriptures, brought down to us by the general tradition of the Christian Church; and by their pretended unwritten traditions: We do with reason reject this kind of proof, and desire them first to prove their *rule*, before they pretend to prove any thing by it: For we protest against this rule, as never declared and owned by the Christian Church, nor proceeded upon by the ancient Fathers of the Church, nor by any Council whatsoever, before the Council of *Trent*.

In vain then doth the Church of *Rome* vaunt it self of the antiquity of their faith and Religion, when the very foundation and rule of it is but of yesterday; a new thing never before known or heard of in the Christian world: Whereas the foundation and rule of our Religion is the word of God, contained in the
holy

holy Scriptures; to which Christians in all Ages have appealed, as the *only rule* of faith and life.

I proceed now to the

3^d thing I propos'd, *viz.* That we are *to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, against all the temptations and terrors of the world. And this seems more especially and principally to be here intended by the Apostle in this exhortation.

I shall first speak of the temptations of the world. And they are chiefly these *two*: The temptation of *fashion* and *example*; and of *worldly interest* and *advantage*.

1. Of *fashion* and *example*. This in truth and reality, is no strong argument; and yet in experience and effect it is often found to be very powerful. It is frequently seen, that this hath many times too great an influence upon weak and foolish minds. Men are apt to be carried down with the stream, and to *follow a multitude* in that which is *evil*: But more especially men are prone to be sway'd by great examples, and to bend themselves to such an obsequiousness to their superiors and betters, that, in compliance with them they are ready not only to change their affection to persons and things as *they* do, but even their judgment also; and that in the greatest and weightiest matters, even in matters of Religion, and the great concernments of another world. But this surely is an argument of a poor and mean spirit, and of a weak understanding, which leans upon the judgment of another, and is in truth the lowest degree of servility, that a reasonable creature can stoop to; and even beneath that of a slave, who, in the midst of his chains and fetters, doth still retain the freedom of his mind and judgment.

But I need not to urge this upon considerate persons, who know better how to value their duty and obligation to God, than to be tempted to do any thing contrary thereto, merely in compliance with *fashion* and *example*. There are some things in Religion so very plain, that a wise and good man would stand alone in the belief and practice of them, and not be moved in the least by the contrary example of the whole world. It was a brave resolution of *Joshua*; though all men should forsake the God of *Israel*, and run aside to other Gods, yet he would not do it, *Joshua* 24. 15. *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve: But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* It was well resolv'd of *Peter*, if he had not been too confident of his own Strength, when he said to our Saviour, *Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I.*

2. Another sort of temptation, and which is commonly more powerful than *example*, is *worldly interest* and *advantage*. This is a mighty bait to a great part of mankind, and apt to work very strongly upon the necessities of some, and upon the covetousness and ambition of others. Some men are tempted by necessity, which many times makes them do ugly and reproachful things, and like *Esau*, for a morsel of meat to sell their birth-right and blessing. Covetousness tempts others to be of that Religion which gives them the prospect of the greatest earthly advantage, either for the increasing or securing of their estates. When they find that they *cannot serve God and mammon*, they will *forsake the one, and cleave to the other*. This was one of the great temptations to many in the primitive times, and a frequent cause of apostasy from the faith; an eager desire of riches, and too great a value for them; as St. *Paul* observes, 1 *Tim.* 6. 9, 10. *But they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have coveted after, they have erred, or been seduced from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* This was the temptation which drew off *Demas* from his Religion; as St. *Paul* tells us, 2 *Tim.* 4. 10. *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.*

Ambition is likewise a great temptation to proud and aspiring minds, and makes many men false to their Religion, when they find it a hindrance to their pre-

preferment; and they are easily persuaded, that *that* is the best Religion, which is attended with the greatest worldly advantages, and will raise them to the highest dignity. The devil understood very well the force of this temptation, when he set upon our Saviour, and therefore reserved it for the last assault. *He shewed him all the Kingdoms of the earth, and the glory of them; and said to him, All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* And when he saw this would not prevail, he gave him over in despair, and left him. But though this be a very dazzling temptation, yet there are considerations of that weight to be set over-against it, from the nature of Religion, and the infinite concernment of it to our immortal souls, as is sufficient to *quench this fiery dart of the devil*, and to put all the temptations of this world out of countenance, and to render all the riches and glory of it, in comparison of the eternal happiness and misery of the other world, *but as the very small dust upon the balance.* What temptation of this world can stand against that argument of our Saviour, if it be seriously weighed and considered; *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* If we would consider things impartially, and weigh them in a just and equal balance; the things which concern our bodies, and this present life, are of no consideration, in comparison of the great and vast concernments of our immortal souls, and the happy or miserable condition of our bodies and souls to all eternity.

And Religion is a matter of this vast concernment; and therefore not to be bargained away and parted with by us for the greatest things this world can offer. There is no greater sign of a sordid spirit, than to put a high value upon things of little worth; and no greater mark of folly, than to make an equal bargain, to part with things of greatest price, for a slender and trifling consideration: As if a man of great fortune and estate, should sell the inheritance of it for a picture, which, when he hath it, will not perhaps yield so much as will maintain him for one year. The folly is so much the greater in things of infinitely greater value; as for a man to quit God and Religion, to sell the truth and his soul, and to part with his everlasting inheritance for a convenient service, for a good customer, and some present advantage in his trade and profession, or indeed for any condition which the foolish language of this world calls *a high place*, or *a great preferment*. The things which these men part with upon these cheap terms, God, and his truth, and Religion, are, to those who understand themselves, and the just value of their immortal Souls, things of inestimable worth, and not to be parted with by a considerate man for any price that this world can bid. And those who are to be bought out of their Religion upon such low terms, and so easily parted from it, 'tis much to be feared that they have little or no Religion to *hold fast*.

Secondly, As we are to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, against the temptations and allurements of this world: so likewise against the terrors of it.

Fear is a passion of great force; and, if men be not very resolute and constant, will be apt to stagger them, and *to move them from their steadfastness*: And therefore when the case of suffering and persecution for the truth happens, we had need *to hold fast the profession of our faith*. Our Saviour in the parable of the sower, tells us, that there were many *that heard the word, and with joy received it: but when persecution and tribulation arose because of the word, presently they were offended.*

And though, blessed be God, this be not now our case; yet there was a time when it was the general case of Christians, in the first beginning of Christianity, and for several ages after, though with some intermission and intervals of ease. In was then a general rule, and the common expectation of Christians, that *through many tribulations they must enter into the Kingdom of God*, and that *if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must suffer persecution*. And in several ages since those primitive times, the sincere professors of Religion have, in divers places, been exposed to most grievous sufferings and persecutions for the

the truth. And even at this day, in several places, the faithful servants of God are exercised with the sharpest and forest trials that perhaps were ever heard of in any age; and for the sake of God, and the constant profession of his true Religion, are *tormented and killed all the day long, and are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*. It is their hard lot to be called to these cruel and bitter sufferings, and our happy opportunity to be called upon for their relief; those of them, I mean, that have escaped that terrible storm and tempest, and have taken refuge and sanctuary here among us, and, out of his majesty's great humanity and goodness, are by his publick letters recommended to the charity of the whole nation, by the name of *distressed protestants*.

Let us consider how much easier our lot and our duty is, than theirs; as much as it is easier to compassionate the sufferings, and to relieve the distresses of others, than to be such sufferers, and in such distress our selves. Let us make their case our own, and then we our selves will be the best judges how it is fit for us to demean our selves towards them, and to what degree we ought to extend our charity and compassion to them. Let us put on their case and circumstances, and suppose that we were the sufferers, and had fled to them for refuge: The same pity and commiseration, the same tender regard and consideration of our sad case, the same liberal and effectual relief, that we should desire and expect, and be glad to have shewn and afforded to our selves, let us give to them; and then I am sure they will want no fitting comfort and support from us.

We enjoy (blessed be the goodness of God to us) great peace and plenty, and freedom from evil and suffering: And surely one of the best means to have these blessings continued to us, and our *tranquillity prolonged*, is to consider and relieve those who want the blessings which we enjoy; and the readiest way to provoke God to deprive us of these blessings, is to *shut up the bowels of our compassion from our distressed brethren*. God can easily change the scene, and make our sufferings, if not in the same kind, yet in one kind or other, equal to theirs; and then we shall *remember the afflictions of Joseph*, and say as his brethren did, when they fell into trouble, *we are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul when he besought us, and we would not bear; therefore is this distress come upon us*.

God alone knows what storms the Devil may yet raise in the world, before the end of it: And therefore it concerns all christians, in all times and places, who have taken upon them the profession of Christ's Religion, to consider well before-hand, and to calculate the dangers and sufferings it may expose them to, and to arm our selves with resolution and patience against the fiercest assaults of temptation; considering the shortness of all temporal afflictions and sufferings, in comparison of the eternal and glorious reward of them; and the lightness of them too, in comparison of the endless and intolerable torments of another world; to which every man exposeth himself, who forsakes God, and renounceth his truth, and wounds his conscience, to avoid temporal sufferings.

And though *fear*, in many cases, especially if it be of death and extreme suffering, be a great excuse for several actions, because it may, *cadere in constantem virum*, happen to a resolute man: Yet in this case of renouncing our Religion (unless it be very sudden and surprizing, out of which a man recovers himself when he comes to himself, as St. Peter did; or the suffering be so extreme, as to put a man besides himself for the time, so as to make him say or do any thing;) I say in this case of renouncing God and his truth, God will not admit *fear* for a just excuse of our apostasy; which, if it be unrepented of (and the Scripture speaks of repentance in that case as very difficult) will be our ruin. And the reason is, because God has given us such fair warning of it, that we may be prepared for it, in the resolution of our minds: And we enter into religion upon these terms, with a professed expectation of suffering, and a firm purpose to lay down our lives for the truth, if God shall call us to it. *If any man will be my Disciple, says our Lord, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me: And again, he that loveth life it self more than*

me is not worthy of me; And if any man be ashamed of me and of my words, in this unfaithful generation, of him will I be ashamed before my Father and the holy Angels.

And therefore to master and subdue this fear, our Saviour hath propounded great objects of terror to us, and a danger infinitely more to be dreaded, which every man runs himself wilfully upon, who shall quit the profession of his Religion, to avoid temporal sufferings; *Luke 12. 4, 5. Fear not them that can kill the body, but after that have nothing that they can do: But I will tell you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him. And to this dreadful hazard every man exposeth himself, who, for the fear of men, ventures thus to offend God. These are the fearful and unbelievers spoken of by St. John, who shall have their portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*

Thus you see how we are to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, against all temptations and terrors of this world. I should now have proceeded to the next particular; namely, that we are to hold fast the profession of our faith, against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to Heaven upon easier terms, in some other church and Religion.

But this I shall not now enter upon.

The Fourth
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N VII.

Of Constancy in the Profession of the true Religion.

H E B. X. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.



IN these words, I have told you, are contained these two parts:

First, An exhortation to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.

Secondly, An argument or encouragement thereto; because he is faithful that promised. I am yet upon the

First of these; The exhortation to christians, to be constant and steady in the profession of their Religion: *let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.* And that we might the better comprehend the true and full meaning of this exhortation, I shewed,

I. *Negatively*, What is not meant and intended by it; and I mentioned these two particulars.

1. The Apostle doth not hereby intend, that those who are capable of enquiring into, and examining the grounds and reasons of their Religion, should not have the liberty to do it. Nor,

2. That when upon due enquiry and examination, men are settled, as they think and verily believe, in the true faith and Religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that can be offered against their present persuasion: For reason, when it is fairly offered, is always to be heard. I proceeded in the

II^d Place,

II^d Place, *Positively*, To explain the meaning of this exhortation: And to this purpose I proposed to consider,

First, *What* it is that we are to hold fast; *viz.* *the confession or profession of our faith*; the ancient christian faith, which every christian makes profession of in his baptism: Not the doubtful and uncertain traditions of men, nor the imperious dictates and doctrines of any church (which are not contained in the holy Scriptures) imposed upon the christian world, though with never so confident a pretence of the antiquity of the doctrines, or of the infallibility of the proposers of them. And then I proceeded, in the

Second Place, to shew *how* we are to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and I mentioned these following particulars, as probably implied and comprehended in the Apostle's exhortation.

1. That we should hold fast the profession of our faith against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to plain Scripture, and reason, and the common sense of mankind; under both which heads I gave several instances of doctrines and practices imposed with great confidence upon the world, some without, and others plainly against Scripture, and reason, and the common sense of mankind.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world; the temptations of fashion and example, and of worldly interest and advantage; and against the terrors of persecution and suffering for the truth. Thus far I have gone; I shall now proceed to the *two* other particulars which remain to be spoken to.

4. We are to hold fast the profession of our faith, against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to Heaven upon easier terms, in some other church and Religion. God hath plainly declared to us in the holy Scriptures, upon what terms and conditions we may obtain eternal life and happiness, and what will certainly exclude us from it; That *except we repent*, (*i. e.*) without true contrition for our sins, and forsaking of them, *we shall perish*; That *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*; that *no fornicator, or adulterer, or idolater, or covetous person, nor any one that lives in the practice of such sins, shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of God or Christ*. There is as great and unpassable a gulf fixt between Heaven and a wicked man, as there is betwixt Heaven and Hell. And when men have done all they can to debauch and corrupt the christian doctrine, it is impossible to reconcile a wicked life with any reasonable and well-grounded hopes of happiness in another world. No church hath that privilege, to save a man upon any other terms, than those which our blessed Saviour hath declared in his holy Gospel. All Religions are equal in this; that a bad man can be saved in none of them.

The church of *Rome* pretends their church and Religion to be the only safe and sure way to salvation; and yet, if their doctrine be true, concerning the intention of the priest, (and if it be not, they are much to blame in making it an article of their faith) I say, if it be true, that the intention of the priest is necessary to the validity and virtue of the sacraments; then there is no Religion in the world, that runs the salvation of men upon more and greater hazards and uncertainties, and such as by no care and diligence of man in *working out his own salvation*, are to be avoided and prevented.

As for the easier terms of salvation which they offer to men, they signify nothing, if they be not able to make them good; which no man can reasonably believe they can do, that hath read the Bible, and doth in any good measure understand the nature of God, and the design of Religion. For instance; that after the long course of a most lewd and flagitious life, a man may be reconciled to God, and have his sins forgiven at the last gasp, upon confession of them to the priest, with that imperfect degree of contrition for them, which they call *attrition*, together with the absolution of the priest.

Now *attrition* is a trouble for sin, merely for fear of the punishment of it. And this, together with *confession*, and the *absolution* of the priest, with-

out any hatred of sin for the evil and contrariety of it to the holy nature and law of God, and without the least spark of love to God, will do the sinner's business, and put him into a state of grace and salvation, without any other grace or disposition for salvation, but only the fear of hell and damnation. This, I confess, is easie: But the great difficulty is, to believe it to be true. And certainly, no man, that ever seriously considered the nature of God and Religion, can ever be persuaded to build the hopes of his salvation upon such a *quick-sand*. The absolution of all the priests in the world will not procure the forgiveness of God for any man, that is not disposed for his mercy by such a repentance, as the Gospel requires; which I am sure is very different from that which is required by the *Council of Trent*.

They that offer Heaven to men upon so very large and loose terms, give great cause to suspect, that they will never make good their offer; the terms are so unreasonably cheap and easie, that there must be some fraud and false dealing. And on the other hand, nothing ought to recommend our Religion more to a wise and considerate man, than that the terms of salvation which we propose to men, *viz.* faith, and repentance, and a sincere obedience to the precepts of the Gospel, manifested in the tenour of a holy and virtuous life, are not only perfectly agreeable to the plain and constant declaration of holy Scripture; but do likewise naturally tend to engage men most effectually to a good life, and thereby to make them *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*. And therefore every body ought to be afraid of a Religion, which makes such lavish offers of salvation, and to take heed how he ventures his soul upon them. For if, after all the hopes that are given of salvation upon such and such terms, the sinner doth really miscarry and miss of heaven; it is but very ill comfort to him to be put into a *fool's paradise*, for a minute or two before he leaves the world, and the next moment after to find himself *in the place of torments*. I proceed to the

5th, and last particular I mentioned, as implied in the exhortation here in the text, *viz.* that we *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busie and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their Religion, and to gain proselytes to their party and faction. To this purpose there are several cautions given by our blessed Saviour and his Apostles. *Matth. 24. 4. Take heed that no man deceive you; for many shall come in my name, and shall deceive many.* *Eph. 4. 14. That ye henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men; ἐν τῇ ψεύσει (the word signifies the cunning of gamesters at dice;) by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness whereby they lye in wait to deceive.* And *chap. 5. 6. Let no man deceive you with vain words.* *Col. 2. 8. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit; that is, by sophistry and vain reasoning, under a pretence of philosophy.* *Heb. 13. 9. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.* *2 Pet. 3. 17. Beware lest you also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.* And this caution is enforced by an expresse prediction of a great apostasie which should happen in the christian church, by which many should be seduced, by pretence of miracles, and by several arts of deceit and falshood. This apostasie St. Paul expressly foretells. *2 Thes. 2. 1, 2, 3. We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit (that is, by pretence to inspiration) nor by word (or message) nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.* And after a particular description of him, he adds, *v. 9. Whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and in all deceitfulness of unrighteousness in them that perish.* From all which he concludes, *v. 15. Therefore, brethren, stand fast.*

The particular nature and kind of this *apostasie* the same apostle describes more fully, *1 Tim. 4. 1, 2, 3.* Now the spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall apostatize from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils, speaking lies in hypocrisie, (i. e. under a great pretence of sanctity, spreading their pernicious errors) forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats. This is a very lively and pat description of that great *apostasie* in the christian church, which began in the western part of it, and hath spread it self far and wide. For there the spirit of error and falshood has prevailed, under an hypocritical pretence of their being the only true church and true christians in the world. There marriage, and several sorts of meats, are forbidden to several ranks and orders of men. All the difficulty is, what is here meant by *doctrines of devils*; and these certainly can be no other than doctrines tending to idolatry, which the Scripture every where doth in a particular manner ascribe to the devil, as the inventer and great promoter of it. And this is very much confirmed by what we find added in some ancient Greek copies in this text, which runs thus; *In the latter times some shall apostatize from the faith; for they shall worship the dead, as some also in Israel worshipped.* And then it follows, *giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.* So that the particular kind of idolatry, into which some part of the christian church should apostatize, is here pointed at; that they should worship souls departed, or the spirits of dead men; which was part of the heathen idolatry, into which the people of *Israel* did frequently relapse. So that the spirit of God doth here foretel such an *apostasie* in some part of the christian church as the people of *Israel* were guilty of, in falling into the heathen idolatry. *They shall be worshippers of the dead, as the Israelites also were.*

And this is the great and dangerous seduction which the christians are so much cautioned against in the new testament, and charged to hold fast the profession of the faith against the cunning arts and insinuations of seducing spirits; not but (as I said before) that we are always to have an ear open to reason, and to be ready to hearken and to yield to that, whenever it is fairly proposed: But to be over-reached and rooked out of ones Religion, by little sophistical arts and tricks, is childish and silly. After we are, upon due tryal and examination of the grounds of our Religion, settled and established in it, we ought not to suffer our selves to be removed from it, by the groundless pretences of confident people to *infallibility*, and to be practised upon by cunning men, who lie at catch to make profelytes to their party. This is to be like Children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.

And we ought to be the more careful of our selves; because there never was any time, wherein seducing spirits were more bold and busie to pervert men from the truth. Against these we should hold fast our Religion, as a man would do his money in a crowd. It passeth in the world for a great mark of folly, when a man and his money are soon parted: But it is a sign of much greater folly, for a man easily to quit his Religion; especially to be caught by some such gross methods, as the seducers I am speaking of commonly use, and which lie so very open to suspicion; such as ill-designing men are wont to practise upon a young heir, when they have insinuated themselves into his company, to make a prey of him. They charge him to tell no body in what company he hath been; nor to ask the counsel and advice of his friends concerning what they have been persuading him to; because they for their own interest will be sure to dissuade him from it. Just thus do these seducers practise upon weak people. They charge them not to acquaint their minister, with whom they have been; nor what discourse they have had about Religion; nor what books have been put into their hands; because then, all their kind design and intention towards them will be defeated. But above all, they must be sure to read no books on the other side, because they are no competent judges of points of faith; and this reading on both sides will rather confound than clear their understandings. They tell them, that they have stated the matter truly, and would not for all the world deceive them; and they may easily perceive, by their earnest application to them, that nothing

but

but charity, and a passionate desire of the salvation of their souls makes them take all these pains with them. But this is so gross a way of proceeding, that any man of common understanding must needs discern by this kind treatment, that these men can have no honest design upon them.

To come then to a more particular consideration of the arts and methods which they use (I mean particularly those of the church of *Rome*) in making profelytes to their Religion: As,

1. In allowing them to be very competent and sufficient judges for themselves, in the choice of their church and Religion, (that is, which is the true church and Religion, in which alone salvation is to be had) and yet telling them at the same time, that they are utterly incapable of judging of particular doctrines, and points of faith and practice; but for these they must rely upon the judgment of an infallible church, when they are in it; otherwise they will certainly run into damnable errors and mistakes about these things.

And they must of necessity allow them to be sufficient judges for themselves in the choice of their Religion; as will be evident, by considering in what method they proceed with their intended profelyte.

They propose to him to change his church and his Religion, because he is in the wrong; and they will shew him a better, and such a one as is the only true one, and in which alone salvation is to be had. To persuade him hereto, they offer him some reasons and arguments, or give him books to read, containing arguments to move him to make this change, to satisfy him of the reasonableness, and to convince him of the necessity of it.

Now by this way of proceeding (and they can take no other) they do, whether they will or no, make the person, whom they are endeavouring to convert, a judge for himself, which church and Religion is best; that which they would have him embrace and come over to, or that which they would persuade him to forsake. For to what end else do they offer him reasons and arguments to persuade him to leave our church, and to come over to theirs; but that he may consider the force and weight of them; and having considered them, may judge whether they be of force sufficient to over-rule him to make this change? So that as unwilling as they are to make particular persons judge for themselves about points of faith, and about the sense of Scripture confirming those points (because this is to leave every man to his own private spirit and fancy and giddy brain) yet they are compelled by necessity, and against their own principles, to allow a man in this case of choosing his Religion, to be a judge of the reasons and arguments which they offer to induce him thereto. So that, whether they will or no, they must permit him to be a judge for himself for *this once*, but not to make a practice of it, or to pretend this privilege ever after; For in acknowledgment of this great favour, of being permitted to judge for himself *this once* (which they do unwillingly grant him, and upon mere necessity) he is for ever after to resign up his judgment to the church. And tho' this liberty be allowed *pro hac vice*, and properly *to serve a turn*, i. e. in order to the changing of his Religion; yet he is to understand, that he is no fit and competent judge of particular points of faith; these he must all learn from the true church when he is in it, and take them upon her authority, and in so doing he shall do very prudently, because she is infallible, and cannot be deceived; but he may.

But is there any sense in all this, that a man should be very fit and able to judge of that which they esteem the main and fundamental point of all, namely, which is the true church and Religion; and of the reasons and arguments whereby they pretend to demonstrate it; and of the true meaning of those texts of Scripture whereby they pretend to prove theirs to be the only true church: And yet should be wholly unable to judge of particular points of faith; or of the true sense of any texts of Scripture that can be produced for the proof of those points.

Is it so very prudent, in all the particular points of faith, for a man to rely upon the judgment of the church, because she is infallible; and not to trust his own judgment about them, because he is fallible, and may be deceived? And is it

it prudent likewise for this man to trust his own judgment in the main business of all; namely, which is the true church and Religion; concerning which he is as fallible in his judgment, and as liable to be deceived, as in the particular points? And if he be mistaken in the main point, they must grant his mistake to be fatal; because his sincerity, as to all the rest, depends upon it. This is a great mystery and riddle, that every particular man should have so sufficient a judgment as to this main and fundamental business, Which is the true church and Religion: And should have no judgment at all about particular points, fit to be trusted and relied upon? As if there were a certain judgment and prudence, *quoad hoc*; and as if all mens understandings were so framed, as to be very judicious and discerning in this main point of Religion; but to be weak, and dangerous, and blind, as to all particular points: Or, as if a man might have a very good judgment, and be fit to be trusted and relied upon, before he come into their church; but from the very moment he enters into it, his judgment were quite lost and good for nothing: For this in effect and by interpretation they say, when they allow a man to be very able to judge which is the true church and Religion; but so soon as he hath discovered and embraced that, to have no judgment of his own afterwards of any point of Religion whatsoever; and a very tempting argument it is to any man that hath judgment, to enter into that church.

2. Another art they use with their intended profelyte, in order to his making a right choice of his Religion, is to caution him, to hear and read only the arguments and books which are on one side. But now admitting their designed profelyte to be just such a judge, and so far they will allow him to be, and no farther, *viz.* which is the true church; but to have no fitness and ability at all to judge of particular points of faith: Yet methinks they put a very odd condition, and untoward restraint upon this judge, in telling him, (as they certainly use to do those whom they would pervert) that he must have no discourse, nor read any books, but only on that side which they would gain him to; because that is the way to perplex and confound him, so that he shall never be able to come to a clear judgment and resolution in the matter. But will any man admit this way of proceeding in a temporal case? This is just as if in a cause of the greatest consequence, the Council on one side should go about to persuade the Judge, that it is only fit to hear what he hath to say in the case; that he will open it very plainly, and state the matter in difference so clearly and impartially, and bring such strong reasons and proofs for what he says, that he shall not need to hear any thing on the other side, but may proceed to judgment without any more ado: But if when the matter is thus laid before him so plainly, and is even ripe for judgment, he will trouble himself needlessly to hear the other side; this will cast them back where they first began, and bring the matter to an endless wrangling, and so confound and puzzle his understanding, that he shall never be able to pass any clear judgment in the cause.

What think we would a Judge say to such a bold and senseless pleader? The case is the same, and the absurdity every whit as gross and palpable, in pressing any man to make a judgment in a matter which infinitely more concerns him, upon hearing only the reasons and arguments on one side.

3. Another art which they use in making profelytes, is to possess them, that there is but one thing that they are mainly concern'd to inquire into, and that is this; Since there is but one true catholick church of Christ upon earth, out of which there is no salvation to be had; which that true church is? And when they have found that out, that will teach them in a most infallible way the true faith and Religion, and all things that are necessary to be believed or done by them, in order to their salvation; so that they have nothing to do, but to satisfy themselves in this single enquiry, Which is the true catholick church of Christ? This is the *unum necessarium*, the one thing necessary; and when they have found out this, and are satisfied about it, they need to enquire no farther. this church will fully instruct and satisfy them in all other things. And this I cannot deny to be a very artificial way of proceeding, and to serve their purpose very well; for they have these two great advantages by it.

1. That it makes the work short, and saves them a great deal of labour, by bringing the whole business to one single enquiry: And when they have gained this point, that this single question is all that they need to be satisfied in; then they have nothing to do, but to ply and puzzle the man with their motives of credibility, and marks of the true church; and to shew, as well as they can, how these marks agree to their church, and are all to be found in it, and in no other; and to set out to the best advantage the glorious privileges of their church, the miraculous things that have been, and are still daily done in it, and the innumerable multitude of their Saints and martyrs; and if these general things take and sink into them, their work is in effect done.

2. Another great advantage they have by it, is, that by bringing them to this method, they divert and keep them off from the many objections against their church and Religion, namely, the errors and corruptions which we charge them withal. For this is the thing they are afraid of, and will by no means be brought to; to vindicate and make good their innovations in faith and practice, so plainly in many things contrary to Scripture, and to the faith and practice of the primitive church; as the doctrines of *transubstantiation*, of *purgatory*, the *Popes supremacy*, of *the infallibility of their church*, of their *seven sacraments* instituted by Christ, and of *the intention of the priest* being necessary to the validity and virtue of the sacraments. And then several of their practices; as of the *worship of images*, of *the invocation of Angels and Saints*, of the *service of God and the Scriptures in an unknown tongue*, and the *communion in one kind*; and several other things, so plainly contrary to the Scriptures, and the practice and usage of the primitive church, that almost the meanest capacity may easily be made sensible and convinced of it. These are sore places, which they desire not to have touched, and therefore they use all possible artifice to keep men at a distance from them; partly because the particular discussion of them is tedious, and it requires more than ordinary skill, to say any thing that is tenable for them, and so to paint and varnish them over, as to hide the corruptions and deformities of them; but chiefly because they are conscious to themselves, that as in all these points they are upon the defensive, so they are also upon very great disadvantages; and therefore to avoid, if it be possible, being troubled with them, they have devised this shorter, and easier, and more convenient way of making profelytes.

Not that they are always able to keep themselves thus within their trenches; but are sometimes, whether they will or no, drawn out to encounter some of these objections: But they rid themselves of them as soon, and as dexterously as they can, by telling those that make them, that they will hereafter give them full satisfaction to all these matters, when they are gotten over the first and main enquiry, Which is the true church? For if they can keep them to this point, and gain them to it, they can deal with them more easily in the rest: For when they can once swallow this principle, that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church, and consequently, as they have told them all along, infallible; this infallibility of the church once entertained, will cover a multitude of particular errors and mistakes; and will very much help to cure the weakness and defects of some particular doctrines and practices, and at last to silence and overrule all objections against them. So that the benefit and advantage of this method is visibly and at first sight very great; and therefore no wonder they are so steady and constant to it, and do so obstinately insist upon it. But how convenient soever it be to them, it is, I am sure, very unreasonable in it self; and that upon these accounts.

1. Because the true church doth not constitute and make the true christian faith and doctrine; but it is the true christian faith and doctrine, the profession whereof makes the true church; and therefore in reason and order of nature, the first enquiry must be, what is the true faith and doctrine of Christ; which by him was delivered to the Apostles, and by them published and made known to the world, and by their writings transmitted and conveyed down to us? And this being found, every society of christians which holds this doctrine, is a true

true part of the catholick church; and all the christians throughout the world that agree in this doctrine, are the one true catholick church.

2. The enquiry about the true church can have no issue, even according to their own way of proceeding, without a due examination of the particular doctrines and practices of that church, the communion whereof they would persuade a man to embrace. We will admit at present this to be the first enquiry, which is the true church? Let us now see in what way they manage this, to gain men over to their church. They tell them that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church of Christ. The truth of this assertion we will particularly examine afterwards, when we come to consider the next step of their method in dealing with their converts. At present I shall only take notice in the general, what way they take to prove this assertion; namely, that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church; and that is, by the notes and marks of the true church, which they call their *motives of credibility*; because by these they design to persuade them, that the church of *Rome* is the one true catholick church. I shall not now reckon up all the notes and marks which they give of the true church; but only observe, that one of their principal marks of the true church is this; that the faith and doctrine of it be agreeable to the doctrine of the primitive and apostolick church, (*i. e.*) to the doctrine delivered by our Saviour and his Apostles: And this *Bellarmino* makes one of the marks of the true church. And they must unavoidably make it so; because the true faith and doctrine of Christ, is that which indeed constitutes the true church. But if this be an essential mark of the true church, then no man can possibly know the church of *Rome* to be the true church, till he have examined the particular doctrines and practices of it, and the agreement of them with the primitive doctrine and practice of christianity; and this necessarily draws on and engages them in a dispute of the particular points and differences betwixt us; which is the very thing they would avoid by this method, and which I have now plainly shewed they cannot do, because they cannot possibly prove their church to be the true church, without shewing the conformity of their doctrines and practices, to the doctrine and practice of the primitive and apostolick church; and this will give them work enough, and will, whether they will or no, draw them out of their hold and fastness, which is to amuse people with a general enquiry which is the true church? without descending to the examination of their particular doctrines and practices. But this they must of necessity come to, before they can prove by the notes and marks of the true church, that theirs is the true church.

And this is a demonstration, that their method of satisfaction, as it is unnatural and unreasonable, so it cannot serve the purpose they aim at by it; which is, to divert men from the examination of the particular points in difference between the church of *Rome* and us, and to gain them over to them by a wile and trick; because the very method they take to prove themselves to be the true catholick church, will enforce them to justify all their particular doctrines and practices, before they can finish this proof.

And here we fix our foot, that the single question and point, upon which they would put the whole issue of the matter, cannot possibly be brought to any reasonable issue, without a particular discussion and examination of the points in difference betwixt their church and ours: And when they can make out these to be agreeable to the primitive doctrine and practice of the christian church; we have reason to be satisfied, that the church of *Rome* is a church, in the communion whereof a man may be safe: But till that be made out, they have done nothing to persuade any man that understands himself, that it is safe, much less necessary to be of their communion. But if particular points must be discussed and cleared, before a man can be satisfied in the enquiry after the true church; then they must allow their intended convert to be a Judge likewise of particular points; and if he be sufficient for that too, before he comes into their church, I do not see of what use the infallibility of the church will be to him, when he is in it.

The Fifth
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N VIII.

Of Constancy in the Profession of the true Religion.

H E B. X. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.



Have already made a considerable progress in my discourse upon these words, in which I told you, there is an exhortation to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*: And an argument or encouragement thereto, because *he is faithful that promised*. I am yet upon the *first* of these, the exhortation to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*; by which I told you the Apostle doth not intend, that those who are capable of examining the grounds and reasons of their Religion, should not have the liberty to do it; nor that, when upon due enquiry they are, as they verily believe, established in the true faith and Religion, they should obstinately refuse to hear any reason that is fairly offered against their present persuasion.

And then I proceeded to shew *positively*,

First, *What* it is that we are exhorted to *hold fast*, (*viz.*) *the confession or profession of our faith*; the ancient christian faith, of which every christian makes profession in his baptism. For it is of *that* the Apostle here speaks, as appears plainly by the context.

Secondly, How we are to *hold fast the profession of our faith*. And of this I gave account in these following particulars.

1. We should *hold fast the profession of our faith*, against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence.

2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to plain Scripture and reason, and the common sense of mankind; of which I gave you particular instances.

3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world.

4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to Heaven upon easier terms, in some other church and Religion. I am now upon the

5. And *last* particular I mentioned, namely, that we are to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busie and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their Religion, and to make profelytes to their party and faction. I have already mentioned some of the arts which they use, (I mean particularly them of the church of *Rome*) in making profelytes to their Religion; and I have shewn the absurdity and unreasonableness of them. As,

First, In allowing men to be very competent and sufficient judges for themselves, in the choice of their Religion; (*i. e.* which is the true church and Religion in which alone salvation is to be had;) and yet telling them at the same time, that they are utterly incapable of judging of particular doctrines and points of faith. As for these, they must rely upon the judgment of an infallible church; and if they do not, they will certainly run into damnable errors and mistakes.

And they must of necessity allow them the first, a sufficient ability to judge for themselves in the choice of their Religion: Otherwise in vain do they offer them arguments to persuade them to theirs; if they cannot judge of the force

force of them. But now, after this, to deny them all ability to judge of particular doctrines and points of faith, is a very absurd and inconsistent pretense.

Secondly, Another art they use, in order to their making a right choice of their Religion, is earnestly to persuade them to hear and read only the arguments and books on their side: Which is just as if one should go about to persuade a Judge, in order to the better understanding and clearer decision of a cause, to hear only the Council on one side.

Thirdly, They tell them, that the only thing they are to enquire into, is, which is the true church, the one catholick church mentioned in the creed, out of which there is no salvation; and when they have found that, they are to rely upon the authority of that church, which is infallible, for all other things. And this method they wisely take, to avoid particular disputes about the innovations and errors which we charge them withal. But I have shewn at large, that this cannot be the first enquiry: Because it is not the true church, that makes the true christian faith and doctrine: But the profession of the true christian faith and doctrine, which makes the true church.

Besides, their way of proving their church to be the only true church, being by the marks and properties of the true church, of which the chief is, the conformity of their doctrines and practices with the primitive and apostolical church; this unavoidably draws on an examination of their particular doctrines and practices, whether they be conformable to those of the primitive and apostolical church, before their great enquiry, *which is the true church?* can be brought to an issue; which it is plain it can never be, without entering into the ocean of particular disputes, which they desire above all things to avoid. So that they are never the nearer by this method: they can neither shorten their work by it, nor keep off the examination of their particular errors and corruptions; which are a very sore place, and they cannot endure we should touch it.

I shall now proceed to discover some other arts and methods which they use in seducing people to their church and religion, and shall be as brief in them as I can.

Fourthly, They pretend that the *Roman* church is the catholick church, (*i. e.*) the visible society of all christians, united to the bishop of *Rome*, as the supreme pastor and visible head of Christ's church upon earth: From whence it clearly follows, that it is necessary to all christians to joyn themselves to the communion of the *Roman* church; otherwise they cannot be members of the catholick church of Christ, out of which there is no salvation.

We grant the consequence, that if the *Roman* church be the catholick church, it is necessary to be of that communion; because out of the catholick church there is ordinarily no salvation to be had. But how do they prove, that the *Roman* church is the catholick church? They would fain have us so civil, as to take this for granted: Because if we do not, they do not well know how to go about to prove it. And indeed, some things are obstinate, and will not be proved without so much trouble and difficulty, that it is better to let them alone; and by the confident assertion of them, by importunity, and by any other fair means, to get them believed, without proof of this stubborn sort of propositions, which will admit of no proof. This is one, that a part is the whole; or which is all one, that the *Roman* church is the catholick church. For that it is but a part of the christian church, and not the best part neither, but perhaps the very worst and most corrupt of all the rest, is no difficult matter to prove, and hath been often done. But now to prove the church of *Rome* to be the catholick church, that is, the whole society of all true christians in the world, these following particulars ought to be clearly shewn and made out.

I. A plain constitution of our Saviour, whereby St. *Peter*, and his successors at *Rome* are made the supreme head and pastors of the whole christian church. For St. *Peter* first. Can they shew any such constitution in the Gospel, or can they produce the least proof and evidence out of the history of the Acts and the Epistles of the Apostles, that St. *Peter* was acknowledg'd for such by the rest of the Apostles? Nay, is there not clear evidence there to the contrary,

that in the first Council of the christian church at *Jerusalem*, *St. James*, the Bishop of *Jerusalem*, was, if not superior, at least equal to him? Does *St. Paul* acknowledge any superiority of *St. Peter* over him? Nay, does he not upon several occasions declare himself equal to the chiefest Apostles, even to *St. Peter* himself? And is this consistent with a plain constitution of our Lord's making *St. Peter* supreme head and pastor of the christian church?

But suppose this to have been so; where doth it appear, by any constitution of our Saviour, that this authority was derived to his successors? And if it were, why to his successors at *Rome*, rather than at *Antioch*, where he was first, and unquestionably Bishop? They must acknowledge, that when he was Bishop of *Antioch*, he was the supreme head and pastor of the whole christian church; and then the style must have been, the *Antiochian* catholic church, as it is now the *Roman* catholic. But do they find any footsteps of such a style in ecclesiastical history?

2. To make good this proposition, that the *Roman* church is the catholic church, they are in consequence obliged to affirm and believe, that the churches of *Asia*, which were excommunicated by the Bishops of *Rome*, for not keeping *Easter* as they did; and the churches of *Asia* and *Africa*, which were excommunicated by the same Bishop, upon the point of rebaptizing hereticks, that all these, by being turn'd out of the communion of the *Roman* church, were also cut off from the catholic church, and from a possibility of salvation. This the church of *Rome* themselves will not affirm; and yet, if to be cast out of the communion of the *Roman*, and the catholic church, be all one, they must affirm it.

3. In consequence of this proposition, that the church of *Rome* is the catholic church, they ought to hold, that all baptism out of the communion of their church is void and of none effect. For if it be good; then it makes the persons baptized, members of the catholic church; and then those that are out of the communion of the *Roman* church, may be true members of the catholic church; and then the *Roman*, and the catholic church are not all one. But the church of *Rome* holds the baptism of hereticks, and of those that are out of the communion of their church, to be good; which is a demonstration, that the *Roman* church neither is the catholic church; nor if she believe consistently, can she think her self to be so.

4. In consequence of this proposition, all the christians in the world, which do not yield subjection to the Bishop of *Rome*, and acknowledge his supremacy, are no true parts of the catholic church, nor in a possibility of salvation. And this does not only exclude those of the reform'd Religion from being members of the catholic church; but the *Greeks*, and the *Eastern* churches; (*i. e.*) four of the five patriarchal churches of the christian world; which taken together, are really greater than those in communion with the church of *Rome*. And this the church of *Rome* does affirm, concerning all those churches and christians, which refuse subjection to the Bishop of *Rome*, that they are out of the communion of the catholic church, and a capacity of salvation. But surely it is not possible, that the true catholic church of Christ can have so little charity as this comes to; and to a wise man there needs no other demonstration than this, that the church of *Rome* is so far from being the whole christian church, that it is a very arrogant and uncharitable part of it.

5. and Lastly; In consequence of the truth of this proposition, and of the importance of it to the salvation of souls, and to the peace and unity of the christian church, they ought to produce express mention of the *Roman* catholic church, in the antient creeds of the christian church. For if this proposition, that the *Roman* church is the catholic, be true; it was always so, and always of the greatest importance to the salvation of men, and the peace and unity of the christian church. And if it were so, and always believed to be so, by the christian church, as they pretend; what reason can be imagined, why the antient christian church should never say so, nor put an article of such consequence and importance in express words in their creeds; nor why they should not have used the style of *Roman* catholic as familiarly then, as they do now in the *Roman* church?

church? a plain evidence that this is a new style which they use when they give themselves the title of the *Roman* catholick church; and that the ancient christian church knew better, than to call one part of the catholick church, the whole. I am sure, that *Aeneas Sylvius* (who was afterwards Pope *Pius* the second) says, that before the Council of *Nice*, little respect was had to the *Roman* church. But how does this consist with their present pretense, that the *Roman* church is, and always hath been the catholick church; and that the bishop of *Rome* is by Christ's appointment, the supream pastor, and visible head of the whole christian church? Is it possible that this should be believed in the christian church before the Council of *Nice*; and yet little respect to be had at that time to the *Roman* church? This indeed was said by *Aeneas Sylvius* before he sat in the infallible chair; but is never the less true for that.

Fifthly, The next step of their method is, that the *Roman* church is infallible; and by this means they have a certain remedy against heresy, and a judge of controversies, from which there is no appeal, which we want in our church. And this is a glorious privilege indeed, if they could prove that they had it, and that it would be so certain a remedy against heresy, and give a final decision to all controversies. But there is not one tittle of all this, of which they are able to give any tenable proof: For,

1. All the pretense for their infallibility relies upon the truth of the former proposition, that the church of *Rome* is the catholick church, and *that* they say is infallible: And I have already shewn that, that proposition is not only destitute of any good proof; but is as evidently false, as that part of a thing is the whole.

2. But supposing it were true, that the *Roman* church were the catholick church; yet it is neither evident in it self, nor can be proved by them, that the catholick church of every age is infallible, in deciding all controversies of Religion. It is granted by all christians, that our Saviour and his Apostles were infallible, in the delivery of the christian doctrine; and they proved their infallibility by miracles; and this was necessary at first for the security of our faith: But this doctrine being once delivered and transmitted down to us in the holy Scriptures, written by the Evangelists and Apostles, who were infallibly assisted by the Holy Ghost; we have now a certain and infallible rule of faith and practice, which, with the assistance and instruction of those guides and pastors which Christ hath appointed in his church, is sufficiently plain in all things necessary. And as there is no evidence of the continuance of infallibility in the guides and pastors of the church, in the ages which followed the Apostles; because miracles are long since ceased: So there is no need of the continuance of it, for the preservation of the true faith and religion; because God hath sufficiently provided for that, by that infallible rule of faith and manners which he hath left to his church in the holy Scriptures, *which are every way sufficient and able to make both pastors and people wise unto salvation.*

3. As for a certain remedy against heresy, it is certain God never intended there should be any; no more than he hath provided a certain remedy against sin and vice; which surely is every whit as contrary to the christian religion, and therefore as fit to be provided against, as heresy: But it is certain in experience, that God hath provided no certain and effectual remedy against sin and vice; for which I can give no other reason, but that God does that which he thinks best and fittest, and not what we are apt to think to be so.

Besides that infallibility is not a certain remedy against heresy. The Apostles were certainly infallible; and yet they could neither prevent nor extinguish heresy; which never more abounded than in the Apostles times. And St. *Paul* expressly tells us, *1 Cor. 1. 19. That there must be heresies; that they which are approved may be made manifest.* And St. *Peter*, the *2 Epist. 2. 1. That there should be false teachers among Christians, who should privily bring in damnable heresies; and that many should follow their pernicious ways.* But now if *there must be heresies*; either the church must not be infallible, or infallibility in the church is no certain remedy against them.

I proceed to the next step they make, *viz.*

Sixthly,

Sixthly, That Christ hath always a visible church upon earth; and that they can shew a church, which from the time of Christ and his Apostles, hath always made a visible profession of the same doctrines and practices which are now believed and practised in the church of *Rome*. But that we can shew no visible church, that from the time of Christ and his Apostles hath always opposed the church of *Rome*, in those doctrines and practices which we now re-vile and find fault with in their church.

That Christ hath always had, and ever shall have to the end of the world, a visible church, professing and practising his true faith and religion, is agreed on both sides: But we say that he hath no where promised, that this shall be free from all errors and corruptions in faith and practice. This the churches planted by the Apostles themselves were not, even in their times, and during their abode amongst them; and yet they were true parts of the christian catholic church. In the following ages, errors and corruptions and superstitions did by degrees creep in and grow up, in several parts of the church; as St. *Augustin*, and other of the fathers complain of in their times. Since that, several famous parts of the christian church, both in *Asia* and *Africa*, have not only been greatly corrupted, but have apostatized from the faith; so that in many places there are hardly any footsteps of christianity among them. But yet still Christ hath had in all these ages a visible church upon earth; tho' perhaps no part of it at all times free from some errors and corruptions; and in several parts of it, great corruptions both in faith and practice; and in none I think more and longer, than in the church of *Rome*, for all she boasts her self, like old *Babylon*, Isa. 47. 7, 8. *That she is a Lady for ever; and says in her heart, I am, and none else besides me;* and like the church of *Laodicea*, Revel. 3. 17. which said, *I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;* when the spirit of God saith, *that she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and knew it not.*

Thus the church of *Rome* boasts, that she hath in all ages been the true visible church of Christ (and none besides her) free from all errors in doctrine, and corruptions in practice; and that from the age of Christ and his Apostles, she hath always professed the same doctrines and practices which she does at this day. Can any thing be more shameless than this? Did they always believe *transubstantiation*? let their Pope *Gelasius* speak for them; who expressly denies, that in the sacrament there is any substantial change of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Was this always an article of their faith, and necessary to be believed by all christians? let *Scotus*, and several other of their schoolmen and learned writers speak for them. Was *Purgatory* always believed in the *Roman* church, as it is now defined in the Council of *Trent*? let several of their learned men speak. In what Father, in what Council before that of *Trent*, do they find Christ to have instituted just *seven sacraments*, neither more nor less? and for practices in their religion, they themselves will not say, that in the ancient christian church the Scriptures were with-held from the people, and lockt up in an unknown tongue; and that the publick service of God, the prayers and lessons were read, and the sacraments celebrated, in an unknown tongue; and that the sacrament of the Lord's-supper was given to the people only in one kind. Where do they find in holy Scripture, or in the doctrine and practice of the ancient christian church, any command or example for the worship of images; for the invocation of saints and angels and the blessed Virgin; which do now make a great part of their religion? nay, is not the doctrine of the Scriptures, and of the ancient fathers plainly against all these practices? With what face then can it be said, that the church of *Rome* hath made a constant visible profession of the same faith and practice in all ages, from the time of Christ and his Apostles? Or would the primitive church of *Rome*, if it should now visit the earth again, own the present church of *Rome* to be the same in all matters of faith and practice, that it was when they left it?

And whereas they demand of us, to shew a visible church from the time of Christ and his Apostles, that hath always opposed the church of *Rome*, in those

those points of doctrine and practice which we object to them; what can be more impertinent than this demand? When they know that in all these points we charge them with innovations in matters of faith and practice, and say that those things came in by degrees, several ages after the Apostles time, some sooner, some later; as we are able to make good, and have done it. And would they have us shew them a visible church, that opposed these errors and corruptions in their church, before ever they appeared? This we do not pretend to shew. And supposing they had not been at all opposed, when they appeared, nor a long time after, not till the reformation; yet if they be errors and corruptions of the christian doctrine, and contrary to the holy Scriptures, and to the faith and practice of the primitive church; there is no prescription against truth. 'Tis never too late for any church to reject those errors and corruptions, and to reform it self from them.

The bottom of all this matter is, they would have us to shew them a society of christians, that in all ages have preserved it self free from all such errors and corruptions as we charge them withal; or else we deny the perpetual visibility of the catholick church. No such matter. We say the church of Christ hath always been visible in every age since Christ's time; and that the several societies of Christians, professing the christian doctrine, and laws of Christ, have made up the catholick church; some parts whereof have in several ages fallen into great errors and corruptions; and no part of the catholick into more and greater than the church of *Rome*; so that it requires the utmost of our charity to think that they are a true, tho' a very unsound and corrupt part of the catholick church of Christ.

We acknowledge likewise, that we were once involved in the like degeneracy; but by the mercy of God, and pious care and prudence of those that were in authority, are happily rescued out of it: And tho' we were not out of the catholick church before; yet since our reformation from the errors and corruptions of the church of *Rome*, we are in it upon better terms, and are a much sounder part of it; and I hope, by the mercy and goodness of God, we shall for ever continue so.

So that to the perpetual visibility of Christ's church, it is not necessary that the whole christian church, nor indeed that any part of it should be free from all errors and corruptions. Even the churches planted by the Apostles in the primitive times were not so. St. *Paul* reproveth several doctrines and practices in the church of *Corinth*, and of *Colosse*, and of *Galatia*; and the spirit of God, several things in the seven churches of *Asia*: And yet all these were true parts and members of the catholick church of Christ, notwithstanding these faults and errors; because they all agreed in the main and essential doctrines of christianity. And when more and greater corruptions grew upon the church, or any part of it, the greater reason and need there was of a reformation. And as every particular person hath a right to reform any thing that he finds amiss in himself so far as concerns himself; so much more every national church hath a power within it self, to reform it self from all errors and corruptions, and by the sanction of the catholick authority to confirm that reformation; which is our case here in *England*. And whatever part of the church, how great and eminent soever, excludes from her communion such a national church, for reforming her self from plain errors and corruptions, clearly condemned by the word of God, and by the doctrine and practice of the primitive christian church, is undoubtedly guilty of *Schism*. And this is the truth of the case between us and the church of *Rome*. And no blind talk about a perpetual visible church can render us guilty of *Schism*, for making a real reformation; or acquit them of it, for casting us out of their communion for that cause.

Seventhly, and *Lastly*, (to mention no more) they pretend that we delude the people, by laying too much stress upon Scripture, and making it the only rule of faith and manners: whereas Scripture and tradition together make up the entire rule of faith; and not Scripture interpreted by every man's private fancy, but by tradition carefully preserved in the church. So that it ought to be

be no wonder, if several of their doctrines and practices cannot be so clearly made out by Scripture, or perhaps seem contrary to it, as it may be expounded by a private spirit; but not as interpreted by the tradition of the church, which can only give the true sense of Scripture. And therefore they are to understand, that several of those doctrines and practices, which we object against, are most clearly proved by the tradition of their church, which is of equal authority with Scripture.

In this objection of theirs, which they design for the cover of all their errors and corruptions, there are several things distinctly to be considered, which I shall do as briefly as I can.

First, Whereas it is suggested, that we delude the people by laying too much stress upon the Scriptures, (which certainly we cannot well do, if it be the word of God) it ought to be considered, whether they do not delude and abuse them infinitely more, in keeping the Scriptures from them, and not suffering them to see that which they cannot deny to be at least a considerable part of the rule of christian doctrine and practice. Doth it not by this dealing of theirs appear very suspicious, that they are extremely afraid that the people should examine their doctrine and practice by this rule? For what other reason can they have to conceal it from them?

Secondly, Whereas they affirm, that Scripture alone is not the rule of christian faith and practice, but that Scripture and oral tradition preserved in the church, and delivered down from hand to hand, make up the entire rule; I would fain know, whence they learn'd this new doctrine of the rule of faith. I know that the Council of *Trent* declares it for the rule they intend to proceed upon and make use of, for the confirmation and proof of their following determinations and decrees. But did any of the ancient Councils of the christian church lay down this rule, and proceed upon it? Did not *Constantine* the Emperor, at the opening of the *first general Council*, lay the *Bible* before them, as the only rule, according to which they were to proceed; and this with the approbation of all those holy fathers that were assembled in that Council? And did not following Councils proceed upon the same rule? Do any of the ancient fathers ever mention any rule of christian faith and practice, besides the holy Scriptures, and the ancient creed; which, because it is an abridgment of the necessary articles of christian faith contained in the holy Scriptures, is by them frequently called *the rule of faith*? Do not the same fathers frequently and expressly say, that the Scriptures are a perfect rule, and that all things are plainly contained in them, which concern faith and life; and that whatever cannot be proved by testimony of Scripture, is to be rejected? All this I am sure I can make good, by innumerable express testimonies of the ancient fathers, which are well known to those that are versed in them. By what authority then hath the Council of *Trent* set up this new rule, unknown to the christian church for 1500 years? and who gave them this authority? The plain truth is, the necessity of it for the defense of the errors and corruptions which they had embraced, and were resolved not to part with, forced them to lengthen out the rule; the old rule of the holy Scriptures being too short for their purpose.

Thirdly, Whereas they pretend, that holy Scripture, as expounded by a private spirit, may not seem so favourable to some of their doctrines and practices; yet, as interpreted by tradition, which can only give the true sense of Scripture, it agrees very well with them: I suppose they mean, that whereas a private spirit would be apt to understand some texts of Scripture, as if people were to search and read the Scripture; tradition interprets those texts in a quite other sense, that people are not to be permitted to read the holy Scriptures. A private spirit would be apt to understand St. *Paul's* discourse, in the 14th of the 1st to the *Corinthians* to be against celebrating prayer and the service of God in an unknown tongue, as being contrary to edification, and indeed to common sense; For he says, *If one should come, and find them speaking and praying in an unknown tongue, will they not say, Ye are mad?* But now tradition, which only knows how to give the true sense, can reconcile this discourse of St. *Paul* very easily with

with the practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter. And so likewise the Epistle of St *Paul* to the *Colossians*, with the worship of Angels; and the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, with offering the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ in the mass a thousand times every day. And to give but one instance more: Whereas a man, by his private spirit, would be very apt to understand the second commandment to forbid all worship of Images; tradition discovers the meaning of this commandment to be, that *due veneration is to be given to them*. So that at this rate of interpreting Scripture by tradition, it is impossible to fix any objection from Scripture, upon any doctrine or practice which they have a mind to maintain.

Fourthly, Whereas they pretend the tradition of their church, delivered from the mouth of Christ, or dictated by the holy Spirit, and brought down to them, and preserved by continual succession in the church, to be of equal authority with the word of God; for so the Council of *Trent* says, *that the holy synod doth receive and venerate these traditions with equal pious affection and reverence as they do the written word of God*: This we must declare against, as unreasonable in it self, to make tradition, conveyed by word of mouth from one to another, through so many ages, and liable to so many mistakes and miscarriages, to be, at the distance of 1500 years, of equal certainty and authority with the holy Scriptures, carefully preserved and transmitted down to us; because this (as I said before) is to make common rumour and report of equal authority and certainty with a written record. And not only so; but hereby they make the Scriptures an imperfect rule; contrary to the declared judgment of the ancient fathers and Councils of the christian church; and so, in truth, they set up a *new rule of faith*, whereby they change the christian Religion. For a *new rule of faith and Religion*, makes a *new faith and Religion*. This we charge the church of *Rome* with, and do challenge them to shew this *new rule of faith*, before the Council of *Trent*; and consequently where their Religion was before that Council; to shew a Religion, consisting of all those *articles* which are defined by the Council of *Trent* as necessary to salvation, and established upon this *new rule*, professed by any christian church in the world before that time. And as they have pitch'd upon a *new rule of faith*; so it is easy to see to what end. For take Pope *Pius* the IVth's *creed*, and we may see where the *old* and *new* Religion parts; even at the end of the twelve *articles* of the *Apostles Creed*, which was the ancient christian faith; to which are added, in Pope *Pius's Creed*, twelve *articles* more, defined in the Council of *Trent*, and supported only by tradition. So that as the Scripture answers for the *twelve old articles*; which are plainly contained there; so tradition is to answer for the *twelve new ones*. And therefore the matter was calculated very exactly, when they make tradition just of *equal* authority with the Scriptures; because as many *articles* of their faith were to be made good by it, and rely upon it, as those which are proved by the authority of Scripture. But that tradition is of equal authority with the Scriptures, we have nothing in the whole world for it, but the bare assertion of the Council of *Trent*.

I should now have added some other considerations, tending to confirm and establish us in our Religion, against the pretences and insinuations of seducing spirits: But I shall proceed no farther at present.

The Sixth
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N IX.

Of Constancy in the Profession of the true Religion.

H E B. X. 23.

Let us hold fast the profession of our Faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.



THESE words contain an exhortation *to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, and an argument or encouragement thereto, *because he is faithful that promised*. By the exhortation to *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, is not meant, that those who are capable of examining the grounds and reasons of their Religion, should blindly hold it fast against the best reasons that can be offered; because upon these terms, every man must continue in the Religion in which he happens to be fix'd by education, or an ill choice, be his Religion true or false, without examining and looking into it, whether it be right or wrong; for till a man examines, every man thinks his Religion right. That which the Apostle here exhorts christians *to hold fast*, is *the ancient faith*, of which all christians make a solemn *profession* in their *baptism*; as plainly appears from the context. And this *profession of our faith*, we are *to hold* in the following instances, which I shall but briefly mention, without enlarging upon them.

1. We are *to hold fast the profession of our faith* against the confidence of men, without Scripture or reason to support that confidence.
2. And much more against the confidence of men, contrary to plain Scripture and reason, and to the common sense of mankind.
3. Against all the temptations and terrors of the world, against the temptations of fashion and example, and of worldly interest and advantage; and against all terrors and sufferings of persecution.
4. Against all vain promises of being put into a safer condition, and groundless hopes of getting to Heaven upon easier terms than the Gospel hath proposed, in some other church and Religion.

Lastly, We are *to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, against all the cunning arts and insinuations of busy and disputing men, whose design it is to unhinge men from their Religion, and to make profelytes to their party and faction.

But without entring into these particulars, I shall, in order to our establishment in the reformed Religion, which we profess, in opposition to the errors and corruptions of the church of *Rome*, apply my self at this time, to make a short comparison betwixt the Religion which we profess, and that of the church of *Rome*, that we may discern on which side the advantage of truth lies; and in making this comparison, I shall insist upon *three* things, which will bring the matter to an issue, and are, I think, sufficient to determine every sober and considerate man, which of these he ought in reason, and with regard to the safety of his soul, to embrace; and they are these.

I. That we govern our belief and practice, in matters of Religion by the true ancient rule of christianity, the word of God contained in the holy Scriptures: But the church of *Rome*, for the maintenance of their errors and corruptions, have been forced to devise a new rule, never owned by the primitive church nor by the ancient fathers and Councils of it.

II. That

II. That the doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us and the church of *Rome*, are either contrary to this rule, or destitute of the warrant and authority of it, and are plain additions to the antient christianity, and corruptions of it.

III. That our Religion hath many clear advantages of that of the church of *Rome*, not only very considerable in themselves, but very obvious and discernible to an ordinary capacity, upon the first proposal of them. I shall be as brief in these as I can.

I. That we govern our belief and practice in matters of Religion, by the true antient rule of christianity, the word of God contain'd in the holy Scriptures: But the church of *Rome*, for the maintaining of their errors and corruptions, have been forced to devise a new rule, never owned by the primitive church, nor by the ancient Councils and fathers of it; that is, they have joyned with the word of God contained in the holy Scriptures, the unwritten traditions of their church, concerning several points of their faith and practice, which they acknowledge cannot be proved from Scripture, and these they call the unwritten word of God; and the Council of *Trent* hath decreed them to be *of equal authority with the holy Scriptures*, and that they do *receive and venerate them with the same pious affection and reverence*; and all this, contrary to the express declaration and unanimous consent of all the ancient Councils and fathers of the christian church, (as I have already shewn;) and this never declar'd to be a point of faith, till it was decreed, not much above a hundred years ago, in the Council of *Trent*. And this surely, if any thing, is a matter of great consequence, to presume to alter the antient rule of christian doctrine and practice, and to enlarge it, and add to it, at their pleasure. But the church of *Rome* having made so great a change in the doctrine and practice of christianity, it became consequently necessary to make a change of the rule: And therefore with great reason did the Council of *Trent* take this into consideration in the first place, and put it in the front of their decrees, because it was to be the foundation and main proof of the following definitions of faith, and decrees of practice, for which, without this new rule, there had been no colour.

II. The doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us, and the church of *Rome*, are either contrary to the true rule; or destitute of the warrant and authority of it, and plain additions to the antient christianity, and corruptions of it. The truth of this will best appear, by instancing in some of the principal doctrines and practices in difference betwixt us.

As for their two great fundamental doctrines, of the supremacy of the Bishop of *Rome* over all the christians in the world, and the infallibility of their church, there is not one word in Scripture concerning these privileges; nay, it is little less than a demonstration that they have no such privileges, that St. *Paul* in a long Epistle to the church of *Rome* takes no notice of them, that the church of *Rome* either then was, or was to be soon after, the mother and mistress of all churches, which is now grown to be an article of faith, in the church of *Rome*; and yet it is hardly to be imagined, that he could have omitted to take notice of such remarkable privileges of their Bishops and church, above any in the world, had he known they had belonged to them. So that in all probability he was ignorant of those mighty prerogatives of the church of *Rome*; otherwise it cannot be, but that he would have written with more deference and submission to this seat of infallibility, and center of unity; he would certainly have paid a greater respect to this mother and mistress of all churches, where the head of the church, and vicar of Christ, either was already seated, or by the appointment of Christ was designed for ever to fix his throne and establish his residence; but there is not one word, or the least intimation of any such thing throughout this whole Epistle, nor in any other part of the new testament.

Besides that both these pretended privileges are omitted, by plain fact and evidence of things themselves; their *supremacy*, in that the far greatest part of the christian church, neither is at this day, nor can be shewn by the records

of any age, ever to have been subject to the Bishop of *Rome*, or to have acknowledged his authority and jurisdiction over them: And the *infallibility* of the Pope, whether with or without a general Council, about which they still differ, though infallibility was devised on purpose to determine all differences; I say, this *infallibility*, where-ever it is pretended to be, is plainly confuted by the contradictory definitions of several Popes and Councils; for if they have contradicted one another, as is plain, beyond all contradiction, in several instances, then there must of necessity be an error on one side; and there can be no so certain demonstration, that any one is infallible, as evident error and mistake is of the contrary.

Next, their concealing both the rule of Religion, and the practice of it in the worship and service of God, from the people, in an unknown tongue; and their administering the communion to the people in one kind only, contrary to clear Scripture, and the plain institution of our blessed Saviour. And then their worship of images, and invocation of Angels and Saints, and the blessed Virgin, in the same solemn manner, and for the same blessings and benefits which we beg of God himself; contrary to the express word of God, which commands us *to worship the Lord our God, and to serve him only*; and which declares, that as there is but *one God*, so there is but *one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus*; but *one mediator*, not only of *redemption*, but of *intercession* too; for the Apostle there speaks of *a mediator of intercession*, by whom only we are to offer up our prayers, which are to be put up to God only; and which expressly forbids men to worship any image or likeness. And the learned men of their own church acknowledge, that there is neither precept nor example for these practices in Scripture, and that they were not used in the christian church for several ages; and this acknowledgment we think very considerable, since so great a part of their Religion, especially as it is practised among the people, is contained in these points. For the service of God in an unknown tongue, and with-holding the Scriptures from the people, they do not pretend so much as one testimony of any father for the first 600 years, and nothing certainly can be more unreasonable in it self, than to deny people the best means of knowing the will of God, and not to permit them to understand what is done in the publick worship of God, and what prayers are put up to him in the church.

The two great doctrines of *transubstantiation* and *purgatory* are acknowledged by many of their own learned writers, to have no certain foundation in Scripture: And that there are *seven sacraments* of the christian Religion, tho' it be now made an article of faith by the Council of *Trent*, is a thing which cannot be shewn in any Council or father for above a thousand years after Christ. And we find no mention of this number of the sacraments, till the age of *Peter Lombard* the father of the schoolmen.

That the church of *Rome* is *the mother and mistress of all churches*, tho' that also be one of the new articles of Pope *Pius IV.* his creed, which their priests are by a solemn oath obliged to believe and teach; yet it is most evidently false. That she is not the mother of all churches is plain, because *Jerusalem* was certainly so; for *there* certainly was the first christian church, and from thence all the christian churches in the world derive themselves: That she is not, (tho' she fain would be) the mistress of all churches, is as evident, because the greatest part of the christian church does at this day, and always did, deny that she hath any authority or supremacy over them. Now these are the principal matters in difference betwixt us; and if these points, and a few more, be pared off from *Popery*, that which remains of their Religion, is the same with ours, that is, the true antient Christianity.

III. I shall shew that our Religion hath many clear advantages of theirs, not only very considerable in themselves, but very obvious and discernible to an ordinary capacity, upon the very first proposal of them; as,

I. That our Religion agrees perfectly with the Scriptures, and all points both of our belief and practice, esteemed by us as necessary to salvation, are there contained, even our enemies themselves being judges. We *worship the Lord our God,*

God, and him only do we serve. We do not fall down before images and worship them: We address all our prayers to God alone, by the only mediation and intercession of his Son Jesus Christ, as he himself hath given us commandment, and as *St. Paul* doth plainly direct, giving us this plain and substantial reason for it, because as there is but *one God*, so there is but *one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.*

The publick worship and service of God is perform'd by us in a language which we understand, according to *St. Paul's* express order and direction, and the universal practice of the ancient church, and the nature and reason of the thing itself. We administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in both kinds, according to our Saviour's example and plain institution, and the continual practice of all the christian churches in the world, for above a thousand years.

2. We believe nothing as necessary to salvation, but what hath been owned in all ages to be the christian doctrine, and is acknowledged so to be by the church of *Rome* itself; and we receive the whole faith of the primitive christian church, (*viz.*) whatever is contained in the Apostles creed, and in the explanations of that in the creeds of the four first general Councils. By which it plainly appears, that all points of faith in difference betwixt us and the church of *Rome* are mere innovations and plain additions to the ancient christian faith: But all that we believe, is acknowledged by them to be undoubtedly the ancient christian faith.

3. There is nothing wanting in our church and Religion, whether in matter of faith or practice, which either the Scripture makes necessary to salvation, or was so esteem'd by the christian church for the first five hundred years, and we trust, that what was sufficient for the salvation of christians in the best ages of christianity, for five hundred years together, may be so still; and we are very well content to venture our salvation upon the same terms that they did.

4. Our Religion is not only free from all idolatrous worship, but even from all suspicion and probable charge of any such thing: But this the church of *Rome* is not, as is acknowledged by her most learned champions, and as no man of ingenuity can deny; and the reason which the learned men give, why the worship of images and the invocation of Angels and Saints departed were not practised in the primitive church, for the first three hundred years, is a plain acknowledgment that these practices are very liable to the suspicion of idolatry; for they say, that the christians did then forbear those practices, because they seem'd to come too near to the pagan idolatry, and lest the heathen should have taken occasion to have justified themselves, if these things had been practised among christians; and they cannot now be ignorant, what scandal they give by these practices both to the *Jews* and *Turks*, and how much they alienate them from Christianity by this scandal; nor can they chuse but be sensible, upon how great disadvantage they are in defending these practices from the charge of idolatry, and that by all their blind distinctions, with which they raise such a cloud and dust, they can hardly make any plausible and tolerable defense of themselves from this charge; insomuch, that to secure their own people from discerning their guilt in this matter, they have been put upon that shameful shift of leaving out the second commandment in their common catechisms and manuals, lest the people seeing so plain a law of God, against so common a practice of their church, should upon that discovery have broken off from them.

5. Nor is our Religion incumbered with such an endless number of superstitious and troublesome observances, as theirs infinitely is, even beyond the number of the *Jewish* ceremonies, to the great burthen and scandal of the christian Religion, and the diverting of men's minds from the spiritual part of Religion, and the more weighty and necessary duties of the christian life; so that, in truth, a devout pastor is so taken up with the external rites and little observances of his Religion, that he hath little or no time to make himself a good man, and to cultivate and improve his mind in true piety and virtue.

6. Our

6. Our Religion is evidently more charitable to all christians that differ from us; and particularly to them, who, by their uncharitableness to us, have done as much as is possible to discharge and damp our charity towards them. And charity, as it is one of the most essential marks of a true christian, so it is likewise the best mark and ornament of a true church; and of all things that can be thought of, methinks the want of charity in any church should be a motive to no man to fall in love with it, and to be fond of its communion.

7. Our Religion doth not clash and interfere with any of the great moral duties, to which all mankind stand obliged by the law and light of nature; as fidelity, mercy and truth. We do not teach men to break faith with hereticks or infidels; nor to destroy and extirpate those who differ from us, with fire and sword: No such thing as equivocation or mental reservation, or any other artificial way of falsehood, is either taught or maintain'd, either by the doctrine, or by the casuists of our church.

8. Our Religion and all the doctrines of it are perfectly consistent with the peace of civil government, and the welfare of humane society. We neither exempt the clergy from subjection to the civil powers; nor absolve subjects upon any pretense whatsoever from allegiance to their Princes; both which points, the necessity of the one, and the lawfulness of the other, have been taught and stiffly maintain'd in the church of *Rome*, not only by private doctors, but by Popes and general Councils.

9. The doctrines of our Religion, are perfectly free from all suspicion of a worldly interest and design; whereas the greatest part of the erroneous doctrines with which we charge the church of *Rome*, are plainly calculated to promote the end of worldly greatness and dominion.

The Pope's *kingdom is plainly of this world*; and the doctrines and maxims of it, like so many *servants*, are *ready upon all occasions to fight for him*. For most of them do plainly tend, either to the establishment and enlargement of his authority; or to the magnifying of the priests, and the giving them a perfect power over the consciences of the people, and the keeping them in a slavish subjection and blind obedience to them. And to this purpose do plainly tend the doctrines of exempting the clergy from the secular power and jurisdiction; the doctrine of transubstantiation; for it must needs make the priest a great man in the opinion of the people, to believe that he can make God, as they love to express it, without all reason and reverence. Of the like tendency is the communicating of the laity only in one kind, thereby making it the sole privilege of the priest to receive the sacrament in both: The withholding the Scripture from the people, and celebrating the service of God in an unknown tongue: The doctrine of an implicit faith, and absolute resignation of their judgments to their teachers: These do all directly tend to keep the people in ignorance, and to bring them to a blind obedience to the dictates of their teachers. So likewise the necessity of the intention of the priest, to the saving virtue and efficacy of the sacraments; by which doctrine, the people do upon the matter depend as much upon the good will of the priest, as upon the mercy of God for their salvation. But above all, their doctrine of the necessity of auricular and private confession of all mortal sins committed after baptism, with all the circumstances of them to the priest; and this not only for the ease and direction of their consciences, but as a necessary condition of having their sins pardoned and forgiven by God: By which means they make themselves masters of all the secrets of the people, and keep them in awe by the knowledge of their faults, *Scire volunt secreta domus atque inde timeri*. Or else their doctrines tend to filthy lucre, and the enriching of their church: As their doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, and their prayers and masses for the dead; and many more doctrines and practices of the like kind plainly do.

10. Our Religion is free from all disingenuous and dishonest arts of maintaining and supporting it self. Such are clipping of ancient authors, nay, and even

even the authors and writers of their own church, when they speak too freely of any point; as may be seen in their *indices expurgatorii*, which much against their wills have been brought to light. To which I shall only add these three gross forgeries, which lie all at their doors, and they cannot deny them to be so.

1. The pretended *canon* of the Council of *Nice* in the case of appeals, between the church of *Rome* and the *African* church; upon which they insisted a great while very confidently, till at last they were convinced by authentick copies of the canons of that Council.

2. *Constantine's* donation to the Pope, which they kept a great stir with, till the forgery of it was discovered.

3. The decretal epistles of the ancient Popes; a large volume of forgeries compiled by *Isidore Mercator*, to countenance the usurpations of the Bishop of *Rome*, and of which the church of *Rome* made a great use for several ages, and pertinaciously defended the authority of them, till the learned men of their own church have at last been forced for very shame to disclaim them, and to confess the imposture of them. A like instance whereto is not I hope to be shewn in any christian church. This is that which *St. Paul* calls *Kυβερια*, the sleight of men, such as gamesters use at dice; for to alledge false and forged authors in this case, is to play with false dice, when the salvation of men's souls lies at stake.

11. Our Religion hath this mighty advantage, That it doth not decline tryal and examination, which to any man of ingenuity must needs appear a very good sign of an honest cause; but if any church be shy of having her Religion examined, and her doctrines and practices brought into the open light, this gives just ground of suspicion that she hath some distrust of them; for truth doth not seek corners, nor shun the light. Our Saviour hath told us who they are that love darkness rather than light, viz. they whose deeds are evil; for every one, saith he, that doth evil, hateth the light; neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd and made manifest. There needs no more to render a Religion suspected to a wise man, than to see those who profess it, and make such proud boasts of the truth and goodness of it, so fearful that it should be examin'd and look'd into, and that their people should take the liberty to hear and read what can be said against it.

12. We persuade men to our Religion by human and christian ways, such as our Saviour and his Apostles used, by urging men with the authority of God, and with arguments fetch'd from another world, the promise of eternal life and happiness, and the threatening of eternal death and misery, which are the proper arguments of Religion, and which alone are fitted to work upon the minds and consciences of men. The terror and torture of death may make men hypocrites, and awe them to profess with their mouths what they do not believe in their hearts; but this is no proper means of converting the soul, and convincing the minds and consciences of men; and these violent and cruel ways cannot be deny'd to have been practis'd in the church of *Rome*, and set on foot by the authority of Councils, and greatly countenanced and encouraged by Popes themselves; witness the many croisades for the extirpation of hereticks, the standing cruelties of their inquisition, their occasional massacres and persecutions, of which we have fresh instances in every age.

But these methods of conversion are a certain sign that they either distrust the truth and goodness of their cause, or else that they think truth and the arguments for it are of no force, when dragoons are their *ratio ultima*, the last reason which their cause relies upon, and the best and most effectual it can afford.

Again, we hold no doctrines in defiance of the senses of all mankind; such as is that of transubstantiation, which is now declared in the church of *Rome* to be a necessary article of faith, so that a man cannot be of that Religion, unless he will renounce his senses, and believe against the clear verdict of them in a plain sensible matter: But after this, I do not understand how a man
can

can believe any thing, because by this very thing he destroys and takes away the foundation of all certainty. If any man forbid me to believe what I see, I forbid him to believe any thing upon better and surer evidence. St. *Paul* saith, that *faith cometh by hearing*. But if I cannot rely upon the certainty of sense, then the means whereby faith is conveyed is uncertain; and we may say as St. *Paul* doth in another case, *then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain*.

Lastly, (to mention no more particulars) as to several things used and practised in the church of *Rome*, we are on much the safer side, if we should happen to be mistaken about them, than they are, if they should be mistaken; for it is certainly lawful to read the Scriptures, and lawful to permit to the people the use of the Scriptures in a known tongue; otherwise we must condemn the Apostles and the primitive church for allowing this liberty. It is certainly lawful to have the publick prayers and service of God celebrated in a language which all that join in it can understand. It is certainly lawful to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the people in both kinds; otherwise the christian church would not have done it for a thousand years. It is certainly lawful not to worship images, not to pray to Angels, or Saints, or the blessed Virgin; otherwise the primitive church would not have forbore these practices for three hundred years, as is acknowledged by those of the church of *Rome*.

Suppose a man should pray to God only, and offer up all his prayers to him only by Jesus Christ, without making mention of any other mediator or intercessor with God for us, relying herein upon what the Apostle says concerning our *High-Priest, Jesus the Son of God*, Heb. 7. 25. *That he is able to save them to the uttermost, who come unto God by him, (i. e.) by his mediation and intercession, since he ever liveth to make intercession for them*; might not a man reasonably hope to obtain of God all the blessings he stands in need of by addressing himself only to him, in the name and by the intercession of that *one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*? Nay, why may not a man reasonably think, that this is both a shorter and more effectual way to obtain our requests, than by turning our selves to the Angels and Saints, and importuning them to sollicite God for us; especially if we should order the matter so, as to make ten times more frequent addresses to these, than we do to God and our blessed Saviour; and, in comparison of the other, to neglect these. We cannot certainly think any more able to help us and do us good, than the great God of heaven and earth, *the God* (as the psalmist styles him) *that heareth prayers*, and therefore *unto him should all flesh come*. We cannot certainly think any intercessor so powerful and prevalent with God, as his only and dearly beloved Son, offering up our prayers to God in heaven, by virtue of that most acceptable and invaluable sacrifice, which he offered to him on earth. We cannot surely think, that there is so much goodness any where as in God; that in any of the Angels or Saints, or even in the blessed mother of our Lord, there is more mercy and compassion for sinners, and a tenderer sense of our infirmities, than in the son of God, *who is at the right hand of his Father, to appear in the presence of God for us*. We are sure that God always hears the petitions which we put up to him; and so does the Son of God, by whom we put them up to the Father, because he also is *God blessed for evermore*. But we are not sure that the Angels and Saints hear our prayers, because we are sure that they are neither omniscient nor omnipresent; and we are not sure, nor probably certain, that our prayers are made known to them any other way, there being no revelation of God, to that purpose. We are sure that God hath declared himself to be *a jealous God*, and that *he will not give his honour to another*; and we are not sure but that prayer is part of the honour which is due to God alone; and if it were not, we can hardly think but that God should be so far from being pleased with our making so frequent use of those other mediators and intercessors, and from granting our desires the sooner upon that account; that, on the contrary, we have reason to think he should be highly offended, when he himself is ready to receive all our petitions, and hath appointed a great mediator to that purpose, to see more addresses made to, and by the Angels

gels and Saints, and blessed Virgin, than to himself by his blessed Son; and to see the worship of himself almost justled out, by the devotion of people to Saints and Angels, and the blessed mother of our Lord; a thing which he *never commanded*, and which, so far as appears by Scripture, *never came into his mind*. I have been the longer upon this matter, to shew how unreasonable and needless at the best, this more than half part of the Religion of the church of Rome is; and how safely it may be let alone.

But now, on the other hand, if they be mistaken in these things, as we can demonstrate from Scripture they are, the danger is infinitely great on that side; for then they oppose an institution of Christ, who appointed the sacrament to be received in both kinds; and they involve themselves in a great danger of the guilt of idolatry, and our common christianity in the scandal and reproach of it; and this without any necessity, since *God hath required none of these things at our hands*; and, after all the bustle which hath been made about them, the utmost they pretend (which yet they are not able to make good) is, that these things may lawfully be done; and at the same time they cannot deny, but that if the church had not enjoined them, they might lawfully be let alone. And can any thing be more unreasonable, than so pertinaciously to insist upon things so hard, I might say impossible, to be defended or excused, and which by their own acknowledgment, are of no great weight and necessity; in which we are certainly safe in not doing them, if they should prove lawful; but if they do not prove so, they are in a most dangerous condition. So that here is certain safety on the one hand, and the danger of damnation on the other; which is as great odds as is possible.

And they must not tell us that they are in no danger, because they are infallible, and cannot be mistaken; they must prove that point a great deal better than they have yet done, before it can signify any thing either to our satisfaction or their safety.

I might have insisted more largely upon each of these particulars, any one of which is of weight to incline a man to that religion, which hath such an advantage on its side; but all of them together make so powerful an argument to an unprejudiced person, as must almost irresistibly determine his choice; for most of the particulars are so evident, that they cannot, upon the very mention and proposal of them, be denied to be clear advantages on our side.

And now, to use the words of St. Peter, *I testify unto you, that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand*, that the reformed Religion which we profess, and which by the goodness of God is by law established in this nation, is the true antient christianity, *the faith which was at first delivered to the Saints*, and which is conveyed down to us in the writings of the Apostles and the Evangelists of our Lord and Saviour. *Remember therefore how you have received and heard; and hold fast; for he is faithful that hath promised*; which is the second part of the text: The encouragement which the Apostle gives us *to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; he is faithful that hath promised to give us his holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, to establish, strengthen, and settle us in the profession of it, to support and comfort us under all trials and temptations, and to seal us up to the day of redemption; and he is faithful that hath promised to reward our constancy and fidelity to him and his truth, with a crown of everlasting life and glory. Wherefore my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord; for he is faithful that hath promised; and let us provoke one another to charity and good works, which are the great ornament and glory of any Religion, and so much the more, because the day approacheth in which God will judge the belief and lives of men, by Jesus Christ; not according to the imperious and uncharitable dictates of any church, but according to the Gospel of his Son; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory now and for ever.*

Now the God of peace, which brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

S E R M O N X.

The Christian Life, a Life of Faith.

2 COR. V. 7.

For we walk by Faith, not by Sight.

IN the latter part of the former chapter, the Apostle declares what it was that was the great support of christians under the persecutions and sufferings which befel them, *viz.* the assurance of a blessed resurrection to another life, verse 14. *Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus; for which cause,* saith he, verse 16. *we faint not; but though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day; that is, though our bodies, by reason of the hardships and sufferings which we undergo, are continually decaying and declining; yet our minds grow every day more healthful and vigorous, and gain new strength and resolution, by contemplating the glory and reward of another world, and, as it were, feeding upon them by faith; for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.*

And he resumes the same argument again at the beginning of this chapter; *For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens; that is, we are firmly persuaded, that when we die, we shall but exchange these earthly and perishing bodies, these houses of clay, for a heavenly mansion, which will never decay nor come to ruin: From whence he concludes, verse 6. Therefore we are always confident, διαβεβαιότες ἐν πάντοτε, therefore whatever happens to us, we are always of good courage, and see no reason to be afraid of death; knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; that is, since our continuance in the Body is to our disadvantage, and while we live, we are absent from our happiness; and when we die we shall then enter upon the possession of it. That which gives us this confidence and good courage, is our faith; for though we be not actually possess'd of this happiness which we speak of, yet we have a firm persuasion of the reality of it, which is enough to support our spirits, and keep up our courage under all afflictions and adversities whatsoever, ver. 7. For we walk by faith, not by sight.*

These words come in by way of *Parentthesis*, in which the Apostle declares in general, what is the swaying and governing principle of a christian life; not only in case of persecution and affliction, but under all events, and in every condition of humane life; and that is faith, in opposition to sight and present enjoyment: *We walk by faith, and not by sight. We walk by faith:* Whatever principle sways and governs a man's life and actions, he is said to walk and live by it. And as here a christian is said to *walk by faith*, so elsewhere *the just* is said to *live by faith*. Faith is the principle which animates all his resolutions and actions.

And

And *not by sight*. The word is *εἶδεν*, which signifies the thing it self in present view and possession, in opposition to a firm persuasion of things future and invisible. Sight is the thing in hand, and faith the thing only in hope and expectation. Sight is a clear view and apprehension of things present and near to us, faith an obscure discovery and apprehension of things at a distance: So the Apostle tells us, *2 Cor. 13. 12. Now we see through a glass darkly*; this is faith; *but then face to face*, this is present sight, as one man sees another face to face; and thus likewise the same Apostle distinguisheth betwixt hope and sight, *Rom. 8. 24, 25. Hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man sees, why doth he yet hope for it? but if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it*. Sight is possession and enjoyment; faith is the firm persuasion and expectation of a thing; and this the Apostle tells us was the governing principle of a christian's life; *For we walk by faith, and not by sight*; from which words I shall observe these three things.

I. That faith is the governing principle, and that which bears the great sway in the life and actions of a christian; *we walk by faith*; that is, we order and govern our lives in the power and virtue of this principle.

II. Faith is a degree of assent inferiour to that of sense. This is sufficiently intimated in the opposition betwixt faith and sight. He had said before, that *whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*; and gives this as a reason and proof of our absence from the Lord, *for we walk by faith, and not by sight*; that is, whilst we are in the body, we do not see and enjoy, but believe and expect; if we were present with the Lord, then faith would cease, and be turned into sight; but tho' we have not that assurance of another world, which we shall have when we come to see and enjoy these things, yet we are firmly persuaded of them.

III. Notwithstanding faith be an inferiour degree of assurance, yet 'tis a principle of sufficient power to govern our lives; *we walk by faith*; it is such an assurance as hath an influence upon our lives.

I. That faith is the governing principle, and that which bears the great sway in the life and actions of a christian. *We walk by faith*; that is, we order and govern our lives in the power and virtue of this principle. A christian's life consists in obedience to the will of God; that is, in a readiness to do what he commands, and in a willingness to suffer what he calls us to; and the great arguments and encouragements hereto, are such things, as are the objects of faith and not of sense; such things as are absent and future, and not present, and in possession. For instance, the belief of an invisible God, of a secret power and providence, that orders and governs all things, that can bless or blast us, and all our designs and undertakings, according as we demean our selves towards him, and endeavour to improve our selves to him; the persuasion of a secret aid and influence always ready at hand to keep us from evil, and to strengthen and assist us to that which is good; more especially the firm belief, and expectation of the happiness of Heaven, and the glorious rewards of another world, which tho' they be now at a distance, and invisible to us, yet being grounded upon the promise of *God that cannot lie*, shall certainly be made good.

And this faith, this firm persuasion of absent and invisible things, the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, was the great principle of the piety and virtue of good men from the beginning of the world. This he calls, *Ch. 11. verse 1. the ὑπόστασις*, or *the confident expectation of things hoped for, and the proof or evidence of things not seen, viz. a firm persuasion of the being and providence of God, and of the truth and faithfulness of his promises*. Such was the faith of *Abel*, he believed *that there was a God, and that he was a rewarder of those that faithfully serve him*. Such was the faith of *Noah*, who being warned of God, of things at a great distance, and not seen as yet, notwithstanding believed the divine prediction concerning the flood, and prepared an ark; Such also was the faith of *Abraham*, concerning a numerous posterity by *Isaac*, and the inheritance of the land of *Canaan*; and such likewise was the faith of *Mo-*

ses, he did as firmly believe the invisible God, and the recompense of reward, as if he had beheld them with his eyes.

And of this recompense of reward, we christians have a much clearer revelation, and much greater assurance, than former ages and generations had; and the firm belief and persuasion of this, is the great motive and argument to a holy life; *The hope which is set before us* of obtaining the happiness, and the fear of incurring the misery of another world. This made the primitive christians, with so much patience to bear the sufferings and persecutions, with so much constancy to venture upon the dangers and inconveniencies which the love of God and Religion exposed them to.

Under the former dispensation of the law, tho' good men received good hopes of the rewards of another life, yet these things were but obscurely revealed to them, and the great inducements to obedience were temporal rewards and punishments, the promises of long life, and peace, and plenty, and prosperity, in that good land which God had given them, and the threatenings of war, and famine, and pestilence, and being delivered into captivity. But now under *the Gospel, life and immortality are brought to light*; and the great arguments that bear sway with christians, are the promises of everlasting life, and the threatenings of eternal misery; and the firm belief and persuasion of these is now the great principle that governs the lives and actions of good men: For what will not men do, that are really persuaded, that as they do demean themselves in this world, it will fare with them in the other? That *the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal*. I proceed to the

II. Observation, namely, that faith is a degree of assent, inferiour to that of sense. This is intimated in the opposition betwixt faith and sight; *We walk by faith, and not by sight*; that is, we believe these things, and are confidently persuaded of the truth of them, tho' we never saw them, and consequently cannot possibly have that degree of assurance concerning the joys of heaven, and the torments of hell, which those have who enjoy the one and endure the other.

There are different degrees of assurance concerning things arising from the different degrees of evidence we have for them. The highest degree of evidence we have for any thing is our own sense and experience; and this is so firm and strong, that it is not to be shaken by the utmost pretence of a rational demonstration; men will trust their own senses and experience, against any subtilty of reason whatsoever: But there are inferiour degrees of assurance concerning things, as the testimony and authority of persons every way credible: And this assurance we have in this state concerning the things of another world, we believe with great reason, that we have the testimony of God concerning them, which is the highest kind of evidence in it self; and we have all the reasonable assurance we can desire that God hath testified these things, and this is the utmost assurance which things future, and at a distance are capable of.

But yet it is an unreasonable obstinacy to deny, that this falls very much short of that degree of assurance which those persons have concerning these things, who are now in the other world, and have the sense and experience of these things. And this is not only intimated here in the text, in the opposition of faith and sight, but is plainly express'd in other texts of Scripture; 1 Cor. 13. 9, 10. *We know now but in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away*. That degree of knowledge and assurance which we have in this life is very imperfect, in comparison to what we shall have hereafter; and ver. 12. *We now see, as through a glass darkly, & ἀνίματι, as in a riddle*, in which there is always a great deal of obscurity; all which expressions are certainly intended by way of abatement and diminution to the certainty of faith; because it is plain, by *that which is in any part, or imperfect*, the Apostle means faith and hope, which he tells us shall cease, when *that which is perfect*, meaning vision and sight, is come. We see likewise in experience, that the faith and hope of the best christians in this life is accompanied with doubting concerning these things, and all doubting is a degree of uncertainty, but

but those blessed souls who are enter'd upon the possession of glory and happiness, and those miserable wretches who lie groaning under the wrath of God and the Severity of his justice, cannot possibly, if they would, have any doubt concerning the truth and reality of these things.

But however contentious men may dispute against common sense, this is so plain a truth, that I will not labour in the farther proof of it; nor indeed is it reasonable, while we are in this state, to expect that degree of assurance concerning the rewards and punishments of another life, which the sight and sensible experience of them would give us; and that upon these two accounts;

1. Because our present state will not admit it; and,
2. If it would, it is not reasonable we should have it.

1. Our present state will not admit it. For while we are in this world, it is not possible we should have that sensible experiment and trial how things are in the other. The things of the other world are remote from us, and far out of sight, and we cannot have any experimental knowledge of them, till we ourselves enter into that state. Those who are already past into it know how things are; those happy souls who live in the reviving presence of God, and are possessors of those joys which we cannot now conceive, understand these things in another manner, and have a more perfect assurance concerning them, than it is possible for any man to have in this world; and those wretched and miserable spirits who feel the vengeance of God, and are plunged into the horrors of eternal darkness, do believe upon irresistible evidence, and have other kind of convictions of the reality of that state, and the insupportable misery of it, than any man is capable of in this world.

2. If our present state would admit of this high degree of assurance, it is not fit and reasonable that we should have it. Such an over-powering evidence would quite take away the virtue of faith, and much lessen that of obedience. Put the case that every man, some considerable time before his departure out of this life were permitted to visit the other world, to assure him how things are there, to view the mansions of the blessed, and to survey the dark and loathsome prisons of the damned, to hear the lamentable outcries of miserable and despairing souls, and to see the inconceivable anguish and torments they are in; after this, what virtue would it be in any man to believe these things? he that had been there and seen them, could not disbelieve them if he would. Faith in this case would not be virtue, but necessity, and therefore it is observable, that our Saviour doth not pronounce them blessed, who believed his resurrection, upon the forcible evidence of their own senses, *but blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* They might be happy in the effects of that faith, but there is no praise, no reward belongs to that faith which is wrought in man by so violent and irresistible an evidence. It was the great commendation of *Abraham's* faith, that *against hope he believed in hope*, he believed the promise of God concerning a thing in it self very improbable: But it is no commendation at all to believe the things which we have seen, because they admit of no manner of dispute; no objection can be offered to shake our assent, unless we will run to the extremity of scepticism; for if we will believe any thing at all, we must yield to the evidence of sense. This does so violently enforce our assent, that there can be no virtue in such a faith.

And as this would take away the virtue of faith, so it would very much lessen that of our obedience. It is hardly to be imagined, that any man who had seen the blessed condition of good men in another world, and been an eye-witness of the intolerable torments of sinners, should ever after be tempted knowingly to do any thing that would deprive him of that happiness, or bring him *into that place of torment.* Such a sight could not chuse but affect a man as long as he lived; and leave such impressions upon his mind, of the indispensable necessity of a holy life, and of the infinite danger of a wicked course, that we might sooner believe that all men in the world should conspire to kill one another, than that such a man, by consenting to any deliberate act of sin should wilfully throw himself into those flames: No, his mind would be continually haunted with

with those furies he had seen tormenting sinners in another world, and the fearful shrieks and outcries of miserable souls would be perpetually ringing in his ears; and the man would have so lively and terrible an imagination of the danger he was running himself upon, that no temptation would be strong enough to conquer his fears, and to make him careless of his life and actions, after he had once seen how *fearful a thing it was to fall into the hands of the living God*: So that in this case, the reason of mens obedience would be so violent, that the virtue of it must be very little; for what praise is due to any man, not to do those things which none but a perfect mad man would do? for certainly that man must be besides himself, that could by any temptation be seduced to live a wicked life, after he had seen the state of good and bad men in the other world; the glorious rewards of holiness and virtue, and the dismal event of a vicious and sinful course. God hath designed this life for the trial of our virtue, and the exercise of our obedience; but there would hardly be any place for this, if there were a free and easie passage for us into the other world, to see the true state of things there. What argument would it be of any man's virtue to forbear sinning after he had been in *hell*, and seen the miserable end of sinners? But I proceed to the

III. And *last* observation; namely, that notwithstanding faith be an inferiour degree of assent, yet it is a principle of sufficient force and power to govern our lives. *We walk by faith*. Now that the belief of any thing may have its effect upon us, it is requisite that we be satisfied of these two things.

I. Of the certainty, and 2. Of the great concernment of the thing. For if the thing be altogether uncertain, it will not move us at all; we shall do nothing towards the obtaining of it, if it be good; nor for the avoiding and preventing of it, if it be evil: And if we are certain of the thing, yet if we apprehend it to be of no great moment and concernment, we shall be apt to slight it, as not worth our regard: But the rewards and punishments of another world, which the gospel propounds to our faith, are fitted to work upon our minds, both upon account of the certainty and concernment of them. For,

I. We have sufficient assurance of the truth of these things, as much as we are well capable of in this state. Concerning things future and at a distance, we have the dictates of our reason arguing us into this persuasion, from the consideration of the justice of the divine providence, and from the promiscuous and unequal administration of things in this world; from whence wise men in all ages have been apt to conclude, that there will be another state of things after this life, wherein rewards and punishments shall be equally distributed. We have the general consent of mankind in this matter: And to assure us, that these reasonings are true, we have a most credible revelation of these things, God having sent his Son from heaven to declare it to us, and given us a sensible demonstration of the thing, in his resurrection from the dead, and his visible ascension into heaven; so that there is no kind of evidence wanting, that the thing is capable of, but only our own sense and experience of these things, of which we are not capable in this present state. And there is no objection against all this, but what will bring all things into uncertainty, which do not come under our senses, and which we our selves have not seen.

Nor is there any considerable Interest to hinder men from the belief of these things, or to make them hesitate about them. For as for the other world, if at last there should prove to be no such thing, our condition after death will be the same with the condition of those who disbelieve these things; because all will be extinguish'd by death: But if things fall out otherwise (as most undoubtedly they will) and our souls after this life do pass into a state of everlasting happiness or misery, then our great interest plainly lies, in preparing our selves for this state; and there is no other way to secure the great concerns of another world, but by believing those things to be true, and governing all the actions of our lives by this belief. And as for the interests of *this* life, they are but short and transitory, and consequently of no consideration in comparison of the things which are eternal; and yet (as I have often told you) setting aside the
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case of persecution for Religion, there is no real interest of this world, but it may be as well promoted and pursued to as great advantage, nay, usually to a far greater, by him that believes these things, and lives accordingly, than by any other person: For the belief of the rewards and punishments of another world, is the greatest motive and encouragement to virtue; and as all vice is naturally attended with some temporal inconvenience, so the practice of all christian virtues doth in its own nature tend both to the welfare of particular persons, and to the peace and prosperity of mankind.

But that which ought to weigh very much with us, is, that we have abundantly more assurance of the recompense of another world, than we have of many things in this world, which yet have a greater influence upon our actions, and govern the lives of the most prudent and considerate men. Men generally hazard their lives and estates upon terms of greater uncertainty than the assurance which we have of another world. Men venture to take physick upon *probable* grounds of the integrity and skill of their physician; and yet the want of either of these may hazard their lives: And men take physick upon greater odds; for it certainly causeth pain and sickness, and doth but uncertainly procure and recover health; the patient is sure to be made sick, but not certain to be made well; and yet the danger of being worse, if not of dying, on the one hand, and the hope of success and recovery on the other, make this hazard and trouble reasonable. Men venture their whole estates to places which they never saw; and that there are such places, they have only the concurrent testimony and agreement of men; nay, perhaps have only spoken with them that have spoken with those that have been there. No merchant ever insisted upon the evidence of a miracle to be wrought, to satisfy him that there were such places as the *East* and *West-Indies*, before he would venture to trade thither: And yet *this* assurance God hath been pleased to give the world of a state beyond the grave, and of a blessed immortality in another life.

Now, what can be the reason that so slender evidence, so small a degree of assurance will serve to encourage men to seek after the things of this world with great care and industry; and yet a great deal more will not suffice to put them effectually upon looking after the great concerns of another world, which are infinitely more considerable? No other reason of this can be given, but that men are partial in their affections towards these things. It is plain they have not the same love for God and Religion, which they have for this world and the advantages of it; and therefore it is, that a less degree of assurance will engage them to seek after the one, than the other; and yet the reason is much stronger on the other side: For the greater the benefit and good is, which is offered to us, we should be the more eager to seek after it, and should be content to venture upon less probability. Upon *excessive* odds a man would venture upon very small hopes; for a *mighty* advantage, a man would be content to run a great hazard of his labour and pains upon little assurance. Where a man's *life* is concerned, every suspicion of danger will make a man careful to avoid it. And will nothing affright men from hell, unless God carry them thither, and shew them the place of torments, and the flames of that fire which shall *never be quenched*?

I do not speak this, as if these things had not abundant evidence; I have shewn that they have; but to convince men how unreasonable and cruelly partial they are about the concerns of their souls, and their eternal happiness.

2. Supposing these things to be real and certain, they are of infinite concernment to us. For what can concern us more, than that eternal and unchangeable state, in which we must be fix'd and abide for ever? If so vast a concern will not move us, and have no influence upon the government of our lives and actions, we do not deserve the name of reasonable creatures. What consideration can be set before men, who are not touched with the sense of so great an interest, as that of our happy or miserable being to all eternity? Can we be so solicitous and careful about the concernment of a few days; and is it nothing to us what becomes of us for ever? Are we so tenderly concerned to avoid poverty and disgrace, persecution and suffering in this world; and shall we not much more *flee*
from

from the wrath which is to come, and endeavour to escape the damnation of Hell? Are the flight and transitory enjoyments of this world, worth so much thought and care? And is an eternal inheritance in the heavens, not worth the looking after? As there is no proportion betwixt the things which are temporal and the things which are eternal, so we ought in all reason to be infinitely more concern'd for the one than for the other.

The proper inference from all this discourse is, that we would endeavour to strengthen in our selves this great principle of a christian life, the belief of another world; by representing to our selves all those arguments and considerations which may confirm us in this persuasion. The more reasonable our faith is, and the surer grounds it is built upon, the more firm it will abide, when it comes to the trial, against all the impressions of temptations, and assaults of persecution. If our faith of another world be only a strong imagination of these things, *so soon as tribulation ariseth, it will wither; because it hath no root in it self.* Upon this account the Apostle so often exhorts christians, to endeavour *to be established in the truth, to be rooted and grounded in the faith*, that when persecution comes, they may *continue stedfast and unmoveable.* This firmness of our belief will have a great influence upon our lives: If we be *stedfast and unmoveable* in our persuasion of these things, we shall be *abundant in the work of the Lord.* The Apostle joins these together, 1 Cor. 15. 58. *Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* *Stedfast and unmoveable*, in what? In the belief of a blessed resurrection; which the more firmly any man believes, the more active and industrious will he be in the work and service of God.

And that our faith may have a constant and powerful influence upon our lives, we should frequently revolve in our minds the thoughts of another world, and of that vast eternity which we shall shortly launch into. The great disadvantage of the arguments fetch'd from another world, is this, that these things are at a distance from us, and not sensible to us, and therefore we are not apt to be so affected with them; present and sensible things weigh down all other considerations. And therefore to balance this disadvantage, we should often have these thoughts in our minds, and inculcate upon our selves the certainty of these things, and the infinite concernment of them; we should reason thus with our selves; if these things be true, and will certainly be, why should they not be to me, as if they were actually present? Why should not I always live, as if Heaven were open to my view, and *I saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God*, with crowns of glory in his hands; ready to be set upon the heads of all those who continue faithful and obedient to him? And why should I not be as much afraid to commit any sin, as if *Hell were naked before me*, and I saw the astonishing miseries of the damned?

Thus we should, by frequent meditation, represent these great things to our selves, and bring them nearer to our minds, and oppose to the present temptations of sense, the great and endless happiness and misery of the other world. And if we would but thus exercise our selves about *the things which are not seen*, and make eternity familiar to our selves, by a frequent meditation of it, we should be very little moved with present and sensible things; we should *walk and live* by faith, as the men of the world do by *sense*, and be more serious and earnest in the pursuit of our great and everlasting interest, than they are in the pursuit of sensual enjoyments, and should make it the great business of this present and temporal life, to secure a future and eternal happiness.

S E R M O N XI.

The Danger of Apostasy from the True Religion.

HEB. X 38.

But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

THE great design of this epistle (whoever was the author of it, which I shall not now enquire into) is plainly this, to confirm the *Jews*, who were but newly converted to *christianity*, in the stedfast profession of that faith which they had embraced, and to arm them against that temptation which christians were then exposed to, *viz.* the fierce and cruel persecutions which threatened those of that profession.

And to this purpose, he represents to them the excellency of that Religion, above any other former revelation, that God had made of himself to the world, both in respect of the author and revealer of it, who was the Son of God, and in respect of the revelation it self; which as it contains better and more perfect directions for a good life, so likewise more powerful and effectual motives there-to, better promises, and more terrible threatenings, than were annexed to the observation of the *Jewish* law, or clearly and certainly discoverable by the light of nature. From these considerations, he earnestly persuades them, all along throughout this Epistle, to continue constant in the profession of this faith, and not to suffer themselves to be frighted out of it by the terror of persecution; chap. 2. verse 1. *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip*; and chap. 4. 1. *Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should come short of it*; and verse the 23d of this chapter, *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering*; and to encourage them to constancy, he sets before them the glorious rewards and recompences of the Gospel, verse 35. *Cast not away therefore your confidence, τὴν παρρησίαν ὑμῶν, your free and open profession of christianity, which hath great recompense of reward.*

And then on the other hand, to deter them from Apostasy from this profession he represents to them the horrible danger of it here in the text, *But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

I shall briefly explain the words, and then prosecute that which I mainly intended in them. *If any man draw back*, Ἐὰν ὑποσείληται: These words, with the foregoing, are cited out of the Prophet *Habbakuk*, chap. 2. verse 3, 4. and they are cited by the Apostle, according to the translation of the LXXII, which differs somewhat from the *Hebrew*; and the difference ariseth from the various readings of the *Hebrew* word, which is render'd by the LXXII, *to draw back*; but by the change of a letter, signifies *to be lifted up*, as we render it in the Prophet; but however that be, the Apostle follows the translation of the LXXII, and accommodates it to his purpose. Ἐὰν ὑποσείληται, *if any man draw back*; the word signifies to keep back, to withdraw, to sneak and slink away out of fear, to fail or faint in any enterprize: And thus this word is render'd in the new testament. *Acts* 20. 20. ἐδὲν ὑπεσείλαμην, *I did not withhold, or keep back anything that was profitable for you*; and so it is said of St. Peter *Gal.* 2. 12. ὑπέσεν ἐαυτὸν, *he slunk away, or withdrew himself, fearing them of the circumcision*; and the *Hebrew* word which is here render'd by the LXXII, *to draw back*, is render'd elsewhere ἐκλείπειν, which is *to fail, or faint*; from all which it appears, that by *drawing back*, the Apostle here means, mens quitting their profession of christianity, and slinking out of it, for fear of suffering for it.

My soul shall have no pleasure in him: These words are plainly a *μετῴσις*, and less is said than is meant; for the meaning is, that God will be extremely displeased with them, and punish them very severely. The like figure to this, you have *Psal. 5. 4. Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness*, which in the next verse is explained, by his hatred and detestation of those who are guilty of it, *Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity*. So that the plain sense of the words is this, that apostasy from the profession of God's true Religion, is a thing highly provoking to him, and will be most severely punished by him.

. In speaking to this argument, I shall consider these *four* things.

I. The nature of this sin of apostasy from Religion.

II. The several steps and degrees of it.

III. The heinousness of it.

IV. The great danger of it, and the terrible punishment it exposeth men to. And when I have spoken to these, I shall conclude all with a short exhortation, *to hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*.

I. We will consider the nature of this sin of apostasy from Religion; and it consists in forsaking or renouncing the profession of Religion, whether it be by an open declaration in words, or a virtual declaration of it by our actions; for it comes all to one in the sight of God, and the different manner of doing it, does not alter the nature of the thing. He indeed that renounceth Religion by an open declaration in words, offers the greatest and boldest defiance to it; but he is likewise an apostate, who silently withdraws himself from the profession of it, who quits it for his interest, or for fear disowns it, and sneaks out of the profession of it, and forsakes the communion of those who own it. Thus *Demas* was an apostate, in quitting Christianity for some worldly interest. *Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world*, saith *St. Paul*, *2 Tim. 4. 10.*

And those whom our Saviour describes, *Matth. 13. 20. 21. who received the word into stony ground*, were apostates out of fear, *they heard the word, and with joy received it, but having no root in themselves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation and persecution ariseth because of the word, presently they fall off.*

And there is likewise a partial apostasy from Christianity, when some fundamental article of it is denied, whereby, in effect and by consequence, the whole christian faith is overthrown. Of this *Hymeneus* and *Philetus* were guilty, of whom the Apostle says, that they *erred concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection was past already, and thereby overthrew the faith of some*, *2 Tim. 2. 17, 18.* that is they turned the resurrection into an allegory, and did thereby really destroy a most fundamental article of the christian Religion.

So that to make a man an apostate, it is not necessary that a man should solemnly renounce his baptism and declare Christianity to be false; there are several other ways whereby a man may bring himself under this guilt, as by a silent quitting of his Religion, and withdrawing himself from the communion of all that profess it; by denying an essential doctrine of Christianity; by undermining the great end and design of it, by teaching doctrines which directly tend to encourage men in impenitence, and a wicked course of life; nay, to authorise all manner of impiety and vice, in telling men that whatever they do they cannot sin; for which, the primitive christians did look upon the *Gnosticks* as no better than Apostates from Christianity; and tho' they retained the name of Christians yet not to be truly and really so. And there is likewise a partial apostasy from the christian Religion; of which I shall speak under the

II^d Head I proposed, which was, to consider the several sorts and degrees of apostasy. The highest of all, is the renouncing and forsaking of Christianity, or of some essential part of it, which is a virtual apostasy from it: But there are several tendencies towards this, which they who are guilty of, are in some degree guilty of this sin. As,

1. Indifferency in Religion, and want of all sort of concernment for it; when a man, though he never quitted his Religion, yet is so little concerned for it, that a very small occasion or temptation would make him do it; he is contented

to be reckoned in the number of those who profess it, so long as it is the fashion, and he finds no great inconvenience by it; but is so indifferent in his mind about it, (like *Gallio, who minded none of those things*) that he can turn himself into any other shape, when his interest requires it; so that though he never actually deserted it, yet he is a kind of apostate, in the preparation and disposition of his mind: And to such persons, that title which *Solomon* gives to some, may fitly enough be applied, they are *backsliders in heart*.

2. Another tendency to this sin, and a great degree of it, is withdrawing from the publick marks and testimonies of the profession of religion, by forsaking the assemblies of christians for the worship and service of God, to withdraw our selves from those, for fear of danger or suffering, is a kind of denial of our religion. And this was the case of some in the Apostle's time, when persecution grew hot, and the open profession of christianity dangerous; to avoid this danger, many appeared not in the assemblies of christians, for fear of being observed and brought into trouble for it. This the Apostle taxeth some for, in this chapter, and speaketh of it as a letting go our profession, and a kind of deserting of christianity, v. 23, 25. *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of our selves together, as the manner of some is.* He doth not say, they had quitted their profession, but they had but a loose hold of it, and were silently stealing away from it.

3. A light temper of mind, which easily receives impressions from those who lie in wait to deceive and seduce men from the truth. When men are not well rooted and established in religion, they are apt to be *inveigled by the crafty insinuations of seducers, to be moved with every wind of doctrine, and to be easily shaken in mind*, by every trifling piece of sophistry that is confidently obtruded upon them for a weighty argument.

Now this is a temper of mind which disposeth men to apostasy, and renders them an easie prey to every one that takes a pleasure and a pride in making profelytes. It is true indeed, a man should always have a mind ready to entertain truth, when it is fairly proposed to him: But the main things of religion are so plainly revealed, and lie so obvious to every ordinary capacity, that every man may discern them; and when he hath once entertained them, ought to be steadfast and unmoveable in them, and not suffer himself to be whiffled out of them by an insignificant noise about the infallibility of a visible church; much less ought he to be moved by any man's uncharitableness and positiveness, in damping all that are not of his mind.

There are some things so very plain, not only in scripture, but to the common reason of mankind, that no subtilty of discourse, no pretended authority, or even infallibility of any church, ought to stagger us in the least about them; as that we ought not, or cannot believe any thing in direct contradiction to sense and reason; that the people ought to read and study the holy Scriptures; and to serve God and pray to him in a language which they understand; that they ought to receive the sacrament as our Saviour instituted and appointed it, that is, in both kinds; that it can neither be our duty, nor lawful to do that which God hath forbidden, as he hath done the worship of images in the second commandment, as plainly as words can do it. Upon any one of these points, a man would fix his foot, and stand alone against the whole world.

4. Another degree of apostasy is, a departure from the purity of the christian doctrine and worship, in a gross and notorious manner. This is a partial, though not a total apostasy from the christian religion, and there have been, and are still some in the world, who are justly charged with this degree of apostasy from religion; namely such, as tho' they retain and profess the belief of all the articles of the christian faith, and worship *the only true God, and him whom he hath sent, Jesus Christ*, yet have greatly perverted the christian religion, by superinducing, and adding new articles of faith, and gross corruptions and superstitions in worship, and imposing upon men the belief and practice of these, as necessary to salvation. And *St. Paul* is my warrant for this censure, who chargeth those who added to the christian religion, the necessity of cir-

cumcision, and observing the law of *Moses*, and thereby perverted the Gospel of Christ, as guilty in some degree of apostasy from christianity; for he calls it, *preaching another Gospel*, Gal. i. 7, 8. *There be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ: But tho' we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel to you, than that which we have preached, let him be accursed.* And those who were seduced by these teachers, he chargeth them with having in some sort quitted the Gospel of Christ, and embraced another Gospel, ver. 6. *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel.* So that they who thus pervert and corrupt the christian doctrine or worship, are plainly guilty of a partial apostasy from christianity; and they who quit the purity of the christian doctrine and worship, and go over to the communion of those who have thus perverted christianity, are in a most dangerous state, and in the judgment of St. Paul, are in some sort *removed unto another Gospel*. I shall now proceed in the

III. Place, to consider the heinousness of this sin. And it will appear to be very heinous, if we consider, what an affront it is to God, and how great a contempt of him. When God hath revealed his will to mankind, and sent no less person than *his own son* out of his own bosom to do it, and hath given such testimonies to him from Heaven, by *signs and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost*; when he hath transmitted down to us, so faithful a record of this revelation, and of the miracles wrought to confirm it, in the books of the holy Scriptures; and when we our selves have so often declared our firm belief of this revelation: Yet after all this to fall from it, and deny it, or any part of it, or to embrace doctrines and practices plainly contrary to it; this certainly cannot be done without the greatest affront and contempt of the testimony of God himself; for it is in effect, and by interpretation, to declare, that either we do not believe what God says, or that we do not fear what he can do. So St. John tells us, 1 Ep. 5. 10. *He that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record which God hath given of his Son.*

And all along in this Epistle to the *Hebrews*, the Apostle sets himself to aggravate this sin; calling it *an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God*, ch. 3. 12. And he frequently calls it so, κατ' ἔξοχην, and by way of eminency, as being of all sins the greatest and most heinous. ch. 10. 26. *If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth.* That the Apostle here speaks of the sin of apostasy, is plain from the whole scope of his discourse; for having exhorted them before, ver. 23. *to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of themselves together,* he immediately adds, *for if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth*; that is, if we fall off from christianity, after we have embraced it. And chap. 12. 1. *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us*, that is, the great sin of apostasy from Religion, to which they were then so strongly tempted by that fierce persecution which attended it; and therefore he adds, *let us run with patience the race which is set before us*, that is, let us arm our selves with patience against the sufferings we are like to meet with in our christian course. To oppose the truth, and resist the clear evidence of it, is a great sin, and men are justly condemned for it. John 3. 19. *This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light*: But to desert the truth after we have been convinced of it, to fall off from the profession of it after we have embraced it; is a much greater sin. Opposition to the truth, may proceed in a great measure from ignorance and prejudice, which is a great extenuation; and therefore St. Paul tells us, that after all his violent persecution of christianity, *he found mercy because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief*. To revolt from the truth, after we have made profession of it, after we have known the way of righteousness, to turn from the holy commandment; this is the great aggravation. The Apostle makes wilfulness, an usual ingredient into the sin of apostasy, *if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth.*

And

And as the sin is one of the greatest affronts to God, so it is the highest and most effectual disparagement of Religion: For it is not so much considered, what the enemies of Religion speak against it, because *they speak evil of the things which they knew not*, and of which they have had no tryal and experience; but he that falls off from Religion, after he hath made profession of it, declares to the world, that he hath tryed it, and dislikes it, and pretends to leave it, because he hath not found that truth and goodness in it which he expected, and upon long experience of it, sees reason to prefer another Religion before it. So that nothing can be more despiteful to Religion than this, and more likely to bring it into contempt; and therefore the Apostle (ver. 29. of this chapter) calls it *a trampling under foot the Son of God, and making the blood of the covenant a profane thing, and offering despite to the spirit of Grace*: For we cannot put a greater scorn upon the Son of God, who revealed this doctrine to the world; nor upon his blood, which was shed to confirm and seal the truth of it; and upon the Holy Ghost, who came down in miraculous gifts to give testimony to it; than notwithstanding all this, to renounce this doctrine, and to forsake this Religion. But we shall yet farther see the heinousness of this sin, in the terrible punishment it exposeth men to; which was the

IV. And *last* thing I proposed to consider. And this is represented to us in a most terrible manner, not only in this Epistle, but in other places of Scripture. This sin is placed in the highest rank of pardonable sins, and next to the sin against the Holy Ghost, which our Saviour declares to be absolutely unpardonable. And indeed the Scripture speaks very doubtfully of the pardonableness of this sin, as being near a-kin to that against the Holy Ghost, being said to be an *offering despite to the spirit of grace*. In the 6th chapter of this Epistle, ver. 4, 5, 6. the Apostle speaks in a very severe manner, concerning the state of those, who had apostatized from Christianity, after the solemn profession of it in baptism; *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened* (that is baptized) *and have tasted of the heavenly gift, (that is regeneration) and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost; and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, (that is, have been instructed in the christian Religion, and endowed with the miraculous powers of the Gospel-age, for the Jews used to call the age of the Messias, *seculum futurum*, or, *the world to come*) it is impossible for those to be renewed again unto repentance*; where the least we can understand by *impossible*, is, that it is extremely difficult; for so the word *impossible* is sometimes used; as when our Saviour says, *it is impossible for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. And, Ch. 10. 26. the Apostle speaking of the same thing, says, *if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin*; that is, they who renounce Christianity, since they reject the only way of expiation, *there remains no more sacrifice for their sins*.

St. Peter likewise expresseth himself very severely concerning this sort of Persons, 2 Epist. 2. 20, 21. *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, (that is, after they have been brought from heathenism to Christianity) they are entangled therein again, and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning*. He seems loath to say how sad the condition of such persons is; but this he tells them, that it is much worse than when they were heathens before; and he gives the reason, *for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them*. And St. John calls this sin of apostasy, the *sin unto death*; and tho' he do not forbid christians to pray for them that are guilty of it; yet he will not say, that they should pray for them, 1 Epist. 5. 16. *If any man see his brother sin a sin, which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life, for them that sin not unto death; there is a sin unto death, I do not say, that he shall pray for it*. Now that by
this

this *sin unto death*, the Apostle means apostasy from the christian Religion to idolatry, is most probable from what follows, verse 18. *we know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not*, (that is this sin unto death) *but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not*, (that is, he is preserved from idolatry, unto which the devil had seduced so great a part of mankind) *and we know that we are of God, and the whole world, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ καί τῳ, is under the dominion of that wicked one*, (viz. the devil whom the Scripture elsewhere calls *the God of this world*;) *and we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true*, (that is, hath brought us from the worship of false Gods to the knowledge and worship of the true God;) and then he concludes, *little children, keep yourselves from idols*; which caution hath no manner of dependence upon what went before, unless we understand *the sin unto death*, in this sense; and it is the more probable, that it is so to be understood, because apostasy is so often in this *Epistle* to the *Hebrews* called *the sin*, by way of eminency, as it is here, by *St. John*, *whosoever is born of God, sinneth not*.

So that at the very best, the Scripture speaks doubtfully of the pardon of this sin; however, that the punishment of it, unrepented of, shall be very dreadful. It seems to be mildly exprest here in the text, *If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him*: But it is the more severe, for being exprest so mildly, according to the intention of the figure here used; and therefore in the next words, this expression of God's taking no pleasure in such persons, is explained by their utter ruin and perdition; *But we are not of them that draw back unto perdition*. And in several parts of this *Epistle*, there are very severe passages to this purpose; ch. 2. 2, 3. *If the word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great Salvation?* And ch. 10. 26, 27. *If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary. He that despised Moses law, dyed without mercy, under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, that hath trodden under foot the Son of God!* &c. *For we know him who hath said, vengeance is mine I will recompense saith the Lord*: And again, *The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. What can be more severe and terrible than these expressions?

I will mention but one text more, and that is *Rev. 21. 8*. where in the catalogue of great sinners, those who apostatize from Religion, out of fear, do lead the van: *He that overcometh shall inherit all things*, (which is elsewhere in this book exprest, by continuing faithful unto the death.) *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my Son*: But *the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and whoremongers, and forcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. The fearful, and unbelievers, and liars*, that is, they who out of fear relapse into infidelity, and abide not in the truth, shall be reckoned in the first rank of offenders, and be punished accordingly.

And thus I have done with the *four* things I propounded to speak to, from these words; the nature of apostasy; the several steps and degrees of it; the heinous nature of this Sin; the danger of it, and the terrible punishment it exposeth men to.

And is there any need now, to exhort men to hold fast the profession of faith when the danger of *drawing back* is so evident, and so terrible? or is there any reason and occasion for it? certainly there is no great danger amongst us, of men's apostatizing from Christianity, and turning *Jews*, or *Turks*, or *heathens*; I do not think there is, but yet for all that, we are not free from the danger of apostasy; there is great danger, not of men's apostatizing from one Religion to another, but from Religion to infidelity and atheism; and of this
worst

worst kind of apostasy of all other, I wish the age we live in had not afforded us too many instances. It is greatly to be lamented, that among those who have profess'd christianity, any should be found that should make it their endeavour to undermine the great principles of all Religion; the belief of a God, and his providence; and of the immortality of the souls of men; and a state of rewards and punishments after this life; and to bring the most serious matters in the world into contempt, and to turn them into jest and raillery. This is not only a renouncing of christianity, the Religion which God hath revealed, but even of the Religion which is born with us, and the principles and notions which God hath planted in every man's mind: This is an impiety of the first magnitude, and not to be mentioned without grief and horror; and this, it is to be feared, hath had a great hand in those great calamities which our Eyes have seen; and I pray God it do not draw down still more and greater judgments upon this nation: But I hope there are none here that need to be cautioned against this horrible impiety, and highest degree of *apostasy from the living God*. That which people are much more in danger of, is apostasy from the purity of the christian doctrine and worship, so happily recovered by a regular reformation, and established amongst us by all the authority that laws, both ecclesiastical and civil, can give it; and which, in truth, is no other than the ancient and primitive christianity; I say, a defection from this, to those gross errors and superstitions, which the reformation had pared off, and freed us from. I do not say, that this is a total apostasy from christianity; but it is a partial Apostasy and defection, and a very dangerous one; and that those, who, *after they have received the knowledge of the truth*, fall off from it into those errors and corruptions, are highly guilty before God, and their condition certainly worse, and more dangerous, than of those who are brought up in those errors and superstitions, and never knew better; for there are terrible threatenings in Scripture against those who fall away from the truth, which they once embraced, and were convinced of; *If we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, &c. and, If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

God considers every man's advantages and opportunities of knowledge, and their disadvantages likewise; and makes all reasonable allowances for them; and for men to continue in the errors they have been always brought up in, or, which comes much to one, in errors which they were led into by principles easily infused into them, before they were in any measure competent judges of those matters; I say, for such persons to continue in these errors, and to oppose and reject the contrary truths, against which, by their education, they have received so strong and violent a prejudice, this may be in a great degree excusable, and find pardon with God, upon a general repentance for all sins, both known and unknown, and cannot be reasonably charged with the guilt of this great sin of apostasy: But not to abide in the truth, after we have entertained and professed it, having sufficient means and advantages of knowing it, hath no excuse.

I would not be rash in condemning particular persons of any society or communion of christians, provided they be sincerely devout, and just, and sober, to the best of their knowledge; I had much rather leave them to God, whose mercies are great, than to pass an uncharitable censure upon them, as to their eternal state and condition: But the case is far otherwise, where the opportunities of knowledge are afforded to men, and *men love darkness rather than light*; for they who have the means and advantages of *knowing their master's will*, are answerable to God as if they had known it; because if they had not been grossly negligent, and wanting to themselves, they might have known it.

And this, I fear, is the case of the generality of those who have been bred up to years of consideration and choice in the reformed Religion, and forsake it; because they do it without sufficient reason, and there are invincible objections against it: They do it without sufficient reason; because every one amongst us, knows, or may know upon very little enquiry, that we hold all the articles of the faith, which are contained in the ancient creeds of the christian church, and into which all christians are baptized; that we inculcate upon men the necessity

cessity of a good life, and of sincere repentance, and perfect contrition for our sins, such as is followed with real reformation and amendment of our lives, and that, without this, no man can be saved by any device whatsoever.

Now what reason can any man have, to question whether he may be saved in that faith which saved the first christians, and by believing the twelve articles of the Apostles creed, though he cannot swallow the twelve articles which are added to it in the creed of Pope *Pius IV*, every one of which, besides many and great corruptions and superstitions in worship, are so many and invincible objections against the communion of the *Roman* church, as I could particularly shew, if it had not been already done, in so many learned treatises upon this argument? What is there then, that should move any reasonable man to forsake the communion of our church, and to quit the reformed Religion?

There are three things chiefly with which they endeavour to amuse and affright weaker minds.

1. A great noise of infallibility, which, they tell us, is so excellent a means to determine and put an end to all differences. To which I shall at present only object this prejudice; that there are not wider and hotter differences among us, about any thing whatsoever, than are amongst them, about this admirable means of ending all differences; as, where this infallibility is seated, that men may know how to have recourse to it, for the ending of differences.

2. They endeavour to fright men with the danger of schism. But every man knows, that the guilt of schism lies at their door, who impose sinful articles of communion; and not upon them, who, for fear of sinning against God, cannot submit to those articles; which we have done, and still are ready to make good, to be the case betwixt us and the church of *Rome*. But,

3. The terrible engine of all is, their positive and confident damning of all that live and die out of the communion of their church. This I have fully spoken to upon another occasion, and therefore shall only say at present, that every man ought to have better thoughts of God, than to believe, that he, *who delighteth not in the death of sinners, and would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*, will confirm the sentence of such uncharitable men, as take upon them to condemn men for those things, for which our Saviour in his Gospel condemns no man. And of all things in the world, one would think that the uncharitableness of any church should be an argument to no man to run into its communion.

I shall conclude with the Apostle's exhortation, verse the 23d of this chapter, *let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and provoke one another to charity and good works; and so much the more, because the day approacheth, in which God will judge the faith and lives of men by Jesus Christ, according to his Gospel.*

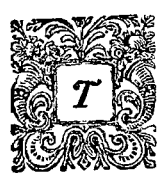
S E R M O N XII.

The First
Sermon on
this Text.

Of Self-denial and Suffering for Christ's Sake.

M A T T H. xvi. 24.

Then said Jesus unto his Disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.



H E N said Jesus to his Disciples, that is, upon occasion of his former discourse with them, wherein he had acquainted them with his approaching passion, that he must shortly go up to *Jerusalem*, and there suffer many things of the *elders* and *chief priests* and *scribes*, and at last be put to death by them; *then said Jesus unto his Disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*

If any man will come after me, or follow me; that is, if any man will be my disciple, and undertake the profession of my Religion; if any man chuse and resolve to be a christian; he must be so upon these terms, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me; he must follow me in self-denial and suffering.

In the handling of these words, I shall do these *four* things.

I. I shall consider the way and method which our Saviour useth in making profelytes, and gaining men over to his Religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel them to the profession of his Religion: but fairly offers it to their consideration and choice, and tells them plainly upon what terms they must be his disciples; and if they be contented and resolved to submit to these terms, well; if not, it is in vain to follow him any longer: for *they cannot be his disciples.*

II. I shall endeavour to explain this duty of self-denial, express'd in these words, *let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.*

III. I shall consider the strict and indispensable obligation of it, whenever we are called to it; *Without this we cannot be Christ's disciples; If any will come after me, or be my disciple, let him deny himself.*

IV. I shall endeavour to vindicate the reasonableness of this precept of self-denial and suffering for Christ, which, at first appearance, may seem to be so very harsh and difficult; and I shall go over these particulars as briefly as I can.

I. We will consider the way and method which our Saviour here useth in making profelytes, and gaining men over to his Religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel men to the profession of his Religion; but fairly proposeth it to their consideration and choice, telling them plainly upon what terms they must be his disciples; if they like them, and are content, and resolved to submit to them, well; he is willing to receive them, and own them for his disciples: If not, it is in vain to follow him any longer: *For they cannot be his disciples.* As, on the one hand, he offers them no worldly preferment and advantage to intice them into his Religion, and to tempt them outwardly to profess what they do not inwardly believe; so on the other hand, he does not hale and drag them by force, and awe them by the terrors of torture and death to sign the christian faith, tho' most undoubtedly true, and to confess with their mouths, and subscribe with their hands, what they do not believe in their hearts. He did not obtrude his sacraments upon them, and plunge them into the water to baptize them, whether they would or no, and thrust the sacrament of bread into their mouths; as if men might be worthy receivers of that blessed sacrament, whether they receive it willingly or no.

Our blessed Saviour, the author and founder of our Religion, made use of none of these ways of violence, so contrary to the nature of man, and of all Religion, and especially of Christianity, and fitted only to make men hypocrites, but not converts; he only says, *If any man will be my disciple*; he useth no arguments, but such as are spiritual, and proper to work upon the minds and consciences of men. For as his *Kingdom was not of this world*, so neither are the motives and arguments to induce men to be his subjects, taken from this world; but from the endless rewards and punishments of another. *The weapons* which he made use of to subdue men to the obedience of faith, were not *carnal*; and yet they were *mighty through God*, to conquer the obstinacy and infidelity of men. This great and infallible teacher, who certainly came from God, all that he does, is to propose his Religion to men, with such evidence and such arguments as are proper to convince men of the truth and goodness of it, and to persuade men to embrace it; and he acquaints them likewise with all the worldly disadvantages of it, and the hazards and sufferings that would attend it; and now if upon full consideration they will make his Religion their free choice, and become his disciples, he is willing to receive them; if they will not, he understands the nature of Religion better, than to go about to force it upon men, whether they will or no.

II. I shall endeavour to explain this duty or precept of self-denial, express'd in these words, *Let him deny himself, and take up his cross*. These are difficult terms, for a man to *deny himself*, and *take up his own cross*, that is willingly to submit to all those sufferings which the malice of men may inflict for the sake of Christ and his Religion. For this expression of *taking up one's cross*, is an allusion to the *Roman* custom, which was this, that he that was condemned to be crucified, was to take his cross upon his shoulders, and to carry it to the place of execution; this the *Jews* made our Saviour to do, as we read *John* 19. 17. till that being ready to faint under it, and least he should die away before he was nailed to the cross, they compelled *Simon of Cyrene* to carry it for him, as is declared by the other Evangelists; and yet he tells them, *they that will be his disciples, must follow him, bearing their own cross*, that is, being ready (if God call them to it) to submit to the like sufferings for him and his truth, which he was shortly to undergo for the truth and for their sakes.

But tho' these terms seem very hard; yet they are not unreasonable, as I shall shew in the conclusion of this discourse. Some indeed have made them so by extending this self-denial too far, attending more to the latitude of the words, than to the meaning and scope of our Saviour's discourse: For there is no doubt but that there are a great many things, which may properly enough be called self-denial, which yet our Saviour never intended to oblige christians to. It is, no doubt, great self-denial, for a man, without any necessity, to deny himself the necessary supports of life; for a man to starve and make away himself: But no man certainly ever imagined, that our Saviour ever intended by this precept to enjoyn this kind of self-denial.

It is plain then, that there is no reason or necessity to extend this precept of our Saviour concerning self-denial, to every thing that may properly enough be called by that name; and therefore this precept must be limited by the plain scope and intendment of our Saviour's discourse; and no man can argue thus; *such a thing is self-denial, therefore our Saviour requires it of his disciples*: For our Saviour doth not here require all kinds of self-denial; but limits it by his discourse to one certain kind, beyond which, self-denial is no duty by virtue of this text; and therefore, for our clearer understanding of this precept of self-denial, I shall do these *two things*.

First, Remove some sorts of self-denial, which are instanced in by some, as intended in this precept.

Secondly, I shall shew what kind of self-denial that is, which our Saviour here intends.

First, There are several things brought under this precept of self-denial, which were never intended by our Saviour. I shall instance in two or three things, which

which are most frequently insisted upon, and some of them by very devout and well-meaning men; as, that in matters of faith, we should deny and renounce our own senses and our reason; nay, that we should be content to renounce our own eternal happiness, and be willing to be damned for the glory of God and the good of our brethren. But all these are so apparently and grossly unreasonable, that it is a wonder that any one should ever take them for instances of that self-denial which our Saviour requires; especially considering, that in all his discourse of self-denial, he does not so much as glance at any of these instances, or any thing like to them.

1. Some comprehend under self-denial, the denying and renouncing our own senses in matters of faith. And if this could be made out to be intended by our Saviour in this precept, we needed not dispute any of the other instances. For he that renounceth the certainty of sense, so as not to believe what he sees, may after this renounce and deny any thing. For the evidence of sense is more clear and unquestionable than that of faith, as the Scripture frequently intimates; as *John* 20. 29. where our Saviour reproves *Thomas*, for refusing to believe his resurrection, upon any less evidence than that of sense; *Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed: Blessed are they which have not seen, and yet have believed*; which plainly supposeth the evidence of sense to be the highest and clearest degree of evidence. So likewise that of *St. Paul*, *2 Cor.* 5. 7. *We walk by faith, and not by sight*; where the evidence of *faith*, as that which is more imperfect and obscure, is opposed to that of *sight*, as more clear and certain. So that to believe any article of faith, in contradiction to the clear evidence of sense, is contrary to the very nature of assent, which always yields to the greatest and clearest evidence.

Besides that our belief of Religion is *at last* resolved into the certainty of sense: So that by renouncing *that*, we destroy and undermine the very foundation of our faith. One of the plainest and principal proofs of the being of God (which is the first and fundamental article of all Religion) relies upon the certainty of sense, namely, the frame of this visible world, by the contemplation whereof we are led to the acknowledgment of the invisible author of it. So *St. Paul* tells us, *Rom.* 1. 20. *That the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.*

And the great external evidence of the christian Religion, I mean miracles, is at last resolved into the certainty of sense, without which we can have no assurance that any miracle was wrought for the confirmation of it.

And the knowledge likewise of the christian faith is conveyed to us by our senses; the evidence whereof if it be uncertain, takes away all certainty of faith. *How shall they believe, faith St. Paul, Rom.* 10. 14. *How shall they believe in him, of whom they have not heard?* And ver. 17. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* So that to deny and renounce our senses in matters of faith, is to take away the main pillar and foundation of it.

2. Others, almost with equal absurdity, would comprehend under our Saviour's precept of self-denial, the denying and renouncing of our reason in matters of faith. And this is self-denial with a witness, for a man to deny his own reason; for it is to deny himself to be a man. This surely is a very great mistake, and tho' the ground of it may be innocent; yet the consequence of it, and the discourses upon it, are very absurd.

The ground of the mistake is this. Men think they deny their own reason, when they assent to the revelation of God in such things, as their own reason could neither have discovered, nor is able to give the reason of: Whereas in this case, a man is so far from denying his own reason, that he does that which is most agreeable to it. For what more reasonable than to believe whatever we are sufficiently assur'd is reveal'd to us by God, who can neither be deceived himself, nor deceive us?

But tho' the ground of this mistake may be innocent, yet the consequences of it are most absurd and dangerous. For if we are to renounce our reason in matters of faith, then are we bound to believe without reason, which no man can do; or if he could, then faith would be unreasonable, and infidelity reasonable. So that this instance likewise of self-denial, to renounce and deny our own reason, as it is no where exprest, so it cannot reasonably be thought to be intended by our Saviour in this precept.

3. Nor doth this precept of self-denial require men to be content to renounce their own eternal happiness, and to be willing to be damned for the glory of God, and the good of their brethren. If this were the meaning of this precept, we might justly say, as the Disciples did to our Saviour, in another case, *this is a hard saying, and who can bear it?* The very Thought of this is enough to make humane nature to tremble at its very foundation. For the deepest principle that God hath planted in our nature is *the desire of our own preservation and happiness*, and into this the force of all laws, and the reason of all our duty is at last resolved.

From whence it plainly follows, that it can be no man's duty in any case to renounce his own happiness, and to be content to be for ever miserable; because if once this be made a duty, there will be no Argument left, to persuade any man to it. For the most powerful arguments, that God ever used, to persuade men to any thing, are the promise of eternal happiness, and the terror of everlasting torments: But if this were a man's duty, to be content to be miserable for ever, neither of these arguments would be of force sufficient to persuade a man to it.

The first of these, namely the promise of eternal happiness, could signifie nothing to him that is to be eternally miserable; because if he be to be so, it is impossible that he should ever have the benefit of that Promise; and the threatening of eternal misery, could be no argument in this case; because the duty is just as difficult, as the argument is powerful, and no man can be moved to submit to any thing that is grievous and terrible, but by something that is more terrible; for if it be not, it is the same thing, whether he submit to it, or not; and then no man can be content, to be eternally miserable, only for the fear of being so; for this would be for a man to run himself upon that very inconvenience which he is so much afraid of; and 'tis madness for a man to die for fear of death. *Quis novus hic furor est, ne moriari, mori?*

By this it plainly appears, how unreasonable it is to imagine, that by this precept of self-denial, our Saviour should require men to renounce everlasting happiness, and to be content to be miserable for ever, upon any account whatsoever; because this were to suppose, that God hath imposed that upon us as a duty, to oblige us whereto there can be no argument offer'd, that can be powerful enough.

As for the glory of God, which is pretended to be the reason, it is an impossible supposition; because it cannot be for the glory of God, to make a creature for ever miserable, that shall not by his wilful obstinacy and impenitence deserve to be so. But this is only cast in to add weight.

The other reason of the good and salvation of our brethren, is the only consideration for which there is any manner of colour from Scripture; and two instances are alledged to this purpose, of two very excellent persons, that seem to have desired this, and to have submitted to it; and therefore it is not so unreasonable as we would make it, that our Saviour should enjoin it as a duty. The instances alledged are these. *Moses* desired of God that he might be blotted out of the book of life, rather than the people of *Israel*, whom he had conducted and governed so long, should be destroyed: And in the new Testament *St. Paul* tells us, that *he could wish, that himself were accursed from Christ for his brethren*; so earnest a desire had he of their salvation.

But neither of these instances are of force sufficient to overthrow the reasons of my former discourse; for the desire of *Moses* amounts only to a submission to a temporal death, that his nation might be saved from a temporal ruin.

For

For the expression of *blotting out of the book of life*, is of the same importance with those phrases so frequently used in the old testament, of *blotting out from the face of the earth*, and *blotting out ones name from under Heaven*, which signifie no more than temporal death and destruction; and then *Moses's* wish was reasonable and generous, and signifies no more, but that he was willing, if God pleased, to die to save the nation.

As for *St. Paul's* wish of *being accursed from Christ*, it is plainly an hyperbolical expression of his great affection to his country-men the *Jews*, and his zeal for their salvation, which was so great, that if it had been a thing reasonable and lawful, he could have wished the greatest evil to himself for their sakes; and therefore it is observable, that it is not a positive and absolute wish, but expressed in the usual form of ushering in an hyperbole; *I could wish*; just as we are wont to say, when we would express a thing to the height, which is not fit, nor intended to be done by us, *I could wish, so or so*; *I could even afford to do this or that*; which kind of speeches, no man takes for a strict and precise declaration of our minds, but for a figurative expression of a great passion.

And thus I have done with the *first* thing I proposed for the explication of this precept, or duty of self-denial, which was to remove some sorts of self-denial, which by some are frequently instanced in, as intended by our Saviour in this precept. I proceed now to the

Second thing I proposed, which is to declare positively, what that self-denial is, which our Saviour here intends; and 'tis plainly this, and nothing but this; that we should be willing to part with all earthly comforts and conveniences, to quit all our temporal interests and enjoyments, and even life it self, for the sake of Christ and his Religion; this our Saviour means, by *denying our selves*: And then (which is much the same with the other) that we should be willing to bear any temporal inconvenience and suffering upon the same account; this is to *take up our cross and follow him*.

And that this is the full meaning of these two phrases, of *denying our selves*, and *taking up our cross*, will clearly appear, by considering the particular instances, which our Saviour gives of this self-denial, whenever he hath occasion to speak of it, by which you will plainly see, that these expressions amount to no more than I have said. Even here in the *text*, after our Saviour had told his Disciples, that *he that would come after him, must deny himself and take up his cross*; It follows immediately, *For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake, shall find it*. You see here, that he instanceth in parting with our lives for him, as the highest piece of self-denial, which he requires. And he himself elsewhere tells us, that *greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend*. Elsewhere he instanceth in quitting our nearest relations for his sake, *Luke 14. 26, 27. If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my Disciple; and whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, he cannot be my Disciple*.

Which expressions, of *bating father and mother, and other relations, and even life it self*, are not to be understood rigorously, and in an absolute sense, but comparatively; for it is an *Hebrew* manner of speech, to express that absolutely, which is meant only comparatively; and so our Saviour explains himself in a parallel text to this, *Matth. 10. 37, 38. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; he that loveth son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy, of me*. In another place, our Saviour instanceth in quitting our estates for his sake, *Matth. 19. 29. Every one that shall forsake houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my names sake*; by all which it appears that this self-denial which our Saviour here requires of his Disciples, is to be extended no farther, than to a readiness and willingness; whenever God shall call us to it, to quit all our temporal interests and enjoyments, and even life it self, the dearest of all other, and to sub-

mit to any temporal inconvenience and suffering for his sake. And thus much for the explication of the precept here in the *text*. I proceed in the

III. Place, to consider the strict and indispensable obligation of this precept of self-denial, and suffering for Christ and his truth, rather than to forsake and renounce them. *If any man will come after me, or be my Disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross and follow me*; that is, upon these terms he must be my Disciple, in this manner he must follow me; and in the *text* I mention'd before, he declares again, that he that is not ready to quit all his relations and even life it self for his sake, *is not worthy of him, and cannot be his Disciple*; and *whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after him, cannot be his Disciple*; so that we cannot be the Disciples of Christ, nor be worthy to be called by his name, if we be not ready thus to deny our selves for his sake: And not only so; but if for fear of the cross, or of any temporal sufferings, we should renounce and deny him, he threatens *to deny us before his Father which is in Heaven*, (*i.e.*) to deprive us of eternal life, and to sentence us to everlasting misery, *Matth. 10. 32. Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess before my Father which is in Heaven: But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven*; and *Mark 8. 38. Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the Glory of his Father, with his holy Angels*: that is, when he cometh to judge the world, they shall not be able to stand in that judgment; for that by his *being ashamed of them*, is meant, that they shall be condemned by him, is plain from what goes before, *v. 26, 27. What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* and then it follows, *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words.*

But because some have had the confidence to tell the world, that our Saviour doth not require thus much of christians; but all that he obligeth us to, is to believe in him in our hearts, but not to make any outward profession of his Religion, when the magistrate forbids it, and we are in danger of suffering for it; I shall therefore briefly examine what is pretended for so strange an assertion, and so directly contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel, and to the express words of our Saviour.

The author of the book called the *Leviathan* tells us, that we are not only not bound to confess Christ, but we are obliged to deny him, in case the magistrate requireth us so to do: his words are these; *What if the Sovereign forbid us to believe in Christ?* he answers, *Such forbidding is of no effect, because belief and unbelief never follow mens commands. But what* (says he) *if we be commanded by our lawful Prince to say with our tongues we believe not; must we obey such commands?* To this he answers, *that profession with the tongue is but an external thing, and no more than any other gesture, whereby we signifie our obedience, and wherein a christian, holding firmly in his heart the faith of Christ, hath the same liberty which the Prophet Elisha allowed to Naaman. But what then* (says he) *shall I answer to our Saviour, saying, Whosoever denieth me before men, him will I deny before my Father which is in Heaven?* his answer is, *this we may say, that whatsoever a subject is compell'd to in obedience to his Sovereign, and does it not in order to his own mind, but the law of his countrey, the action is not his, but his Sovereign's; nor is it he that in this case denies Christ before men, but his Governour, and the laws of his countrey.*

But can any man that in good earnest pays any degree of reverence to our blessed Saviour and his Religion, think to baffle such plain words by so frivolous an answer? there is no man doubts, but if the magistrate should command men to deny Christ, he would be guilty of a great sin in so doing: But if *we must obey God rather than men*, and every man must *give an account of himself to God*; how will this excuse him that denies Christ, or breaks any other commandment of God upon the command of the magistrate? And to put the matter out of all doubt, that our Saviour forbids all that will be his Disciples upon pain of damna-
tion

tion, to deny him, tho' the magistrate should command them to do so, it is very observable, that in that very place where he speaks of confessing or denying him before men, he puts this very case of their being brought before kings and governors for confessing him, *Matth. 10. 17. Beware (says he) of men, for they will deliver you up to the Councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.* But what testimony would this be against them, if christians were bound to deny Christ at their command? But our Saviour goes on, and tells them how they ought to demean themselves, when they were brought before kings and governors, verse 19. *But when they shall deliver you up, take ye no thought how or what ye shall speak; for it shall be given you in that very hour what ye shall speak.* But what need of any such extraordinary assistance in the case, if they had nothing to do but to deny him, when they were required by the magistrate to do it? And then (proceeding in the same discourse) he bids them, verse 28. *Not to fear them that can kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; that is, not to deny him, for fear of any temporal punishment or suffering the magistrate could inflict upon them; but to fear and obey him who can destroy body and soul in Hell.* And upon this discourse our Saviour concludes, ver. 32, 33. *Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven: but whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven.* And now can any thing be plainer, than that our Saviour requires his Disciples to make confession of him before kings and governors, and not to deny him for fear of any thing which they can do to them? But let us enquire a little farther, and see how the Apostles, who received this precept from our Saviour himself, did understand it. *Acts 4. 14.* We find Peter and John summoned before the Jewish magistrates, who strictly commanded them not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. *But Peter and John answer'd and said unto them, whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* And when they still persisted in their course, notwithstanding the command of the magistrate, and were called again before the Council, chap. 5. 28. *and the high-priest asked them, saying, did we not straitly command you, that you should not teach in this name? and behold ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine:* They return them again the same answer, verse 29. *Then Peter and the other Apostles answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men.*

And let any man now judge, whether our Saviour did not oblige men to confess him even before magistrates, and to obey him rather than men. And, indeed, how can any man in reason think, that the great king and governor of the world should invest any man with a power to controul his authority, and to oblige men to disobey and renounce him, *by whom kings reign, and princes decree judgment?* This is a thing so unreasonable, that it can hardly be imagined, that any thing but down-right malice against God and Religion could prompt any man to advance such an assertion.

I should now have proceeded to the *fourth* and *last* particular, which I proposed to speak to; namely, to vindicate the reasonableness of this precept of self-denial and suffering for Christ, which, at first appearance, may seem to be so very harsh and difficult. But this, together with the application of this discourse, shall be reserved to another opportunity.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N XIII.

Of Self-denial, and Suffering for Christ's Sake.

MATTH. XVI. 24.

Then said Jesus unto his Disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.



*T*HEN said Jesus to his Disciples, that is, upon occasion of his former discourse with them, concerning his approaching passion, and that he must shortly go up to Jerusalem, and there suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and at last be put to death by them; then said Jesus unto his Disciples, if any man will come after me; that is, if any man will be my disciple, and undertake the profession of my Religion, he must do it upon these terms of self-denial and suffering.

In the handling of these words, I proceeded in this method.

First, I considered the way which our Saviour here useth in making profelytes, and gaining men over to his Religion. He offers no manner of force and violence to compel men to the profession of it; but fairly proposeth it to their consideration and choice, telling them plainly upon what terms they must be his Disciples; if they like them, and be resolved to submit to them, well; if not, 'tis in vain to follow him any longer; for they *cannot be his Disciples*. And to use any other way than this to gain men over to Religion, is contrary both to the nature of man, who is a reasonable creature; and to the nature of Religion, which, if it be not our free choice, cannot be Religion.

Secondly, I explained this duty or precept of self-denial, express'd in these words, *let him deny himself, and take up his cross*; which phrase of *taking up one's cross*, is an allusion to the Roman custom, which was, that the malefactor that was to be crucified, was to take up his cross upon his shoulders, and to carry it to the place of execution.

Now for our clearer understanding of this precept of self-denial, I told you, that it is not to be extended to every thing that may properly be call'd by that name, but to be limited by the plain scope and intendment of our Saviour's discourse; and therefore I did in the

First place remove several things which are instanced in by some, as intended and required by this precept. As,

1. That we should deny and renounce our own sense in matters of faith. But this I shewed to be absurd and impossible; because if we do not believe what we see, or will believe contrary to what we see, we destroy all certainty, there being no greater than that of sense. Besides, that the evidence of faith being less clear and certain than that of sense, it is contrary to the nature of assent, which is always sway'd and born down by the greatest and clearest evidence. So that we cannot assent to any thing in plain contradiction to the evidence of sense.

2. Others would comprehend under this precept, the denying of our reason in matters of faith; which is in the next degree of absurdity to the other; because no man can believe any thing, but upon some reason or other; and to believe without any reason, or against reason, is to make faith unreasonable, and infidelity reasonable.

3. Others pretend, that by virtue of this precept, men ought to be content to renounce their own eternal happiness, and to be miserable for ever, for the glory

Glory of God, and the salvation of their brethren. But this I shewed cannot be a duty, for this plain reason; because if it were, there is no argument left powerful enough to persuade a man to it. And as for the two Scripture instances alledged to this purpose; *Moses* his wish, of being *blotted out of the book of life* for the people of *Israel*, signifies no more than a temporal death; and *St. Paul's* of being *accursed from Christ for his brethren*, is only an hyperbolical expression of his great passion and zeal for the salvation of his countrey-men; as is evident from the form of the expression, such as is commonly used to usher in an hyperbole; *I could wish*. And in the

Second place, I shewed positively, that the plain meaning of this precept of self-denial is this, and nothing but this; that we should be willing to part with all our temporal interests and enjoyments, and even life it self, for the sake of Christ and his Religion. This is *to deny our selves*. And then that we should be willing to bear any temporal inconvenience and suffering upon the same account, this is *to take up our cross*. And this I shewed from the instances which our Saviour gives of self-denial, whenever he had occasion to discourse of it.

Thirdly, I considered the strict and indispensable obligation of this precept of self-denial, rather than to forsake Christ and his Religion. Without this disposition and resolution of mind we *cannot be his disciples*; and *if we deny him before men; he will also deny us before his Father which is in Heaven*. And this confession of him and his truth we are to make before Kings and governours, and notwithstanding their commands to the contrary, which are of no force against the laws and commands of God.

Thus far I have gone. There remains only the

Fourth and *last* particular, which I proposed to speak to; *viz.* to vindicate the reasonableness of this self-denial and suffering for Christ, which at first appearance may seem to be so very difficult. And this precept cannot be thought unreasonable, if we take into consideration these *three* things.

I. That he, who requires this of us, hath himself given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was. The greatest in it self, in that he denied himself more, and suffered more grievous things, than it is possible for any of us to do: And such an example as, in the circumstances of it, is most apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it, because all his self-denial and sufferings were for our sakes.

II. If we consider, that he hath promised all needful supplies of his grace, to enable us to the discharge of this difficult duty of self-denial and suffering, and to support and comfort us therein.

III. He hath assured us of a glorious reward of all our sufferings and self-denial, beyond the proportion of them, both in the degree and duration of it. I shall go over these as briefly as I can.

I. If we consider, that he, who requires us thus to deny our selves for him, hath given us the greatest example of self-denial, that ever was. Our Saviour knowing how unwelcome this doctrine of self-denial and suffering must needs be to his disciples, and how hardly this precept would go down with them, to sweeten it a little, and take off the harshness of it, and to prepare their minds the better for it, he tells them first of his own sufferings, that by that means he might, in some measure, reconcile their minds to it, when they saw that he required nothing of them, but what he was ready to undergo himself, and to give them the example of it. And upon this occasion it was, that our Saviour acquaints them with the hard and difficult terms upon which they must be his disciples; *v. 21.* the Evangelist tells us, that *Jesus began to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief Priests, and scribes, and be killed. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, that is immediately upon this discourse of his own sufferings, as the fittest time for it, he takes the opportunity to tell them plainly of their own sufferings, and that unless they were prepared and resolved to deny themselves so far, as to suffer all manner of persecution for his sake and the profession of his Religion, they could not be his disciples. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself,*

himself, *'and take up his cross, and follow me*, that is, let him reckon and resolve upon following that example of self-denial and suffering in which I will go before him. Now the consideration of this example of self-denial and suffering which our Saviour hath given us, hath great force in it to reconcile us to this difficult duty, and to shew the reasonableness of it.

1. In that he, who requires us thus to deny our selves, hath himself in his own person, given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was. And,

2. Such an example as, in all the circumstances of it, is most apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it; because all his self-denial and sufferings were for our sakes.

1. He, who requires us thus to deny our selves, hath himself in his own person given us the greatest example of self-denial that ever was; in that he denied himself more, and suffered more grievous things, than any of us can do. He bore the insupportable load of all the sins of all mankind, and of the wrath and vengeance due to them. *Never was sorrow like to his sorrow wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; his visage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men. (i. e.)* He underwent more affliction, and had more contempt poured upon him, than ever was upon any of the sons of men: And yet he endured all this with incredible patience and meekness, with the greatest evenness and constancy of mind, and with the most perfect submission and resignation of himself to the will of God, that can be imagined.

Such an example as this should be of great force to animate us with the like courage and resolution, in lesser dangers and difficulties. To see *the Captain of our salvation* going before us, and leading us on so bravely, and *made perfect by greater sufferings* than we can ever be called to, or are any ways able to undergo, is no small argument and encouragement to us, to *take up our cross and follow him*. The consideration of the unknown sufferings of the Son of God, so great as we cannot well conceive of them, should make all the afflictions and sufferings that can befall us, not only tolerable, but easy to us. Upon this consideration it is, that the Apostle animates christians to patience in their christian course, notwithstanding all the hardships and sufferings that attended it. *Heb. 12. 2. Let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who endured the cross, and despised the shame. For consider him, who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye also be weary and faint in your minds.*

And this example is more powerful for our encouragement, because therein we see the world conquered to our hands, and all the terrors and temptations of it baffled and subdued, and thereby a cheap and easy victory over it obtained for us. By this consideration, our Saviour endeavours to inspire his Disciples with cheerfulness and courage in this great conflict, *John 16. 33. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

2. This example of our Saviour, is such as, in all the circumstances of it, is most apt and powerful to engage and oblige us to the imitation of it, because all his self-denial and sufferings were for our sakes, in pity and kindness to us, and wholly for our benefit and advantage. We are apt to have their example in great regard, from whom we have received great kindness and mighty benefits. This pattern of self-denial and suffering, which our Religion proposeth to us, is the example of one, whom we have reason to esteem, and love, and imitate, above any person in the world. 'Tis the example of our Lord and Master, of our Sovereign, and our Saviour, of the founder of our Religion, and of *the author and finisher of our faith*: And surely such an example must needs carry authority with it, and command our imitation. 'Tis the example of our best friend, and greatest benefactor; of him, who laid down his life for us, and sealed his love to us with his dearest blood, and even when we were bitter enemies to him, did and suffered more for us, than any man ever did for his best friend. If we should be reduced to poverty and want, let us consider him,

who

who being Lord of all, had not where to lay his head; who being rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich. If it should be our lot to be persecuted for righteousness sake, and exercised with sufferings and reproaches; let us look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who endured the cross and despised the shame for our sakes. In a word, can we be discontented at any condition, or decline it in a good cause; when we consider how contented the Son of God was, in the meanest and most destitute, how meek and patient in the most afflicted and suffering condition; how he welcomed all events, and was so perfectly resigned to the will of his heavenly Father, that whatever pleased God, pleased him?

And surely in no case is example more necessary than in this, to engage and encourage us in the discharge of so difficult a duty, so contrary to the bent and inclination of flesh and blood. A bare precept of self-denial, and a peremptory command to sacrifice our own wills, our ease, our pleasure, our reputation, yea and life it self, to the glory of God, and the maintenance of his truth, would have founded very harsh and severe, had not the practice of all this been mollified and sweetened by a pattern of so much advantage; by one who in all these respects denied himself, much more than it is possible for us to do; by one who might have insisted upon a greater right, who abased himself, and stooped from a greater height and dignity; who was not forced into a condition of meanness and poverty, but chose it for our sakes; who submitted to suffering, tho' he had never deserved it. Here is an example that hath all the argument, and all the encouragement that can be, to the imitation of it.

Such an example is of greater force and authority than any precept or law can be; so that well might our Lord, thus going before us, command us to follow him, and say, *if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* For if he thus denied himself, well may we, who have much less to deny, but much more cause and reason to do it. He did it voluntarily, and of choice; but it is our duty. He did it for our sakes; we do it for our own. His own goodness moved him to deny himself for us; but gratitude obligeth us to deny our selves in any thing for him. We did not in the least deserve any thing from him; but he hath wholly merited all this, and infinitely more from us. So that such an example as this is, in all the circumstances of it, cannot but be very powerful and effectual to oblige us to the imitation of it. But the reasonableness of this precept will yet farther appear if we consider in the

Third place, That God hath promised to all sincere christians all needful supplies of his grace, to enable them to the discharge of this difficult duty of self-denial, and to support and comfort them therein. For the spirit of Christ dwells in christians, and the same glorious power that raised up Jesus from the dead, works mightily in them that believe; Eph. i. 19. That ye may know (saith St. Paul, speaking in general to all christians) what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead. Of our selves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world very powerful; but there is a principle residing in every true christian, able to bear us up against the world, and the power of all its temptations. Whatsoever is born of God (saith St. John) overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World.

And this grace and strength was afforded to the first christians in a most extraordinary manner, for their comfort and support under sufferings; so that they were *strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all long-suffering with joyfulness*, as St. Paul prays for the *Colossians*, ch. i. 11. And these *consolations of the Spirit of God, this joy in the Holy Ghost*, was not peculiarly appropriated to the first times of christianity; but is still afforded to all sincere christians, in such degree as is necessary, and convenient for them. And whenever God exerciseth good men with tryals more than humane, and such

sufferings, as are beyond the ordinary rate of humane strength and patience to bear, he hath promised to endue them with more than humane courage and resolution. So St. Paul tells the *Corinthians*, 1 Cor. 10. 13. *He is faithful, that hath promised; who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* And why should we be daunted at any suffering; if God be pleased to encrease our strength, in proportion to the sharpness of our sufferings?

And blessed be God, many of our persecuted brethren at this day have remarkably found this comfortable assistance and support; tho' many likewise have fallen through fear and weakness, as it also happened in the primitive times. But where-ever this promise is not made good, it is, (as I have formerly said) by reason of some fault and failing on our part. Either men were not sincere in the profession of the truth, and then, no wonder if *when tribulation and persecution ariseth, because of the word, they are offended and fall off.* Or else they were too confident of themselves, and did not seek God's grace and assistance, and rely upon it as they ought; and thereupon God hath left them to themselves (as he did *Peter*) to convince them of their own frailty and rash confidence; and yet even in that case, when there is truth and sincerity at the bottom, there is no reason to doubt, but that the goodness of God is such, as by some means or other to give to such persons (as he did to *Peter*) the opportunity of recovering themselves by repentance, and a more stedfast resolution afterwards.

Fourthly, If we consider in the last place, that our Saviour hath assured us of a glorious and eternal reward of all our self-denial and sufferings for him; a reward infinitely beyond the proportion of our sufferings, both in the degree and duration of it. Now the clear discovery of this is peculiarly owing to the christian Religion, and the appearance of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel.

And as our blessed Saviour hath assured us of this blessed state of good men in another world; so hath he likewise assur'd us, that greater degrees of this happiness shall be the portion of those who suffer for him and his truth, *Mat. 5. 10, 11, 12. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely, for my names sake. Rejoyce and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in Heaven.* And nothing surely can be more reasonable, than to part with things of small value, for things infinitely greater and more considerable; to forego the transient pleasures and enjoyments, and the imperfect felicities of this world, for the solid and perfect and perpetual happiness of a better life; and to exchange a short and miserable life, for eternal life and blessedness; in a word, to be content to be driven home, to be banisht out of this world into our own native countrey, and to be violently thrust out of this vale of tears, into those regions of bliss, where are joys unspeakable and full of glory.

This consideration St. Paul tells us supported the primitive christians under their sharpest and heaviest sufferings, 2 Cor. 4. 16. *For this cause* (says he) *we faint not, because our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* So that our sufferings bear no more proportion to the reward of them, than finite does to infinite, than temporal to eternal, between which there is no proportion.

All that now remains, is to draw some useful inferences from what hath been discoursed, concerning this great and difficult duty of self-denial for the sake of Christ and his Religion; and they shall be these following.

I. To acknowledge the great goodness of God to us, that all these laws and commands, even the hardest and severest of them, are so reasonable.

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God, as he is our maker and gave us our beings, hath an entire and sovereign right over us, and by virtue of that right, might have imposed very hard things upon us, and this without the giving account to us of any of his matters, and without propounding any reward to us, so vastly disproportionable to our obedience to him. But in giving laws to us, he hath not made use of this right. The most severe and rigorous commands of the Gospel are such, that we shall be infinitely gainers by our obedience to them. If we deny our selves any thing in this world for Christ and his religion, we shall, in the next, be considered for it to the utmost, not only far beyond what it can deserve, but beyond what we can conceive or imagine; for this perishing life, and the transitory trifles and enjoyments of it, we shall receive *a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, an incorruptible crown which fadeth not away, eternal in the heavens*. For these are faithful sayings, and we shall infallibly find them true, *if that we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him; if we be persecuted for righteousness sake, great shall be our reward in Heaven*; if we part with our temporal life, we shall be made partakers of eternal life. He that is firmly persuaded of the happiness of the next world, and believes *the glory which shall then be revealed*, hath no reason to be so much offended at the sufferings of this present time, so long as he knows and believes, that *these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, will work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.

II. Seeing this is required of every christian, to be always in a preparation and disposition of mind to deny our selves, and to take up our cross; if we do in good earnest resolve to be christians, we ought to sit down and consider well with our selves, what our Religion will cost us, and whether we be content to come up to the price of it. If we value any thing in this world above Christ and his truth, *we are not worthy of him*. If it come to this, that we must either renounce him and his Religion, or quit our temporal interest, if we be not ready to forego these, nay, and to part even with life it self rather than to forsake him and his truth; *we are not worthy of him*. These are the terms of our christianity, and therefore we are required in baptism solemnly to renounce the world: And our Saviour, from this very consideration, infers, that all who take upon them the profession of his Religion should consider seriously beforehand, and count the cost of it, *Luke 14. 28. Which of you, (says he) intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Or what King going to war with another King, doth not sit down and consult, whether with 10000 he be able to meet him that cometh against him with 20000. So likewise, whosoever he be, that forsaketh not all he hath, cannot be my disciple*. You see the terms upon which we are christians; we must always be prepared in the resolution of our minds to deny our selves, and take up our cross, tho' we are not actually put upon this trial.

III. What hath been said is matter of great comfort and encouragement to all those who deny themselves, and suffer upon so good an account? of whom, God knows, there are too great a number at this day, in several parts of the world; some under actual sufferings, such as cannot but move compassion and horror in all that hear of them; others who are fled hither, and into other countries, for refuge and shelter from one of the sharpest persecutions that perhaps ever was, if all the circumstances of it be duly considered. But not to enlarge upon so unpleasant a theme, they who suffer for the truth and righteousness sake, have all the comfort and encouragement, that the best example, and the greatest and most glorious promises of God can give. They have the best example in their view; *Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith who, endured the cross, and despised the shame*. So that how great and terrible soever their sufferings be, they do but tread in the steps of the Son of God, and of the best and holiest man that ever was; and he, who is their great example in suffering, will likewise be their support, and *their exceeding great reward*.

So that tho' suffering for Christ be accounted great self-denial, and he is graciously pleased so to accept it, because in denying things present and sensible, for things future and invisible, we do not only declare our affection to him, but our great faith and confidence in him, by shewing that we rely upon his word, and venture all upon the security which he offers us in another world; yet according to a right estimate of things, and to those who *walk by faith and not by sight*, this which we call self-denial, is, in truth and reality, but a more commendable sort of self-love; because we do herein most effectually consult, and secure, and advance our own happiness.

IV. And *Lastly*, Since God hath been pleased for so long a time to excuse us from this hardest part of self-denial, let us not grudge to deny our selves in lesser matters, for the sake of his truth and Religion; to miss a good place, or to quit it upon that account; much less let us not think much to renounce our vices, and to thwart our evil inclinations for his sake. As *Naaman's* servant said to him concerning the means prescribed by the Prophet for his cure. *If he had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much more, when he hath only said, wash and be clean?* So since God imposeth no harder terms upon us, than repentance and reformation of our lives, we should readily and thankfully submit to them.

This, I know, is difficult to some, *to mortifie their earthly members, to crucifie the flesh with the affections and lusts of it; 'tis like cutting off a right hand, and plucking out a right eye.* Some are so strongly addicted to their lusts and vices, that they could with more ease despise life in many cases, than thus deny themselves. But in truth, there is no more of self-denial in it, than a man denies himself when he is mortally sick and wounded, in being content to be cured, and willing to be well. This is not at all to our temporal prejudice and inconvenience, and it directly conduceth to our eternal happiness; for there is no man that lives a holy and virtuous life, and in obedience to the laws of God, that can lightly receive any prejudice by it in this world. Since God doth not call us to suffer, we should do so much the more for him. Since he doth not put us to testifie our love to him by laying down our lives for him, we should shew it by a greater care to keep his commandments.

God was pleased to exercise the first christians with great sufferings, and to try their love and constancy to him and his truth, in a very extraordinary manner, by severity and contempt, by *the spoiling of their goods, and the loss of all things; by bonds and imprisonments; by cruel mockings and scourgings; by the extremity of torments, and by resisting even unto blood; by being kill'd for his sake all the day long, and appointed as sheep for the slaughter.* God was pleased to make their way to Heaven very sharp and painful, and to hedge it in as it were *with thorns on every side*, so that they could not, but *through many tribulations, enter into the kingdom of Heaven.*

Thus we ought all to be in a readiness and resolution to submit to this duty, if God should think fit at any time of our lives to call us to it. But if he be pleased to excuse us from it, and *to let this cup pass from us*, (which may lawfully be our earnest prayer to God, since we have so good a pattern for it) there will be another duty incumbent upon us, which will take up the whole man, and the whole time of our life, and that is *to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives.*

S E R M O N XIV.

Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon Earth.

Preached
at White-
hall before
the Fami-
ly, Nov. 1.
1686.

HEB. XI. 13.

The First
Sermon on
this Text.

And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The whole verse runs thus;

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.



THE Apostle having declared at the latter end of the foregoing chapter, that faith is the great principle whereby good men are acted, and whereby they are supported under all the evils and sufferings of this life, verse 38. *now the just shall live by faith*; in this chapter he makes it his main business, to set forth to us at large the force and power of faith; and to this purpose, he first tells us what kind of faith he means, viz. a firm persuasion of things not present and visible to sense, but invisible and future; ver. 1. *Now faith* (saith he) *is the confident expectation of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.* Faith represents to us the reality of things which are invisible to sense, as the existence of God and his providence; and of things which are at a great distance from us, as the future state of rewards and punishments in another world.

And then he proceeds to shew, by particular and famous instances, that the firm belief and persuasion of these things, was the great principle of the piety and virtue of the Saints, and of good men in all ages of the world; by this *Abel*, and *Enoch*, and *Noah*; *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*; *Joseph* and *Moses*, and all the famous heroes of the old Testament, *obtained a good report, and pleased God*, and did all those eminent acts of obedience and self-denial which are recorded of them. *They believed the being of God, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* They dreaded his threatenings, and relied upon his promises of future and invisible good things. They lived and died in a full persuasion and confidence of the truth of them; tho' they did not live to see them actually fulfilled and accomplished. *All these* (saith he, speaking of those eminent Saints which he had instanced in before) *died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them.* This is spoken with a more particular regard to *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, to whom the promises of the conquest and possession of a fruitful land, were made, and of a numerous offspring, among whom should be the *Messias*, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed.

These promises they did not live to see accomplished and made good in their days; but they heartily believed them, and rejoiced in the hope and expectation of them, as if they had embraced them in their arms, and been put into the actual possession of them: *And they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth.*

This saying and acknowledgment more particularly and immediately refers to those sayings of the patriarchs *Abraham* and *Jacob*, which we find recorded, *Gen. 23. 4.* where *Abraham* says to the sons of *Heth*, *I am a stranger and a sojourner with you*: And *Gen. 47. 9.* where *Jacob* says to *Pharaoh*, *the days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years; few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.* These good men were strangers and sojourners

journalers in a land which was promised to be theirs afterwards. They dwelt in it themselves as *strangers*, but were in expectation that it would one day become the inheritance of their posterity.

Now in this, as by a type and shadow, the Apostle represents to us the condition of good men, while they are passing through this world. They are *pilgrims and strangers in the earth*; they travel up and down the world for a time, as the patriarchs did in the land of *Canaan*; but are in expectation of a better and more settled condition hereafter; *they desire a better countrey, that is an heavenly*, says the Apostle at the 16th verse of this chapter.

That which I design from these words, is to represent to us our present condition in this world, and to awaken us to a due sense and serious consideration of it. It is the same condition that all the Saints and holy men that are gone before us were in, in this world; and every one of us may say with *David*, Psalm 39. 12. *I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner as all my Fathers were*. It is a condition very troublesome and very unsettled, such as that of *pilgrims and strangers* useth to be. This we must all acknowledge, if we judge rightly of our present state and condition. *They confessed, that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*; but yet it was not without the hope and expectation of a better and happier condition in reversion. So it follows just after; *they that say such things*, (that is, *that confess themselves to be strangers and pilgrims on the earth*) *declare plainly, that they seek a countrey*.

This bore up the patriarchs under all the evils and troubles of their pilgrimage, that they expected an inheritance, and a quiet and settled possession of that good land which God had promised to them. Answerably to which, good men do expect, after *the few and evil days of their pilgrimage* in this world are over, a blessed inheritance in *a better countrey, that is an heavenly*; and with blessed *Abraham*, the father of the faithful, they *look for a City which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*, as it is said of that good patriarch at the tenth verse of this chapter.

It is very frequent not only in Scripture, but in other authors, to represent our condition in this world, by that of pilgrims and sojourners in a foreign countrey: For the mind, which is the man, and our immortal souls, which are by far the most noble and excellent part of our selves, are the natives of Heaven, and but *pilgrims and strangers* here in the earth; and when the days of our pilgrimage shall be over, are designed to return to that *heavenly countrey* from which they came, and to which they belong. And therefore the Apostle tells us, *Phil.* 3. 20. that christians have relation to Heaven, as their native place and countrey, Ἡμεῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, *our conversation is in Heaven*, so we render the words; but they properly signify, that christians are members of that city and society which is above; and tho' they converse at present here below, while they are passing through this world, yet Heaven is the countrey to which they do belong, and whither they are continually tending, *sedes ubi fata quietas ostendunt*, where a quiet habitation, and a perpetual rest, is designed and prepared for them. This acknowledgment *David* makes concerning himself, and all the people of God, *1 Chron.* 29. 15. *For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers. Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding*. So likewise *St. Peter*, *1 Pet.* 1. 17. *Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear*; and chap. 2. verse 11. *Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts*.

And not only the inspired writers of holy Scripture, but heathen authors, do frequently make use of this allusion. *Plato* tells us, it was a common saying, and almost in every man's mouth, *παρεπιδημία τις ἐστὶν ὁ βίος*, the life of man is a kind of pilgrimage. And *Tully*, in his excellent discourse *de senectute*, (concerning old age) brings in *Cato* describing our passage out of this world, not as a departure from our home, but like a man leaving his inn, in which he hath lodged for a night or two, *ex vita ista discedo, tanquam ex hospitio, non tanquam ex domo; commorandi enim natura diversorium nobis, non habitandi dedit*: "When I leave this world (says he) I look upon my self as departing out of

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“an inn, and not as quitting mine own home and habitation; nature having assigned this world to us as a place to sojourn, but not to dwell in.” Which is the same with what the Apostle says in the text, concerning the patriarchs, *they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth*; and concerning all christians, chap. 13. 14. *Here we have no continuing city; but we seek one to come.*

But I do not intend to follow the metaphor too close, and to vex and torture it, by pursuing all those little parallels and similitudes, which a lively fancy might make or find, betwixt the condition of strangers and pilgrims, and the life of man during his abode and passage through this world. I will insist only upon *two* things, which seem plainly to be designed and intended by this metaphor, and they are these;

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled; *they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

II. It implies a tendency to a future settling, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we shall enter when we go out of this world. For so it follows in the very next words after the text; *they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth: For they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country. They that say such things; that is, they that acknowledge themselves to have lived in such a restless and uncertain condition in this world, travelling from one place to another, as the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did, and yet pretend to be persuaded of the goodness of God, and the faithfulness of his promise, in which he solemnly declared himself to be their God, do hereby plainly shew, that they expect some happier condition hereafter, wherein that great promise of God will be made good to them to the full.*

And these are two very weighty and useful considerations, that we should both understand our present condition in this world, and our future hope and expectation after our departure out of it, that so we may demean our selves suitably to both these conditions; both as it is fit for those who look upon themselves as *pilgrims and sojourners* in this world, and likewise as it becomes those who *seek and expect a better country*, and hope to be made partakers of a blessed immortality in another world. I shall briefly speak to both these; and then shew, what effect and influence the serious meditation of these *two* points ought to have upon every one of us.

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled. This I take to be principally intended in the metaphor of *strangers and pilgrims*. Such was the life of the patriarchs, which is here spoken of in the text; they had no constant abode and fix'd habitation, but were continually wandering from one Kingdom and country to another; in which travels they were exposed to a great many hazards and dangers, afflictions and miseries, affronts and injuries, as we read at large in the history of their travels in the old Testament. And such is our condition in this world; it is often troublesome, and always uncertain and unsettled.

'Tis often very troublesome: Not to insist upon the weak condition of infancy and childhood, the helplessness of that state, and insufficiency of it for its own preservation, and the supply of its natural wants and necessities: Not to mention the dangerous vanity and desperate folly of youth, nor the infirmities and contempts, the many tedious and wearisome days and nights that old age is commonly grieved and afflicted withal, to that degree, as to make life not only unpleasant, but almost an intolerable burthen to us. Not to dwell upon these, which yet take up and possess a great share and portion of our lives: If we look upon man in his best state, we shall find him, as *David* hath long since pronounced on him, to be *altogether vanity*. We need not go a pilgrimage, and travel into remote countries, to make life more troublesome and uneasy. In what part of the world soever we are, even that which we improperly call our own home and native country, we shall meet with trouble and inconvenience enough to convince us, that we are but *strangers* in it. More especially good men are pecu-

liably liable to a great many evils and sufferings, upon account of their piety and virtue. *They are not of the world* (as our blessed Saviour tells his Disciples, *John 15. 19.*) and *because they are not of the world, therefore the world hateth them*, and taketh all opportunities and occasions to vex and persecute them in one kind or other, either by doing all manner of evil to them, or by speaking all manner of evil of them.

But suppose we escape trouble upon this account, there are abundance of common and natural inconveniencies, which render human life very uneasy. For either we must live alone, or in the company and society of others: One of these two is necessary and unavoidable. Suppose we would live alone; how few are there that can enjoy themselves tolerably alone for any considerable time? For though there be a great deal too much of self-love in mankind, and men are generally extremely fond of themselves; yet I know not how it happens, (though so it is) that very few men in the world care for their own company, or can endure, for any considerable time, to converse only with themselves; nay, for the most part, they are sooner glutted with themselves, and surfeited of their own conversation, than with the worst company they can meet with; a shrewd sign, as one would think, that they knew something worse by themselves than of any body else, or at least they know it more certainly. It is a wise and deep saying of *Aristotle, whoever affects to be alone, must be a God, or a Devil, either a God or a wild beast*; either he must be sufficient for himself, and want nothing; or of so wild and savage a disposition, as to destroy every thing that is weaker, and to run away from every thing that is stronger than himself. Now man is neither good enough to be contented and satisfied with himself, nor bad enough to hate and avoid every body else; and therefore he must enter into society, and keep company with other men.

And if we go abroad into the world, and try the conversation of men, it cannot but grieve us to see a great many things, which yet we must see every day; the censoriousness, and uncharitableness, and insincerity of men one towards another; to see with what kindness they will treat one another to the face, and how hardly they will use them behind their backs. If there were nothing else, this one naughty quality, so common and reigning among mankind, were enough to make an honest and true-hearted man, one that loves plainness and sincerity, to be heartily sick of the world, and glad to steal off the stage, where there is nothing native and sincere, but all personated and acted; where the conversation of a great part of men is all designing and insidious, full of flattery and falsehood, of good words and ill offices: *One speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth; but in his heart he lieth in wait*, as it is in the Prophet, *Jer. 9. 8.* And when a man hath done all the good turns he can, and endeavoured to oblige every man, and not only to live inoffensively, but exemplarily; he is fairly dealt withal, and comes off upon good terms, if he can but escape the ill words of men for doing well, and obtain a pardon for those things which truly deserve praise.

But setting aside these, and the like melancholy considerations; when we are in the health and vigour of our age, when our blood is warm, and our spirits quick, and the humours of our body not yet turned and fowred by great disappointments, and grievous losses of our estates, or nearest friends and relations, by a long course of afflictions, by many cross events and calamitous accidents; yet we are continually liable to all these; and the perpetual fear and danger of them is no small trouble and uneasiness to our minds, and does in a great measure rob us of the comfort, and eat out the pleasure and sweetness of all our enjoyments; and, by degrees, the evils we fear overtake us; and as one affliction and trouble goes off, another succeeds in the place of it, like *Job's* messengers, whose bad tidings and reports of calamitous accidents came so thick upon him, that they overtook one another.

If we have a plentiful fortune, we are apt to abuse it to intemperance and luxury; and this naturally breeds bodily pains and diseases, which take away all the comfort and enjoyment of a great estate. If we have health, it may be we are
afflicted

afflicted with losses or deprived of friends, or cross'd in our interests and designs, and one thing or other happens to impede or interrupt the contentment and happiness of our lives. Sometimes an unexpected storm, or some other sudden calamity, sweepeth away, in an instant, all that which with so much industry and care we have been gathering many years. Or if an estate stand firm, our children are taken away, to whose comfort and advantage all the pains and endeavours of our lives were devoted. Or if none of these happen, (as it is very rare to escape most, or some of them) yet for a demonstration to us that God intended this world to be uneasy, to convince us that a perfect state of happiness is not to be had here below, we often see in experience that those who seem to be in a condition as happy as this world can put them into, by the greatest accommodations towards it, are yet as far or farther from happiness, as those who are destitute of most of those things wherein the greatest felicity of this world is thought to consist. Many times it so happens, that they who have all the furniture and requisites, all the materials and ingredients of a worldly felicity at their command, and in their power, yet have not the skill and ability out of all these to frame a happy condition of life to themselves. They have health, and friends, and reputation, and estate in abundance, and all outward accommodations that heart can wish; and yet in the midst of all these circumstances of outward felicity, they are uneasy in their minds, and as the wise man expresseth it, *in their sufficiency they are in straits*, and are as it were forfeited even with happiness itself, and do so fantastically and unaccountably nauseate the good condition they are in, that tho' they want nothing to make them happy, yet they cannot think themselves so; though they have nothing in the world to molest and disgust them, yet they can make a shift to create as much trouble to themselves, out of nothing, as they who have the real and substantial causes of discontent.

Which plainly shews, that we are not to look for happiness here; 'tis not to be found in this land of the living; and after our enquiries after it, we shall see sufficient reason to take up *Solomon's* conclusion, that *all is vanity and vexation of spirit*; which is much the same with that aphorism of *David* his father, which I mentioned before, that *man in his best estate is altogether vanity*.

But what happiness soever our condition in this world is capable of, 'tis most assuredly full of uncertainty and unsettlement; we cannot enjoy it long, and every moment we are in danger of being deprived of it. Whatever degree of earthly felicity we are possess'd of, we have no security that it shall continue. There is nothing in this world, but when we are as sure of it as this world can make us, may be taken away from us by a thousand accidents. But suppose it to abide and continue; we our selves shall be taken away from it. We must die, and *in that very day* all our enjoyments and hopes, as to this world, will *perish* with us; for here is no abiding place, *we have no continuing city*; so that it is in vain to design a happiness to our selves in this world, when we are not to stay in it, but only travel and pass through it.

And this is the *First*; our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled.

II. Our condition in this world being a state of pilgrimage, doth imply a tendency to future settlement, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition hereafter. And so the Apostle reasons immediately after the text; *they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth; for they that say such things, declare plainly that they seek a country*; that is, they who acknowledge themselves to be *pilgrims and strangers on the earth*, and yet withal profess to be persuaded of the goodness of God and the fidelity of his promise, *do plainly declare, that they seek another country*. This is spoken of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, who acknowledged themselves to be *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*; and thereby declared that they sought another country. Now, says the Apostle, this cannot be the country from whence they first came, *Ur of the Chaldees*, v. 15. *And truly, if they had been mindful of that coun-*

treys from whence they came out, they might have had an opportunity of returning thither. And therefore he concludes, that the countrey which they fought was a better countrey than any in this world. *v. 16. But now they desire a better countrey; that is, an heavenly.* Therefore God is not ashamed to be called *their God*; for he hath prepared for them a city. This plainly refers to that famous declaration or promise of God to the Patriarchs of being their God; *I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.* Now certainly this promise of God did signifie some very great blessing and advantage to those faithful servants of God above others. This was not made good to them in this world; for *they confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth.* Where then is the blessing spoken of and signified by the great words of that promise that *God was their God*? They met with no such condition in this world, as was answerable to the greatness of the promise. From hence the Apostle argues, that they had a firm persuasion of a future happiness; *For they that say such things declare plainly, that they seek a better countrey; that is an heavenly.* Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called *their God*, since he hath prepared for them a city. And tho' the promise of God to *Abraham* did immediately design the land of *Canaan*, and the earthly *Jerusalem*; yet the Apostle extends it to that which was typified by it; *viz. an heavenly countrey, the Jerusalem which is above*, which at the 10th verse of this chapter, is called *a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* And now, seeing God hath designed and prepared so great a happiness for them in another world, well might he be called *their God*, notwithstanding that they were *strangers and pilgrims on the earth*; that is, tho' the full meaning and importance of this promise was not made good to them in this world, yet it was accomplish'd to the full in the happiness which was designed for them in another life. And God need not be ashamed to be called *their God*; implying, that if nothing had been meant by it beyond this world, this promise, of God's being *their God*, would have fallen shamefully short of what it seemed to import. And this I conceive to be the true reason why our Saviour lays so much weight upon this promise, as to pitch upon it for the proof of the resurrection; that is, of a future state of happiness in another world.

There are many considerations apt to persuade good men of another life after this; as, that mankind is generally possess'd with this hope and persuasion; and that the more wise and virtuous men have been, the more plainly have they apprehended the hopes of immortality, and the better have they been contented to leave this world, as if, seeing farther than other men, they had a clearer prospect of the happiness they were entring upon: But above all, that God hath made our condition in this world so troublesome and unsettled, as if he had designed on purpose to make us seek for happiness elsewhere, and to elevate and raise our minds to the hopes and expectation of a condition better and more durable, than any that is to be met with in this world; which, considering the goodness of God, and his gracious providence and care of good men, is a thing of it self extremely credible.

Having thus, as briefly as I could, dispatched the *two* particulars which I propounded to speak to for the explication of the text, I should now shew what influence these considerations ought to have upon our lives and practice.

And if this be our condition in this world, and these our hopes and expectations, as to another life; if we be *pilgrims and strangers on the earth*; and look for a better countrey, that is, an heavenly; this ought to have a great influence upon us in these following respects, which I shall at present but very briefly mention.

1. Let us intangle and incumber our selves as little as we can in this our pilgrimage; let us not engage our affections too far in the pleasures and advantages of this world; for we are not to continue and settle in it, but to pass through it. A little will serve for our passage and accommodation in this journey; and beyond that, why should we so earnestly covet and seek more.

2. If we be *pilgrims and strangers*; then it concerns us to behave our selves blamelessly and inoffensively, remembring, that the eyes of people are upon us, and that those among whom we live will be very curious and observant of our manners and carriage.

3. Let us be chearful and patient under the troubles and afflictions of this present life. They who are in a strange countrey, must expect to encounter many injuries and affronts, and to be put to great difficulties and hazards, which we should endeavour to bear with that chearfulness, as men that are upon a journey use to bear foul ways and bad weather, and inconvenient lodging and accommodations.

4. The consideration of our present condition and future hopes should set us above the fondness of life, and the slavish fear of death. For our minds will never be raised to their true pitch and height, till we have in some good measure conquered these two passions, and made them subject to our reason. As for this present life, and the enjoyments of it, what do we see in them, that should make us so strangely to dote upon them? *Quæ lucis miseri tam dira cupido!* This world, at the best, is but a very indifferent place; and he is the wisest man that bears himself towards it with the most indifferent affection; that is always willing to leave it, and yet patient to stay in it as long as God pleases.

5. We should always prefer our duty and a good conscience before all the world; because it is in truth more valuable, if our souls be immortal, and do survive in another world. For (as our Saviour argues) *What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* And thus St. Paul reasoned with himself, from the belief of a *resurrection of the just and unjust*. *For this cause* (saith he) *I exercise my self alway to have a conscience void of offence both toward God and toward man.*

Lastly, If we be sojourners and travellers, we should often think of our end, and carefully mind the way to it. Our end is everlasting happiness; and the way to it is a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the commandments of God. When the young man in the Gospel enquired of our Saviour the way to eternal happiness, saying, *good master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?* His answer to him was, *if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments*. We may easily mistake our way; for *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there be that find it*. Therefore we should often pray to God, as David does, *Psal. 119. 19. I am a stranger in the earth, hide not thy commandments from me*. And Psalm 139. 23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

S E R M O N XV.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

Good Men Strangers and Sojourners upon Earth.

HEB. xi. 13.

And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The whole verse runs thus;

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.



Have lately in this place (upon a particular day and occasion) begun to handle these words; I shall briefly give you the heads of what hath been already delivered, and proceed to what remains. And that which I designed from this text was, to represent our present condition in this world, and to awaken our minds to a due sense and consideration of it. It is the same condition that all the Saints and holy men that have gone before us were in, in this world; and we may all of us say with *David, Psal. 39. 12. I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.*

It is very frequent not only in Scripture, but in other authors, to represent our condition in this world, by that of *pilgrims and sojourners* in a far countrey. For the mind, which is the man, and our immortal souls, which are, by far, the most noble and excellent part of our selves, are the natives of Heaven, and but *pilgrims and strangers* here on the earth; and when the days of our pilgrimage shall be accomplished, are designed to return to that *heavenly countrey* from which they came, and to which they belong. And for the explication of this metaphor, I insisted only upon two things, which seem plainly to be designed and intended by it.

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled; *They confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth.*

II. It implies a tendency to a future settlement, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we shall enter when we go out of this world.

And these I told you are two very weighty and useful considerations; that we should both understand our present condition in this world, and our future hopes and expectation after our departure out of it; that so we may demean our selves suitably to both these conditions; both as is fit for those who look on themselves as *pilgrims and sojourners* in this world; and likewise as it becomes those who *seek and expect a better countrey*, and hope to be partakers of a blessed immortality in another world.

I. That our condition in this world is very troublesome and unsettled; and this is principally intended by the metaphor of *pilgrims and strangers*. Such was the life of the Patriarchs here spoken of in the text; they had no constant abode and fixt habitation, but were continually wandering from one kingdom and countrey to another; in which travels they were exposed to a great many dangers and sufferings, affronts and injuries; as we read at large in the history of their travels in the old Testament. And such is our condition in this world; it is often troublesome, and always uncertain, and unsettled; so that whatever degree of worldly felicity any man is possess of, he hath no security that it shall continue for one moment.

II. Our

II. Our condition in this world being a state of pilgrimage, it implies a tendency to a future settlement, and the hopes and expectation of a happier condition, into which we shall enter so soon as we leave this world. For so it follows immediately after the text; *They confessed that they were pilgrims and strangers on the earth; For they that say such things; declare plainly that they seek a country. They that say such things; that is, they that acknowledge themselves to have lived in such a restless and uncertain condition in this world, travelling from one place to another, as the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did; and yet pretend to be persuaded of the goodness of God, and the faithfulness of his promise, in which he so solemnly declares himself to be their God; do hereby plainly shew, that they expect some happier condition hereafter, wherein that great promise of God will be made good to them to the full; so that he need not be ashamed to have been called their God.*

Having handled at large these *two* particulars, I come now to shew what influence the consideration of them ought to have upon our lives and practices. And if this be our condition in this world, and these our hopes and expectations as to another life; if we be *pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and look for a better country, that is, an heavenly*; this ought to have a great influence upon us in these following respects, which I did but briefly mention before, but shall now prosecute and press more largely.

I. Let us entangle and incumber our selves as little as we can in this our pilgrimage: Let us not engage our affections too far in the pleasures and advantages of this world, because we are not to stay in it, but to pass thro' it. Upon this consideration, the Apostle St. Peter doth so earnestly exhort christians to preserve themselves from fleshly lusts, *1 Pet. 2. 11. Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.* The gratifying of our inordinate lusts, and our carnal and sensual inclinations, is directly opposite both to the nature of our immortal spirits, and to their great design and business in this world. Fleshly lusts do not only pollute and defile, but even quench and extinguish our diviner part, and do work the ruin and destruction of it; they sink our affections into the mud and filth of this world, and do entangle and detain them there; in a word, they do wholly indispose and unfit us for that pure, and spiritual, and divine life, which alone can qualify us for our heavenly country and inheritance. And therefore while our souls are sojourning in this world, we should abstain from them, and preserve our selves unspotted and untainted by them, as being altogether unuseful, and perfectly contrary to the laws and manners of our heavenly country. If we wallow in brutish and filthy lusts, as we pass through this world; our native country, when our souls think to return to it, will reject us and cast us out: When we come to Heaven's gate, and knock there, expecting to be admitted, and shall cry, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*; He will bid us *to depart from him, because we have been workers of iniquity. Nothing that is unclean can enter into Heaven.* He who is to receive us into those blessed mansions, hath declared it to be his immutable resolution and decree, that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* And therefore as ever we hope to see God in that happy and blissful state, we must *cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God*; that having render'd our selves as like him as we can in this world, we may be capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of him in the other.

And as for the advantages of this world, let us not pursue them too eagerly, we may take the conveniencies which fairly offer themselves to us, and be content to want what we cannot honestly have, and without going out of the way of our duty, considering that we are travellers, and that a little will serve for our passage and accommodation in our pilgrimage. And beyond that why should we so earnestly covet more, and trouble our selves for that which is not necessary to our journey, why should we at any time deal unjustly to attain any of this world's goods? They will stand us in stead for so little a while, that we can have no temptation to injure or oppress any man, to break the peace of our

Consciences, and to wound our souls for the attaining of them. If the providence of God offer them to us, and bring them to our hands, in the use of honest diligence and lawful means; as we are not to refuse them, so neither are we to set our hearts upon them, nor to suffer our affections to be entangled in them.

The wisest use we can make of them, will be, to do like those who traffick in foreign parts, to consign our estates into our own native countrey, to send our treasures before us into the other world, that we may have the benefit of them when we come there. And this we may do by alms and charity. Whatever we spend upon the flesh, we leave behind us, and it will turn to no account to us in our own countrey: But whatever we lay out for the relief of the poor, is so much treasure laid out and secured to our selves against another day. So our blessed Saviour assures us, *Luke 12. 33. That giving of alms is providing for our selves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the Heavens that faileth not.*

II. If we be *pilgrims* and *strangers* then it concerns us to behave our selves with great caution, and to live blamelessly and inoffensively; remembering that the eyes of people are upon us, and that those among whom we sojourn, will be very prying and curious, and narrow observers of our manners and carriage. They that are in a strange countrey, are not wont to take that liberty and freedom which the natives of the place may do, but to keep a perpetual guard upon themselves, knowing how strictly they are observed, and that they live among those who bear no good-will to them, and that every bad thing we do, reflects upon our nation, and is a reproach to the countrey to which we belong. *Ye are not of the world* (says our Lord) *if ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but ye are not of the world; therefore, the world hateth you.* Upon this account the Apostle chargeth christians to be *harmless* and *blameless*, and as it becomes the sons of God to be, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we should shine as lights. The same Argument St. Peter useth, *1 Pet. 2. 11, 12. I beseech you, as pilgrims and strangers, to abstain from fleshly lusts, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles;* that is considering that you are among strangers and enemies, and therefore ought to be very careful to bring no scandal upon your holy profession, among those who will be ready to take all advantages against you. Particularly, we who pretend to the same heavenly countrey, must be kind to one another, and whilst we live among strangers, have no quarrels amongst our selves. In a strange countrey, it useth to be a mighty endearment of men to one another, that they are of the same countrey and fellow-citizens, and this alone is commonly sufficient to unite their affections, and to link their interests together. But how little of this is to be seen among christians! How shamefully do they quarrel among themselves, in the midst of enemies and strangers! as if they had no relation to one another, and never expected to meet at last in the same countrey, and there to live together for ever.

III. Let us be as patient and chearful as we can, under all the troubles and afflictions which we meet with in this life. They who are in strange countries, must expect to encounter many injuries and affronts, and to be put to great difficulties and hardships. Those which are lighter and more tolerable, we must bear with chearfulness. Upon a journey men use to put on all the pleasantness they can, and to make sport of all the inconveniencies of the ways and weather, and little cross accidents that befall them: And thus, if we had but the art and wisdom to do it, many of the lesser inconveniencies of human life might well enough be play'd off, and made matter rather of mirth and diversion, than of melancholy and serious trouble.

But there are some evils and calamities of human life, that are too heavy and serious to be jested withal, and require the greatest consideration, and a very great degree of patience to support us under them, and enable us to bear them decently; as the loss of friends and dearest relations; as the loss of an only son, grown up to be well fix'd and settled in a virtuous course, and promising all the comfort to his parents that they themselves can wish: These certainly are some of the greatest evils of this world, and hardest to be born. For men may pre-
tend

tend what they will to philosophy, and contempt of the world, and of the perishing comforts and enjoyments of it; to the extirpation of their passions, and an insensibility of these things, which the weaker and undisciplin'd part of mankind keep such a wailing and lamentation about: But when all is done, nature hath framed us as we are, and hath planted in our nature strong inclinations and affections to our friends and relations; and these affections are as naturally moved upon such occasions, and pluck every string of our hearts as violently, as extreme hunger and thirst do gnaw upon our stomachs.

And therefore it is foolish for any man to pretend to love things mightily, and to rejoyce greatly in the enjoyment of them; and yet to be so easily contented to lose them, and to be parted from them. This is to separate things which nature hath strongly linked together. Whatever we mightily love, does thereby, in some sort, become part of our selves, and it cannot hang loose to us, to be separated and divorced from us without trouble; no more than a limb, that is vitally and by strong ligaments united to the body, can be dropt off when we please, or rent from the body without pain. And whoever pretends to have a mighty affection for any thing, and yet at the same time does pretend that he can contentedly, and without any great sense or signification of pain, bear the loss of it, does not talk like a philosopher, but like an hypocrite; and, under a grave pretence of being wise, is in truth an ill-natur'd man. For most certainly, in proportion to our love of any thing, will be our trouble and grief for the loss of it.

So that under these great and heavier strokes, we had need both of faith and patience. And indeed, nothing but the firm belief of *a better country, that is, an heavenly*, of another life after this, and a blessed immortality in another world, is sufficient to support a man in the *few and evil days of his pilgrimage*, and to sustain his spirit under the great evils and calamities of this life. But this fully answers all, *that the afflictions and sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*. Nay, that if we bear these afflictions patiently, and with a due submission to the will of God (especially our sufferings for his truth and cause) it will certainly increase our happiness in the other world, and *work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.

IV. The consideration of our present condition, and of our future hopes, should set us above the fondness of life, and the slavish fears of death. For our minds will never be raised to their true pitch and height, till we have in some good measure conquered these two passions, and made them subject to our reason.

As for this present life, and the enjoyment of it, what is it that we see in them, that should make us so strangely to dote upon them? *Quæ lucis miseris tam dira cupido!* This world at the best is but a very indifferent place, and he is the wisest man, that bears himself towards it with the most indifferent mind and affection; that is always willing to leave it, and yet patient to stay in it as long as God pleaseth. And as for death, tho' the dread of it be natural, yet why should the terrors of it be so very surprising and amazing to us, after we have consider'd, that to a good and pious soul, it is no other but the gate of heaven, and an entrance into eternal life? We are apt to wonder, to see a man undaunted at the approach of death, and to be not only contented, but chearful at the thoughts of his departure out of this world, this sink of sin, and vale of misery and sorrow. Whereas, if all things be duly considered, it is a greater wonder that men are so patient to live, and that they are not glad of any fair excuse and opportunity of getting out of this strange country, and retiring home, and of ridding themselves of the troubles and inconveniences of life. For, considering the numerous troubles and calamities we are liable to in a long pilgrimage, there are really but *three* considerations that I can readily think of, that can make this world, and our present condition in it, in any good measure tolerable to a wise man; *viz.* that God governs the world; that we are not always to stay in it; that there is a happiness designed and reserved for us in another

another place, which will abundantly recompence and make amends to us for all the troubles and sufferings of this life.

And yet it is strange to see how fast most men cling to life; and that even in old age, how they catch at every twig that may but hold them up a little while; and how fondly they hanker after a miserable life, when there is nothing more of pleasure to be enjoyed, nothing more of satisfaction to be expected and hoped for in it. When they are just putting into the port, and, one would think, should rejoice at their very hearts that they see land; yet how glad would they be then of any cross wind, that would carry them back into the sea again, as if they loved to be toss'd, and were fond of storms and tempests.

Nay, the very best of us, even after we have made that acknowledgment of *David, I am a stranger and a sojourner with thee, as all my fathers were*, are apt with him, to be still importuning God for a little longer life; *O spare me a little, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more*. And when God hath granted us this request, then we would be spared yet a little longer.

But let us remember, that God did not design us to continue always in this world; and that he hath on purpose made it so uneasy to us, to make us willing to leave it; and that so long as we linger here below, we are detained from our happiness; *while we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord*. This consideration made St. Paul so desirous to be dissolved, because he knew, *that when his earthly house of this tabernacle was dissolved, he should have a much better habitation, a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens*. This was that which made him so full of joy and triumph, at the thoughts of his leaving the world: *2 Tim. 4. 6. I am now ready (says he) to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which God the righteous judge shall give me in that day*.

Nay, the consideration of this (tho' but obscurely apprehended by them) did raise the spirits of the wiser and better heathen, and fill them with great joy and comfort at the thoughts of their dissolution. With what constancy and evenness of mind did *Socrates* receive the sentence of death? And with what excellent discourse did he entertain his friends just before he drank off the fatal cup, and after he had taken it down, whilst death was gradually seizing upon him? One can hardly, without a very sensible transport, read *Cato's* discourse concerning his death, as it is represented by *Tully* in his book of old age. *I am (says he) transported with a desire of seeing my forefathers, those excellent persons, of whom I have heard, and read, and written; and now I am going to them, I would not willingly be drawn back into this world again. Quod si quis Deus mihi largiatur, ut ex hac ætate repuerescam, & in cunis vagiam, valde recusem. If some God would offer me, at this age, to be a Child again, and to cry in the cradle, I would earnestly refuse it, and upon no terms accept it. And now that my race is almost run, and my course just finished, how loath should I be to be brought back, and made to begin again? For what advantage is there in life? Nay rather, what labour and trouble is there not in it? But let the benefit of it be what it will, there is certainly some measure of life, as well as of other things, and men ought to know when they have enough of it. O præclarum diem, cum in illud animorum concilium cætumque proficiscar, & cum ex hac turbâ & colluvione discedam: O blessed and glorious day, when I shall go to that great council and assembly of spirits, and have got out of this crowd and rabble!* And if a heathen, who had but some obscure glimmerings of another life, and of the blessed state of departed souls, could speak thus cheerfully of death; how much more may we, who have a clear and undoubted revelation of these things, and to whom *life and immortality are brought to light by the Gospel*.

V. We should alway prefer our duty, and the keeping of a good conscience, before all the world; because it is, in truth, infinitely more valuable, if so be our Souls be immortal, and do survive in another world, and we must there give a strict

strict account of all the actions done by us in this life, and receive the sentence of eternal happiness or misery, *according to the things done in the body, whether they be good, or whether they be evil.* For as our Saviour argues concerning the case of denying him and his truth, to avoid temporal suffering and death; *What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* when we are tempted by temporal interest and advantage, or by the fear of present loss and suffering, to deny or dissemble our Religion, to do any thing that is sinful in any kind, and contrary to our duty and conscience, let us ask our selves, what will be the profit and advantage of it? what, if for fear of men, and what they can do to me, I incur the wrath and displeasure of Almighty God? This is infinitely more to be dreaded; and his frowns are a thousand times more terrible, than the bitterest wrath and cruellest malice of men. What, if to preserve this frail and mortal body, I shall evidently hazard the loss of my immortal soul; and to escape a temporal inconvenience, I forfeit everlasting happiness, and plunge my self into eternal misery and ruin? would not this be a wild bargain and a mad exchange, for any temporal gain and advantage to lose the things that are eternal? and for the pleasing of our selves for a little while, to make our selves miserable for ever?

If we confess our selves to be *pilgrims and strangers on the earth*, and are persuaded of the promises of God concerning an *heavenly countrey*, where we hope to arrive after the *few and evil days of our pilgrimage* are over; let us not, by complying with the humors of strangers, and the vicious customs and practices of an evil world, bar our selves of our hopes, and banish our selves from that happy place, to which we all profess we are going.

We pretend to be travelling towards Heaven: But if we *make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience*, we destroy our own hopes of ever arriving at that happy port. We do not live up to our expectation of a future happiness; if the unseen glories of another world do not raise us above all the temptations and terrors of sense. Our faith and hope have not their due and proper influence upon us, if they do not govern our lives and actions; and make us steadfast in the profession of our holy Religion, and in the conscientious practice of it. St. Paul reason'd himself into this holy resolution, from the hopes of a blessed resurrection, *Acts 24. 15, 16. I have hope, says he, toward God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust; ἐπεὶ τὰς αἰνῶν, for this cause therefore, I exercise my self always to have a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men.*

VI. And lastly, If we be *sojourners and travellers* in this world, we should often think of our end, and carefully mind the way to it. Our end is everlasting happiness, and the direct way to it is by a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the laws and commandments of God. And this in it self is so plain a way, that a sincere and honest man can hardly err in it. And therefore we must not suffer our selves to be led and trained out of it, upon any pretence whatsoever; not by the wildfire of pretended illuminations and enthusiasms; nor by the confident pretense of an infallible guide, that will needs shew us another way, and persuade us to follow him blindfold in it. Let us not quit *the infallible rule of God's word*, to follow any guide whatsoever. *If an Apostle or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other doctrine and way to Heaven, let him be accursed.* He who is *the way, and the truth, and the life*, when he was consulted with about the way to eternal happiness, knew no other but this. For when the young man ask'd him; *Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?* His answer was, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.* 'Tis true indeed, that by reason of our corrupt inclinations within, and powerful temptations without, this way (especially at our first setting out) is rugged and difficult. So our Lord hath forewarned us, telling us, that *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth to life*, and that *there be few that find it*; therefore we should strive to enter in, take great care and pains to discern the right way, and to overcome the difficulties of our first entrance

into it; and should often pray to God as *David* did, *Psal.* 119. 19. *I am a stranger in the earth; hide not thy commandments from me; Psal.* 139. 23, 24. *Search me O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Thus, if we would always have our end in our eye; it would both be a direction to us in our way, and an encouragement to quicken our pace in it; there being no more powerful motive to a good life, than to be assured, that, *If we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life.*

S E R M O N XVI.

The Presence of the Messias, the Glory of the Second Temple.

HAGGAI ii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

For thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.



THE Author of this prophecy was the first of the three Prophets, which God sent to the people of *Israel* after the captivity; and this prophecy contains several messages from God, to the Princes, and elders, and people of *Israel*, in which he reproves their slackness and negligence in the building of the temple, and encourageth them thereto, by the promise of his assistance, and tells them, that however in respect of the magnificence of the building, and the rich ornaments of it, it should be incomparably short of *Solomon's* temple, (which some that were then alive had seen in its glory) yet in other respects it should far excell it; for the time would come, that this second temple should be graced with the presence of the *Messias*, which would be a greater glory to it, than all the riches of *Solomon's* temple.

And this is fully exprest in the words which I have read unto you, *Thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.*

Now, that it is some very great thing which is here foretold and promised, for the honour of this second temple, no man can doubt, that considers in what a solemn manner it is here exprest; this great and glorious title, *the Lord*

Lord of Hosts, being no less than five several times used within the compass of these four verses; the like instance whereto is not, perhaps, in the whole bible: *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth*, verse 6. *And I will fill this house with glory*, saith the Lord of hosts, ver. 7. *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine*, saith the Lord of hosts, ver. 8. And twice ver. 9. *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former*, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts. So that by the solemn manner of expressing it, we may imagine, that it is some very great thing which is spoken of, and such as the like had never been before; and such was *the incarnation and coming of the Messias*.

I know that the modern *Jews* will by no means have this text to be understood of the *Messias*, and not without cause; for he that is spoken of in the text, was to come into the second temple, which hath now been destroyed above 1600 years ago; and they do not believe the *Messias* to be yet come; and therefore whatever shift they make, they must interpret this text, of some other person than the *Messias*: But then it is plain for what reason they do so, it being evident from their own *Talmud*, that the ancient *Jews* did understand it of the *Messias*; but being harden'd in their unbelief, they pervert all those texts whereby they might be convinc'd, that *Jesus* our blessed Saviour was the true *Messias*.

And indeed, whoever carefully considers the several expressions and circumstances of this prediction, cannot understand it of any other. To make this evident, I shall explain the several expressions in the text, *thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once, it is a little while*. *Yet a little while*, so it is in the *Hebrew*. *Yet once more*, so the *LXXII* render it, and so it is quoted from the *LXXII* in the new Testament, *Heb.* 12. 26. and this sense the *Hebrew* word may likewise bear, and our translation of the text takes them both in, *yet once it is a little while*.

If we take the words in the first sense, *yet a little while*, they signify, that God was then beginning those changes in the world, which were to precede and make way for the coming of the *Messias*. This indeed was not till about four hundred years after; but a great while before that time God began those changes in the world, which were to prepare the way for his coming; and considering the long time which was past from the first promise made to *Abraham*, four hundred years in comparison of that may seem but a little while. But I rather choose the latter sense of this phrase, *yet once more*; because the *Hebrew* will bear it, and because it is so quoted in the new testament; as if the prophet had said, that God had before done a great thing in the world, and accompanied with great miracles; viz. *the giving of the law by Moses*, which was attended with great commotions, both in *Egypt*, by bringing the people of *Israel* out from thence with a mighty hand, and by destroying the nations before them, whose land God gave them for a possession; but now he would do one greater thing more, *the sending of the Messias*, and the planting of his Religion in the world; in order whereunto there should be much greater, and more universal commotions and changes in the world, and more and greater miracles wrought; *yet once more, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations*. From which words the Apostle to the *Hebrews* argues the abolishing of the Jewish dispensation, and the bringing in of another that should be unalterable, *Heb.* 12. 27. *And this word, yet once more*, (says the Apostle) *signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*. And this I shall have occasion to explain more fully in the following parts of this discourse.

Yet once more I will shake the heavens, and the earth, &c. For the understanding whereof, we are to consider that the *Hebrews* have no one word whereby to express *the world*, and therefore they do it by an enumeration of the principal parts of it. So *Gen.* 1. when *Moses* would express the creation of the world,

world, he says, *in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* And so St. Peter, when he would express the revolution of all things, after the universal conflagration of the world, calls it, *a new heaven; and a new earth,* 2 Pet. 3. 13. *Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens, and a new earth;* that is, *a new world,* a quite other frame and state of things, than that which we now see. And so the Prophet here in the text to express the great commotions and changes that should be in the world before the coming of the Messias, says, that God *will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;* that is, he would cause great revolutions in the world; there should be great wars and confusions, and the empires of the world should pass from one hand to another. And thus we find this very expression interpreted, ver. 21, 22, of this chapter, *I will shake the heavens and the earth, and I will overthrow the throne of Kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the Kingdoms of the nations.* And to shew that by *shaking the heavens, and the earth,* is meant great changes in the world, and as it were an universal commotion of it, he adds in the text, by way of farther explication, *and I will shake all nations.*

And then it follows, *and the desire of all nations shall come.* This we (as the ancient Jews also did) take to be a plain character and description of the Messias, he is *the desire of all nations;* he whom all nations had reason to desire, because of those great blessings and benefits which he was to bring to the world. Thus interpreters generally understand these words, and it is very true the Messias was so: But this does not seem to be the true importance of this phrase; for the Hebrew word signifies *expectation* as well as *desire*, and so I should rather choose to render it, *the expectation of all nations shall come;* which signifies, that about the time of the coming of the Messias, not only the Jews, but other nations, should be in a general expectation of some great prince then to appear; which was most eminently accomplished in our blessed Saviour, as I shall shew by and by.

And I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts, speaking of the second temple, which was then in building, which though it fell very much short of Solomon's, in point of state and magnificence; yet by being honoured with the presence of the Messias, it should be much more glorious than Solomon's temple. *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts;* not that God wanted the command of gold and silver, to have made the second temple equal to Solomon's in outward glory and splendour; he could easily have made it so in that respect; and Josephus tells us, that not long before the time of our Saviour's coming, Herod had built and beautified it to that degree, that in some respects it excelled Solomon's; and of this some understand the next words, *the glory of this latter house shall be greater, than of the former;* namely, that this was accomplished in that beauty and magnificence which was added to it, when it was re-edified by Herod the great: But however that be, this is certain, that it was much more glorious in another respect, namely, that it entertained the Messias, *the great expectation and blessing of all nations.*

And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts. Some understand this, of that universal peace which was throughout the world, when our Saviour was born in the reign of Augustus Caesar. Others with great probability interpret this of the Messias himself, who is called here by the name of *peace;* and so some of the ancient Jews understood it; *in this place will I give peace,* that is, *the Messias.* For the Hebrew word signifies all kind of happiness, and so it includes all those blessings and benefits, that happiness and salvation which the Messias brought to the world. And this will appear very probable, if we consider, how frequently in Scripture this title is given to the Messias. *Isai.* 9. 6. he is called *the prince of peace;* and *Zach.* 9. 10. it is said of him, *that he should speak peace to the nations;* and the Apostle to the Hebrews parallels him with Melchisedech in this particular, *that he was king of Salem,* that is, *king of peace;* and which is very little different from this, he is frequently in Scripture called *salvation*, which signifies the happiness of being rescued and delivered from all kind of evil; as *peace* signifies all kind of Good, *Isai.* 49. 6. *I will*

will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayst be my salvation to the end of the earth: And Luke 2. 30. When Simeon had our blessed Saviour in his arms, when he was first brought into the temple, he calls him *the salvation of God*; mine eyes (saith he to God) *have seen thy salvation*; and John 4. 22. *Salvation is of the Jews*, that is, the *Messias* was to be of that nation. But which is more exprefs, Christ is called *our Peace*, Eph. 2. 14. Nay, he is expressly called *peace*, or *the peace*, Micah 5. 5. *And this man* (speaking of the *Messias*) *shall be the peace*, that is, one of his names or titles shall be *peace*. So that I make little doubt, but that in this expression in the text, of *giving peace*, is meant, giving the *Messias*; and that this is render'd as the reason, why the glory of the second temple should be greater than of the first, because in that place the *Messias* should appear, and remarkably shew himself. God could have given this second temple, if he had thought fit, as much outward glory and beauty as that of Solomon's building; for *silver and gold are his*, and all the riches of the world are at his command; but he chose to put a far greater honour upon it than that of silver and gold, and to make it much more glorious in another respect, *the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former*; because in this place I will give the *Messias*, the *peace*, and happiness, and salvation of mankind, and incomparably the greatest blessing that ever was given to the world.

The words being thus explained, it will now be more easie to shew, how the several parts of this prediction do agree to *our blessed Saviour*, and to no other.

I. That there should be great changes and commotions in the world before his coming; *I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations*; and then he should come.

II. That about the time of his coming, the world should be in a general expectation of him; *and the expectation of all nations shall come*.

III. That he should come during the continuance of the second temple; for it was his coming that should fill that house with glory, and in that place the *Messias*, who is called *peace*, is promised to be given; *and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts*.

IV. That this coming of the *Messias* should be the last dispensation of God for the salvation of men, and consequently should be perpetual and unalterable; *yet once more, and I will shake the heavens and the earth; yet once more*, from whence the Apostle to the *Hebrews* argues, that the gospel should be a perpetual and unalterable dispensation. Of these I shall speak severally, and as briefly as I can.

I. Here is a prediction of great changes and commotions in the world before the coming of the *Messias*; *thus saith the Lord of hosts, I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come*; plainly signifying hereby, that before the coming of the *Messias* (who is here called *the desire and expectation of all nations*) there should be very great commotions and changes in the world, that the empire of the world should be overturned; for so I have told you, that this expression of *shaking the heavens and the earth* is explained, *verse 21. of this chapter, I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and will overthrow the throne of kingdoms*. And this was fulfilled in a most remarkable manner, between the time of this prophecy, and the coming of our blessed Saviour, during which time, (though it was but four hundred years) there happened greater commotions, and much more considerable revolutions in the great kingdoms of the world, than had done in above two thousand years before, and in almost one thousand seven hundred years since; so that it is no wonder, that the prediction of these things is by God himself exprest in so very solemn a manner, as I observed before.

At the time of this prophecy, the empire of the world was newly translated from the *Assyrians* to the *Medes* and *Persians*; and not long after, the *Grecians* under *Alexander the Great* quite overthrow the *Persian* empire, and that by

by as sudden a change as was ever perhaps made in the world, possessing themselves by so swift and speedy a conquest of a great part of the then known world, as if to pass through it, and to conquer it, had been all one.

After the death of *Alexander*, the empire of the *Grecians* was shared among his great captains, whom the *Romans* by degrees conquered, besides a great many other Kingdoms which *Alexander* never saw, and some of them perhaps had never heard of. At last the empire of the world, in all its greatness and glory was possess'd by *Augustus*, in whose time our blessed Saviour was born.

So that here were mighty commotions in the world, wonderful changes of kingdoms and empires, before the coming of the *Messias*; far greater, and of much larger extent, than those that were in *Egypt* and *Palestine*, at the bringing of the children of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, and the giving of the law from mount *Sinai*. And these did not only go before the coming of the *Messias*, but they made way for the more easy propagating of his doctrine and Religion; for the *Grecians*, and especially the *Romans*, settled their conquests in such a manner, as in a good measure to propagate their language among the nations which they conquered; and particularly the *Romans* did make the ways for travel and commerce much more easy and commodious than ever they were before, by employing their armies, when they had no other work, to make high-ways, for the convenience of passage from the station of one legion to another; the benefit and effect whereof, we in *England* enjoy to this day; (a pattern to all Princes and states that have necessary occasion for armies how to employ them:) And this very thing proved afterwards a mighty advantage for the more easy and speedy spreading of Christianity in the world.

II. Another part of this prophecy is, that about the time of the coming of the *Messias*, the world should be in a general expectation of him; and the expectation of all nations shall come: And I doubt not but this character of the *Messias* is taken out of that famous prophecy concerning him, *Gen. 49. 10. The Scepter shall not depart from Judah till Shiloh come*, (and by *Shiloh*, the ancient *Jews* generally understood the *Messias*) and to him shall the gathering of the people be; or as it is render'd by the *Septuagint*, and several other translations, and he shall be the expectation of the Nations. In allusion to which ancient prophecy concerning him, he is here in the text called, *The expectation of all nations*; and so by the Prophet *Malachi*, chap. 3. verse 1. *And the Lord whom ye expect, or look for, shall suddenly come into his temple*. Now this part of the prediction in the text, was most eminently fulfilled in our blessed Saviour. For about the time of his coming, the *Jews* were in a general expectation of him, as appears not only from that ancient and general tradition of theirs, from the school of *Elias*, that at the end of the second two thousand years of the world, the *Messias* should come; (and our blessed Saviour's coming did accordingly happen at that time;) but likewise from that particular computation of the *Jewish* doctors, not long before our Saviour's coming, who upon a solemn debate of the matter, did determine that the *Messias* would come within fifty years. And this is farther confirmed, from the great jealousy which *Herod* had concerning a King of the *Jews*, that was expected to be born about that time; and from that remarkable testimony in *Josephus*, who tells us, *That the Jews rebelled against the Romans, being encouraged thereto by a famous prophecy in their Scriptures, That about that time a great Prince should be born among them, that should rule the world*: And *Josephus* flattered *Vespasian* so far, as to make him believe that he was the man; and thereupon persuaded him to destroy the line of *David*, out of which the tradition was, that the *Messias* should spring; as if the accomplishment of a divine prediction could be hinder'd by any human endeavour.

And this was not only the general expectation of the *Jews* about that time, but of a great part of the world; as appears from those two famous testimonies of two of the most eminent *Roman* historians, *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*. The words of *Suetonius* are these; *Percrebuerat oriente toto vetus & constans opinio, esse in fatis, ut Judæa profecti rerum potirentur*: There was an ancient and general opi-

nion,

nion, famous throughout all the Eastern parts; that the fates had determined that there should come out of Judea those that should govern the world; and he adds what I quoted before out of Josephus, *Id Judæi ad se trahentes rebel- larunt*; That the Jews taking this to themselves, did thereupon rebel. Now it is very remarkable, that the very words of this tradition seem to be a verbal translation of that prophecy in Micah, that out of Judah should come the go- vernour: *Ut Judæa profecti rerum potirentur*. The other testimony is out of Tacitus; and his words are these, (*lib. 21. §. 13*) *Pluribus persuasio inerat anti- quis sacerdotum libris contineri, eo ipso tempore fore, ut valesceret oriens, profectique Judæa rerum potirentur*: A great many (says he) were possessed with a persuasion that it was contained in the ancient books of the priests, that at that very time the east should prevail, and that they who should govern the world, were to come out of Judea. By the ancient books of the priests, he, in all probability, means the ancient prophecies of Scripture; for the last ex- pression is the same with that of Suetonius, taken out of the Prophet Micah; and the other, *that the east should prevail*, does plainly refer to that title given to the *Messias* by the Prophet Zachary, chap. 6. 12. where he is called, *the man whose name is rōmā*, which signifies *Oriens* and *Germen*, both the east and a branch; our translation hath it, *the man whose name is the branch*; but it might as well be render'd, *the man whose name is the east*. Thus you see this character of our Saviour in this prophecy most literally fulfilled, that he was *the expectation of all nations*. I proceed to the

III^d circumstance of this prediction, That he who is here foretold, should come during the continuance of this second temple; because it was his presence that should *fill that house with glory*; and it was *in that place* that the *Messias*, who is called *the peace*, is promised to be given; and *in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts*. And this is likewise most expressly foretold by the Prophet Malachi, chap. 3. 1. *Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye look for, shall sud- denly come into his temple; even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye de- light in, behold he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts*: And accordingly Jesus, our blessed Saviour, came during the second temple; he was presented there by his parents, and owned by Simeon for the *Messias*; he disputed there, and taught frequently there, and by his presence *filled that house with glory*. For that the Son of God taught publicly there, was a greater honour to it, than all the silver and gold of Solomon's temple.

And not long after his death (according to his express prediction) this second temple was destroyed to the ground; *so that not one stone of it was left upon another*. And when, some hundred of years after, it was attempted to be re- built three several times, the last whereof was by Julian the apostate, in oppo- sition to christianity, and to our Saviour's prediction; fire came out of the foun- dation, and destroyed the workmen; so that they desisted in great terror, and durst never attempt it afterwards. And this not only the christian writers of that age, in great numbers, do testify, but Ammianus Marcellinus (a heathen historian who liv'd in that time) does also give us a very particular account of this memora- ble matter. So that if by *the expectation of the nations* be here meant the *Messias*, (as I have plainly shewn) then he is long since come, and was no other than Jesus, our blessed Saviour, who, according to this prophecy, was *to fill the second Temple with glory*; which hath now been demolished above one thousand six hundred years ago, and the re-building whereof hath been so often and so remarkably hindred from Heaven. The consideration of all which were sufficient to convince the Jews of their vain expectation of a *Messias* yet to come, were they not so obstinately rooted and fixed in their infidelity. There remains now the

IVth and last circumstance of this prophecy, *viz.* That the coming of the *Messias* was to be the last dispensation of God, for the salvation of men; and, consequently, was to be perpetual and unchangeable: *Yet once more, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake all nations, and the expectation of all nations shall come. Yet once more;*

from which words, the Apostle to the *Hebrews* argues the perpetuity of the Gospel, and that it was the dispensation which should never be changed, *Heb. 12. 27. And this word, yet once more, signifies, the removing of those things which are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.* And then it follows, *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, &c.* It was usual with the *Jews* to describe the times of the Gospel, by *the Kingdom of the Messias*; and accordingly the Apostle here calls the dispensation of the Gospel, *a Kingdom which cannot be moved*: In opposition to the law, which was an imperfect and alterable dispensation. For this is plainly the scope of the Apostle's reasoning; namely, to convince the *Jews* that they were now under a more gracious and perfect dispensation than that of the law, verse 18. *Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire*; meaning mount *Sinai*, which was a sensible literal mountain, *a mountain that might be touched*, in opposition to the mystical and spiritual mount *Sion*, by which the dispensation of the Gospel is described: Which, by the way, prevents the objection of its being called *the mountain that might be touched*, when it was forbidden to be touch'd upon pain of death; *Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched*; that is, I am not now speaking of a literal and sensible mountain, such as was mount *Sinai*, from whence the law was given; but of that spiritual and heavenly dispensation of the Gospel, which was typify'd by mount *Sion* and by *Jerusalem*; *but ye are come to mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.* And then he cautions them to take heed how they reject him that came from Heaven, to make this last revelation of God to the world, which because of the clearness and perfection of it, should never need to receive any change, verse 25. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, (viz. Moses, who delivered the law from mount Sinai) much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from Heaven; whose voice then shook the earth, (alluding to the earthquake at the giving of the law) but now he hath promised, saying, yet once more, I shake not the earth only, but also heaven; that is, the whole world, in order to the coming of the Messias, and the planting of the Gospel in the world; and then he argues from the words once more, that the former dispensation should be removed, to make way for that which should perpetually remain.*

And indeed there is no need of any farther revelation after this; nor of any change of that Religion which was brought from Heaven by the Son of God; because of the perfection of it, and its fitness to reform the world, and to recover mankind out of their lapsed and degenerate condition, and to bring them to happiness; both by the purity of its doctrine, and the power of its arguments, to work upon the minds of men, by the clear discovery of the mighty rewards and punishments of another world.

And now the proper inference from all this discourse, is the very same with that which the Apostle makes, from the consideration of the perfection and excellency of this revelation, which God had made to the world by his Son. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for how shall we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from Heaven?* And at the 28th verse of that chapter, *Wherefore we receiving a Kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear*; that is, let us live as becomes those to whom God hath made so clear and perfect a revelation of his will. We have all the advantages of the divine revelation which the world ever had, and the last and most perfect that the world ever shall have: We have not only *Moses and the Prophets*, but that doctrine which *the Son of God* came down from Heaven on purpose to declare to the world. God hath vouchsafed to us that clear and compleat revelation of his will, which he denied to many *Prophets and righteous men, who desired to see the things which we see, but could not see them, and to hear the things which we hear, but could not hear them.* There were good men in the world under those imperfect revelations

lations which God made to them ; but we have far greater advantages, and more powerful arguments to be good than ever they had. And as we ought thankfully to acknowledge these blessed advantages ; so ought we likewise, with the greatest care and diligence to improve them.

And now how does the serious consideration of this condemn all impenitent sinners under the Gospel, who will not be reclaim'd from their sins, and persuaded to goodness, by all that God can do ; by the most plain declaration of his will to the world, by the most perfect precepts and directions for a good life ; by the most encouraging promises to obedience, and by the most severe threatenings of an eternal and unutterable ruin, in case of disobedience ; *by the wrath of God, revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men* ; by the terrors of the great day, and the vengeance of eternal fire ; by the wonderful and amazing condescension of the Son of God, appearing in our nature ; by his merciful undertaking for the redemption of lost and sinful man ; by his cruel sufferings for our sins, and by the kindest offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and by the glorious hopes of eternal life !

What could God have done more for us, than he hath done ? What greater concernment could he shew for our salvation, than *to send his own Son, his only Son, to seek and save us* ? And what greater demonstration could he give of his love to us, than *to give the Son of his love to die for us* ? This is the last effort that the divine mercy and goodness will make upon mankind. So the Apostle tells us in the beginning of this epistle, chap. i. 1. that *God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers, by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son* : And if we will not hear him, he will speak no more ; after this it is not to be expected that he should make any farther attempts for our recovery, he can send no greater and dearer person to us, than *his own Son*. If we despise him ; whom will we reverence ? if we reject him, and the great salvation which he brings and offers to us, we have all the reason in the world to believe that our case is desperate, and that we shall *die in our sins*. *This was the condemnation of the Jews, that they did not receive and believe on him whom God had sent*. And if we who profess to believe on him, and to receive his doctrine, be found disobedient to it, in our lives, we have reason to fear that our condemnation shall be far heavier than theirs : For since the appearance of *the Son of God* for the salvation of men, *the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*, especially against those *who detain the truth of God in unrighteousness* ; that is, against those who entertain the light of God's truth in their minds, but do not suffer it to have its proper effect and influence upon their hearts and lives ; and make that a prisoner, which would make them free. So our Lord tells us, that *the truth shall make us free* ; but if *after we have received the knowledge of the truth, we are still the servants of sin* ; our condemnation is much worse, than if *the Son of God* had never come : For the christian Religion hath done nothing, if it do not take men off from their sins, and teach them to live well.

Especially at *this time* when we are celebrating *the coming of the Son of God, to destroy the works of the Devil*, we should take great heed, that we be not found guilty of any impiety or wickedness ; because this is directly contrary to the main design of *the grace of God, which brings salvation, and hath appeared to all men*, (and the appearance whereof we do at *this time* commemorate) for that *teacheth men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world* : And we cannot gratify the Devil more than by shewing our selves more diligent than ordinary to uphold his works, at *this very time*, when *the Son of God was manifested on purpose to dissolve them* : We cannot possibly choose a worse, a more improper season to sin in, than when we are celebrating the birth of the blessed *Jesus*, who came *to save us from our sins*. This is, as if a sick man, for joy that a famous physician is come to his house, should run into all manner of excess, and so do all he can to enflame

his disease, and make his case desperate. Not but that our inward joy may lawfully be accompanied with all outward innocent expressions of it: But we cannot be truly thankful, if we allow our selves at *this time* in any thing contrary to the purity and sobriety of the Gospel. It is matter of just and sad complaint, being of great scandal to our Saviour, and his holy Religion, that such irregular and extravagant things are at *this time* commonly done by many, who call themselves Christians; and done under a pretense of doing honour to the memory of Christ's birth; as if, because *the Son of God* was at this time made *man*, it were fit for *men* to make themselves *beasts*.

If we would honour him indeed, we must take care that our joy do not degenerate into sin and sensuality, and that we do not express it by lewdness and luxury, by intemperance and excess, by prodigal gaming, and profuse wasting of our estates, *as the manner of some is*; as if we intended literally to requite our Saviour, *who being rich, for our sakes became poor*. This is the way of *parting with houses and land, and becoming poor for his sake*, for which he will never thank, nor reward us. This is not to commemorate the coming of our Saviour; but to contradict it, and openly to declare that we will uphold *the works of the devil*, in despite of *the Son of God, who came to destroy them*. It is for all the world like that lewd and senseless piece of Loyalty, too much in fashion some years ago, of being drunk for the King. Good God! that ever it should pass for a piece of Religion among Christians, to run into all manner of excess for twelve days together in honour of our Saviour! A greater aggravation of sin cannot easily be imagined, than to abuse the memory of the greatest blessing that ever was, *Christ coming into the world to take away sin*, into an opportunity of committing it; this is to represent the Son of God as a patron of sin and licentiousness, and to treat him more contumeliously than the *Jews* did, who bowed the knee to him and mocked him, and called him King, and spat upon him; and under a pretence of rejoicing for his birth, *to crucifie to our selves afresh the Lord of life and glory; and to put him to an open shame*.

I will conclude all with the Apostle's exhortation, *Rom. 13. 12, 13, 14. Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk decently as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*.

Now to our most gracious and merciful God, the great friend and lover of souls, who regarded us in our low and lost condition, and cast an eye of pity upon us, when *we were in our blood, and no other eye pityed us*, and when we had lost and ruined our selves, was pleased in tender compassion to mankind, *to send his only begotten Son into the world, to seek and save us*, and by the purity of his doctrine, and the pattern of his life, and the sacrifice of his death, to purchase eternal life for us, and to direct and lead us in the way to it: And to him also, the blessed Saviour and Redeemer of mankind, who came down from Heaven, that he might carry us thither, and took human nature upon him, that we thereby might be *made partakers of a divine nature*; and *humiliated himself to death, even the death of the cross*, that he might exalt us to glory and honour; and whilst we were bitter enemies to him, gave such a demonstration of his love to us, as never any man did to his best friend: *Unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the lamb that was slain; to God, even our Father, and to our Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth, to him, who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and honour, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.*

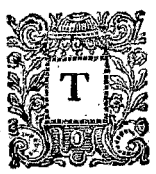
S E R M O N XVII.

Preached
at St. Peter's Corn-
hill on the
feast of the
Annuncia-
tion. 1691.

Christ Jesus the only Mediator between God and Men.

I TIM. ii. 5, 6.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.



THESE words contain in them these four propositions; three of them express, and the fourth of them sufficiently implied in the text.

I. *That there is one God.*

II. *That there is one mediator between God and men; Christ Jesus.*

III. *That he gave himself a ransom for all.*

IV. *That the mediation or intercession of Jesus Christ, is founded in the redemption of mankind.* For this seems to be the reason why it is added, that *he gave himself a ransom for all*, to signifie to us, that because *he gave himself a ransom for all*, therefore he intercedes for all. In virtue of that sacrifice which he offered to God for the salvation of men, he offers up our prayers to God; and therefore it is acceptable to him, *that we should pray for all men*. This seems to be the true connexion of the Apostle's discourse, and the force of his reasoning, about our putting up *publick prayers for all men*.

I have in a former discourse handled the *first* of these. I proceed now to the

II^d. *That there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* One mediator, that is, *but one*; for the expression is the very same concerning *one God, and one mediator*; and therefore if the Apostle when he says, *there is one God*, certainly means that there is *but one God*; it is equally certain, that when he says, *there is one mediator between God and men*, he means, there is *but one mediator*, viz. *Christ Jesus*. He is the only mediator between God and men.

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In the handling of this argument, I shall proceed in this method.

1. I shall endeavour to shew, that God hath appointed but one mediator, or advocate, or intercessor in heaven for us; in whose name, and by whose mediation and intercession, we are to offer up our prayers and services to God.

2. That this is most agreeable to one main end and design of the christian Religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world.

3. That it is likewise evident *from the nature and reason of the thing it self*, that *there is but one mediator* and intercessor in Heaven for us, to offer up our prayers to God; and that there can be no more. And then,

4. And *lastly*, I shall endeavour to shew, how contrary to the doctrine of the christian Religion, concerning *one mediator and intercessor in Heaven for us*, the doctrine and practice of the church of Rome in this matter is, in their invocation of Angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the saints, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners; as likewise how contrary it is to the doctrine and practice of the primitive christian church: And then I shall answer their several pretences for this doctrine and practice; and shew that this practice is not only needless, but useless and unprofitable; and not only so, but very dangerous and impious.

First, I shall endeavour to shew, that God hath appointed but one mediator, or advocate, or intercessor in Heaven for us, in whose name, and by whose intercession we are to offer up all our prayers and services to God.

Besides

I.

II.

III.

IV.

Besides that it is expressly said here in the text, *there is but one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*, and that the Scripture no where mentions any other : I say, besides this, we are constantly directed to offer up our prayers and thanksgivings, and to perform all acts of worship in his name, and no other, and with a promise, that the prayers and services, which we offer in his name will be graciously answered and accepted : *John 14. 13, 14. Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do ; that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it. And ch. 16. 23, 24. And in that day ye shall ask me nothing : verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name ; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. In that day ; that is, when I have left the world, and am gone to my Father, as he explains it at the 28th verse, In that day ye shall ask me nothing ; but whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name ; he will give it you. That is, you shall not need to address your prayers to me, but to my Father in my name. And v. 26, 27. At that day ye shall ask in my name ; that is, from the time that I am ascended into Heaven, ye shall put up all your prayers and requests to God, in my name ; and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you ; for the Father himself loveth you ; that is, I need not tell you (though I shall certainly do it) that I will intercede with the Father for you ; for he of himself is kindly disposed and affected towards you, for my sake ; The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me.*

St. Paul likewise commands Christians to perform all acts of religious worship in the name of Christ : *Col. 3. 16, 17. Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord, and whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. And this precept of addressing all our prayers and thanksgivings to God, by Jesus Christ, as the only Mediator between God and us, is the more remarkable, because it is given in opposition to the worshipping of God by any other Mediators and Intercessors in Heaven for us ; and to that superstition which had begun so early to prevail among some Christians at Colosse and Laodicea, of worshipping God by the mediation and intercession of Angels, against which he had cautioned in the former chapter, v. 18. 19. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of Angels, not holding the head. Intimating, that for Christians to address themselves to God, by any other Mediator but Jesus Christ only, was a defection from Christ the head, and high priest of our profession. And that this is the Apostle's meaning, Theodoret assures us, in his comment upon this place, where he tells us, that some who maintained an observance of the law, together with the gospel, asserted also, That Angels were to be worshipped, saying, That the Law was given by them. And this custom, he tells us, remained a long time in Phrygia and Pisidia, and that upon this account it was, that the synod of Laodicea in Phrygia (about the middle of the 4th century) forbade Christians by a law, to pray to Angels. And yet more expressly in his comment upon those words, chap. 3. verse 17. Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. For because, (says he) they (meaning those of whom St. Paul warns the Colossians to beware) because they did command men to worship Angels, he enjoins the contrary ; that they should adorn both their words and actions with the memory (or mention of) the name of Christ their Lord : And send ye up (saith he) thanksgiving to God and the Father by him, and not by the Angels. And then he makes mention of the Canon of the synod of Laodicea, which (says he) in pursuance of this rule, and being desirous to cure that old disease, made it a law, that none should pray unto Angels, nor forsake the Lord Jesus Christ. It seems then that some reliques of that impious custom, of praying to Angels, which Theodoret here calls, that old disease, had continued from St. Paul's time, to the Council of Laodicea, which was the occasion of that severe Canon then made about that matter ; the very words whereof I will set down, because they are remarkable ;*

viz.

viz. that christians ought not to forsake the church of God, and go away from it, and to invoke angels, and to make conventicles, all which are forbidden. If any therefore be found giving himself to this secret idolatry, let him be anathema; because he hath forsaken our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and is gone over to idolatry. What shall be said to them, who do not only secretly, and in their private devotions, but in the publick assemblies of christians, and in the most publick offices of their church, invoke angels, and pray to them. So that it was praying to angels (or making use of them as mediators and intercessors with God for us) which St. Paul here reproves so severely in the *Colossians*, as a defection from Christ and the christian Religion.

And indeed, considering how frequently the Scripture speaks of Christ, as *our only way to God, and by whom alone we have access to the throne of grace*, we cannot doubt but that God hath constituted him our only mediator and intercessor, by whom we are to address all our requests to God, *John 14. 6.* Jesus there saith unto Thomas, *I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh to the Father but by me. I am the way, the truth, and the life; that is, the true and living way to the Father (which the Apostle calls a new and living way, Heb. 10. 19, 20. Having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us.) No man cometh to the Father but by me; that is, we can have no access to God by prayer, or by any other acts of religious worship, but by him. So St. Paul tells us, Eph. 2. 18. For through him (speaking of Christ) we both have an access by one spirit unto the Father. We both, that is, both Jews and Gentiles. Under the law the Jews had access to God by their high-priest, who interceded with God, and offered up prayers in behalf of the people. The Gentiles, they addressed themselves to God by innumerable mediators, by Angels, and the souls of their departed heroes, which were the Pagan Saints. Instead of all these, God hath appointed one mediator and intercessor in Heaven for us, Jesus the Son of God, and by him all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, have access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

And we have no need of any other, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* reasons, chap. 7. 24, 25. *But this person (speaking of Christ) because he continueth for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood, ἀπαράλειπτον, a priesthood which doth not pass from one to another, as the priesthood under the law did, when upon the death of one high-priest, another succeeded in his place; but our high-priest under the Gospel, since he abides for ever, is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us. So that Jesus Christ is an all-sufficient mediator, and able to carry on and accomplish the work of our salvation from first to last: And as we do not find that God hath appointed any other; so we are sure, that there needs no other, since he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, and that he lives for ever to make intercession for us.*

Secondly, I proceed now in the second place to shew, that this doctrine or II. principle of *one mediator between God and man*, is most agreeable to one main end and design of the christian Religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world, which was *to destroy idolatry out of the world; which St. John calls the works of the Devil, 1 John 3. 8. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy, ὡς λύσιν, that he might dissolve or demolish the works of the Devil; by which St. John does more especially mean the idolatrous worship of the heathen, which consisted in the multitude of their Gods, and the bloody and barbarous rites and sacrifices, whereby they worshipped them; and likewise in the multitude of their mediators between the Gods and men, who were also esteem'd by them an inferior sort of deities. Both these kinds of idolatry had strangely prevailed, and over-run the world before the appearance of our Lord and Saviour, who came on purpose to deliver mankind from the horrible superstition and slavery of the worship of false Gods, to pull down this Kingdom of the Devil, and to demolish that fabrick which he hath been so long a rearing, and to beat him out of those strong holds, which he thought had been impregnable.*

God

God, indeed, gave some check to these, many ages before, and not long after their first appearance, by the *Jewish Religion*, which was on purpose introduced and confirmed, and established by so many and such mighty miracles, to preserve and keep alive in the world the primitive tradition and belief of *the one true God*; and likewise to be (as it were) some shadow and rude draught of that more perfect dispensation of *the Christian Religion*, which, by *one sacrifice once offered*, and by *one Mediator between God and men*, was to put an end to the infinite superstitions of the heathen worship, and all the bloody and barbarous rites of it, and likewise to the idolatry they were guilty of, in the worship of their inferior deities, whom they look'd upon as a middle sort of powers between the Gods and men, and therefore address'd themselves to them, as Mediators between the superior and heavenly Gods, and men here on earth. This was plainly one of the great designs of the christian Religion, and therefore it concerns christians to understand it, and to be very careful that they do not suffer themselves to be deluded by any specious pretences whatsoever, to bring these things back again into the christian Religion, for the ruin and extirpation whereof, it was purposely designed and intended.

And this seems plainly to be the meaning of that caution, wherewith St. *John* concludes his catholick or general Epistle, namely, that christians should be very careful that they were not carried back again into the heathen idolatry, by the confident pretences of the *gnostick* hereticks to higher degrees of knowledge and illumination than other christians had; that is, by their pretending to be *the infallible church, and the only true and genuine Christians*. For it is against this *Seet*, that this Epistle is plainly designed, which St. *John* thus concludes, chap. 5. from verse the 18th to the end; *We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not*; meaning that he doth not commit *the sin unto death*, which he had spoken of just before, (*viz.* Apostasy from Christianity to the heathen idolatry, or that which was very like it) *whosoever is born of God doth not commit this sin, but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not*; that is he preserveth himself from the contagion of idolatry, into which the devil was so busy to seduce mankind. *And we know that we are of God*, that is, do belong to the true God, and are worshippers of him: *And the whole world lieth in wickedness*, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *is in the power, or under the dominion of that wicked one*; that is, the greatest part of mankind was sunk into idolatry, and the worship of the devil. *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true*. *We know*, that is, we christians are better taught by the christian Religion, to acknowledge and worship the only true God: *And we are in him that is true, in or by his Son Jesus Christ*; that is, we worship the only true God, by his Son Jesus Christ. And then he concludes, *Little children, keep your selves from idols*; intimating hereby, that the worshipping of any other, besides this only true God, and by any other Mediator than Jesus Christ, is idolatry.

There were indeed, two very ancient and common notions, both amongst *Jews* and *Gentiles*, of the original whereof it is hard to give any certain account; only this is certain, that they did prevail very early, and did very generally possess mankind: And they were these: *First*, that God was not to be appealed to towards sinners, meerly upon their repentance, without the death and suffering of some other in their stead; and that God would accept of this vicarious punishment and suffering, instead of the death of the sinner himself. And this seems to have given the original to the sacrifices of living creatures, to appease the wrath of God towards sinners; which, in process of time, as the worship of false Gods prevailed in the world, did proceed to that degree of superstition and barbarous inhumanity, that by the instigation of the devil, men offered up the blood of their children, and sacrificed their sons and daughters to their idols and false Gods. *Secondly*, another common notion, which had likewise possess'd mankind was, that God was not to be immediately approached by sinful men; but that their prayers were to be offered up to the deity by certain mediators and inter-

intercessors, that were to procure for them the favour of the Gods, and the gracious answer and acceptance of their prayers. And this was the original of that other sort of heathen idolatry, which consisted in the worship of the Dæmons and heroes, that is of Angels and souls departed, *viz.* of such eminent persons as had been great benefactors to mankind, and, for their worthy deeds upon earth, were canonized, and translated into the number of the inferior Gods: By these, as the chief courtiers and favourites of Heaven, they address'd their prayers and supplications to the superior Gods.

Now with these notions, which had generally possess'd mankind (how imperfect soever) God was pleas'd to comply so far, as in the frame of the *Jewish* Religion (which was designed for a type of the more perfect institution of the christian Religion, and a preparation for it:) I say, God was pleas'd to comply so far with these notions, as to appoint sacrifices to be slain and offered up for the sinner; and likewise *an high priest, that once a year should enter into the holy of holies, with the blood of sacrifices* that were offered up for the people, to make expiation for them; and, in virtue of that blood, *should intercede for the people*, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* does declare at large. And when God sent his son in the fulness of time, he was pleas'd likewise, in the dispensation of the Gospel, (that perfect institution which was never to be alter'd) to have so much regard to these common notions, and apprehensions of mankind, as to provide for the supply of those two great wants, which they seem'd always to have labour'd under, and concerning which they were at so great a loss, *viz.* an effectual expiatory sacrifice for sins upon earth, and a powerful mediator and intercessor with God in heaven: And both these by the same person, *Jesus Christ, who appeared in the end of the world, to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; and in the merit and virtue of that sacrifice, *appearing in Heaven in the presence of God for us*, is become a perpetual advocate, and a most powerful intercessor with God in Heaven for us. So that instead of the endless sacrifices of the *Jewish* Religion, which were ineffectual to the real expiation of sin, and only types and shadows of the true expiatory sacrifice, and instead of the bloody and inhumane sacrifices of the heathen idolatry; the Son of God hath by one sacrifice for sin once offered, perfected for ever them that are sanctified, and obtained eternal redemption for us. And instead of the mediation of Angels, and the souls of their departed heroes, which the heathen made use of to offer up their prayers to the Gods, we have one mediator between God and men, appointed by God himself, *Jesus the Son of God*, who in our nature is ascended into Heaven, *to appear in the presence of God for us*. And who so fit to be our patron and advocate, as he who was our sacrifice and propitiation?

Thus the method of our redemption, as it was by the wisdom of God admirably suited to the common apprehensions of mankind; concerning the necessity of a sacrifice to make expiation of sin, and of a mediator to intercede with God for sinners; so was it likewise excellently fitted, not only to put an end to the *Jewish* sacrifices, but likewise to abolish the barbarous sacrifices and rites of the Heathen idolatry, and to cashier that infinite number of mediators and intercessors, by whom they address'd their prayers to the Deity; and, instead of all this, to introduce a more reasonable and spiritual worship, more agreeable to the nature and perfections of God, and the reason of mankind; which was one of the main and principal designs of the christian Religion: And therefore to bring in any other mediators, to intercede in Heaven for us (whether Angels or Saints) and by them to offer up our prayers to God, is directly contrary to the design of the christian Religion.

Thirdly, It is likewise evident from the nature and reason of the thing it self, that there is but one mediator and intercessor in Heaven, who offers up our prayers to God, and that there can be no more. Because under the Gospel there being but one high priest, and but one sacrifice once offered for sin; and intercession for sinners being founded in the merit and virtue of the sacrifice, by which expiation for sin is made, there can be no other mediator of intercession, but he who hath made expiation of sin, by a sacrifice offered to God for that purpose;

purpose; and this *Jesus Christ* only hath done. He is both *our high-priest*, and *our sacrifice*; and therefore he only, in the merit and virtue of that sacrifice, which he offered upon earth, can *intercede* in Heaven for us, and offer up our prayers to God. Others may pray to God for us; as our brethren upon earth do, and perhaps the Angels and Saints in Heaven; but none of these can offer up our prayers to God, and procure the acceptance of them; for that can only be done in virtue of a sacrifice first offered, and by him that offered it; this being the peculiar office and qualification of a *mediator* or *intercessor*, properly so called.

It is the plain design of the author of the epistle to the *Hebrews*, to prove that Christ is our *only mediator* in Heaven, in virtue of that sacrifice for sin, which he offered upon earth; and that he alone *appears in the presence of God for us*, to present our requests to him, and obtain a gracious answer to them; and he shews at large how this was particularly typify'd by the *Jewish high-priest*, who, upon the great day of expiation, after the sacrifice was slain without, *entered alone into the holy of holies, with the blood of the sacrifices*, in virtue whereof he *made intercession for the people*. Answerably to this, *Jesus the high-priest of our profession*, offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of men, and, in virtue of that sacrifice, *is entered into the high place not made with hands*, that is, *into Heaven it self, there to appear in the presence of God for us, where he lives for ever to make intercession for us*, in virtue of that *eternal redemption* which he hath obtained for us, by the price of his blood, as the Apostle declares in several chapters of that epistle. So that this intercession being founded in the merit of a sacrifice, which he alone offered, he is of necessity *the only mediator between God and men*.

And for this reason it is, that the mediation and intercession of *Christ* is so frequently in scripture mentioned together with the expiation which he made for the sins of men, or (which is the same) with the price which he paid for the redemption of mankind; because the one is founded in the other, and depends upon it. So we find, *1 John 2. 1, 2. If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world*. And here likewise in the text, *There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all; therefore the only mediator between God and men*, because he only gave himself a ransom for all men. The efficacy and prevalency of his mediation, being founded in the merit and virtue of the ransom of his blood.

And the force of these texts, and the reasoning from them, is not to be avoided and turned off, by distinguishing between a *mediator of redemption* and *of intercession*, and by saying, that it is true, that Christ is *the only mediator of redemption*, but there may be many *mediators of intercession*: For if the force of his being advocate or intercessor be founded in the virtue of his ransom and propitiation (as I have plainly shewn, to the conviction of any that are not strongly prejudiced, and that will read and consider what the scripture says in this matter without prepossession,) then it is plain, that none can be a proper *mediator of intercession*, but he that paid the price of our redemption: So that *the mediator of our redemption*, and *our mediator of intercession*, must of necessity be one and the same person; and none can appear in the quality of *our advocate with the Father*, but he only who is *the propitiation for the sins of the whole world*.

I should now have proceeded to

- IV. The *Fourth* thing I propos'd in the handling of this argument, namely, to shew how contrary to this doctrine of the christian Religion, concerning *one only mediator and intercessor in Heaven for us*, the doctrine and practice of the Church of *Rome* is in this matter; namely, in their invocation of Angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the Saints, and flying to their help, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners: As likewise how contrary all this is to the doctrine and practice of the christian church, for several of the first ages of it. And then I should have answered their chief pretenses and excuses for these things, and shewed that this practice of theirs is not only needless (being

(being no where commanded by God) but useless also, and unprofitable; and not only so, but very dangerous and impious, being contrary to the christian Religion, and highly derogating from the virtue and merit of Christ's sacrifice, and from the honour of *the only Mediator between God and men*. But of this another time.

S E R M O N XVIII.

*The Second
Sermon on
this Text.*

Christ Jesus the only Mediator between God and Men.

I TIM. ii. 5, 6.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.

IN these words *four* propositions: *three* exprest, and the *fourth* implied.

- I. *That there is one God.*
- II. *That there is one Mediator between God and men; Christ Jesus.*
- III. *That he gave himself a ransom for all.*

IV. *That the mediation or intercession of Jesus Christ, is founded in his redemption of mankind: That because he gave himself a ransom for all men, therefore he, and he only, is qualified to intercede for all men, in virtue of that sacrifice which he offer'd for the salvation of all mankind.*

The *Second* of these I spake to the last time, and endeavour'd to shew,

1. That God hath appointed *but one Mediator*, or Advocate or Intercessor in Heaven for us; by whose mediation we are to offer up all our prayers and services to God. 1.

2. That this doctrine of *one Mediator* is most agreeable to one main end and design of the christian Religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world, which was to destroy idolatry. 2.

3. That from the nature and reason of the thing (*viz.* because intercession for sinners is founded in the merit of that sacrifice, by which expiation of sin is made) there can be no other *Mediator of intercession*, but he who hath made expiation for sin, by a sacrifice offered to God for that purpose; and this *Jesus Christ* only hath done. Thus far I have gone: I proceed now to 3.

The *Fourth* thing which I propos'd in the handling of this argument, namely, to shew how contrary to this doctrine of the christian Religion, concerning *one only Mediator and Intercessor* in Heaven for us, the doctrine and the practice of the church of *Rome* is in this matter; namely, in their invocation of Angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the Saints, and flying to their help, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners. 4.

And that I may proceed more distinctly in this argument, I shall handle it under these particular heads.

First, I shall endeavour to shew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter, is contrary to the doctrine of the christian Religion, concerning *one only Mediator and Intercessor* in Heaven for us.

Secondly, That it is contrary to the doctrine and practice of the christian church, for several of the first ages of it.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to answer their chief pretenses and excuses, for this doctrine and practice.

Fourthly, To shew that this doctrine and practice of theirs is not only needless, being no where commanded by God, but useless also, and unprofitable.

Fifthly, And not only so, but very dangerous and impious; because contrary to the christian Religion, and greatly derogating from the virtue and merit of Christ's sacrifice, and from the honour of *the only Mediator between God and men*.

First, I shall endeavour to shew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter, is contrary to the doctrine of the christian Religion concerning *one only Mediator and Intercessor* in Heaven for us; namely in their invocation of Angels, and the blessed Virgin, and the Saints, and flying to their help, and making use of their mediation and intercession with God for sinners.

That Jesus Christ is *our only Mediator and Intercessor* with God in Heaven, by whom we have access to God in any action of religious worship, and that all our prayers and services are to be offered up to God only by him, and in his name and mediation, and no other, I have plainly shewed from Scripture, and proved it by an invincible argument, taken likewise from Scripture; namely, because the efficacy and prevalency of his mediation and intercession is founded in the virtue and merit of his sacrifice; and that he is therefore *the only mediator between God and men, because he only gave himself a ransom for all*; he is therefore *our only Advocate with the Father*, because *he only is the propitiation for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world*.

I have shewed likewise, that the Scripture excludes Angels from being our Mediators with God, from the main scope and design of the Epistle to the *Colossians*; and much more are the Saints departed excluded from this office, being inferior to the Angels, not only in the dignity and excellency of their beings, but very probably in the degree of their knowledge.

In short, prayer is a proper act of religious worship, and therefore peculiar to God alone; and we are commanded *to worship the Lord our God, and to serve him only*: And no where in Scripture are we directed to address our prayers and supplications and thanksgivings to any but God *alone*, and only in the name and mediation of *Jesus Christ*. Our blessed Saviour himself hath taught us, to put up all our prayers to God our heavenly Father, Luke 11. 2. *when you pray, say, Our Father which art in Heaven*. Which plainly shews, to whom all our prayers are to be address'd; and unless we can call an Angel, or the blessed Virgin, or a Saint, *Our Father*, we can pray to none of them. And elsewhere he as plainly directs us, by whom we are to apply our selves to God, and in whose name and mediation we are to put up all our requests to him, John 14. 6. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*: And then it follows, ver. 13, 14. *And whatsoever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorify'd in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it*. Nothing is clearer in the whole Bible, than one *Mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus*, and that he is *our only Advocate and Intercessor* with God in Heaven for us.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, that the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* in this matter, is contrary to that of the christian church, for several of the first ages of it.

As for the ages of the Apostles, it hath been already proved out of their writings. That it was not practised in the three first ages, we have the acknowledgment of Cardinal *Perron*, and others of their learned writers; and they give a very remarkable reason for it; namely, because the worship and invocation of Saints and Angels, and addressing our prayers to God by them, might have seem'd to have given countenance to the heathen idolatry. From whence I cannot forbear, by the way, to make these two observations. 1. That the invocation of Saints and Angels, and the blessed Virgin, and addressing our selves to God by their mediation, was not in those primitive ages esteemed a duty of the christian Religion; because, if it had, it could not have been omitted for fear of the scandal consequent upon it: And if it was not a duty then, by what

what authority or law, can it be made so since? 2. That this practice is very liable to the Suspicion of idolatry; and surely every Christian cannot but think it fit, that the church of Christ should, like a chaste spouse, not only be free from the crime, but from all suspicion of idolatry.

And for the next ages after the Apostles, nothing is plainer, than that both their doctrine and practice were contrary to the doctrine and practice of the present church of *Rome* in this matter. The most ancient fathers of the christian church do constantly define prayer, to be *an address to God*; and therefore it cannot be made to any but God only: And after the rise of *Arianism*, they argued for the divinity of Christ, against the *Arians*, from our praying to him; which argument were of no force, if prayers might be made to any but God; and this was in the beginning of the fourth age.

And we no where find any mention of those distinctions, of *Gods by nature*, and *Gods by participation* (as *Bellarmino* calls the Angels and Saints) or of a *supreme* and *inferior religious worship*; or of a *Mediator of redemption*, and a *Mediator of intercession*; which are so commonly made use of by the church of *Rome* in this controversy.

And, which is as considerable as any of the rest, the ancient fathers were generally of opinion, that the Saints were not admitted to the beatific vision, till after the day of judgment; and this is acknowledged by the most learned of the church of *Rome*. But this very opinion takes away the foundation of praying to Saints: because the church of *Rome* grounds it upon their reigning with Christ in Heaven, and upon the light and knowledge which is communicated to them in the beatific vision; and if so, then they who believed the Saints not yet to be admitted to this vision, could have no reason or ground to pray to them.

And *lastly*, The ancient church prayed for Saints departed, and for the blessed Virgin her self; and therefore could not pray to them, as intercessors for them in Heaven, for whom they themselves interceded upon earth. And therefore the church of *Rome*, in compliance with the change which they have made in their doctrine, have changed the *Missal* in that point, and instead of praying for St. *Leo* (one of their Popes) as they were wont to do in their ancient *Missal*, in this form, *Grant, O Lord, that this oblation may be profitable to the soul of thy servant Leo*; the *Collect* is now changed in the present *Roman Missal* into this form, *Grant, O Lord, that by the intercession of blessed Leo, this offering may be profitable to us*. And (as the gloss upon the *canon law* observes) this change was made in their *Missal* upon very good reason; *because anciently they prayed for Leo, but now they pray to him*; which is an ingenuous acknowledgment, that both the doctrine and practice of their church are plainly changed, from what they anciently were in this matter.

What the doctrines and practices of their church of *Rome* are in this matter, all the world sees, and they themselves are so ashamed of them, that of late all their endeavours have been, to represent them otherwise than in truth they are, and to obtrude upon us a *new Popery*, which they think themselves better able to defend than *the old*; which yet they have not shewn, that they are so well able to do; and therefore now, instead of defending the true doctrines and practices of their own church, they would fain mince and disguise them, and change them into something that comes nearer to the *Protestant* doctrine in those points: As if they had no way to defend their own doctrines, but by seeming to desert them, and by bringing them as near to ours as possibly they can.

But take them, as they have mollified them and par'd them, to render them more plausible and tenable; that which still remains of them, I mean *the solemn invocation of Saints and Angels, as mediators and intercessors with God in Heaven for us*, is plainly contrary both to the doctrine and practice of the primitive ages of christianity.

As for the age of the Apostles, I have already shewn it; and the matter is as clear for several of the next following ages, as I shall briefly shew, from a few very plain testimonies.

In the next age to the Apostles, we have an Epistle of one of the seven Churches, (I mean the Church of *Smyrna*) in which in vindication of themselves from that calumny which was raised against them by the *Jews*, among the heathen, *That if they permitted the Christians to have the body of the martyred Polycarp, they would leave Christ, to worship Polycarp*; I say, in vindication of themselves from this calumny, they declare themselves thus, *Not knowing (say they) that we can neither leave Christ, who suffered for the salvation of the world of those that are saved, nor worship any other; or (as it is in the old Latin translation) nor offer up the supplication of Prayer to any other person; for as for Jesus Christ, we adore him, as being the Son of God; but as for the Martyrs, we love them, as the disciples and imitators of the Lord.* So that they plainly exclude the Saints from any sort of religious worship, of which Prayer or Invocation was always esteemed a very considerable part.

Irenæus likewise tells us, (l. 2.) *That the Church doth nothing (speaking of the miracles which were wrought) by the invocation of Angels, nor by enchantment, nor by any other wicked arts; but by prayers to the Lord who made all things, and by calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Here all invocation of Angels, and by the same or greater reason, of the Saints, is excluded. And *Clemens Alexandrinus* delivers it as the doctrine of the Church; that *since there is but one good God, therefore both we and the Angels pray to him, both for the giving, and the continuance of good things.*

In the next age, *Origen* is so full and express in this matter, that it is not possible for any protestant to speak more positively and clearly, l. 8. cont. *Celsus*, where he does on set purpose declare and vindicate the christian doctrine and practice in this matter; *We worship (says he) the one only God, and his one only Son, and word, and image, with our utmost supplications and honours, bringing our prayers to the God of all things, through his only begotten Son; and afterwards, Away (says he) with Celsus his counsel, that says, we must pray to Demons (or Angels) for we must pray only to God who is above all; we must pray to the only begotten and first born of every creature, and we must beseech him to offer up our prayers which we make to him, to his God and our God: And again, (speaking of Angels) As for the favour of others (if that be to be regarded) we know, that thousands of thousands stand before him, and ten thousand times ten thousand minister unto him; these are our brethren and friends, who when they see us imitating their piety towards God, work together to the salvation of those who call upon God, and pray as they ought to do, that is, to God only; and (l. 5.) where Celsus urges him with this, That the scriptures call Angels Gods, he tells him, that the scriptures do not call the Angels Gods, with any design to require us to worship and adore them instead of God, who are ministring spirits, and bring messages and blessings down to us from God; for (says he) all supplications, and prayer, and intercession, and giving of thanks, must be sent up to God, who is above all, by the high-priest, who is above all Angels, and is the living word and God. And though Angels be only here mentioned, yet by the same reason, all other Creatures are excluded, from being the objects of our religious worship and invocation, or, mediators of intercession with God for us; because all supplication and prayer, and intercession, and thanksgiving, must be sent up to God by our high-priest, who is the living word and God. Let us then also (as he goes on) make supplication to the word himself: and intercession, and giving of thanks, and prayer: But to invoke Angels is not reasonable; since we do not comprehend the knowledge of them, which is above us; and if we could comprehend the knowledge of them, which is wonderful and secret, this very knowledge, which declares to us their nature and office, would not allow us to presume to pray to any other, but to the God who is Lord over all, and abundantly sufficient for all, by our Saviour the Son of God; where he gives two plain reasons, why we ought to pray only to God, and to offer up our prayers only by the mediation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and our Saviour: First, Because he only is Lord over all, and therefore the worship of prayer is to be given to him only. And then, Secondly, Because we have no need*

need of any other patron and benefactor, or of any other mediator and advocate, *he is abundantly sufficient for all, by our Saviour the Son of God.*

In the same age *Novatian*, in his book concerning the Trinity, makes use of this argument, to prove the divinity of Christ; because he hears our prayers, when we call upon him. *If Christ (says he) be only a man, how can he be present every where to those that call upon him? since this is not the nature of man, but of God, to be able to be present every where? If Christ be only a man, why do we in our prayers call upon him as mediator; since prayer to a man is deemed ineffectual to help or save us? If Christ be only a man, why do we put our hope in him; since hope in man is accursed in scripture?*

In the IVth Century, the *Apostolical Constitutions*, under the name of *Clemens Romanus* (but undoubtedly written in that age) give us a pregnant negative testimony in this matter; for though a great many of the publick prayers are there set down at large, yet they are all directed to *God alone*, and not the least intimation there of any prayer made to the *Angels*, or *Saints*, or even to the *Virgin Mary*; not of their intercession or aid; which now makes so great a part of the publick devotions of the Church of *Rome*.

Athanasius, in his fourth oration against the *Arians*, proves the unity of the Father and the Son, from *1 Thes. 3. 11*. *Now God himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.* From whence he argues thus, *One would not pray to receive any thing from the Father and the Angels, or from any other creature; nor would one say, God and the Angels give thee this; but one would pray to receive any thing from the Father and the Son, because of their unity and uniform gift; for all things that are given by the Father, are given by the Son, and there is nothing which the Father doth not work by the Son; and then concludes, that it doth not belong to any, but to God alone, to bless and grant deliverances.* This I take to be a very remarkable testimony against the church of *Rome*, who in their publick offices join the blessed *Virgin* with *God*, and our Saviour, in the same breath, and sometimes put her before her Son; *Let Mary and her Son bless us*, as it is in the office of the blessed *Virgin*; in direct contradiction to what I just now cited out of *Athanasius*: and nothing so common in their mouths, as *Jesu Maria; Jesus and Mary*; nothing more frequent in their most eminent writers, than to join them together in their doxologies and thanksgivings, *Glory be to God, and the blessed Virgin, and to Jesus Christ*, says *Gregory de Valencia*. And *Bellarmin* himself concludes his disputations concerning the worship of *Saints*; in these words, *Praise be to God, and to the blessed Virgin Mother Mary; likewise to Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, be praise and glory.* And in the very *Roman Missal* it self, they make confession of their sins to *God Almighty, and the blessed Virgin Mary, to St. Michael the Archangel, and to all the Saints.* And in their absolution, they join together *the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the merits of the blessed Virgin, and of all the Saints, for the remission of sins.* And is not this the very thing which *Athanasius* doth severely condemn?

I have mentioned before the Council of *Laodicea*, which about the middle of this century condemns the worship of *Angels*, and praying to them, as downright idolatry: And towards the end of this fourth age, and in the beginning of the fifth, when it is pretended that praying to *Saints* did begin (though it was rather by way of apostrophe and rhetorical address, than of formal invocation) there are expresse testimonies against it of the most eminent fathers of that time. I will instance but in three, *Epiphanius*, *St. Chrysostom*, and *St. Augustine*.

Epiphanius, in his confutation of the heresie of the *Collyridians* (which he calls the heresie of the women, because they first began the worship of the *Virgin Mary*) declares most expressely against the worship of any creature whatsoever; *For neither (says he) is Elias to be worshipped, though he is reckoned among the living (meaning that he was taken up into Heaven, body and soul) nor John, nor any other of the Saints:* And as for the *Virgin Mary*, he particularly adds, *that if God will not have us to worship the Angels, how much more would he not have us to worship*

worship her that was born of Anna? And concludes, *let Mary be had in honour; but let the Lord be worshipped.*

St. Chrysostom, in a long discourse, persuades men to address their prayers immediately to God, and not as we address our selves to great men by their officers and favourites; and tells us, *that there is no need of such intercessors with God, who is not so ready to grant our petitions, when we entreat him by others, as when we pray to him our selves.*

Lastly, St. Augustine, because the Scripture pronounces him accursed, that putteth his trust in man; from thence he argues, that therefore we ought not to ask of any other, but of our Lord God, either the grace to do well, or the reward of it. The contrary to which I am sure is done in several of the publick prayers used in the church of Rome. And, l. 22. de civ. Dei, he expressly tells us, that *the names of the martyrs were recited in their prayers at the Altar; but they were not invocated by the priest, who did celebrate divine service.* And in the third Council of Carthage (which was in St. Augustin's time) it is enjoined (can. 33) *that all prayers that were made at the altar, should be directed to the Father.* Which how it is observed in the church of Rome, we all know.

To conclude this matter, it cannot be made appear, that there were any prayers to Saints in the publick offices of the church, till towards the end of the eighth century. For in the year 754 the invocation of Saints was condemned by a Council of 338 Bishops at Constantinople, as is acknowledged by the second Council of Nice, which first established this superstition, in the year 787; and this very Council was condemned seven years after, in a Council at Frankfort, and declared void, and to be no otherwise esteemed of, than the Council of Ariminum.

Thus you see, when this doctrine and practice, so contrary to the doctrine and practice of a great many of the first ages of the christian church, was first established, namely, at the same time with *the worship of Images*, and when the first foundation of *transubstantiation* was laid; which as they began at the same time, so they are very fit to go together.

I should now have proceeded to the next thing which I propos'd, namely, to answer the chief pretenses which are made for this doctrine and practice. But of that in the following discourse.

The third
Sermon on
this text.

S E R M O N XIX.

Christ Jesus the only Mediator between God and Men.

I TIM. ii. 5, 6.

For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all.

IN the two former discourses upon this text, I have treated on the second proposition I laid down from the words; viz. *that there is but one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* In treating of this proposition, I shewed,

First, That it is agreeable to Scripture.

Secondly, That it is agreeable to one great end and design of the christian Religion, and of our Saviour's coming into the world, which was to destroy idolatry out of it.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, That from the nature and reason of the thing, there can be *but one mediator or intercessor* in Heaven with God for sinners; and that he can be no other than *Jesus Christ*.

Fourthly, I shewed how contrary to this doctrine, the doctrine and practice of the church of *Rome* is, in their invocation of Angels and the blessed Virgin, and the Saints, and making use of their *Mediation and Intercession* with God for sinners.

This I endeavoured to do, by shewing *1st*, How contrary this is to the doctrine of the Scriptures. *2dly*, How contrary to the doctrine and practice of the church, for several of the first ages of it. And thus far I have gone.

I proceed now, in the *3d* place, to answer the chief pretences and excuses which are made by those of the church of *Rome*, for this doctrine and practice.

As, *1.* That they only say, that it is lawful to pray to Angels and Saints; but do not enjoin and require it. To this I answer two things.

(*1.*) In saying that it is lawful to pray to Saints and Angels (if they went no farther) they say that which they can never make good; because prayer is an act of religious worship, and peculiar and proper to God only, and therefore cannot be given to any creature, Angel, or Saint. This I have proved from Scripture, where our Saviour commands us, *when we pray, to say, Our Father which art in Heaven*; that is to direct and address our prayers to God only. And *St. Paul* likewise forbids *the worshipping Angels*, by invoking of them, and making use of them as *mediators* between God and us, in his epistle to the *Colossians*; which *Theodoret* expressly interprets concerning the invocation of Angels, and applying our selves to them, as *mediators and intercessors* with God in Heaven for us. And the Council of *Laodicea* declares this practice to be idolatry. Besides that the ancient fathers of the christian church, for above three hundred years, never spake of praying to any, but God only; and do expressly condemn the invocation of Angels, much more of the Saints, who are inferior to them; and therefore they always define *prayer* to be *an address to God, a conversing and discoursing with God*; which would be a false definition of prayer, if it were lawful to pray to any but to God only. All which considered, one may justly wonder at the confidence of some men, who would have it taken for granted, without any proof, that the invocation of Saints and Angels is lawful.

(*2.*) If it were true, that it is lawful to pray to Angels and Saints; it is not true, that the church of *Rome* does only declare it to be lawful, but does not require and enjoin it, as some of their late writers pretend.

With what face can this be said, when there are so many prayers to Angels and Saints, and especially to the blessed Virgin, in *the publick offices* of their church, in which all are supposed to joyn, as much as in the prayers which are put up to God by the priest? 'Tis true, indeed, the people understand neither; but they are present at both, and joyn in both alike; that is, as much as men can be said to joyn in that which they do not understand; as that church supposeth People may do, and receive great edification also, by joyning with the priest, in a Service which they do not understand. But how they can be edified by what they do not understand, I must confess my self as little able to understand, as they do their prayers. But whether they understand them or not, 'tis certain that if the people have any part in the publick prayers of the church, they are bound to pray to Angels and Saints.

And if the creed of Pope *Pius IV*, framed by virtue of an order of the Council of *Trent*, be of any authority with them; one of the articles of it is, that *I do firmly hold, that the Saints which reign together with Christ, are to be worshipped and invocated, and that they do offer up prayers to God for us*. And this creed all the governors of cathedrals and superior churches, and all who hold any dignity, or benefice, with cure of souls from them, are bound solemnly to make profession of, and swear to, and carefully to cause it to be held, and taught, and preached by all that are under their charge; so that they are to teach the people, *that the Saints which reign together with Christ, are to be worshipped and prayed to*. And therefore unless people are not bound to do that, which they are

to be taught it is their duty to do, they are, by virtue of this article, required *to worship and pray to Saints*. And if the *publick office* of their church be *the publick worship*, and Pope Pius's creed *the publick faith* of the *Romish church*, no man can be either of the faith or in the communion of that church, who does not only hold it lawful, but his duty, *to worship the Saints in Heaven, and to pray to them*, and accordingly does joyn in the worship of them, and prayers to them, as much as in any other part of divine service.

2. Another pretense for this doctrine and practice is, that the Saints in Heaven do pray for us; and what is this but to be *mediators* and *intercessors* with God for us? And if so, why may we not pray to them, to intercede with God for us? To this I answer *four* things.

(1.) We do not deny that the Saints in Heaven pray for us that are here upon earth, because they may do so, for any thing we know; but that they do so, is more than can be proved, either by clear testimony of Scripture, or by any convincing argument from reason, and therefore no doctrine or practice can be safely grounded upon it.

(2.) Tho' it were certain, that the Saints in Heaven do pray for us; yet they are not *mediators* and *intercessors*, properly so called: For all *intercession* strictly and properly so called, is in virtue of a *sacrifice* offered by him that intercedes; and therefore he only by whom expiation of sin is made upon earth, can be properly *an intercessor* with God in Heaven; but this, no Angel or Saint hath done, nor can do.

And (as I have shewed in some of the former discourses) it is the plain scope of a great part of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* to prove this very thing, that under the Gospel *we have an High-Priest that lives for ever, and appears in the presence of God for us*, in the virtue of *that blood which he shed, and that sacrifice which he offered upon the cross for the expiation of sin*: And that by *this High-priest only we have access, with freedom and confidence, to the throne of Grace*, and by him do offer up all our prayers and thanksgivings, and all other acts of religious worship to God: And this the Apostle shews was typify'd, in an imperfect manner, by the *Jewish High-priest* under the law, who was but *one*, and none but *he only could enter into the holy of holies, with the blood of the sacrifices, that were slain and burnt without, by which blood he made an attonement, and interceded for the people*; and though every priest might pray for the people, and the people for one another, which is a kind of *intercession*; yet that peculiar kind of *intercession*, which was performed by the *High-priest in the holy of holies*, in virtue of the *sacrifice* that was slain without, could not be made, but by *the High-priest only*. By all which was typify'd *our High-priest* under the Gospel, *who only hath made expiation of sin, by the sacrifice of himself, and is enter'd into Heaven, to appear in the presence of God for us, where he lives for ever, to make intercession for us*, in virtue of *that blood which was shed for the expiation of sin*, and which can only be presented to God by him that shed it. And this is properly *intercession*, like that of *the High-priest* under the law for the people of *Israel*; and this kind of *intercession* can be made by none in Heaven for us, but only by *the High-priest of our profession, Jesus the Son of God*, and by none else can we offer up our prayers and services to God; and consequently we cannot address our selves to any other, Angels or Saints, as *mediators* with God for us.

(3.) Supposing it certain, that the Saints do pray for us; yet we may not address solemn prayer to them to pray for us, because prayer and solemn invocation is a part of that religious worship which is peculiar to God.

(4.) Supposing it only certain that the Saints in Heaven do pray for us, but likewise that they might be proper *mediators* and *intercessors* with God for us; yet we ought not to pray to them, because they cannot hear us, as I shall have occasion to shew fully by and by.

Another of their pretenses or excuses for this practice is, that praying to Saints to pray for us, is no more than what we do to good men upon earth, when we desire them to pray for us. So the late *expounder of the catholic faith*, namely the Bishop of *Meaux*, tells us, *that they pray to the Saints in Hea-*

ven, in the same order of brotherly society with which we entreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us.

But that this is not a true representation either of their doctrine or practice in this matter, will appear by these following considerations.

(1.) That they pray to the Angels and Saints in Heaven with the same solemn circumstances of religious worship that they pray to God himself, in the same place, and in the same humble posture, and in the same religious offices and services, in which they pray to God; which surely is never done by any to their *brethren upon earth*.

(2.) That in their prayers and thanksgivings, they join the Angels and the blessed Virgin and the Saints together with God and Christ, as if (to use their own phrase) it were *in the same order of brotherly society*, and as if they were all equally the objects of our invocation and praise; of which, in my last discourse, I gave several plain instances; but this also is never done to *our brethren upon earth*.

(3.) That in the Creed of Pope Pius IV, it is expressly said, *That the Saints which reign together with Christ, are to be worshipped and invocated*; but this surely they will not allow to be done to *our brethren upon earth*. And the Council of Trent does expressly ground the worship and invocation of Saints, upon *their reigning with Christ in Heaven*; and therefore this worship and invocation of Saints must necessarily be something more, than according to the same order of brotherly society, with which we entreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us: Otherwise the reason given by the Council of *their reigning with Christ in Heaven*, would be frivolous, if the same thing may be done to *our brethren upon earth*.

(4.) In the publick offices of their Church, they do not only pray to the Saints to pray for them, but they direct their prayers and thanksgivings immediately to them, for all those blessings and benefits which they ask of God, and thank him for. Of which innumerable examples might be given out of their publick offices; particularly in the office of the blessed Virgin, they pray to the Angels thus; *Deliver us we beseech you, by your Command, from all our Sins*.

And the words of the decree of the Council of Trent, [*ad eorum orationes, opem, auxiliumque confugere*, to flee to their prayers, aid, and help,] unless we will make them a meer tautology, must of necessity signify something more than begging of them to pray for us. And, indeed, those words of their *aid* and *help*, seem to be added on purpose to give countenance to those direct Prayers which are made to the Saints, for all spiritual and temporal blessings, and which still remain without any change in their publick Offices; and unless we will understand them contrary to the plain and obvious sense of those prayers, they must signify something more than praying to the Saints to pray for us.

'Tis true, indeed, that the Catechism which was framed by order of the Council of Trent, for the explaining of their doctrines, makes the difference between their Prayers to God, and to the Saints, to lie in this, that *we say to God, Have mercy on us, or hear our prayers*; but to the Saints, *Pray for us*. But I have shewn before, that this is not the constant form of praying to Saints, but that frequently they make direct addresses to them for their help and aid. And this the compilers of the Catechism were sensible of, and therefore they add, *although it be lawful in another manner to ask of the Saints themselves, that they would have mercy on us; because they are very merciful*. And is not God so too? And then where is the difference between their prayers to God, and to the Saints? If it neither lie in the *matter* of them, nor in the *form*, nor in the *reason* of them; if we pray to them for the same thing, and in the same form, *Have mercy on us*, and our prayers to them to be grounded upon the same reason that our Prayers to God are, namely, *because they are merciful*; where then is the difference between them?

4. I will mention but one pretense more, which is, that by praying to the Saints in Heaven, they do not make them Gods; and therefore there can be no suspicion or danger of idolatry in the case.

To this I shall answer *two things*.

(1.) That praying to them in all places, and at all times, and for all sorts of blessings, does suppose them to have the incommunicable perfections of the divine nature imparted to them, or inherent in them, namely his omnipotence, and omniscience, and immense presence; and to whatever being we ascribe these perfections, in so doing we make it God; for prayer to God is no otherwise an acknowledgment of his omnipotence, omniscience, and immense presence, than as we do in all places, and at all times, pray to him for all things; and so they do to the Saints, and that not only with vocal but with mental prayer, which *the Council of Trent* allows, and in so doing, necessarily supposeth them to know our hearts, directly contrary to the reason which *Solomon* gives, why we should put up all our prayers and supplications to God (*1 Kings* 8. 39.) *for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men.*

(2.) *Bellarmino* is so sensible of the dirt of this argument, that he is forced to acknowledge *the Saints which reign with Christ in Heaven to be Gods by participation*, (that is, a sort of inferior Gods, as the heathen supposed their mediators to be) *and that therefore we may fly to their aid and help, as well as to their intercession and prayers.* And is this also to pray to the Saints in Heaven, *in the same order of brotherly society, with which we entreat our brethren upon earth to pray for us?* This methinks is great familiarity, to treat *Gods by participation*, just in the same manner as we do *our brethren upon earth*. Certainly either *Bellarmino* hath raised the Saints in heaven too high, when he makes them *Gods by participation*; or the Bishop of *Meaux* hath sunk them too low, when he thinks they are to be treated and addrest to, *in the same rank of brotherly society, with mortal men here upon earth.*

One cannot but think the decree of *the Council of Trent* to be very obscure and ambiguous, when it can admit of two so very different explications. If *the infallible judge of controversies* can speak no plainer; I think we had even best stick to *the Bible*, and hear what *God* says in his word, and endeavour to understand it as well as we can.

I proceed now to the *Fourth* thing which I proposed, namely, to shew that this practice of theirs, of addressing our selves to Angels and Saints, and making use of their mediation, to offer up our prayers and thanksgivings to God, is not only needless, being no where commanded by God; but *useless* also, and unprofitable.

They are so far from pretending, that it is *commanded by God*, that several of their later Writers would fain make us believe that it is not *enjoyed* by their *Councils*; but only declared to be lawful, or at most, but recommended as profitable. Nor is there any example of praying to Saints, either in the old or new Testament: Not in the old, (as they of the Church of *Rome* confess) *because the Saints were not then admitted into Heaven*; nor in the new, *for fear of scandalizing the Jews, and of making the Gentiles think they proposed new Gods, and new Mediators to them, instead of the old*; which are the reasons given by their own writers.

And it is *needless* likewise; because the mediation of Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for us, and more than the intercession of millions of Saints and Angels. *He alone is able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him*, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* speaks. Hath not he made a clear and full promise to us, that *whatever we ask in his name, shall be granted us?* And have we any reason to doubt, either of his inclination and good-will, or of his power and interest to do us good? What need then is there to sue for the favour, or to take in the assistance of any other, even of those who are thought to be most powerful, and the chief ministers and favourites in that heavenly court? After such an assurance that my business will be effectually done there, by that great *Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*; why should I apply myself to St. *Peter*, though he be said to keep the keys of Heaven; or to *Michael* the Archangel, though he be *the chief of the ministring spirits*: or to the *blessed Virgin* her self, notwithstanding those glorious titles of the *Queen of Heaven*,

Heaven, and the *Mother of Mercy*, which they of the Church of *Rome* are pleased to bestow upon her, and without her consent, and as may reasonably be presumed, against her will.

I will put a case, which may help to render this matter a little more plain and sensible to us, so as every man may be able to judge of it. Suppose a King should constitute his son, *the great master of requests*; with this express declaration and assurance, that all petitions that were addrest to him by his Son, should be graciously received and answered; in this case, though every man might use his own discretion, at his own peril, and take what course he pleased, yet I should most certainly prefer all my petitions to the King, in the way which he had so plainly directed, and should trouble never a Courtier of them all with my Business; for fear the King should think, that I did either distrust his royal word, or despise his son, by my soliciting the aid and help of every little Courtier, after I had put my petition into the hands of this *great master of requests*.

And now I will not distrust any of your understandings so far as to make the application. I will only add, that it is an eternal rule of truth, and which never fails in any case, *Frustra fit per plura, quod fieri potest per pauciora, it is in vain to attempt that by more ways and means, which may as well and as effectually be done by one*; because this would be perfect loss of time and pains: And therefore they who would send us so far about, as to trouble all the Saints and Angels in Heaven with our petitions, when they cannot deny but that *our great Mediator* is alone sufficient; do seem to me to send us upon a very sleeveless errand; so that if with all their skill in fencing, they could defend this practice from being *unlawful*, yet this one thing is a sufficient objection in reason against it, that it is perfectly *needless*.

Or if we could imagine any *need* of this; all addressees to them must be *vain and unprofitable*, if they do not know our wants, and hear our prayers that are put up to them; which St. *Austin* thought they do not know and hear, *Fatendum est* (saith he, *L. De Curâ pro mortuis*) *nescire quidem mortuos, quid hic agatur*; *it must be acknowledged that the dead are ignorant of what is done here*. This was his opinion; but we are certain that they cannot know our wants, nor hear our prayers at all times and in all places; unless they can either be present every where, which no finite being can be; or else God be pleased in some supernatural way to communicate to them the knowledge of our wants, and of the prayers which we put up to them; which we can never know that he does, unless he hath communicated to us, that he is pleased to do so, of which the Scripture no where gives us the least intimation.

But because they pretend, that the Scripture gives us some hints of this, I shall briefly examine what they say about this matter.

I. That the Angels know our condition here below, because they are said *to rejoyce at the conversion of a sinner*; and therefore the Saints do likewise know our condition, because *they shall be like the angels*. But this is not said of them till after the resurrection, when we shall have no occasion to pray to them. Besides, that it may well enough be supposed, that God may reveal both to the Angels and Saints in Heaven, the conversion of a sinner, because it may contribute to the increase of their joy and happiness: But will it hence follow, that God reveals to them all other circumstances of our condition, our dangers and temptations and troubles, our sins and our sufferings, the knowledge whereof would no ways contribute to the increase of their happiness? And yet in order to their intercession with God for us, their knowledge of these things would be most beneficial to us.

II. Because *the rich man* was concerned in Hell for the salvation of his relations on earth, they argue that it is much more probable, that the Saints in Heaven are concerned for us, and are ready to pray for us, and therefore it is very credible, that some way or other, they have the knowledge of our condition and wants, though we cannot certainly tell, what that particular way is.

To which I answer.

(1.) That it is a known rule amongst all divines, that no certain argument can be drawn from the circumstances of a parable, but only from the main scope and intention of it; nor is it so likely that the wicked in Hell should have any share in *that*, which St. Paul tells us, is the great virtue of the Saints in Heaven, I mean *Charity*; and if they have it not, then no argument can be drawn from it. Some of their commentators think, that this motion of *the rich man* to *Abraham* concerning his brethren, did not proceed from Charity to *them*, but to *himself*; lest his torment and punishment should be increased by their coming to Hell, by the means of the ill example which he had given them when he was upon earth; and Cardinal *Cajetan* thinks that he was concerned for his brethren out of pride and ambition, and because it would be for the honour of his Family, to have some of them in that glory (so far above any thing in this world) which he saw *Abraham* and *Lazarus* possess of. This is a reason, which I confess I should not have thought on; and yet perhaps it might be likely enough to enter into the mind of a *Cardinal*. And I cannot but observe by the way, that this petition or request, which *the rich man* in Hell made to *Abraham*, is the only instance we meet with in scripture, of any thing like a prayer that was put up to any of the Saints in Heaven.

Well! But suppose that *the rich man* in Hell had this charity for his brethren, and we will easily agree, that the Saints in Heaven have much more charity, not only for their kindred, but for all men here upon earth; let us now consider the particular way and manner which *the great divines* of the Church of Rome (I mean the *school men*, who cannot be content to be ignorant of any thing) do assign of the knowledge which the Saints in Heaven have of the condition and wants of men here below.

They tell us that they know all our prayers and wants in the glass of the Deity, or Trinity; which metaphor of *the glass of the Deity, or Trinity*, if it have any meaning, it must be this, that the Saints in Heaven beholding the face of God or the divine essence, in which the knowledge of all things is contained, they may in that glass see all things that God knows: But then they spoil all this fine speculation again, by telling us, that this glass does not *necessarily* represent to them all that knowledge which is in the divine mind; but that it is a kind of *voluntary* glass, in which the Saints are only permitted to see so much as God pleaseth; but how much that is, they cannot tell us. Which amounts to no more than this, that the Saints in Heaven know as much of our condition here upon earth, as God is pleased to reveal to them: And if this be all, it is as good a reason why we should pray to good men in the *East* or *West-Indies*, to pray for us and help us, because they also know as much of our necessities, and prayers, as God thinks fit to reveal to them.

But if the Saints must have a revelation from God of our prayers, before that they know that we pray to them; then the shortest and surest way both is to pray to God, and not to them; or however (as *Bellarmino* confesseth) it were very fit to pray to God, before every prayer we make to the Saints, that he would be pleased to reveal that prayer to them, that upon this signal and notice given them by God, they may betake themselves to pray to God for us. But unless it were very clear from scripture, that God had appointed this method, it is in reason such a way about, as no man would take that could help it: And it seems to me to as little purpose; for why should not a man think God as ready to grant him all his other requests, without the mediation and intercession of Saints, as this one request of *revealing our prayers and wants to them*? And if this way be not thought so convenient, I know but one more, and that is, to pray to the Saints to go to God, and beg of him, that he would be pleased to reveal to them our supplications and wants, that they may know what to pray to him for in our behalf; which is just such a wise course, as if a man should write a letter to his friend that cannot read, and in a postscript desire him, that as soon as he hath received it, he would carry it to one that can read, and entreat him to read it to him. So that which way soever we put the case, what course soever we take in this matter, it will be so far from seeming reasonable, that we shall have
much

much ado, and must handle the business very tenderly to hinder it from appearing very ridiculous.

Thus I have examined their chief pretences from Scripture, for the countenancing this doctrine and practice, and have shewn how little, or rather nothing at all is there to be found for it; and that alone is reason enough against it, though there were nothing in Scripture against it, that there is nothing in Scripture for it: But I have already produced clear proof out of the new Testament, against it. And because they think the least shew and probability from Scripture a good argument on their side, I will offer them a probable argument out of the old Testament, upon which, though I will lay no absolute stress, yet I believe it would puzzle them, upon their principles, to give a clear answer to it; and it is from *2 Kings 2. 9.* where *Elijah* just before he was taken up into Heaven, says to *Elisha*, *Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee*; thereby intimating (as one would think) that then was the last opportunity of asking any thing of him: But if *Elijah* had understood the matter right (as the church of *Rome* does now) he should rather have directed him, to have pray'd to him, when he was in Heaven, where he would have a more powerful interest, and be in a better capacity to do him a kindness. For the reason the church of *Rome* gives, why they did not pray to the Saints under the old Testament (namely because they were not then admitted into Heaven) will not hold in the case of *Elijah*, who was taken up into Heaven body and soul, and consequently in as good circumstances to be prayed to, as any of the Saints and martyrs that have gone to Heaven since.

I should now have proceeded in the *fifth* and *last* place, to have shewn, that this practice is not only needless and useless, but very dangerous and impious; because contrary to the christian Religion, and greatly derogating from the merit and virtue of Christ's sacrifice, and from the honour of *the only Mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus*. And indeed how can we apply our selves to any other mediators and intercessors with God in Heaven for us, without a gross and apparent contempt of *the High-Priest of our profession, Jesus the Son of God*? As if we either distrusted his kindness and affection, or his power and interest in Heaven, to obtain at God's hand all those blessings which we stand in need of. The Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us expressly, that *he is able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him*; that is, who address their prayers and supplications to God in his name and mediation. But if we will chuse other mediators for our selves, of whom we are not sure that they can either hear or help us, we may fall short of that salvation, which the Apostle tells us we are secure of by the mediation of Jesus Christ; *for he is able, &c.*

But this hath been shewn so abundantly in the former part of this discourse, and is so clearly consequent from the whole, that I shall here conclude my discourse upon the *second proposition* I laid down from the words of my text, *viz. That there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*.

As to the *third proposition* contained in the text, *viz. That this one mediator Jesus Christ, gave himself a ransom for all*, I have treated on that subject particularly on another * occasion.

And as to the *fourth* and *last* proposition, *viz. That the mediation or intercession of Jesus Christ is founded in his redemption of mankind; and because he gave himself a ransom for all, therefore he and he only is qualified to intercede for all men, in virtue of that sacrifice which he offered for the salvation of mankind*; I judge nothing more needful to be added, to what has fallen in concerning that subject, in my handling the *second proposition*, in this and the two former Sermons.

* A Sermon concerning the Sacrifice and Satisfaction of Christ. Printed in the year 1693.

Preached
on Ascen-
sion day.

S E R M O N XX.

The general and effectual Publication of the Gospel by the Apostles.

MARK XVI. 19, 20.

So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into Heaven, and sat on the right Hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following.



IN these words you have these two great points of christian doctrine.

I. Our Saviour's ascension into Heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; *he was received up into Heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.*

II. The effect or consequence of his ascension and exaltation, which was the general and effectual publication of the gospel; *they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.* And both these are very proper for this day; but I shall at this time handle the *latter point*, namely, the effect or consequence of our Saviour's ascension into Heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; *they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.*

And these words contain two things in them.

I. The general publication of the gospel by the Apostles; *They went forth and preached every where.*

II. The reason of the great efficacy and success of it; namely the divine and miraculous power, which accompany'd the preaching of it; *The Lord wrought with them, and confirmed the word with signs following.*

I. The general publication of the Gospel by the Apostles; *They went forth and preached every where.* And, indeed, the industry of the Apostles, and the other disciples, in publishing the gospel, was almost incredible. What pains did they take? what hazards did they run? what difficulties and discouragements did they contend withal in this work? And yet their success was greater than their industry, and beyond all human expectation: As will appear, if we consider these *five things*.

1. The *vast spreading* of the gospel in so short a space.

2. The *wonderful power* and *efficacy* of it upon the lives and manners of men.

3. The *weakness* and *meanness* of the instruments that were employed in this great work.

4. The *powerful opposition* that was raised against it.

5. The *great discouragements* to the embracing the profession of it. I shall speak briefly to each of these.

1. The *vast spreading* of the gospel in so short a space. This is represented *Rev. 14. 6.* by an *Angel flying through the midst of Heaven, and preaching the everlasting gospel to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.* No sooner was the doctrine of the christian Religion published, and made known to the world, but it was readily embraced by great numbers, almost in all places where it came. And, indeed, so it was foretold in the prophecies of the old Testa-

Testament, *Gen. 49. 10. That when Shiloh (that is the Messias) should come, to him should the gathering of the people be: And Isai. 2. 2. That in the last days the mountain of the Lord's house should be established in the top of the mountains, and be exalted above the hills, and that all nations should flow unto it. Isaiah 60. 8. the Prophet speaking of mens ready submission to the Gospel, and the great number of those that should come in upon the preaching of it, they are said to fly as a cloud, and as the doves to the windows.*

So quick and strange a progress did this new doctrine and religion make in the world, that in the space of about 30 years, after our Saviour's death, it was not only diffused through the greatest part of the *Roman* empire, but had reached as far as *Parthia* and *India*. In which we see our Saviour's prediction fully verified, that before the destruction of *Jerusalem*, the Gospel should be preached in all the world, *Matth. 24. 14. This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.* But this is not all; men were not only brought into the profession of the Gospel; but,

2. This doctrine had likewise a *wonderful power and efficacy* upon the lives and manners of men. The generality of those that entertained the Gospel, *were obedient to it in word and deed*, as the Apostle tells us, concerning the *Gentiles* that were converted to *Christianity*, *Rom. 15. 18. Upon the change of their Religion, followed also the change of their manners, of their former course of life. They that took upon them the profession of Christianity, did thenceforth not walk as other Gentiles did, in the lusts of the flesh, and according to the vicious course of the world; but did put off, concerning their former conversation, the old man, which was corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and were renewed in the spirit of their mind, and did put on the new man, which, after God, was created in righteousness and true holiness.* So strange an effect had the Gospel upon the lives of the generality of the professors of it, that I remember *Tertullian*, in his apology to the *Roman* Emperor and Senate, challengeth them to instance in any one that bore the title of *Christian*, that was condemned as a thief, or a murderer, or a sacrilegious person, or that was guilty of any of those gross enormities, for which so many *Pagans* were every day made examples of publick justice, and punished and executed among them.

And this certainly was a very admirable and happy effect, which the Gospel had upon men, to work so great and sudden a change in the lives of those who entertained this doctrine, to take them quite off from those vicious practices which they had been brought up in, and accustomed to; to change their spirits, and the temper of their minds; and of lewd and dishonest, to make them sober and just, and *holy in all manner of conversation*; of proud and fierce, contentious and passionate, malicious and revengeful, to make them humble and meek, kind and tender-hearted, peaceable and charitable.

And that the primitive Christians were generally good men, and of virtuous lives, is credible, because their Religion did teach and oblige them to be such; which, though it be not effectual now, to make all the professors of it such, as it requires they should be; yet it was a very forcible argument then, in the circumstances in which the primitive Christians were: For Christianity was a hated and persecuted profession: No man could then have any inducement to embrace it, unless he were resolved to practise it, and live according to the rules of it; for it offered men no rewards and advantages in this world; but, on the contrary, threaten'd men with the greatest temporal inconveniencies and sufferings; and it promised no happiness to men in the other world upon any other terms, than of *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and of living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.*

And besides this consideration, we have the best testimony in the world of their unblameable lives, *viz.* the testimony of their profess'd Enemies, who did not persecute them for any personal crimes, which they charged particular persons withal, but only for their Religion, acknowledging them otherwise to be very innocent and good people. Particularly *Pliny*, in his letter to *Trajan* the Emperor (who had given him in charge, to make particular enquiry concerning the

the Christians) gives this honourable report of them, *That there was no fault to be found in them, besides their obstinate refusal to sacrifice to the Gods; that at their religious meetings it was an essential part of their worship to oblige themselves by a solemn sacrament, against murder, and theft, and adultery, and all manner of wickedness and vice.* No Christian historian could have given a better character of them than this heathen writer does. But,

3. The *success* of the Gospel will appear yet more strange, if we consider the *weakness* and *meannefs* of the instruments that were employed in this great work. A company of plain and illiterate men, most of them destitute of the advantages of education, went forth upon this great design, weak and unarmed, unassisted by any worldly interest, having no secular force and power on their side, to give countenance and authority to them; and this not only at their first setting out, but they remained under these disadvantages for three ages together.

The first publishers of the christian Religion offered violence to no man; did not go about to compel any by force to entertain the doctrine which they preached, and to list themselves of their number: They were not attended with legions of armed men, to dispose men for the reception of their doctrine, by plunder and free-quarter, by violence and tortures: This modern method of conversion was not then thought of; nor did they go about to tempt and allure men to their way, by the promises of temporal rewards, and by the hopes of riches and honours; nor did they use any artificial insinuations of wit and eloquence, to gain upon the minds of men, and steal their doctrines into them; but delivered themselves with the greatest plainness and simplicity; and without any studied ornaments of speech, or fine arts of persuasion, declared plainly to them the doctrine and miracles, the life, and death, and resurrection of *Jesus Christ*, promising life and immortality to them that did believe and obey his doctrine, and threatening eternal woe and misery in another world to the despisers of it.

And yet these contemptible instruments, notwithstanding all these disadvantages, did their work effectually, and, by the power of God going along with them, gained numbers every day to their Religion, and in a short space *drew the world after them.*

Nor did they only win over the common people, but also several persons considerable for their dignity, and eminent for their learning, who afterwards became zealous assertors of Christianity, and were not ashamed to be instructed in the saving knowledge of the Gospel, by such mean and unlearned persons as the Apostles were; for they saw something in them more divine, and which carried with it a greater power and persuasion than humane learning and eloquence.

4. We will consider the *mighty opposition* that was raised against the Gospel. At its first appearance it could not be otherwise, but that it must meet with a great deal of difficulty and opposition, from the lusts and vices of men, which it did so plainly and so severely declare against, and likewise from the prejudices of men that had been brought up in a contrary Religion; no prejudice being so strong as that which is founded in education; and of all the prejudices of education, none so obstinate and hard to be removed, as those about Religion, yea, though they be never so absurd and unreasonable: *Hath a nation changed their Gods, which yet are no Gods?* Men are very hardly brought off from the Religion which they have been brought up in, how little ground and reason soever there be for it; the being trained up in it, and having a reverence for it implanted in them in their tender years, supplies all other defects.

Had men been free and indifferent in Religion, when Christianity first appeared in the world, and had they not had their minds prepossessed with other apprehensions of God and Religion, and been inured to rites and superstitions of a quite different nature from the christian religion; or had they at that time been weary of the superstitions of their idolatrous worship, and been enquiring after a better way of Religion; then, indeed, the christian Religion had appeared with great advantage, and would in all probability have been entertained with a readiness of mind proportionable to the reasonableness of it. But this was not
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the case: When the doctrine of the Gospel was first published in the world, the whole world, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were violently prejudiced against it, and fixt in their several Religions.

The *Jews* indeed in former times had been very prone to relinquish the worship of the true God, and to fall into the heathen idolatry: But after God had punished them severely for that sin, by a long captivity, they continued ever after, very strict and firm to the worship of the true God; and never were they more tenacious of their religion and law, than at that very time when our Saviour appeared in the world; And though *he* was foretold in their law, and most particularly described, in the authentic books of their religion, the prophets of the old Testament; yet by reason of certain groundless traditions, which they had received from the interpreters of their law, that their *Messias* was to be a great temporal prince, they conceived an invincible prejudice against our Saviour, upon account of the mean circumstances in which he appeared; and upon this prejudice they rejected him, and put him to death, and persecuted his followers: And though their Religion was much nearer to the christian, than any of the heathen idolatries; yet upon this account, of our Saviour's mean appearance, they were much more averse to the entertainment of it, than the grossest idolaters among the nations.

Not but that *their* prejudice also was very great; the common people being strongly addicted to the idolatry and superstitions of their several countries; and the wiser, and more learned (whom they call'd *philosophers*) were so puff'd up, with a conceit of their own knowledge and eloquence, that they despised the rudeness and simplicity of the Apostles, and look'd upon their doctrine of a crucified Saviour, as ridiculous, and the story of his resurrection from the dead, as absurd and impossible. So St. Paul tells us, *that the cross of Christ was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness.*

But besides the *opposition* which the Gospel met withal, from the lusts and prejudices of men, the powers of the world did likewise strongly combine against it. Among the *Jews*, the chief priests and rulers did, with all their force and malice, endeavour to stifle it in the birth, and to suppress it in its first rise; and several of the *Roman* Emperors, who were then the great governors of the world, engaged all their authority, and their whole strength, for the extirpation of it, and raised such a storm of persecution against it, as swept away greater numbers of mankind than any famine, or plague, or war that ever was in the *Roman* Empire: And yet this Religion bore up against all this *opposition*, and made its way through all the resistance, that the lusts and prejudices of men, armed with the power and authority of the whole world, could make against it. And this brings me to the

5. And last consideration I mentioned, the *great discouragement* that was given to the entrance of this Religion.

There was nothing left to invite and engage men to it, but the consideration of *another world*; for all the evils of *this world* threatened every one that took the profession of Christianity upon him. Whoever was known to be a Christian, was liable to reproach and ruin, to cruel mockings and scourgings, to banishment, or imprisonment and confiscation of estate; but these were slight and tolerable evils, in comparison of others that were commonly inflicted upon them; they were condemned to the mines, and to the lions, and all imaginable cruelties were exercised upon them; the most exquisite torments that could be devised, and death in all its fearful shapes was presented to them, to deter men from embracing this Religion, and to tempt them to quit it: And yet they persisted in the profession of their Religion, and for the sake of it, did not only *take joyfully the spoiling of their goods*, but the most barbarous usage of their *persons*; and demeaned themselves not only with patience and courage, but in exultation and triumph, under those tortures which no man can hear or read of, without horror: And they did not only bear up thus manfully, for one brunt; but when these violent persecutions were renewed and repeated upon them, Christianity supported it self under all these daunting discouragements for almost three hundred years,

and held out, till the very malice of their persecutors was out of breath, and their cruelty had tired it self.

Nay it did not only *support it self*, under all these *oppositions*, but *grew* and *prospered*, and *the blood of martyrs became the seed of the Church*, and Christians sprang up faster, than any persecution could mow them down: For men by degrees became curious to enquire into the cause of such sufferings, and the reason of so much constancy and patience under them; and upon enquiry were satisfied, and became Christians themselves; and many times their very persecutors, were ready to sacrifice their lives the next day, for that very cause for which but the day before, they had put others to death.

And it cannot here be reasonably objected, that Christians yielded up themselves to all these sufferings, upon the same account that some *brave spirits* among the heathen, laid down their lives for their countrey; namely, out of a desire of fame, and to perpetuate their names in after-ages; this, I say, cannot reasonably be said in this case; because these sufferers were not the great and ambitious spirits, the flower and select part of mankind, but the common people, and many of them of the tenderer sex and age, who have usually a greater sense of pain than of glory; and yet so were they animated by their Religion, and transported beyond themselves, as not only to submit, but many times to offer themselves to those sufferings, by declaring themselves to be Christians, when no man accused them, and when they knew they should die, for making that profession; so that it is harder to justify their forwardness to suffer, than the sincerity of their sufferings. Besides that nothing could be more foolish, and unreasonable, than for men to hope to get a name by suffering in a crowd, and to be particularly remembered to posterity, when they died in such multitudes, that no man knew the names of the greatest part of the sufferers.

You see then how strongly the Gospel prevailed, how soon this new Religion over-ran the world, how suddenly it subdued the spirits, and changed the manners of men; and by what *mean* and *despicable* instruments, to all humane appearance, this *great* work was done; and how in despite of all opposition and discouragements, it was carried on. Can any one of the false religions of the world pretend to have been propagated and establish'd in such a manner, meerly by their own force, and the evidence and power of truth upon the minds of men; and to have born up and sustained themselves so long under such fierce assaults, as Christianity hath done?

As for the Religion of *Mahomet*, it is famously known to have been planted by force at first, and to have been maintained in the world, by the same violent means. So that great *Impostor* openly declares, *that he came not to plant his religion by miracles, but the sword*.

And as for the idolatries of *the heathen*, they came in upon the world by insensible degrees, and did not oppose the corruptions of men, but grew out of them; and being suited to the vicious temper and disposition of mankind, they easily gained upon their ignorance and superstition, by custom and example. They were just such a corruption of *natural Religion*, in such times of darkness and ignorance, and by such insensible steps, as there hath been since, of the *Christian Religion* in some parts of the world, which we all know. But no sooner did the light of the Gospel shine out upon the world, but the idolatry and superstition of the heathen fell before it, like *Dagon before the ark of God*; and tho' it had the power of the world, and countenance of authority on its side, yet it was not able to maintain its ground; and no sooner was that prop taken away, which was the only support of it, but it presently sunk and vanish'd; it was not driven out of the world by violence and persecution, but upon the breaking in of so great a light, it silently withdrew, as being ashamed of it self: And when afterwards the Emperor *Julian* endeavour'd to retrieve it, by his wit and authority, and used all imaginable arts and stratagems, to suppress and extinguish Christianity, he was able to effect neither; for the *Christian Religion* kept its ground, and *Paganism*, after it had made a little blaze, died with him.

Now

Now to what cause shall we ascribe this wonderful success and prevalency of the Gospel in the world ; there can but these two be imagined ; the *excellency* of the christian Religion, and the *power and presence of the divine spirit* accompanying it.

1. The *excellency* of the christian Religion, which both in respect of the goodness of its precepts, and the assurance of its rewards, hath plainly the advantage of any Religion, that ever yet appeared in the world. And this is a great advantage indeed : But by this alone it could never have been able to have broken through all that mighty *opposition* and *resistance*, which was made against it ; and therefore that it might be able to encounter this with success,

2. God was pleased to accompany the first preaching of it, with a mighty and sensible *presence and power of his spirit*. And this brings me to the

Second part of the text, the *reason* of the *wonderful efficacy* and *success*, which the Apostles had in the preaching of the Gospel ; *the Lord wrought with them, and confirmed the word with signs following*. Which words express to us that miraculous power of the Holy Ghost, which accompanied the first preaching of the Gospel ; by which I do not intend to exclude *the inward operation* of God's Holy Spirit upon the minds of men, secretly moving and inclining those to whom the Gospel was preached, to embrace and entertain it ; which the scripture elsewhere speaks frequently of, and may possibly be intended in the *first* of these expressions, *the Lord working with them* ; and *the latter* may only be meant of *the miraculous gifts* of the spirit, with regard to which, God is said to *confirm the word with signs following*, or *accompanying it*. But I rather think they are *both* intended to express the same thing, and that *the latter* is only added by way of explication of *the former*, to shew more particularly, how the Lord wrought with them ; namely, by giving confirmation to their doctrine, by those miraculous gifts and powers of the spirit, which they were endowed withal ; *the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following* ; that is, with those miracles, which accompanied the first preaching of the Gospel. For these words do plainly refer to the promise of the spirit at the 17th verse ; *and these signs shall follow them that believe* ; which is the reason why they are here call'd *signs following* ; that is, miracles which accompanied the word that was preached.

And that this is the full meaning of this *text*, will appear by comparing it with one or two more, *Rom. 15. 18, 19.* where St. Paul speaking of *the things which Christ had wrought by him, to make the Gentiles obedient to the Gospel*, he says, *they were done through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the spirit of God* ; which is the same with that which is said here in the *text*, of *the Lord's working with the Apostles, and confirming the word with signs following*. So likewise, *Heb. 2. 3, 4.* the Apostle there tells us, that *the Gospel which was first spoken by the Lord, was confirmed by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost*. So that the great confirmation, which is said here to be given to the Gospel, was by *the miraculous gifts of the spirit*, which were poured forth upon the Apostles and primitive Christians.

In speaking of which, I shall briefly do these *two things*.

I. Give an account of the *nature* of these Gifts, and of the *use* and *end* to which they served : And then shew in the

II. Place, how the Gospel was *confirmed* by them.

I. For the *nature* of these gifts, and the *use* and *end* to which they were designed.

They are those miraculous powers which by the descent of the Holy Ghost, upon the day of *Pentecost*, the Apostles were endowed withal, to qualify them to publish the Gospel with more speed and success. Such was the gift of *speaking divers languages*, and the gift of *interpreting* things spoken in divers languages ; (and these *two gifts* were not necessarily united in the same person, for the Apostle tells us, that some had the *one*, and some the *other* ;) the gift of *prophecy* and *foretelling things to come*, which was always a sign of a person

divinely

divinely inspired ; the miraculous powers of *healing diseases*, of *raising the dead*, and of *casting out devils*, a power of *inflicting corporal diseases*, and *punishments*, upon scandalous and obstinate christians, who would not submit to the Apostles authority and government ; which is in Scripture call'd, *a delivering up to Satan, for the destruction*, or tormenting of *the body, that the soul may be saved* ; nay, in some cases, this power extended to *the inflicting of death it self*, as in the case of *Ananias and Sapphira*.

Not that all these miraculous powers were given to every one of the Apostles, or that they could exercise them at all times ; some were bestowed upon one, and some upon another, according to God's good pleasure, and as was most expedient for the *use and benefit* of the church, and most subservient to those *ends* for which God gave them ; only we find that all the Apostles had the gift of *tongues* ; and that the power of *casting out devils, in the name of Christ*, was common to every christian, and continued in the church for a long time after the other gifts were ceased ; as *Tertul. Arnob.* and *Min. Felix* do testify, even of their own times.

But II. I shall briefly shew how the Gospel was *confirmed* by these miraculous gifts.

Now besides the particular *uses and ends* of those miraculous gifts (as *the gift of tongues*, did evidently serve for the more speedy planting and propagating of the christian Religion in the world ; and the power of *inflicting corporal punishments*, in a miraculous manner, upon scandalous and disobedient christians, did maintain the power and authority of the Apostles, and was instead of an ordinary magistratical power, which christians were destitute of, whilst the *Roman* empire continued heathen ;) I say, besides the particular *ends and uses* of all these miraculous gifts, they did all in general, as they were *miracles*, serve for the *confirmation* of the Gospel.

The Apostles delivered the doctrine of Christ, and were *witnesses* of his resurrection from the dead, as *the great miracle*, whereby his doctrine was confirmed ; now there was all the reason in the world to believe *them*, to whom God was pleased to give such a testimony from Heaven ; for who could make any doubt of the truth of *their* testimony, concerning the resurrection of Christ, who were enabled *to raise others from the dead*, and by many other *wonderful things* which they did, gave such clear testimony, that *God was with them* ?

Never had any Religion fewer worldly advantages to recommend it, and so little temporal countenance and assistance to carry it on ; but what it wanted from *men*, it had from *God* ; for *he gave witness to it with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost*. God seems on purpose to have stript it of all secular advantages, that the christian Religion might be perfectly free from all suspicion of worldly interest and design, and that it might not owe its establishment in the world, to the wisdom and contrivance of *men*, but to the arm and power of *God*.

The *inferences* I shall at present make from this discourse shall be these.

I. To give us satisfaction of the truth and divinity of the doctrine of the christian Religion, which hath had so eminent a confirmation given to it from Heaven, and did at its first setting out so strangely prevail in the world, against all humane probability ; *not by might, nor by power ; but by the spirit of the Lord*.

No man can well suppose a Religion in circumstances of greater disadvantage, and upon all humane accounts, more unlikely to sustain and bear up it self than the christian Religion was. The first appearance of it was so mean, and its beginnings so small, that no man but would have thought it would presently have come to nothing ; and no other account can be given of the strange success and prevalency of it, but that *it was of God*, and therefore *it could not be overthrown*.

II. This discourse may likewise satisfy us of the reason why this miraculous power, which accompanied the Gospel at first, is now ceased ; because there is not the like reason and necessity for it, which there was at first.

It was highly necessary *then*, to introduce the christian Religion into the world, and to be a sensible evidence to men of the divinity of that new doctrine which was preached to them: But *now* that the Gospel is generally entertained, there is not the same reason why this miraculous power should still be continued. *Acquisito fine, cessant media ad finem*, when the end is once obtained, the means cease; and the wise God, who is never wanting in what is necessary, does not use to be lavish in that which is *superfluous*. Now that the christian Religion hath got firm footing in the world, God leaves it to be propagated and advanced, by its own rational force, upon the minds of men: Now that the prejudices of education in a contrary Religion are removed, and the powers of the world are reconciled to Christianity; there is no need of such violent and extraordinary means for the continuance of it, now that it stands upon equal advantages with other Religions; God hath left it to be carried on, in more humane and ordinary ways, and such as are more level and accommodate to the nature of man.

That miracles are long since ceased, is acknowledged by the fathers, who lived an age or two after the ceasing of them; particularly by St. *Chrysostome*, who gives the same reason for it, which I have just now assigned. But the Church of *Rome* would still bear us in hand, that this miraculous power does still continue in *their* Church, and, according to *Bellarmino*, must always continue; because he makes it *an inseparable property and mark of the true Church*.

But *we* pretend to no such power, nor have we any reason so to do; because all the doctrines of *our* Religion, are the ancient doctrines of Christianity, delivered by our Saviour, and by his Apostles published to the world; and these are sufficiently confirmed already, by the miracles which our Saviour and his Apostles wrought in the primitive times of Christianity. But the Church of *Rome* hath great occasion and need of *new* miracles, to confirm their *new* doctrines; and therefore, as they have reason, they usually apply them to the confirmation of their *new* doctrines; some to confirm *purgatory*, and to give countenance to *indulgences*; others to encourage *the worship of the blessed Virgin, and the Saints*; others to confirm that which all the miracles in the world are not sufficient to confirm, I mean the doctrine of *transubstantiation*; which, because it overthrows the certainty of *sense*, is in the nature of it peculiarly incapable of being confirmed by a *miracle*.

III. And *lastly*, The consideration of what has been said, does justly upbraid us, that this Religion, which was so powerful at first, and hath such characters of divinity upon it, coming down to us confirmed by so many miracles, should yet have so little effect upon most of us who call our selves Christians.

We have all the advantages of the christian Religion, having been educated and brought up in it; and yet it hath less effect upon *us*, than it had upon *those* whose minds were prejudiced, and whose manners were depraved, by the principles of a false Religion: For *those* who were reduced from Paganism to Christianity, did on the sudden become better men, and were more holy and virtuous in their lives, than the greatest part of *us*, who have been instructed and trained up all our lives in the doctrine of Christianity.

The true reason of which is, that many of *us* are *Christians* upon the same account that *they* were at first *Heathens*; because it was the Religion of their Country, and they were born and bred up in it. But Christianity was the Religion of their choice, and there were no motives to persuade them to the profession of that Religion, but what were as powerful to oblige them to the practice of it. Let *us* also be Christians, not only by custom, but by choice; and then we shall live according to our Religion.

He that takes up a Religion for any other reason than to obey and practise it, does not choose a Religion, but only counterfeits the choice of it. We have, beyond comparison, the best and most reasonable Religion in the world; a Religion that hath the greatest evidence of its truth, that contains the best precepts, and gives men the greatest assurance of a future happiness, and directs them to the surest way of attaining it. Now the better our Religion is, the worse are *we*, if we be not made good by it. The philosophy of the heathen, made some virtuous: and there were

were many eminent Saints under the imperfection of the Jewish institution. What degrees then of holiness and virtue may be expected from us, upon whom the glorious light of the Gospel shineth so brightly?

I will conclude all, with the words of the Apostle, *Heb. 2. 1, 2, 3, 4. Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by Angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward: How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him: God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?*

Preach'd
on the
Feast of
St. Michael.

S E R M O N XXI.

The Nature, Office, and Employment of Good Angels.

HEB. i. 14.

Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?



THIS is spoken of good Angels, whose *existence*, as well as that of evil spirits, the scriptures both of the old and new Testament do every where take for granted, no less than they do, *the being of God, and the immortality of the soul.* And well they may, since they are all founded upon the general consent of all ages, derived down to us from the first spring and original of mankind; of which general consent and tradition, it is one of the hardest things in the world to assign any good reason, if the things themselves were not true. Therefore I shall not go about to force my way into this argument concerning *the existence of spirits, and beings distinct from matter*, by dint of dispute, (which perhaps would neither be so proper, nor so profitable for this assembly) but shall take the thing as I find it received by a general consent of mankind. And so the books of divine revelation do; nor was there reason to proceed in any other method, than to suppose these things, and take them for granted, as generally assented to by mankind, without either asserting them for new discoveries, or attempting to prove what was so universally believed. The scriptures indeed have more particularly declared *the nature* of these spirits, as also their *order* and *employment*; as in the words which I have read to you, where *the office* and *employment* of good Angels is more particularly discovered; *Are they not all* (says the text) *ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

The author of this epistle to the *Hebrews* having had occasion, in comparing the *two dispensations* of the *Law* and the *Gospel*, to speak of the *Angels*, by whose ministry the law was given, did not think fit to entertain those to whom he wrote, with any nice and curious speculations (for school divinity was not then in fashion) about the *nature* and *order* of Angels; but tells us, what it concerns us more to know, namely, what their *office* and *employment* is in regard to us. Concerning their *nature*, he only tells us, that they are *spirits*; as to their *office* and *employment*, he says in general, that they are *ministering spirits*, that is, that they stand before God to attend upon him, ready to receive his commands, and to execute his pleasure; more particularly, that they are upon occasi-
on

on appointed and sent forth by God *to minister* on the behalf, and to do good offices *for them that shall be heirs of salvation*. Which last words are a description of pious and good men, such as had sincerely embraced the christian religion, and were thereby become the children of God, and *heirs of eternal salvation*. So that these words are a brief summary of *the doctrine of good Angels*, and of what the scripture has thought fit to reveal to us concerning them: Which may be referred to these *three heads*.

First, Their nature; *Are they not spirits?*

Secondly, Their general office and employment? *Are they not ministering spirits?*

Thirdly, Their special office and employment, in regard to good men; *they are sent forth to minister for them* (that is, in their behalf, and for their benefit) *who shall be heirs of salvation*.

And this is as much as is necessary for us to know concerning them; and all this is very agreeable to the general apprehension of mankind; but the scripture hath very much cleared and confirmed to us, that which was more obscure and less certain before. I shall briefly explain and illustrate these *three heads*, and then draw some useful inferences from the whole.

First, For their *nature*, they are *spirits*. This is universally agreed by all that acknowledge such an order of beings, that they *are spirits*: But whether they are pure spirits, divested of matter, and all kind of corporeal *vehicle* (as the philosophers term it) hath been a great controversy, but I think of no great moment and consequence. Not only the ancient philosophers, but some of the ancient christian fathers, did believe Angels to be cloathed with some kind of bodies, consisting of the purest and finest matter; which they call *Ætherial*. And this opinion seems to be grounded upon a pious belief, that it is the peculiar excellency and prerogative of the divine nature, to be a pure and simple spirit, wholly separate from matter: But the more current opinion of the christian church (especially of latter times) hath been, that Angels are mere and pure spirits, without any thing that is material and corporeal belonging to them; but yet so, that they have power to assume thin and airy bodies, and can when they please appear in humane shape, as they are frequently in scripture said to have done. And this seems most agreeable to the scripture account of them; tho' I think it is no *necessary article of faith*, either to believe that they are cloathed with some kind of bodies, or that they are wholly divested of matter.

But however this be, they are described in scripture to be endowed with great excellencies and perfections; they are said *to excel in strength*, *Psal. 103. 20.* and in *knowledge and wisdom*. Hence are those expressions of *being as an Angel of God, to discern good and bad*, *2 Sam. 14. 17.* *Wise, according to the wisdom of an Angel*, *ver. 20.* To be of great *activity and swiftness* in their motions; hence it is that they are represented in scripture, as *full of wings*: And to excel in *purity and holiness*; hence is that title given them in scripture, of *the holy Angels*. This is the sum of what the scripture hath in several places delivered to us, concerning the *nature and properties of good Angels*; and beyond this, all our knowledge of them is mere conjecture and uncertainty; and the nice speculations concerning them, idle and wanton curiosities. Indeed the scripture gives sufficient intimation of several *ranks and orders* among them, by calling *Michael* an *Archangel*, and *chief prince*, and by distinguishing them by the names of *principalities, and powers, and thrones, and dominions*: But what the difference of these names import, though some have attempted to explain, yet I do not find that they have discovered any thing to us, besides their own ignorance and arrogance, in pretending to be *wise above what is written*; *intruding into those things which they have not seen, being vainly puff'd up in their fleshly minds*; as the Apostle censures some in his time.

Secondly, We have here their *general office and employment*; *they are ministering spirits*; they are (as I may say) domestick servants, and constant attendants upon that great and glorious King, *whose throne is in the heavens, and whose kingdom ruleth over all*; *they stand continually before him, to behold his face, expecting*

pecting his commands, and in a constant readiness to do his will. For tho' the omnipotence of God, and his perfect power of acting be such, that he can do all things immediately by himself, *whatever he pleaseth in heaven and in earth*; can govern the world, and steer the affairs of it, and turn them which way he thinks best, by the least nod and beck of his will, without any instruments or ministers of his pleasure; yet his wisdom and goodness has thought fit to honour his creatures, especially this higher and more perfect rank of beings, with his commands; and to make them according to their several degrees and capacities, the ordinary ministers of his affairs, in the rule and government of this inferior world; and this not for his own ease (for to infinite power nothing can be difficult or troublesome) but for their happiness; and he therefore employs them in his work and service, that they may be capable of his favour and rewards.

And that the Angels of God are the great ministers of his providence here in the world, hath not only been the constant tradition of all ages; but is very frequently and plainly asserted in scripture. In the old Testament we often read that God employed his Angels to be the messengers of his will and pleasure to men; and to carry good tidings and comfortable news to them upon several occasions: As to *Abraham*, to foretel the miraculous birth of his son *Isaac*; and afterwards to rescue him from being sacrificed: To *Jacob*, when he was so afraid of his brother *Esau*: To *Manoah* and his wife, to foretell the birth of *Sampson*, the great deliverer of *Israel* from the *Philistines*: And upon that great occasion of bringing the people of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, and conducting them through the wilderness, he sent a great and mighty Angel (called *the Angel of his presence*) to go before them, and guide them in their way: And the Apostle tells us, that *the law was delivered to them upon mount Sinai by the disposition of Angels*.

On the other hand, God frequently made them the messengers of his wrath, and instruments of his vengeance. Thus he sent them to foretel, and to execute that terrible destruction upon *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*. And he sent a destroying Angel to brandish his sword in a visible manner over *Jerusalem*, and to smite them with the pestilence, for *David's* sin in numbring the people. And by the ministry of an Angel he slew in the camp of the *Assyrians* in one night, an hundred and eighty five thousand. And *Acts* 12. 23. it is said, that *the Angel of the Lord smote Herod*, for receiving the blasphemous acclamations of the people.

Nay, the Angels shall be the instruments and executioners of God's vengeance upon the wicked at the judgment of the great day. So the judge himself tells us, *Matth.* 13. 49, 50. *So shall it be at the end of the world; the Angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire, there shall be wailing, and gnashing of teeth.*

And that particular Angels do preside over empires and kingdoms, and sway the weighty affairs of them; and by a secret and invisible hand manage and bring about great changes and revolutions, both Jews and Christians have collected with great probability and consent from *Daniel* 10. where there is mention made of *the prince of the kingdom of Persia* withstanding the Angel that was sent to *Daniel*, and of *Michael* a chief prince assisting him. And of this ministry of Angels, in the government of Kingdoms, *Clemens Alexandrinus* speaks, as of a thing out of all controversy. I proceed to the

Third thing, which I principally intended, and seems to be chiefly designed in the text; and this is *the special office and employment* of good Angels, in regard to good men; and for this the Apostle expressly tells us, that *they are sent forth to minister for them* (that is in their behalf, and for their benefit) *who shall be heirs of salvation*. In which words there are three things very considerable for our instruction and comfort.

1. Their particular *designation* and *appointment* for this employment, express in these words, *sent forth*, ἀποσελλόμενοι, as if they were particularly commissioned and appointed by God for this very end. God himself doth superintend all

all affairs, and by his particular designation and command, the Angels do *fulfill his word*, and execute the pleasure of his good will, towards us. Hence it is so frequently said in Scripture, that *God sent his Angel to such or such a person for such or such purposes*.

2. You have here the *general end* of their employment; *for good men*; they are sent forth on our behalf, and for our benefit; to take care of us and protect us, to succour and comfort, to direct and assist, to rescue and deliver us.

3. Here is the *more special end* of their employment, in regard to good men, intended in those words; *for them who shall be heirs of salvation*; hereby signifying, that the Angels are employed about good men, with regard more particularly to their eternal happiness, and for the conducting and furthering of the great affair of their everlasting salvation. This certainly is our greatest concernment; and therefore they have a more particular charge and care of us in regard to this.

It was a common opinion among the *Heathen*, and a constant and firmly believed tradition among the *Jews*, (the *Sadduces* only excepted, who did not believe there were Angels or Spirits) that every man (at least every good man) had a *guardian Angel* appointed him by God, to take a special care of him and his concernments, both spiritual and temporal; to guard him from dangers, to direct and prosper him in his way, and to comfort and deliver him in his affliction and distress. And therefore we find among the *Jewish* prayers, used by them at this day, a particular prayer, wherein they request of God, *to command the Angels who have the care of humane affairs, to help and assist, to preserve and deliver them*. But especially they believed good Angels in their attendance upon good men, to be very active and diligent to incline them to good, and to encourage them therein, by holy motions and suggestions, by secret comfort and assistances, and by opposing evil spirits, and defending us against their assaults, and by countermining their malicious designs and attempts upon us. And accordingly we find that the best men among the *Jews* did stedfastly believe, if not *the particular guardianship* of Angels, and that every good man had his *particular Angel* assigned to him by God, to take the particular charge of him; yet the *common ministry* of good Angels, about good men; and their more *especial care* of *particular persons*, upon *particular and great occasions*, to protect them from temporal evils, and to promote and prosper their temporal affairs and concernments.

Of this, *Abraham, the father of the faithful, and the friend of God*, was most firmly persuaded (at least in matters of great moment and concernment to us) as appears by his discourse with his steward, when he was sending him to treat of a match for his son, *Gen. 24. 40. The Lord (says he) before whom I walk, will send his Angel with thee, and prosper thy way*. And *David, the Man after God's own heart*, does more than once declare his confident belief of the watchful care and ministry of Angels about good men. *Psal. 34. and 7. The Angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them*. And *Psal. 91. 11, 12. speaking of the good man, who putteth his trust and confidence in God, he tells him for his comfort and security, that the holy Angels have a particular charge of him to preserve him from all the mischiefs and dangers to which he is exposed; he shall give his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone*.

So that according to the persuasion of those two excellent persons, and of greatest renown for piety in all the old Testament, very much of the safety and the success of good men, even in their temporal concernments, is to be ascrib'd to the vigilant care and protection of good Angels. And tho' this be seldom visible and sensible to us, yet we have great reason, upon so great testimonies, to assent to the truth of it. And there is no reason I think to doubt, but that God's care extends *now* to *Christians*, as well as it did to the *Jews*; and that the Angels have as much kindness for *us*, as they had for the *Jews*; and there is no reason to think, that the Angels are *now* either dead or idle.

Our Saviour tells us, that they cannot dye: and our reason tells us, that a pure spirit is an active principle; and the Scripture represents Angels as all *flame*

and wings. Evil spirits are believed by *christians* to be as active now to all purposes of harm and mischief, as ever: And why should any man imagine, that good spirits are not as intent and busy to do good? The Apostle (I am sure) tells us in *the text*, that the Angels in common (all of them) do employ their service about us, and wait to do good offices to us; *are they not all* (says he) *ministring spirits, sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?*

And our saviour, *Matth. 18. 10.* seems to approve and confirm the tradition of the *Jews*, concerning *particular guardian Angels* belonging to every one that believed in him; that is, to every christian; *take heed* (says he) *that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven, their Angels always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* And this seems likewise to have been a received opinion among the first *christians*; for we find, *Acts 12. 15.* that when *Peter* was miraculously released out of prison by an Angel, and came to the house where the *christians* were assembled to pray for him, and one told them, *that Peter was at the door, they said it was his Angel*; thinking that he himself was fast in prison: For which saying there could be no reason, had there not been a current opinion among them of *guardian Angels*.

And because the providence of God is more peculiarly concerned, in conducting men to eternal happiness; it is very credible, that God should more especially ordain the ministry of Angels about good men, for the furtherance of their salvation. And so the Apostle tells us in the text; *are they not all ministring spirits, sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?* Nay, our Saviour, in that remarkable place I mentioned before, *Matth. 18. 10.* seems to intimate, that Angels of a *higher rank and quality*, are assign'd guardians and guides to those that believed on him; *but I say unto you, that in Heaven, their Angels do always behold the face of my Father, which is in Heaven:* An allusion to the manner of earthly kings, upon whom not all the servants, but *the chief of their nobility* do more immediately attend, and stand continually in their presence; for *to behold the face of the king, and to stand in his presence*, are phrases used in scripture to signify *immediate attendance upon his person*. So that by this manner of expression, our Saviour doth most significantly intimate, in what esteem good men are with God, whose care and protection he commits to *the chief of the Angels*, to those who are nearest to him and in highest favour and honour with him; as if he had said, *their Angels* are not of the *ordinary rank*, but such as are admitted to *a more immediate attendance* upon the great king and governor of the world.

And no doubt it is for no mean end, that such high and glorious spirits are employ'd about us; it is chiefly for the furtherance of our salvation; for the purchasing whereof, the Son of God himself (*whom all the Angels of Heaven worship*) came down from Heaven, and appeared and suffered in our nature, that we may one day *be made like to the Angels*, and dwell where they are, and may *continually behold the face of our Father which is in Heaven, as they do.* And in order to this end, it is very probable, that good Angels are ready to do good offices, just contrary to those of evil spirits; that is to employ their best diligence and endeavour for the salvation of men; and that they are very sedulous and officious to restrain and pull them back from sin, and to excite and solícite them to that which is good; and in a word, to do all they can to help forward the repentance and conversion of sinners. And this may reasonably be collected from that passage of our Saviour, *Luke 15. 10.* where he tells us, *That there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.* And if they be so glad of the repentance of a sinner; we may easily imagine how forward they are, to further and promote so good a work. And when sinners are brought to repentance; we have no reason to doubt, but that the Angels are as ready to assist their progress in goodness.

It hath been a general, and, I think, not ill-grounded opinion, both of the *Jews* and *Heathens*, that good Angels are more especially present with us, and observant
of

of us, and assistant to us, in the performance of all acts of Religion; that they are particularly present at our prayers; and therefore the *Jews* speak of a particular Angel for this purpose, whom they call the *Angel of prayer*; that they observe our vows, and our breach or performance of them. So *Solomon* seems to intimate, *Eccles. 5. 4, 6. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools; pay that which thou hast vowed. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin*; that is, do not entangle thy life with a rash vow, which the frailty of human nature may make thee afterwards to break; *neither say thou before the Angel, that it was an error*; that is, do not in the presence of the Angel who attends upon thee, and observes thee, betray thine own error and rashness. This I take to be the meaning of this difficult passage, *let not thy mouth cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the Angel, that it was an error.*

But the Angels are yet more particularly present in the places, and at the times of God's publick worship. The placing of the *Cherubims* in the *holy of holies*, seems to signify the presence of the Angels in our most religious addresses to God. And *Plutarch* says, *that the Angels are the Overseers of divine service*. And therefore we ought to behave our selves with all modesty, reverence, and decency in the worship of God, out of regard to the Angels, who are there present, and observe our carriage and behaviour. And to this the Apostle plainly hath respect in that place, which by interpreters hath been thought so difficult, *1 Corin. 11. 13.* where he says, *that, for this cause, in the assembly of christians for the worship of God, the woman ought to have a veil upon her head, in token of subjection to her husband, because of the Angels*; that is, to be decently and modestly attired in the church, because of the presence of the holy Angels; before whom we should compose our selves to the greatest *external gravity and reverence*, which the Angels behold and observe, but cannot penetrate into the *inward devotion* of our minds, which God only can do; and therefore with regard to him who sees our hearts, we should more particularly compose our minds to the greatest *sincerity and seriousness* in our devotion. Which I would to God, we would all duly consider, all the while we are exercised in the worship of God, who chiefly regards our hearts. But we ought likewise to be very careful of our *external behaviour*, with a particular regard to the Angels, who are present there, to see and observe *the outward decency and reverence* of our carriage and deportment: Of which we are very careful in the presence even of an earthly prince, when he either speaks to us, or we make any address to him. And surely much more ought we to be so, when we are in the immediate presence of God, and of his *holy Angels*, every one of whom is a much greater prince, and of greater power, than any of the princes of this world. But how little is this considered, (I speak to our shame) and by how few among us!

And as Angels are helpful to good men, in working out their salvation throughout the course of their lives; so at the hour of death they stand by them, to comfort them and assist them in that needful and dismal time, in that last and great conflict of frail mortality with death and the powers of darkness; to receive their expiring spirits into their charge, and to conduct them safely into the mansions of the blessed. And to this purpose also the *Jews* had a tradition, that the Angels wait upon good men at their death, to convey their souls into paradise: Which is very much countenanced by our Saviour in the parable of *the rich man and Lazarus*, *Luke 16. 22.* where it is said, *that when Lazarus died he was carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom.*

Nay, that the Angels have some charge and care of the *bodies* of good men after death, may not improbably be gathered from that passage in *St. Jude*, verse 9. where *Michael the Archangel* is said to have *contended with the Devil, about the body of Moses*. What the ground of this controversy betwixt them was, may be most probably explain'd, by a passage, *Deut. 34. 6.* where it is said, *that God took particular care* (probably by an Angel) *concerning the burying of Moses in a certain valley*; and it is added, *but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day*. The Devil, it seems, had a fair prospect of laying a foundation for idolatry,

try, in the worship of *Moses* after his death; if he could have gotten the disposal of his body, to have buried it in some known and publick place. And, no doubt it would have gratified him not a little, to have made *him*, who was so declared an enemy to idolatry all his life, an occasion of it after his death. But this God thought fit to prevent, in pity to the people of *Israel*, whom he saw upon all occasions so prone to idolatry; and for that reason committed it to the charge of *Michael* the Archangel, to bury his body secretly; and this was the thing which *Michael* the Archangel contended with the Devil about.

But before I pass from this, I cannot but take notice of one memorable circumstance in this contest, mentioned likewise by St. *Jude*, in these words, *yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the Devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation*. His duty restrained him from it, and probably his discretion too: As he durst not offend God, in doing a thing so much beneath the dignity and perfection of his nature; so he could not but think, that the Devil would have been too hard for him at railing; a thing to which as the Angels have no disposition, so I believe that they have no talent, no faculty at it. The cool consideration whereof should make all men, especially those who call themselves *Divines*, and especially in controversies about Religion, ashamed and afraid of this manner of disputing; since *Michael the Archangel, even when he disputed with the Devil, durst not bring against him a railing accusation*.

But to proceed. This we are sure of, that the Angels shall be the great ministers and instruments of the resurrection of our bodies, and the re-union of them to our souls. For so our blessed Saviour has told us, *Matth. 24. 30, 31*. That *when the Son of man shall come in the clouds of Heaven with power and great Glory; he shall send his Angels to gather the elect, from the four winds, from one end of Heaven to the other*.

Thus I have as briefly as I could, and so far as the Scripture hath gone before us, to give us light in this matter, endeavoured to shew the several ways wherein good Angels do minister in behalf of them who shall be heirs of salvation. All that now remains, is to draw some inferences from this discourse, and so I shall conclude.

First, What hath been said upon this argument and so abundantly proved from Scripture, may serve to establish us in the belief of the truth, and to awaken us to a due consideration of it. That the Angels are invisible to us, and that we are seldom sensible of their presence, and the good offices they do us, is no sufficient reason against the truth and reality of the thing, if by other arguments we are convinced of it. For by the same reason we may almost as well call in question the existence of God, and of our own souls; neither of which do fall under the notice of our senses; and yet by other arguments we are sufficiently convinced of them both. So in this case, the general consent and tradition of mankind, concerning the existence of Angels, and their ministry about us, especially being confirmed to us, by clear and express testimony of holy Scripture, ought to be abundant evidence to us, when we consider that so general a consent must have a proportionable cause; which can be no other but a general tradition grounded at first upon revelation, and derived down to all succeeding ages, from the first spring and original of mankind; and since confirmed by manifold revelations of God, both in the old and new Testament.

But yet I am sensible, that all this is no conviction to the perverse and contentious. Men will not believe even the evidence of sense it self, when they are strongly prepossessed and prejudiced to the contrary: For do we not see great numbers of men, even so many as have the face to call themselves the *Catholic Church*, that can make a shift, when they have a mind, either to believe or disbelieve things contrary to the plainest evidence of their senses? All that I shall say farther about this matter, is, that this doctrine of *Angels* is not a peculiar doctrine either of the *Jewish* or *Christian Religion*, but the general doctrine of *all Religions* that ever were; and therefore cannot be objected against by any but the atheists.

And

And yet after all, I know not whence it comes to pass, that this great truth, which is so comfortable to mankind, is so very little considered by us. Perhaps the corruption of so great a part of the christian church, in the point of *the worship of Angels*, may have run us so far into the other extreme, as scarcely to acknowledge any benefit we receive by them. But surely we may believe they do us good, without any obligation to pray to them; and may own them as the ministers of God's providence, without making them the objects of our worship.

I confess it seems to me a very odd thing, that the power of the Devil, and his influence upon men, and the particular vigilancy and activity of evil spirits to tempt us to sin, should be so readily owned, and so sensibly talked of among christians; and yet the assistance of good Angels should be so little taken notice of and considered by us. The Scripture speaks plainly of both, and the reasons for believing both are equal: For God forbid but that good Angels should be as officious and forward to do us good, as the Devil and his Angels are malicious and busy to do us mischief. And, indeed, it would be very hard with mankind, if we had not as much reason to hope for the assistance and protection of good spirits, as we have cause to fear the malice and fury of the bad. Good Angels are certainly as powerful, and have as strong a propension and inclination to do good, as the Devil has to do harm; and the number of good Angels is probably much greater than of evil spirits. The biggest number that are used in scripture, are applied to good Angels. *Dan. 7. 10.* it is said of *the Angels about God's throne*, that *that thousand thousands ministred unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.* And *Revelations 5. 11.* the number of them is said to be *ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.* And the Apostle to the *Hebrews*, Chap. 12. 22. calls them *an innumerable company of Angels.*

What then should be the reason, that men should be so apt to own the snares and temptations, which the Devil lays before us, in all our ways; but take so little notice of the attendance and good offices done to us by good spirits? I can imagine but these *two* reasons, and I am sorry I can find no better; that we are more mindful of injuries than of benefits; and are glad to take in others for the excuse of our faults; but are loath any should come in for a share in the good that is done by us. And yet methinks it should be a very comfortable consideration to us, against the enmity and cunning of the Devil, and his Angels; that the holy Angels of God are as intent and industrious to do us good, and to help forward our salvation, as evil spirits can be to work our ruin and destroy us.

Secondly, We should with great thankfulness acknowledge the great goodness of God to us, who takes such care of us, as to appoint his Angels, and to give them particular commission and charge concerning us, to protect and assist us in all our ways, and especially to promote the great concernment of our eternal happiness: And that not only some particular and inferior spirits, but the chief ministers of this great King of the world, those that *stand in his presence, and behold his face*; and not a few of these, but the whole order of them are employed about us. So the Apostle seems to say, by the question which he puts in the text, *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister?* That is, all, at one time or other. And though they be principally appointed to minister to us, in order to our salvation; yet we have no reason to doubt but God employs them many times for our temporal safety, and makes use of them more especially in those *great revolutions*, in which his *cause* and *Religion* are more immediately concern'd.

In such a case, it is not at all incredible, that God should give his Angels a particular charge concerning those that *fight his battels; to pitch about their camps*, and secretly to assist them against their enemies, and to ward off, and put by many dangerous blows and thrusts, which are made at them; and wonderfully to preserve them, when the instruments of death fly about them, and do execution on every side of them. To what can we ascribe such and so many remarkable

remarkable deliverances of a person upon whom so much depends; but either to the immediate hand of God, or to the ministry of Angels? And where God is provided so abundantly, with such powerful beings and ministers of his will; though they may be invisible to us, yet there is great reason to believe, that he very seldom works without them.

And now what an astonishing regard is this, which the great God is pleased to have for the sons of men, that he should make the whole creation serviceable to us; not only the visible creation, for the support of our bodies, and the diversion of our minds; but even the noblest of all his creatures, the great and glorious inhabitants of the invisible world, mightily surpassing us mortal men, in the simplicity and purity of their nature, in the quickness and largeness of their understandings, and in their power and vigour of acting; I say, that God should give these excellent and glorious beings the charge over us, and send them forth to minister to us, for the safeguard of our persons, for the success of our affairs, and for the security and furtherance of our eternal salvation! *Lord, what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him, that when thou madest him lower than the Angels, thou shouldest yet make the Angels to minister unto him!*

Thirdly, If the Angels have the particular charge of good men, we should take heed how we despise, or be any way injurious to them: For how despicable soever they may appear to us, they are certainly very dear to God; since he deems them so considerable, as to employ his chief ministers about them, and to commit the charge of them to those, who, by their office, do more immediately attend upon himself. This is our Saviour's own argument, *Matth. 18. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, their Angels do continually behold the face of your Father, which is in Heaven.* With how much contempt soever we may look upon a poor good man, he hath friends and patrons of a higher sort, than any of the princes of this world.

Fourthly, If God appointed Angels to be *ministering spirits in our behalf*; we may thence very reasonably conclude, that God did not intend that we should worship them. This seems to be a clear consequence, if the reasoning of the Angel in the *Revelation* be good; where he forbids *St. John to worship him; because he was his fellow-servant.* Yea, the consequence seems to be yet stronger from the text; that if they be not only *fellow-servants*, but do in some sort *minister unto us*, then we are not to worship them.

And yet this practice is openly avowed in the Church of Rome; though it be reprov'd so very severely by the Apostle, as an apostacy from christianity, *Coloss. 2. 18, 19. Let no man, (says he) deceive you, in a voluntary humility, and worshipping of Angels; not holding the head; as if it were a renouncing of Christ, out of a pretended humility, to make use of other mediators besides him to the Father.* And notwithstanding also that the Angel in the *Revelation* does so vehemently forbid it, *ὅρα μὴ, by no means, upon no terms to do it*; and he forbids it for such a reason as makes it for ever unlawful; namely, that we ought not to worship those who serve and worship God together with us; *Do it not, says the Angel, I am thy fellow-servant, worship thou God.* In which words, he plainly directs us to the sole and proper object of our worship.

Bellarmino, the great champion of the popish cause, never used more gross and apparent shuffling, than in answer to this text. He says *first, Why are we reprov'd for doing what St. John did?* To which the Answer is very easy; because *St. John* himself was reprov'd by an Angel for doing what he did. And now that his question is answered, one might, methinks, ask him a cross question or two. Why does the Church of Rome presume to do that, which an Angel does so expressly forbid to be done? Or was it fit for *St. John* to worship one, who (according to *Bellarmino*) was so ignorant in the doctrine of the Catholick Church, as to reprove him for doing his Duty? as is evident from his *second* crafty answer to this text, *That St. John did well to give due worship to the Angel*: And yet it is plain from this text, that the Angel did not think the worship which *St. John* gave him, to be his due.

It is very hard to imagine, but that a man of *Bellarmino's* understanding did intend to give up the cause, in his answers to this text: But if he was in earnest, then the matter is brought to this plain and short issue; *Whether it be fitter for us to believe a Cardinal of Rome, or an Angel of God?*

Lastly, We should imitate the holy Angels, by endeavouring to serve God as they do, in ministering to the good of others. Whilst we are in the body, in this state of infirmity and imperfection; tho' we cannot serve God with the same activity and vigour that the blessed Angels do, yet we may in the same sincerity, and with the same true pleasure and delight.

And we should learn also of them, to condescend to the meanest services, for the good of others. If the Angels, who are no ways allied to us, do so much excel us, in the dignity and perfection of their nature, (for tho' *David* says, that *God made man little lower than the Angels*; his meaning is, that he made him next below the Angels in the rank of beings; but yet very distant from them in perfection) I say, if those glorious creatures, who are *the chief of the ways and works of God*, do not think much to humble themselves to be ministers on our behalf; shall we be so proud as to think much to stoop to the lowest offices, to serve one another?

You see, my brethren, what is the constant work and employment of the blessed spirits above; to do good to men, especially in order to their eternal happiness; and this is the highest degree of charity, and charity is the highest perfection of men and Angels: So that to employ our selves, with all our minds, and with all our might, to help forward the salvation of others, is to be *good Angels* (I had almost said to be *a kind of Gods*) to men.

I hope that we all of us do hope one day to be *like the Angels*, in the purity and perfection of their nature. So our Saviour has told us, that *at the resurrection we shall be like the Angels*: Now as they are the patterns of our hope and happiness; so let us make them the examples of our duty and obedience; according as our Saviour hath taught us to pray, *that God's will may be done on earth, as it is in heaven*; that is, that we may serve God, and do his will here on earth, (so far as the infirmity of our nature and of our present state will admit) with the same readiness and diligence, with the same cheerfulness and zeal, that the holy and blessed Angels do in heaven. And let us aspire continually in our minds, after that blessed time, when we shall be free from sin and sorrow, from affliction and pain, from diseases and death; when we shall serve God without distraction, and do his will without weariness, and shall be *for ever with the Lord, amidst an innumerable company of Angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect*.

Finally, Let us bless God, as for all the visible effects of his merciful providence towards us, so likewise for the invisible aids and protection of his holy Angels; many times probably vouchsafed to us, when we are but little aware of it. But above all, let us bless him for his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who *was made a little lower than the Angels*, that is, a mortal man; *that by the suffering of death for our sakes, he might be clothed with glory and honour, according to the working of that mighty power which God wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities and powers, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. To him, O Father, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen.*

Preached on
St. Luke's
Day.

S E R M O N XXII.

The Reputation of Good Men, after Death.

PSAL. cxii. 6.

The latter part of the Verse.

The Righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.



AS the desire and hope of immortality, which is implanted in humane nature, is some evidence of the thing; so likewise that natural desire which is in men, to have a good name perpetuated, and to be remembered, and mentioned with honour, when they are dead and gone, is a sign, that there is in humane nature some presage of a life after death; in which they hope, among other rewards of well-doing, to meet with this also, to be well spoken of to posterity: And tho' probably we should not know the good that is said of us, when we are dead, yet it is an encouragement to virtue, to be secured of it before-hand; and to find by experience, that they who have done their part well in this life, go off with applause; and that the memory of their good actions is preserved and transmitted to posterity.

And among the many advantages of piety and virtue, this is not altogether inconsiderable, that it reflects an honour upon our memory after death; which is a thing much more valuable, than to have our bodies preserved from putrefaction: For *that* I think is the meaning of *Solomon*, when he prefers a good name before precious ointment. *Eccl. 7. 1. A good man is better than precious ointment.* This they used in embalming of dead bodies, to preserve them from noisomeness and corruption: But a good name preserves a man's memory, and makes it grateful to posterity; which is a far greater benefit, than that of a precious ointment, which serves only to keep a dead body from stench and rottenness.

I shall briefly explain the words, and then consider the matter contained in them; *the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.* By the *righteous* is probably here meant *the good man* in general; for tho' justice and righteousness, are in scripture frequently used for that particular virtue, whereby a man is disposed to render to every man his own; which is known by the name of *justice*; yet it is less frequently, and perhaps in this place, used in a larger sense, so as to comprehend all *piety* and *virtue*. For so *the righteous man* is described at the beginning of this *psalm*, *Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments:* And he is opposed to *the wicked man*, v. 10. *the wicked shall see it and be grieved;* that is, he shall be troubled to see the prosperity of the *righteous*; the manifold blessings of his life, and the good name he shall leave behind him at his death; which is the meaning of *his being in everlasting remembrance*; that is, long after he is dead, perhaps for many ages, he shall be well spoken of, and his name mentioned with honour, and his good deeds recorded and remembered to all posterity.

So that the sense of the words amounts to this, *That eminently good men, do commonly leave a good name behind them, and transmit a grateful memory of themselves to after-ages.* I say commonly, for so we are to understand this kind of sayings; not that they are strictly, and universally true, without exception; but usually, and for the most part. It is possible, that a good man may soon be forgotten, by the malice of men; or through the partiality and iniquity of the age, may have his name blemished after death, and be misrepresented to posterity: But for the most part it is otherwise; and tho' the world be very

wicked

wicked, yet it seldom deals so hardly and unjustly with Men of eminent Goodness and Virtue, as to defraud them of their due Praise and Commendation after death. It very frequently happens otherwise to good Men, whilst they are alive; nay they are then very seldom so justly treated, as to be generally esteemed and well spoken of, and to be allowed their due Praise and Reputation: But after death, their good Name is generally secured and vindicated, and Posterity does them that right, which perhaps the Age wherein they lived denied to them. Therefore in the prosecution of this Argument, I shall enquire into these *Two* things.

First, Whence it comes to pass, that good Men are very often defrauded of their just Praise and Reputation, whilst they are alive: And,

Secondly, What Security they have of a good Name after death.

First, Whence it comes to pass, that good Men are so frequently defrauded of their just Praise and Reputation, while they are alive. And to give our selves full satisfaction in this matter, *Two* things are fit to be enquired into.

1. From what Cause this proceeds:

2. For what Reason the Providence of God doth often permit it.

(1.) From what Cause it proceeds, that good Men have so often the hard Fate to be ill spoken of, and to be severely censur'd, and to have their worth much detracted from, while they are alive.

And this proceeds partly from good Men themselves; and partly from others.

1. Good Men themselves are many times the cause of it. For the best Men are imperfect; and present and visible Imperfections do very much lessen, and abate the Reputation of a Man's Goodness. It cannot be otherwise, but that the lustre of a great Piety and Virtue should be somewhat obscured, by that mixture of humane Frailty which does necessarily attend this state of Imperfection: And though a Man by great Care and Consideration, by great Vigilancy and Pains with himself, be arrived to that degree and pitch of Goodness, as to have but a very few visible Failings, and those small, in comparison; yet when these come to be scann'd and commented upon, by Envy or Ill-will, they will be strangely inflamed and magnified, and made much greater, and more than in truth they are. But there are few Persons in the World, of that excellent Goodness, but besides the common and more pardonable Frailties of Humanity, they do now and then discover something, which might perhaps justly deserve a severe Censure, if some amends were not made for it, by many and great Virtues.

Very good Men are subject to considerable Imprudences, and sudden Passions; and especially to an affected Severity and Moroseness of Carriage; which is very disgustful, and apt to beget dislike. And they are the more incident to these kind of Imperfections; because out of a just hatred of the vicious Customs and Practices of the World, and to keep out of the way of Temptation, they think it safest to retire from the World as much as they can; being loth to venture themselves, more than needs, in so infectious an Air. By this means, their Spirits are apt to be a little sour, and they must necessarily be ignorant of many points of Civility, and good Humour; which are great *Ornaments* of Virtue, though not of the *Essence* of it.

Now two or three Faults in a good Man, if an uncharitable Man have but the handling and managing of them, may easily cast a considerable Blemish upon his Reputation; because the better the Man is, so much the more conspicuous are his Faults; as Spots are soonest discovered, and most taken notice of, in a pure and white Garment. Besides that, in matters of Censure, Mankind do much encline to the harder side; and but very few Persons are so charitable and equal, as to construe things to the best sense, and to consider a Man all together; and fairly to set the Good that is in him, against his Faults and Imperfections. But,

2. Though Good Men many times contribute too much, to the lessening of their own Reputation, with those among whom they live; yet the principal Cause of their suffering in this kind, is not from themselves, but others; and that upon these *Three* Accounts.

1. From the Hatred and Opposition of bad Men to Holiness and Virtue; and these are commonly the greatest number, and make the loudest cry. They are

declared Enemies to *Goodness*; and then how can it be expected, they should have any great Kindness for *Good Men*? They want Virtue themselves; and therefore they think themselves upbraided by the good Qualities of others.

This Enmity of wicked Men against the Righteous, and the true reason of it, is very well exprest in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, chap. 2. ver. 12. *Let us* (say they) *lie in wait for the Righteous; because he is not for our turn, and is clean contrary to our doings; he upbraideth us with our offending the Law, and he objecteth to our Infamy, the sins of our youth; he was made to reprove our thoughts; therefore he is grievous unto us, even to behold; for his life is not like other men, he is quite of another fashion; we are esteemed of him as reprobate Silver, he abstaineth from our ways, as from filthiness.* This is that which filleth the Minds of wicked Men with Malice against the Righteous; and Malice will easily invent ways to blast any Man's Reputation. Good Men do sometimes, as it is their duty, reprove those that are bad; or if they do it not in Word, yet they upbraid them in their Actions, and contrary course of life; and both these are grievous and provoking to them. Not but that wicked Men are many times in their Consciences convinced of the real Goodness of those whom they speak against; but they will not own it, lest in so doing they should condemn themselves.

2. Another Cause of this, is the Envy of those, who perhaps have some degree of Goodness themselves. For great Virtue is apt to raise Envy in those who fall short of it; and this makes those who are but imperfectly good, to detract from the eminent Worth of others; because they are sensible they are out-shined by them, and that it occasions a disadvantageous Comparison, and makes their Defects taken notice of.

They can endure a Man that is moderately good, and keeps pace with his Neighbours: But if he endeavour to outstrip them, they presently combine against him, and take all opportunities to undermine his Reputation; and will be very glad, either *to find* a blot in his Escutcheon, or *to fix* one there.

3. There is something in the very Presence and Nearness of Goodness and Virtue, which is apt to lessen it.

In matters of *Sense*, the nearer the Object is, the bigger it appears; and the farther distant it is from us, the less it seems to be: But *here* it is quite otherwise; Men are not so apt to value present Worth, when yet they will reverence it mightily at a distance.

I know not whence it comes to pass, but so we certainly find it; that Men are more sensible of the Goodness and Excellency of any thing, under the want of it, than while they enjoy it; and do usually value it more when it is gone, than they did whilst it was present with them. Whilst we live with good Men, and converse with them every day, we take but little notice of them; but no sooner are they departed but we admire them, and every Man's Mouth is open to celebrate their good Qualities. Perhaps Familiarity, and Acquaintance, and Conversation does insensibly beget something of Contempt; but whatever the Reason of it be, we find the thing most certainly true in Experience.

(2.) Let us consider in the next place, for what Reasons the Providence of God permits it thus to be? I shall mention but these *Two*.

1. To keep good Men humble, and, as the expression is in *Job*, *to hide Pride from Men*.

God's Providence, in the disposal and ordering of things in this World, seems rather to consult our Safety, than our Satisfaction; and the Security of our Virtue, than the full Reward of it. Now if good Men should always meet with that clear Esteem and Reputation, which their Goodness deserves, they would be in great danger of being puff'd up with a proud Conceit of themselves; and Pride is enough to supplant the greatest Virtue in the World; such a *dead Fly*, as this, were sufficient *to spoil a box of the most precious Ointment*. For Man is an ambitious Creature, and *vain* above all things; so *vain*, as not only to be covetous of Praise, but even patient of Flattery; and the best of Men lie too open, on this blind side of humane Nature; and therefore God, *who knows our frame,*
and

and how apt Dust and Ashes are to be proud, hath in his wise and merciful Providence so disposed things, that good Men are seldom exposed to the full force of so strong a Temptation. And for this Reason, he lets loose envious and malicious Tongues, to detract from good Men, for a check to the Vanity of humane Nature, and to keep their Virtue safe, under the protection of Humility.

And this is the way likewise to secure the Reputation which they have, and which otherwise would be in danger of being lost: For he that is once proud of the Esteem he hath got, takes the readiest way to fall into Contempt; and certainly it is better of the two, that our Reputation should suffer a little by the Malice of others, than be ruin'd by our own Pride and Vanity.

God does not envy good Men the Reputation of their Goodness and Virtue; but he knows the weakness of Humane Nature, and *will not suffer it to be tempted, above what it is able*. When good Men are grown up to Perfection, and able to bear it, as they will be when they come to Heaven, their good Name shall be fully vindicated, and they shall have Praise, not only from Men, but from Angels, and from God himself.

2. This Life is not the proper season of Reward, but of Work and Service.

In this Life, God is pleased to give some present Encouragement to Piety and Virtue, but reserves the main of our Recompence to be bestowed upon us at the end of our Work. When our *Course is finished*, then, and not before, we must expect our *Crown*; when our Accounts are cast up and stated, and it appears what improvement we have made of our Talents, then will come the *Euge bone serve, Well done good and faithful Servant*. In the mean time, good Men must be content with such a portion of Esteem, as an envious and ill-natured World will afford them.

And thus I have done with the *First* thing I proposed to enquire into; Whence it comes to pass, that good Men are frequently defrauded of their due Praise and Reputation, while alive. I proceed to the

Second Enquiry, namely, What Security good Men have of a good Name after Death?

And the true Account of this is to be given, partly from the *Providence of God*, and partly from the *Nature of the Thing*.

(1.) From the *Providence of God*; which is concerned herein, upon a *two-fold* account.

1. In respect of the *Equity* of it.

2. In regard of the *Example* of it.

1. In respect of the *Equity* of it. God, who will not be behind-hand with any Man, concerns himself, to secure to good Men the proper Reward of their Piety and Virtue. Now Praise is one of the most proper Recompences of good and virtuous Actions; this good Men seldom meet with in this Life, without a great deal of allay and abatement; and therefore the Providence of God hath so ordered things, that it should come in the properest season, when our Work is done, and when we are out of the Danger of the Temptation of it.

2. In regard of the *Example* of it. It is a great argument to Virtue, and encouragement to Men, to act their Part well, to see good Men applauded, when they go off the Stage. Every Man that hath any spark of Generosity in him, is desirous of Fame; and tho' Men care not how soon it comes, yet they will be glad to have it after Death, rather than not at all. Piety and Virtue would be but very melancholy and uncomfortable things, if they should always be so unfortunate, as never to meet with due Esteem and Approbation; but when Men are assured, that they shall have this Reward, one time or other, and observe it to be so in experience; this is a great Spur and Encouragement to do virtuously: And a great Mind, that hath a just Sense of Reputation and a good Name, will be content to lay in for it before-hand; and patiently to wait the time which God knows fittest for the bestowing of it.

(2.) The other part of the Account of this Truth, is to be given from the *Nature of the Thing*: Because Death removes and takes away the chief Obstacle of a good Man's Reputation. For then his Defects are out of sight, and
Men

Men are contented that his Imperfections should be buried in his Grave with him. Death hath put him out of the reach of Malice and Envy; his Worth and Excellency does now no longer stand in other mens light; his great Virtues are at a distance, and not so apt to be brought into Comparifon, to the prejudice and difadvantage of the living; *mortui non mordent*; the Example of the Dead, is not fo cutting a reproof to the Vice of the living; the good Man is removed out of the way, and his Example, how bright foever, is not fo fcorching and troublesom at a distance; and therefore Men are generally contented, to give him his due Character.

Befides, that there is a certain Civility in Humane Nature, which will not fuffer Men to wrong the dead, and to deny them the juft commendation of their worth. Even the *Scribes* and *Pharifees*, (as bad a fort of Men as we can well imagine) though they were juft like their Fathers in perfecuting and flaying the Prophets, while they were alive; yet had they a mighty Veneration for their Piety and Virtue, after they were dead, and thought no Honour too great to be done to them. They would be at the Charge of raifing Monuments to the Memory of thofe good Men, whom their Fathers had flain; and whom they would certainly have ufed in the very fame manner, had they either lived in the days of thofe Prophets, or thofe Prophets had lived in their days, as our Saviour plainly told them.

All that now remains is, to draw fome *Inferences* from what hath been faid, by way of Application; and they fhall be thefe *Three*.

1. To vindicate the Honour and Refpect which the Chriftian Church, for many Ages, hath paid to the Memory of *the firft Teachers and Martyrs* of our Religion.

2. To encourage us to Piety and Goodnefs, from this Confideration; that *the righteous fhall be in everlafting remembrance*.

3. That when we pretend to honour the Memory of good Men, we would be careful to imitate their Holinefs and Virtue,

1. To vindicate the Honour, which the Chriftian Church hath for many Ages done to *the firft Teachers and Martyrs* of our Religion; I mean more efpecially to *the Holy Apoftles* of our Lord and Saviour; to whose Honour, the Chriftian Church hath thought fit to fet apart folemn Times, for the Commemoration of their Piety and Suffering, and to ftir up others to the Imitation of them.

This certainly can with no good colour, either from Scripture or Reason, be pretended to be unlawful; and when *David* here fays, *the righteous fhall be in everlafting remembrance*, he cannot certainly be thought to exclude the moft folemn way of commemorating their Piety and Virtue.

I do not pretend, this Cuftom can be derived from the very firft Ages of Chriftianity; but furely it is fufficient, for the lawfulness of it, that it is no where forbidden; nay it is rather required here in the Text; the beft way to preferve the Memory of good Men, being thus to commemorate them. And it may be of great Ufe to us, if it be not our own fault; the fetting before our eyes the holy Lives of Excellent Men, being in its own Nature apt to excite us to the Imitation of them.

Befides that I could tell you, that though this cannot be proved fo ancient, as fome vainly pretend; yet it is of great Antiquity in the Church, and did begin in fome of the beft Ages of Chriftianity. *Memoria Martyrum, the Meetings of Chriftians at the Tombs of the Martyrs* was practifed long before the degeneracy of the *Western Church*; and the Chriftians were wont at thofe Meetings, folemnly to commemorate the Faith and Conftancy of thofe good Men, and to encourage themfelves from their Examples.

I know very well, that this did in time degenerate into grofs Superftition, which afterward gave colour and occasion to that grofs and Idolatrous Practice in the Church of *Rome*, of *worshipping Saints*. But this Abufe is no fufficient Reason for us to give over the Celebrating of the Memory of fuch holy Men, as *the Apoftles and Martyrs* of Chrift were; and propounding them to our felves for our Patterns. We may ftill lawfully give *them their due Honour*; tho' the Church of *Rome* hath fo over-done it, as to rob God of his.

2. Let this consideration, that *the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance*, be an encouragement to us to piety and goodness. This to a generous nature, that is sensible of honour and reputation, is no small reward and encouragement. Before the happiness of Heaven was clearly revealed, and *life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel*, one of the greatest motives to worthy and virtuous deeds, was the earnest desire which men had of leaving a good name behind them, and of perpetuating the fame and glory of their actions to after-ages. Upon this ground, chiefly, many of the bravest spirits among the heathen were animated to virtue, and, with the hazard of their lives, to do great and glorious exploits for their country.

And certainly it is an argument of a great mind, to be moved by this consideration, and a sign of a low and base spirit to neglect it. He that hath no regard to his fame, is lost to all purposes of virtue and goodness; when a man is once come to this, not to care what *others say* of him, the next step is, to have no care what *himself does*. *Quod conscientia est apud Deum, id fama est apud homines*; what conscience is in respect of God, that is fame in respect of men. Next to a good conscience, a clear reputation ought to be to every man the dearest thing in the world. Men have generally a great value for riches; and yet the scripture pronounceth *him* the happier man, that leaves a good name, than *him* that leaves a great estate behind him, *Prov. 22. 1. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches*.

If then we have any regard to a good name; the best way to secure it to our selves, is by the holy and virtuous actions of a good life. Do well, and thou shalt be well spoken of; if not now, yet by those who shall come after: The surest way to *glory, and honour, and immortality*, is by a *patient continuance in well-doing*. God hath engaged his promise to us to this purpose, *1 Sam. 2. 30. Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed. The name of the wicked shall rot*, says Solomon, *Prov. 10. 7*. But God doth usually take a particular care to preserve and vindicate *their* memory, who are careful to *keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them*.

3dly and lastly, Whenever we pretend to do honour to the memory of good men, let us charge our selves with a strict imitation of their holiness and virtue. The greatest honour we can do to God, or good men, is to endeavour to be like them; to express their virtues, and represent them to the world in our lives. Upon *these days*, we should propound to our selves, as our patterns, all those holy and excellent persons, who have gone before us; *the Apostles* of our Lord and Saviour, and all those blessed *Saints and Martyrs, who were faithful to the death, and have received a crown of life and immortality*.

We should represent to our selves the piety of their actions, and the patience and constancy of their sufferings, that we may imitate their virtues, and *be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises; and seeing we are compassed about with such a cloud of witnesses, we should lay aside every weight, and run with patience the race that is set before us*.

Let us imagine all those great examples of piety and virtue, standing about us in a throng, and fixing their eyes upon us. How ought we to demean our selves in such a presence, and under the eye of such witnesses! And how should we be ashamed to do any thing that is unworthy of such excellent patterns, and blush to look upon *our own* lives, when we remember *theirs*! Good God! at what a distance do the greatest part of christians follow those examples! and while we honour them with our *lips*, how unlike are we to them in our *lives*!

Why do we thus reproach our selves with these glorious patterns? Let us either resolve to imitate their virtues, or to make no mention of their names; for while we celebrate the examples of *Saints and holy men*, and yet contradict them in our lives, we either *mock them*, or *upbraid our selves*.

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, &c.

Preached on
All-Saints
day, 1684.

S E R M O N XXIII.

The Duty of imitating the Primitive Teachers, and Patterns of Christianity.

HEB. xiii. 7.

The latter part of the Verse.

Whose Faith follow, considering the end of their Conversation.

The whole Verse runs thus,

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose Faith follow, considering the end of their Conversation.

THE great scope and design of this epistle, is to persuade the *Jews*, who were newly converted to *Christianity*, to continue stedfast in the profession of it, notwithstanding all the sufferings and persecutions it was attended withal; and to encourage them hereto, among many other arguments which the Apostle makes use of, he doth several times in this epistle propound to them the examples and patterns of Saints and holy men, that were gone before them; especially those of their own nation, who, in their respective ages, had given remarkable testimony of their faith in God, and constant adherence to the truth. Chap. 6. 11, 12. *And we desire, that everyone of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope, unto the end; that ye be not slothful; but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.* And Chap. 11. he gives a catalogue of the eminent heroes and Saints of the old Testament, who *by faith* had done such wonders, and given such testimony of their patience and constancy, in doing and suffering the will of God; from whence he infers, Chap. 12. 1. that we ought to take pattern and heart from such examples, to persevere in our christian course; *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of martyrs, or witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us;* especially since they had greater examples than these, nearer to them, and more fresh in memory; the great example of our Lord, the founder of our religion; and of the first teachers of christianity, the Disciples and Apostles of our Lord and Saviour. The example of our Lord himself, the captain and rewarder of our faith, Ver. 2. of that 12th Chapter; *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame: Verse 3. For consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied, and faint in your minds.* This, indeed, is the great pattern of christians, and, in regard of the great perfection of it, surpasseth all other patterns, and seems to make them useless; as having in it the perfection of the divinity, not in its full brightness, (which would be apt to dazle rather than direct us) but allayed and shadowed with the infirmities of humane nature; and for that reason, more accommodate and familiar to us than the divine perfections abstractedly considered.

But yet because our blessed Saviour was *God* as well as *man*, and clear of all stain of sin, (for though he was clothed with the infirmities, yet he was free from

from the corruption of humane nature) therefore the examples of *meer men*, liable to sin as we are, may in many respects be more suitable and accommodate to encourage us to the imitation of those virtues, which are attainable by us, in this state of imperfection; for which reason the Apostle hath thought fit likewise to propose to us the highest examples of that kind, *the first teachers of our religion*; for of these he seems to speak here in the *Text*, namely, those *Apostles*, or *Apostolical men*, by whom they had been instructed in the faith of Christ, but who were now departed this life; it being very probable, that the Apostle here speaks of such as were dead, when he says, *Remember them which have had the rule over you*, (or, those that have been your guides) *who have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.*

I say this is very probable, because he minds them to *remember*, which supposeth them to be absent; but especially, because he minds them to *consider the end of their conversation*; by which, surely, he means the blessed state of those good men after death; which is elsewhere called *the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls*, 1 Pet. i. 9. So likewise, Rom. 6. 22. this is said to be the *end* of a holy life; *ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end, everlasting life.* And it very much favours this interpretation, that the Apostle afterwards speaks of the living guides, and governours of the church, verse 17. *Obeys them which have the rule over you, and submit your selves, for they watch for your souls.*

So that it is highly probable, that the Apostle here speaks of such guides, and governours of the church, as had once been over them, but were now departed this life; and therefore he might, with more freedom and less envy, recommend their example to them, and bid them *call to mind their faith*, and exemplary conversation among them, and propose it for a pattern to themselves, considering the happy *end* of it, *viz.* the blessed state they were now in, and the glorious reward they were made partakers of in another life.

In the words thus explained, you have,

I. A duty enjoined; which is, to propose to our selves, for our imitation, the examples of good men, that have gone before us; especially the primitive patterns of christianity, and the first teachers of our religion. *Remember them which have been your guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow.*

II. The motive or encouragement to it, from the consideration of the reward of it; *considering the end of their conversation.*

I. The duty enjoined; which is, to propose to our selves, for our imitation, the example of good men that have gone before us; especially the primitive patterns of christianity, and first teachers of our religion. *Remember them that have had the rule over you, that have been your guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow.* In which words the Apostle bids them call to mind their first guides and instructors in christianity, whom they had known, and heard, and conversed with in this world, but who now *rested from their labours*, and were receiving the reward of them; to remember the doctrines they had heard from them, and the virtues they had seen in them; and to embrace the one, and imitate the other.

Thus *we* cannot remember the primitive teachers, and patterns of christianity, the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour; because *we* did not personally know them, and converse with them, living at the distance of many ages from their time: But *we* may do that which is equivalent, and a kind of remembrance of them; *we* may commemorate their faith, and the virtue and holiness of their lives; and what we hear and read of them, we may propose for patterns to our selves, and copy them out in our lives and actions: And this is *our* duty, and the same in substance with *theirs*, who had the happiness to know and converse with those excellent persons, to hear them preach, and to see the rules and precepts of that holy doctrine, which they taught, exemplified in their lives.

In the handling of this argument, I shall do these *three* things.

First, Shew why amongst all the examples of good men, we should more especially propose to our imitation, the *primitive* teachers, and patterns of our religion.

Secondly, Wherein we should imitate them. The Apostle expresseth it in one word, in their Faith; *whose Faith follow*.

Thirdly, The encouragement to this, from the consideration of the happy state they are in, and the glorious reward they are made partakers of; *considering the end of their conversation*.

First, I shall endeavour to shew why among all the examples of good men, we should more especially propose to our imitation, the *primitive* teachers and patterns of our religion, I mean, the holy Apostles of our Lord and Saviour, *whose faith* we should endeavour to follow, and to imitate the holiness and virtue of their conversation. For *these* certainly come nearest to that most perfect, and excellent pattern of all goodness, *our blessed Saviour*, and are the fairest transcripts of that unblemished original. Hence it is that St. Paul so frequently exhorts christians to imitate *his* example, and the examples of the other Apostles; it being reasonable to presume, that *they* came nearest to the pattern of our Lord. 1 Cor. 11. 1. *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*. Phil. 3. 17. *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample. For our conversation is in heaven*.

And this is reasonable, that the *first* in every kind should be *the rule and pattern* of the rest, and of all that follow after; because it is likely to be most perfect. In process of time, the best institutions are apt to decline, and by insensible degrees to swerve, and depart from the perfection of their first state; and therefore it is a good rule, to preserve things from corruption and degeneracy, often to look back to the first institution, and by that to correct those imperfections and errors, which will almost unavoidably creep in with time.

If we would preserve that purity of faith and manners, which our religion requires, we should have frequent recourse to the primitive teachers and patterns of christianity, and endeavour to bring our belief and lives to as near a conformity with theirs, as is possible. Who so likely to deliver the faith and doctrine of Christ pure, and uncorrupted, as the primitive teachers of it, who received it from our Lord himself; and were, by an extraordinary assistance of the holy Spirit, secured from error and mistake in the delivery of it? And who so likely to bring their lives and conversations to an exact conformity with this holy doctrine, as they, who were so thoroughly instructed in it by the best master, and shewn the practice of it in the most perfect example of all holiness and virtue? Great reason there is therefore, why all christians should follow *their* faith, and make *their* conversation more especially the pattern of their lives.

The want of a due regard to these *fountains* of christian doctrine, and the *first* and *best* patterns of christian practice, hath been the great cause of that foul degeneracy of the *Romish* church, both in the doctrine and practice of christianity. They do not follow the faith of the *Apostles*, the *first fathers* and teachers of christianity; but of *the Fathers of the council of Lateran, and Trent*. Thus have they forsaken the fountain of living waters, the holy Scriptures, and have hewn to themselves broken cisterns, that will hold no water; the doctrines and traditions of men. Nay, they have stopt up this fountain of living waters from the people, and forbid them to come to it; and forced them to drink of those impure and puddled streams, which they let out to them; and instead of the lives of *the holy Apostles*, and those eminent *graces* and *virtues* which shined forth in them, they represent to them the patterns of *new Saints*; some of which neither they nor their fathers knew, and indeed never were in being; as St. *Almanach*, and St. *Synoris*, and several others; many of them so far from being *Saints*, that they may be reckoned among the *worst* of men; (for instance, our countryman *Thomas a Becket*, who for pride and rebellion may almost vye with *Lucifer* himself; and yet this ill man, and worst of subjects, was canonized to that height, as for two hundred years together, to engross the worship of these western

western parts of the world, and to impoverish the shrines of all other Saints, even of *the blessed Virgin* herself;) others, such *Ideots*, or hot-headed *Fanaticks*, that he that reads their lives, would take them to be *fools* and *mad-men*, rather than *Saints*, (as *Francis*, and *Dominic*, and *Ignatius Loyola*, and several others of the same stamp;) and many the very best of them, so disguised by their Legends, that instead of the substantial virtues of a good life, their story is made up of false and fantastical miracles, and ridiculous freaks and superstition.

All which considered, there is great reason, why we should have recourse to the *primitive* patterns of faith and holiness, *and be followers of them, who we are sure were followers of Christ*. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, namely, wherein we should imitate these patterns. And the Apostle expresseth it in one word, in their Faith, *whose Faith follow*. And the word *Faith* is frequently in the new Testament used so largely, as to comprehend the whole condition of the Gospel; a firm belief of the doctrine of it, and the fruit and effect of this belief, in a good conversation. And that *Faith* here in the *Text*, takes in a holy life, is evident from what follows, *whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation*; from whence it is evident, that the Apostle speaks of such a *Faith*, as shews forth it self in a good conversation.

So that we may very well suppose the Apostle here to recommend *the Primitive Faith* to our imitation, in these *four* respects.

1. In regard of the *sincerity* and *purity* of it.
2. In regard of the *firmness* and *stability* of it.
3. Of their *constancy* and *perseverance* in it.
4. Of the *efficacy* and *fruitfulness* of it, in a good conversation. All these may be collected from the expressions and circumstances of the *Text*.

1. We are to imitate these *primitive* patterns, in the *sincerity* and *purity* of their Faith, I mean, that the Faith which we profess, be the sincere doctrine of christianity, and the pure word of God, free from all mixture of humane additions and inventions, and not made up, as the faith of the *Pharisees* was among the *Jews*, and theirs of the church of *Rome* is at this day, of *the word of God*, and the *doctrines and traditions of men*; not like the *Creed* of Pope *Pius IV.* (which is now the standard of the *Roman Faith*) consisting of the twelve *old* Articles of the christian faith, delivered to us by Christ and his Apostles, and as many *new* ones, coined and stampd by their later Councils. This is not to *follow the Faith* of the Apostles, and first patterns of christianity, *the Faith once delivered to the Saints*, as St. *Jude* calls it. This is to have our Faith stand upon the authority of men, and not on the word of God; whereas we are to *follow the Faith of the first Guides* of the christian Church, *who spake unto them the word of God*, as the Apostle expressly chargeth here in the *Text*.

2. We are to imitate them, in the *stability* and *firmness* of our Faith, and not suffer our selves to be *shaken*, and removed from it, *by every wind of new doctrine*; the Faith of Christ being unchangeable, as Christ himself. And that by following the Faith of the primitive guides and teachers of christianity, the Apostle here means, that we should *be stedfast and unmoveable* in it, is plain from what follows immediately after the *Text*; *whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation*. Jesus Christ, *the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines: for it is a good thing, that the heart be established with grace*, that is, in the doctrine of the Gospel, which is frequently called *the grace of God*.

3. We are to imitate them, in the *constancy* and *perseverance* of their Faith; and that, notwithstanding all the discountenance and opposition, the persecution and suffering which attend the profession of this Faith; which the Apostle sufficiently intimates in this Epistle, to have been the condition of those christians, to whom he wrote; and therefore he proposeth so many examples to them, of constant and patient suffering for God and his truth; and it is probable enough, that the Apostle here recommends the example of those, who were the *primitive Martyrs*, as well as teachers of christianity. He had before proposed to them

the *living* examples of those, who were under actual persecution and sufferings for the Gospel, v. 3. *Remember those that are in bonds, and those that suffer adversity*; and here in the 7th verse he seems to propose the pattern of those, who had laid down their lives and *died* for the Faith; *Remember those who have been your guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, whose Faith follow, considering the end of their Conversation*, τὴν ἐξέλευσιν τῆς ἀναστροφῆς, which may be render'd, *the last act of their lives*, the manner of their going out of the world, perhaps by Martyrdom; as if he had said, imitate them in their constancy and perseverance in the Faith, even to the last, in laying down their lives for it. And thus we should be ready to do, if God calls us to it. However, it is certain the Apostle meant their constancy and perseverance in the Faith, to the last, and their dying *in*, if not *for* the Faith of Christ. And this is necessary, if we expect *the crown of life*, and hope for the same happy *end*, which they had; for none but *they, that continue to the end, shall be saved*.

4. We should imitate them in the *efficacy* and *fruitfulness* of their Faith, in the practice and virtues of a good life; *whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation*, that is, their perseverance in a *holy course* to the end. And these must never be separated; *a sound faith, and a good life*. Without this, *our faith is barren and dead*, as St. James tells us, ch. 2. v. 17. Our knowledge and belief of the christian doctrine, must manifest it self in a good conversation. *Who is a wise man*, (says the same St. James, ch. 3. v. 13.) *Who is a wise man, and endowed with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works. This is a faithful saying*, saith St. Paul to Titus, ch. 3. v. 8. *and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good works*.

And herein the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour were eminent examples. They lived as they taught, and practised the doctrine which they preached. So St. Paul strictly chargeth Timothy, 1 Tim. 4. 12. *Be thou an example of the Believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, in purity*. And our Saviour tells us, that hereby chiefly false Prophets and teachers might be known from the true Apostles of Christ, Matth. 7. 20. *By their fruits ye shall know them*. And indeed we do not *follow the faith* of those excellent persons, if we do not *abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which, by Jesus Christ, are to the praise and glory of God*. I come now to the

Third and last thing I proposed, *viz.* the encouragement to this, from the consideration of the happy state of those persons, who are proposed to us for patterns, and the glorious reward which they are made partakers of in another world. *Considering the end of their conversation*, τὴν ἐξέλευσιν, *their egress or departure* out of this life, into a blessed and glorious state, where they have received the crown and reward of their faith and patience, and pious conversation in this world; or else, (which comes much to one,) *considering the conclusion of their lives*, with what patience and comfort they left the world, and with what joyful assurance of the happy condition they were going to, and were to continue in for ever.

And this is a great encouragement to constancy and perseverance in faith and holiness, to see with what cheerfulness and comfort good men die, and with what a firm and steady persuasion of the happiness they are entering upon. For who would not be glad to leave the world, in that calmness and serenity of mind, and comfortable assurance of a blessed Eternity? Bad men wish this, and are ready to say with Balaam, *Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his*. But if we would have the comfort of *such a death*, we must live *such lives*, and imitate the faith and good conversation of those, whom we desire to resemble in the manner of their death, and to go into the same happy state that they are in after death. If we do not make their *lives* our pattern; we must not expect to be conformable to them, in the happy manner of their *death*. When we hear of the death of an eminent good man, we do not doubt but he is happy; and are confident, that he will meet with the reward of his piety and goodness in another world. If we believe this of him; let us endeavour

endeavour to be like him ; that we may attain the same happiness, which we believe him to be possessor of, and, as the Apostle exhorts, chap. 6. 12. *Let us not be slothful ; but followers of them, who through Faith and Patience inherit the Promises.* Let us shew the same Diligence that they did ; that we may have the same full assurance of hope unto the end, which they had.

The Inference from this Discourse, which I have made upon this Argument, is, to shew what Use we ought to make of these excellent Examples, which are set before us, of the first Founders and Teachers of our Religion, and what is the proper Honour and Respect, which we ought to pay to their Memory : Not *Invocation* and *Adoration* ; but a zealous *Imitation* of their Faith, and good Conversation. The greatest Honour we can do them, the most acceptable to God, the most grateful to them, and the most beneficial to our selves, is to endeavour to be like them : Not to make any Images, and Likeness of them, to fall down before them, and worship them ; but to form the Image of their Faith and Virtues upon our Hearts and Lives : Not to pray to them ; but to praise God for such bright and glorious examples, and to endeavour with all our might to imitate their faith, and patience, and piety, and humility, and meekness, and charity, and all those other virtues which were so resplendent in them. And this is to remember the Founders of our Religion as we ought, *to follow their Faith, and to consider the end of their Conversation.*

Had the Christian Religion required, or intended any such thing, as of latter times hath been practised in the world ; it had been as easy for the Apostle to have said, *Remember them that have been your Guides, and have spoken to you the word of God, to erect Images to them, and to worship them with due Veneration, and to pray to them and make use of their Intercession.* But no such thing is said, or the least Intimation given of it, either in this Text, or any other in the whole Bible ; but very much to the contrary.

Their Example indeed is frequently recommended to us, for our imitation and encouragement ; and for this reason, the providence of God hath taken particular care, that the memory of the Apostles, and so many primitive Christians and Martyrs, should be transmitted to posterity ; that Christians in all succeeding ages might propound these patterns to themselves, and have perpetually before their eyes the piety and virtue of their lives, and their patient and constant Sufferings for the Truth ; that when God shall please to call us to the like tryal, *we may not be wearied and faint in our minds ; but being compassed about with such a Cloud of Witnesses,* having so many examples in our eye of those, *who through faith and patience inherit the promises,* and do now as it were look down from their happy state upon us here below, who are combating with manifold temptations, to see how we behave and acquit our selves in our Christian course, we may take encouragement to our selves, from such examples, and such spectators, *to run with patience the race which is set before us.*

I know indeed that other use than this hath been, and is at this day made of the memory of the Saints and Martyrs of former ages, very dishonourable to God, and very grievous to them, if they be sensible of what is done here below ; I mean to worship them, and to pray to them, and (to the great Disparagement of the powerful Intercession of *our great high-priest, Jesus the Son of God*) to make them the Mediators and intercessors in heaven with God for us. Of this the Scripture hath no where given us the least Intimation ; but hath expressly commanded the contrary, *to worship the Lord our God, and him only to serve ; and to pray to him alone, in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the only Mediator betwixt God and Man.* Nor are there any footsteps of any such practice, in the primitive Church, for the first three hundred years ; as is acknowledged by our most learned Adversaries of the Church of Rome.

The Scripture no where propounds the Saints to us, for *objects of our worship* ; but for *the patterns of our lives.* This is the greatest respect and veneration, that we can, or ought to pay to them ; and whatever is beyond this, is a *Voluntary Humility*, injurious to God and our blessed Saviour, and most certainly displeasing to those, whom we pretend to honour ; if they know how men play the fool about them here below.

Let

Let us then endeavour to be like them, in the holy and virtuous actions of their Lives, in their constant patience and suffering for the Truth ; if God shall call us thereto. And we may be like them, if we do but sincerely endeavour it, and pray to God for his grace and assistance to that end. For these examples were not left for our *Admiration* only ; but for our *Imitation*. We frequently read the lives of the Apostles and first founders of our Religion : But I know not how it comes to pass, we chuse rather lazily to *admire* them, than vigorously to *follow* them ; as if the piety of the first Christians were *miraculous*, and not at all intended for the Imitation of succeeding Ages ; as if Heaven and Earth, God and Men, and all things were alter'd, since that time ; as if Christianity were then in its youthful age and vigour, but is since decayed, and grown old, and hath quite lost its power and virtue. And indeed the generality of Christians live at such a faint and careless rate, as to make the world believe, that either all the Stories of the Primitive Christians are Fables ; or else, that the Force of Christianity is strangely abated, and that the Holy Spirit of God hath forsaken the Earth, and is retired to the Father. But Truth never grows old, and those Laws of goodness and righteousness, which are contained in the Gospel, are still as reasonable, and apt to gain upon the minds of Men, as ever. God is the same he was, and our blessed Saviour is still at the right hand of God, interceding powerfully for Sinners, for *mercy and grace to help in time of need*. The promises and threatenings of the Gospel are still as true and powerful as ever ; and the holy Spirit of God is still in the World, and effectually works in them that believe.

Let us not then deceive our selves in this matter. The primitive Christians were *Men like our selves, subject to the same Passions that we are, and compassed about with the same Infirmities* ; so that although that extraordinary Spirit and Power of Miracles, which God endowed them withal, for the first planting and propagating of the Gospel in the world, be now ceased ; yet the sanctifying power and virtue of God's holy Spirit, does still accompany the Gospel, and is ready to assist us in every good work.

In a word, we have all that that is necessary to work the same Graces and Virtues in us, which were in them ; and if we be not slothful, and wanting to our selves, we may *follow their Faith*, and at last *attain the end of it, even the Salvation of our Souls*.

Let us then, from an idle admiring of those excellent patterns, proceed to a vigorous imitation of them, and be so far from being discouraged by the Excellency of them, as to make even *that* matter and ground of encouragement to our selves ; according to that of *Tertullian*, *Admonetur omnis ætas fieri posse, quod aliquando factum est ; all Ages to the end of the world may be convinced, that what hath been done, is possible to be done*. There have been such holy and excellent persons in the world ; and therefore it is possible for Men to be such.

Let us not then be slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Since we are compassed about with such a cloud of witnesses ; let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily besets us, and let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking upon Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith, who for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, and despised the Shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God.

S E R M O N XXIV.

Preached on
All-Saints
day.

The Encouragement to suffer for Christ; and the
Danger of denying him.

2 TIM. ii. 11, 12.

It is a faithful saying; For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: If we deny him, he also will deny us.



IN the beginning of this Chapter, St. Paul encourageth Timothy to continue stedfast in the profession of the Gospel, notwithstanding the sufferings which attended it; Verse 1. *Thou therefore my son, be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus*; and Verse 3. *Thou therefore endure hardship, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ*. And to animate him in his resolution, he quotes a saying, which it seems was well known and firmly believed among Christians; a saying on the one hand full of encouragement to those who with patience and constancy suffered for their religion; and on the other hand, full of terror to those who for fear of suffering denied it.

It is a faithful saying. This is a preface used by this Apostle, to introduce some remarkable sentence, of more than ordinary weight and concernment; 1 Tim. i. 15. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*; and chap. 4. 8, 9. *Godliness is profitable unto all things, having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.* Titus 3. 8. *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works.* And here in the text, the same preface is used to signify the importance of the saying he was about to mention; *It is a faithful saying; If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: If we deny him, he also will deny us.*

The first two sentences are matter of encouragement to those who suffer with Christ, and for him, and are the very same in sense. *If we be dead with him*, that is, if we lay down our lives for the testimony of the truth, as he did, *we shall also live with him*, that is, we shall in like manner be made partakers of immortality, as he is: *If we suffer* or endure as he did, *we shall also reign with him* in glory.

The other sentence is matter of terrour to those who deny him and his truth. *If we deny him, he also will deny us*; to which is subjoyned another saying much to the same sense; *if we believe not, εἰ ἀπιστοῦμεν, if we be unfaithful; yet he remaineth faithful, he cannot deny himself*; that is, he will be as good as his word, and make good that solemn threatening which he hath denounced against those, who shall for fear of suffering deny him, and his truth.

The words being thus explained, I shall begin with the first part of this remarkable saying; *If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.* This, it seems, was a noted saying among christians; and whether they had it by tradition of our Saviour, or whether it was in familiar use among the Apostles, as a very proper and powerful argument to keep christians stedfast to their religion, I cannot determine. It is certain, that sayings to this sense are very frequent, especially in the Epistles of St. Paul. Rom. 6. 5. *For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his Death;*

death; we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. And verse 8. Now if we be dead with Christ; we believe that we shall also live with him. 2 Cor. 4. 10. Always bearing about in the body, the dying of our Lord Jesus; that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. And verse 18. For we which live, are always delivered unto death for Jesus sake; that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. And Rom. 8. 17. If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. Phil. 3. 10, 11. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death: If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 1 Pet. 4. 12, 13. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

You see that the sense of this saying was in frequent use among the Apostles, as a powerful argument to encourage christians to constancy in their religion, notwithstanding the dangers and sufferings which attended it. *This is a faithful saying: If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.*

And the force of this argument will best appear, by taking into consideration these two things;

I. What virtue there is in a firm belief and persuasion of a blessed immortality in another world, to support and bear up mens spirits under the greatest sufferings for righteousness sake; and even to animate them, if God shall call them to it, to lay down their lives for their religion.

II. How it may be made out to be reasonable, for men to embrace and voluntarily to submit to present and grievous sufferings, in hopes of a future happiness and reward; concerning which we have not, nor perhaps are capable of having, the same degree of certainty and assurance which we have of the evils and sufferings of this present life.

I. What virtue there is in a firm belief and persuasion of a blessed immortality in another world, to support and bear up mens spirits, under the greatest sufferings for righteousness sake; and even to animate them, if God shall call them to it, to lay down their lives for their religion.

If men do firmly believe that they shall change this temporal and miserable life for an endless state of happiness and glory, and that they shall meet with a reward of their sufferings infinitely beyond the proportion of them, both in the weight and duration of it; this must needs turn the scales on that side, on which there is the greatest weight: And there is a sufficient ground for a firm belief of this. For if any thing can certainly be concluded from the providence of God, this may, that good men shall be happy one time or other: And because they are very often great sufferers in this life; that there is another state remains for them after this life, wherein they shall meet with a full reward of all their sufferings for righteousness sake.

But besides the reasonableness of this, from the consideration of God's providence, we have now a clear and express revelation of it; *life and immortality being brought to light by the Gospel.* This St. John tells us is the great promise of the Gospel, 1 John 2. 25. *This is the promise which he hath promised us; even eternal life.* And this promise, our Saviour most expressly makes to those who suffer for him: Matth. 5. 10, 11, 12. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.* Mark 10. 29, 30. *Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred fold now in this time, with persecutions, (that is, so far as a state of persecution would admit) and in the world to come eternal life.*

And

And if such a persuasion be firmly fixed in our minds; the faith of another world, and the assured hope of eternal life and happiness, must needs have a mighty force and efficacy upon the minds of sober and considerate men; because there is no proportion between suffering for a little while, and being unspeakably and eternally happy. So St. Paul tells us he calculated the matter, *Rom. 8. 18. I reckon (says he) that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.* The vast disproportion between the sufferings of a few days, and the joys and glory of eternity, when it is once firmly believed by us, will weigh down all the evils and calamities of this world, and give us courage and constancy under them. For why should we faint, if we believe that *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?* as the same St. Paul assures us, *2 Cor. 4. 17.* If our minds be but thoroughly possessed with the hopes of a resurrection to a better and happier life; this will make death, attended even with extremity of terror, to be tolerable; as we read of some, in that long catalogue of saints and martyrs, *Heb. 11. 35. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.* It would make a man to rejoice in the ruin and dissolution of *this earthly tabernacle*, to be assured that *when it is dissolved, we shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*, as the same Apostle assures us, *2 Cor. 5. 1.* Thus you see what virtue there is in the firm belief and persuasion of a better life, to bear up mens spirits under those sufferings and torments which may seem *unsupportable* to humane nature.

And so indeed they would be, without an extraordinary grace and assistance of God to enable them to bear those sufferings, which his providence permits them to be exercised withal. But of *this extraordinary grace*, we are assured, not only from the consideration of the attributes and providence of God; but likewise from the express promises and declarations of his word.

The attributes of God and his providence give us good ground to believe that *he* who loves goodness and righteousness, and hath a peculiar favour and regard for good men, will never suffer his faithful friends and servants to be brought into that distress for righteousness sake, that they shall not be able to endure those evils and afflictions which befall them upon that account: And if in the course of his providence, any thing happen to them that is above the ordinary constancy and patience of human nature to bear, that in such a case, God will extraordinarily interpose, and give them strength and patience, support and comfort, proportionable to the evils and sufferings that are upon them; and that he will either lighten their burden, or add to their strength; he will either mitigate their pain, or increase their patience; either he will check and restrain the effect of natural causes, as in the case of the *three children*, that were in the fiery furnace; and of *Daniel*, who was cast into the den of lions: or else (which comes to the same issue) if he will suffer causes to have their natural course, he will afford supernatural comforts to balance the fury and extremity of them. This is very credible, from the meer consideration of God's goodness, and of the particular care and favour of his providence towards good men.

But besides *this*, we have the express promise and declaration of God's word to this purpose, which puts us out of all doubt concerning that which we had good reason to hope and expect before. *1 Cor. 10. 13.* St. Paul there tells the christians at *Corinth*, that though they had met with some troubles, yet they had not been tried with the extremity of suffering: but when that should happen, they had no cause to doubt, but God would enable them bear it. *There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man*; that is, you have not yet been exercised with any trial, but what is humane; what the ordinary strength and resolution of humane nature is able to bear: but in case it should come to extreme suffering, and that they must either comply with the heathen idolatry, or endure extremity of torments; they had the promise of God's help to support them in that case. *God is faithful*, says he, *who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also*

make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it; and then it follows, wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry; that is, let no suffering that you are tempted withal, make you guilty of this sin. And, 1 Pet. 4. 14. the presence of God's spirit, in a very glorious manner, for our support and comfort, is promised to those who suffer for him. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.

And *this* consideration of God's strength to support us under sufferings, makes the *other*, of the reward of them, a perfect and compleat encouragement; which it could not be, without it. For if, upon the whole matter, the present sufferings of good men were intolerable, and humane nature were not divinely assisted to bear them: how great soever the future reward promised to them should be; they that lay under them, would be forced to consult their own present ease and deliverance. I proceed to the

II. Thing I proposed to consider, namely, how it may be made out to be reasonable to embrace and voluntarily to submit to present and grievous sufferings, in hopes of future happiness and reward; concerning which we have not, nor perhaps are capable of having, the same degree of certainty and assurance, which we have of the evils and sufferings of this present life.

Now, granting that we have not the same degree of certainty concerning our future happiness, that we have of our present sufferings, which we feel, or see just ready to come upon us; yet prudence making it necessary for men to run this hazard, does justify the reasonableness of it. This I take to be a *known and ruled case* in the common affairs of life, and in matters of temporal concernment; and men act upon this principle every day. The husbandman parts with his corn, and casts it into the earth, in confidence that it will spring up again, and at the time of harvest bring him in a considerable return and advantage. He parts with a certainty, in hope only of a great future benefit: and tho' he have no demonstration, for the infallible success of his labour and hazard; yet he acts very reasonably: because if he does not take this course, he runs a greater and more certain hazard, of perishing by famine at last, when his present stock is spent. The case of the merchant is the same, who parts with a present estate, in hopes of a future improvement; which yet is not so certain as what he parts withal.

And if this be reasonable in *these* cases; then the hazard which men run, upon much greater assurance than either the husbandman or the merchant hath, is much more reasonable. When we part with this life in hopes of one infinitely better, that is, *in sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life*; and when we submit to present sufferings, to avoid an eternity of misery, which is much more to be dreaded than temporal want, this is reasonable; because here is a much greater advantage in view, and a more pressing necessity in the case; nothing being so desirable to one that must live for ever, as to be happy for ever; and nothing to be avoided by him with so much care, as everlasting misery and ruin. And for our security of obtaining the one, and escaping the other, we have *the promise of God, who cannot lie*: which is all the certainty and security that things future and invisible are capable of.

Nay, I will go lower. If God had made no express promise and declaration of a future happiness and reward, to those that serve him and suffer for him: yet if any man out of a sincere love to God, and awful regard to his laws, endure trouble and affliction, if there be a God and providence, this is assurance enough to us, that our services and sufferings shall one time or other be considered and rewarded. For as sure as any man is, that there is a God, and that his providence regards the actions of men; so sure are we, that no man shall finally be a loser by any thing that he doth or suffers for him.

So that the matter is now brought to this plain issue, that if it be reasonable to believe there is a God, and that his providence regards and considers the actions of men; it is also reasonable to endure present sufferings, in hope of a future reward: and there is certainty enough in this case, to govern and determine a prudent man, that is in any good measure persuaded of another

life

life after this, and hath any tolerable consideration of, and regard to his eternal interest.

Indeed, if we were sure, that there were no life after this; if we had no expectation of a happiness or misery beyond this world; the wisest thing that any man could do, would be to enjoy as much of the present contentments and satisfactions of this world, as he could fairly come at. For *if there be no resurrection to another life*, the Apostle allows the reasoning of the *Epicure* to be very good, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die*. But on the other hand, if it be true that we are designed for immortality, and that another state remains for us after this life, wherein we shall be unspeakably happy, or intolerably and eternally miserable, according as we have behaved our selves in this world; it is then evidently reasonable, that men should take the greatest care of the longest duration, and be content to bear, and dispense with some present trouble and inconvenience, for a felicity that will have no end; and be willing to labour and take pains, and deny our present ease and comfort for a little while, that we may be happy for ever. This is reckoned prudence in the account of this world, for a man to part with a present possession and enjoyment, for a much greater advantage in reversion: But surely the disproportion between *time* and *eternity* is *so vast*, that did men but firmly believe that they shall *live for ever*, nothing in this world could reasonably be thought too good to part withal, or too grievous to suffer, for the obtaining of a blessed immortality.

In the virtue of this belief and persuasion, the primitive christians were fortified, against all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do against them; and they thought they made a very wise bargain, if *through many tribulations they might at last enter into the kingdom of God*; because they believed, that the joys of Heaven would abundantly recompence all their sorrows and sufferings upon earth. And so confident were they of this, that they looked upon it as a special favour and regard of God to them, to call them to suffer for his name. So *St. Paul* speaks of it, *Phil. 1. 29. Unto you it is given, on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake*. Yea, they accounted *them* happy, who upon this account were miserable in this world. So *St. James* expressly pronounceth them, *Jam. 1. 12. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation*; (meaning the temptation of persecution and suffering) *for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*. And this consideration was that, which kept up their spirits from sinking under the weight of their greatest sufferings. So *St. Paul* tells us, *2 Cor. 4. 14, 16. Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up us also by Jesus. For which cause we faint not; but tho' our outward man perish: yet the inward man is renewed day by day*. The sufferings of their bodies, did but help to raise and fortifie their spirits: nay, so far were they from fainting under those afflictions, that they rejoiced and gloried in them. So the same Apostle tells us, *Rom. 5. 2, 3. that in the midst of their sufferings, they rejoiced in hope of the glory of God; and that they gloried in tribulations*, as being the way to be made partakers of that glory: And *Heb. 10. 34. That they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance*. And for this reason, *St. James*, chap. 1. 2. exhorts christians *to account it all joy, when they fall into divers temptations*; (that is, various kinds of sufferings) because of the manifold advantages which from thence would redound to them.

Now what was it that inspir'd them to all this courage and chearfulness, but the belief of a mighty reward, far beyond the proportion of all their sufferings, and a firm persuasion that they should be vast gainers by them at the last? This consideration *St. Paul* urgeth with great force, *2 Cor. 4. 17, 18. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: whilst we look not at the things which are seen; but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal*. If we could compare things justly, and attentively regard and consider *the invisible* glories of another world, as well as

the things which are seen; we should easily perceive, that he who suffers for God and religion, does not renounce happiness; but puts it out to interest, upon terms of the greatest advantage.

I shall now speak briefly to the

Second part of this remarkable saying in the text; *If we deny him, he also will deny us*: To which is subjoined in the words following, *if we believe not*; *ἂν ἀπιστεύωμεν*, *if we deal unfaithfully with him*; yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself; that is, he will be constant to his word, and make good that solemn threatening which he hath denounced against those, who for fear of suffering shall deny him and his truth before men, *Matth. 10. 33. Whosoever* (saith our Lord there) *shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.* *Mark 8. 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.* This is a terrible threatening, to be disowned by Christ at the day of judgment, in the presence of God and his holy Angels; and this threatening will certainly be made good; and tho' we may renounce him, and break our faith with him, yet he remains faithful, who hath threaten'd, and cannot deny himself.

This is matter of great terror, and seriously to be thought upon by those who are tempted to deny Christ and his truth, either by the hope of worldly advantage, or the fear of temporal sufferings. What worldly advantage can we propose to our selves, by quitting our religion, which can be thought an equal price, for the loss of our immortal souls, and of the happiness of all eternity? Suppose the whole world were offered us in consideration; yet *what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* as our Saviour reasons, *Matth. 16. 26.*

And on the other hand, if the fear of temporal suffering be such a terror to men, as to shake their constancy in religion, and to tempt them to renounce it; the fear of eternal torments ought to be much more powerful, to keep them stedfast to their religion, and to deter them from the denial of it. If fear will move us; then in all reason, that which is most terrible ought to prevail most with us, and the greatest danger should be most dreaded by us, according to our Saviour's most friendly and reasonable advice, *Luke 12. 4, 5. I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him.* If there can be no doubt which of them is most to be dreaded; there can be no doubt what we are to do, in case of such a temptation.

I shall now draw some inferences from this discourse by way of application.

First, *If this be a faithful saying, that if we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; but if we deny him, he will also deny us*; the belief of it ought to have a mighty influence upon us, to make us stedfast and unmoveable in the profession and practice of our holy religion. This inference the Apostle makes from the doctrine of a blessed resurrection, *1 Cor. 15. 58. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as you know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.* If any thing will fix men in the profession of their religion, and make them serious in the practice of it; the belief of a glorious resurrection, and of the reward which God will then give to his faithful servants, must needs have a very powerful influence upon them to this purpose. Upon the same ground the Apostle to the Hebrews exhorts them to hold fast the profession of their faith, without wavering; because he is faithful that hath promised. If we be constant in the profession and practice of our holy religion; God will be faithful to the promise which he hath made of eternal life to those who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality.

If under the dark and imperfect dispensation of the law, good men shewed so much courage and constancy for God and religion, as we read in that long catalogue

talogue of heroes, *Heb. 11.* how much more should *Christians*, whose faith is supported much more strongly than *theirs* was, by a much clearer evidence of another life, and a blessed immortality, than *they* had; by more express promises of divine comfort and assistance under sufferings, than were made to *them*; and by the most divine and encouraging example, of the greatest patience under the greatest sufferings, that the world ever had, in the death and passion of the Son of God, *who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God?* When we consider this glorious example of suffering, and the glorious reward of it, how can we *be weary and faint in our minds*! If the Saints and Apostles of the old testament did such great things, by virtue of a faith, which relied chiefly upon the attributes and providence of God; what should not *we* do, who have the security of God's express promise for our comfort and encouragement! *We* certainly have much greater reason to take up our cross more cheerfully, and to bear it more patiently, than they did.

Secondly, We should always be prepared in the resolutions of our minds, to suffer for the testimony of God's truth and a good conscience, if it should please God at any time to call us to it. This our Saviour hath made a necessary condition of his religion, and a qualification of a true disciple. *If any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me.* So that we are to reckon upon it, and to prepare for it; that if it comes, we may not be surpris'd, *as if some strange thing had happened to us*; and may not be unresolv'd what to do in such a case. And God knows when we may be called to it: however it is wise, to forecast it in our minds, and to be always in a preparation and readiness to entertain the worst that may happen, that if it come, we may *be able to stand out in an evil day*; and if it does not come, God will accept the resolution of our minds, and reward it according to the sincerity of it: he that knows what we would have done, will consider it, as if we had done it.

Thirdly, The less we are called to suffer for God, the more we should think ourselves oblig'd to do, for him; the less God is pleas'd to exercise our *patience*, we should abound so much the more in the *active virtues* of a good life; and our obedience to God should be so much the more cheerful, and we more *fruitful in every good work*. If there be no need of *sealing* the truth with our blood, we should be sure to *adorn* and recommend it by our *lives*.

Fourthly and Lastly, If the hopes of immortality will bear men up under the extremity of suffering and torments, and give men courage and resolution against all the *terrors* of the world: they ought much more to make us victorious over the *temptations* and *allurements* of it. For certainly it is in reason much easier to *forego pleasure*, than to *endure pain*; to *refuse or lay down a good place* for the testimony of a good conscience, than to *lay down our lives* upon that account. And in vain does any man pretend that he will be a *Martyr* for his religion, when we will not *rule an appetite*, nor *restrain a lust*, nor *subdue a passion*, nor *cross his covetousness and ambition*, for the sake of it, and in hope of that *eternal life, which God, that cannot lye, hath promised*. He that refuseth to do the *less*, is not like to do the *greater*. It is very improbable, that a man will *die for his religion*, when he cannot be persuad'd to *live according to it*. So that by this we may try the sincerity of our resolution concerning *martyrdom*. For what profession soever men make, he that will not *deny himself* the pleasures of sin, and the advantages of this world, for Christ; when it comes to the push, will never have the heart to *take up his cross, and follow him*. He that cannot take up a resolution to *live a Saint*, hath a demonstration within himself, that he is never like to *die a Martyr*.

S E R M O N XXV.

Preached on
All-Saints
day.

The Blessedness of Good Men, after Death.

REV. xiv. 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.



Will not trouble you with any nice dispute about the author of this book of the *Revelation*, or the authority of it: tho' both these were sometime controverted; because it is now many ages since this book was received into the *Canon* of the scriptures, as of *divine authority*, and as written by *St. John*. Nor shall I at this time enquire into the particular meaning of the several *visions* and *predictions* contained in it. It is confessedly, in several parts of it, a very obscure book; and there needs no other argument to satisfy us that it is so, than that so many learned and inquisitive persons, have given such different interpretations of several remarkable passages in it; as particularly concerning *the slaying of the two witnesses, and the number of the beast*.

The words which I have read to you, tho' there be some difficulty about the interpretation of some particular expressions in them; yet in the general sense and intendment of them, they are very plain, being a solemn declaration of *the blessed state of good men after this life*.

And that we may take the more notice of them, they are brought in with a great deal of solemn preparation and address, as it were on purpose to bespeak our attention to them: *I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth*. And for the greater confirmation of them, the special testimony of *the Spirit* is added to *the voice from heaven*, declaring the reason why they *that die in the Lord* are pronounced to be in so happy a condition: *Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them*.

In the handling of these words, I shall *First* enquire into the particular sense and meaning of them.

Secondly, Prosecute the general intendment of them, which I told you is to declare to us, *the blessed state of those that die in the Lord*, (that is) of Saints and good men, after they are departed this life.

First, I shall enquire into the particular sense and meaning of the words. To the clearing of which, nothing will conduce more, than to consider the occasion of them, which was briefly this. In the *visions* of this and the foregoing chapter, is represented to *St. John*, the great straits that the christians, the true worshippers of the true God, should be reduced to. On the one hand, they are threaten'd with death; or if they be suffered to live, they are interdicted all commerce with humane society, chap. 13. 15. *And he had power to cause, that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed*: And ver. 17. *That no man may buy or sell, save he that had the mark of the beast*. And on the other hand, they that do worship the beast are threaten'd with damnation, chap. 14. 9, 10. *If any man do worship the beast, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone*. So that whenever this should happen, it would be a time of great tryal to the sincere christians, being threaten'd with *extreme persecution* on the one hand, and *eternal damnation* on the

the other; and therefore it is added in the 12th Verse, *here is the patience of the Saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.* This is represented in St. John's visions, as the last and extreamest persecution of the true worshipers of God, and which should precede the final downfall of Babylon. And when this should happen, then he tells us, *the patience of the Saints* would be tried to purpose, and then it would be seen, who are faithful to God, and constant to his truth; and upon this immediately follows *the voice from heaven* in the text; *And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

The main difficulty of the words, depends upon the word ἀπ' ἁρτι, *from henceforth*; which interpreters do variously refer to several parts of the text. Some by changing the accent, and reading it, ἀπαρτι, would change the signification of the word into *omnino*; *omnino beati sunt, they are altogether blessed, very happy, who die in the Lord.* But this is altogether destitute of the countenance and warrant of any ancient copy. We will then suppose that the word is ἀπ' ἁρτι, and to be rendered as we translate it, *from henceforth, from this time.* All the difficulty is, to what part of the text we are to refer it. Some refer it to the word *blessed*; *Blessed from henceforth are the dead which die in the Lord:* as if from this time, and not before, the souls of good men were, immediately after death, admitted into heaven; which, many of the ancient fathers thought, the souls of good men who died before the coming of Christ, were not. But then this blessedness ought to have been dated, not from the time of St. John's vision, but of Christ's Ascension; according to that of St. Ambrose, in the hymn called *Te Deum*; *When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.*

Others refer it to *dying in the Lord.* *Blessed are the dead, that from henceforth die in the Lord.* But this hath no peculiar *Emphasis* in it; because they were *blessed, that died in the Lord, before that time.*

Others refer it to the words following, concerning the testimony of the Spirit; *yea, from henceforth saith the Spirit.* All these varieties agree in this sense in general; that some special blessedness is promised and declared to those who should die after that time: but what that is in particular, is not easy to make out.

But the most plain and simple interpretation, and that which seems to be most suitable to the occasion of these words, is this; that the word ἀπ' ἁρτι, *from henceforth*, is to be referred to the whole sentence, thus; *from henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord;* as if St. John had said, considering the extremity and cruel circumstances of *this last and severe persecution*, we may from that time forward reckon those, who are already dead, (supposing that *they died in the Lord*) to be very happy; in that they did not live to see and suffer those things, which will then befall the faithful servants of God, when *the Devil shall come, having great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time.* Much in the same sense as Solomon, when he considered the oppressions that were done under the Sun, says, *Eccl. 4. 2. that he praised the dead, which were already dead; more than the living, which were yet alive;* that is, considering the oppressions which were so frequent in the world, he reckoned *those* happier that were out of it, than *those* who still lived in it.

And as this is very agreeable to the scope of what goes before, so it suits very well with what follows after, as the reason, why those persons are declared to be so happy; *yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them;* that is, that they may be at an end of their troubles and sufferings; and may not be tryed beyond their strength and patience, under *that terrible persecution* which will reign at that time; and likewise that they may receive the reward of all the good they have done, and the evils they have suffered in this world; in the very same sense, that *the righteous* are said to be *taken away from the evil to come*, *Esaï. 57. 1, 2. The righteous is taken away from the evil to come, he shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking*

in his uprightness; that is, enjoying the comfort of his integrity and sincerity towards God.

And now the main Difficulty being over, we shall need to trouble our selves the less about the other expressions in the *text*: Yet there are *two* which I shall a little explain to you.

1. What is here meant by *dying in the Lord*. And this sort of phrase, *in the Lord; in Christ, and in the name of Christ*, is used in scripture very variously. In general it signifies, *the doing or suffering any thing, with relation to Christ, and upon his account*; and so *to die in the Lord*, doth most frequently signifie *to die in the faith of Christ, and the profession of the christian religion*. Sometimes it signifies *to die for his cause, and to bear testimony to his truth*, which is therefore called *martyrdom*, as St. Paul is said to be *δέσμιος ἐν κυρίῳ*, Eph. 4. 1. *A prisoner in the Lord*; that is, *for his cause*. So likewise, St. Peter; *ἡμεῖς ἐν ὀνόματι Χριστοῦ*, *in the name of Christ; happy are ye*: And 'tis probable, that the expression, 1 Cor. 15. 18. *Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ*, is to be understood, of *those that died for his cause*; because it follows immediately, *if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable*; that is, considering how much christians suffered for him in this life, they were in a most miserable condition, if there were nothing to be expected beyond it; but especially if we consider the parallel Phrase, 1 Thess. 4. 14. *So them also that sleep in Jesus*, *διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ*, *for Jesus sake*; that is, *them that have suffered martyrdom for him, will God bring with him*. And in this sense, many understand the phrase in the *text*, as spoken of *martyrs*; *blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord*; that is, *for his cause*. And tho' I think the phrase may well enough be understood more generally, yet I shall not reject this sense: because it is not unsuitable to the scope and occasion of the words. For considering *that last and extreme persecution* which he had described; it was not altogether improper to pronounce those happy, that had suffered martyrdom already, and were taken away from those dreadful calamities, which in these last days of *Antichrist* were to fall upon the faithful servants of Christ.

The other expression is the last in the *text*, *and their works do follow them*. So we render the word *ἀκολουθεῖ*, which yet does most properly signifie *to accompany, or go along with one*; and so indeed the expression will rather be more emphatical, *they rest from their labours, and their works accompany them*. But whether the word be render'd, *to follow, or to accompany*, the difference is not very material.

Thus you see what the particular sense and meaning of the words probably is, *to declare the happy estate of those saints or martyrs, who were already dead, in and for the faith of Christ; and should not live to see those cruel and fearful sufferings, which should afterwards come upon the christians*. But then this is grounded upon that general truth, that *they are happy that die in the Lord*. And this is that which I intend now to prosecute, abstracting from the particular occasion, upon which these words were spoken; which brings me to the

Second thing I propounded, and chiefly designed to handle upon the occasion of *this day*; namely, *the happy estate of good men after they have departed out of this life*. And in speaking to this, I shall confine my self to *two particulars*, which the *text* mentions, as the reasons and grounds, why *they that die in the Lord*, are declared to be in so *blessed* a condition; yea, *said the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them*.

1. Good men, when they are departed this life, are freed from all the labours and pains they were exercised with in this world: *that they may rest from their labours*.

2. They reap the comfort and reward of all the good which they have done in this world: *and their works do follow them*, or rather, *go along with them*, to receive the reward which God hath promised to *them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality*.

1. Those *who die in the Lord*, are freed from the evils and miseries of this life. And this is so great a felicity, that some (and those who think themselves no small philosophers) have placed the chief happiness of man in freedom from pain

pain and trouble. But tho' happiness do not consist in this alone ; yet it cannot be denied to be a great part of it : For tho' some have been so phantastically obstinate, as, against the reason and common sense of mankind, to maintain this *Paradox*, that *a wise man may be as happy upon the rack, or in Phalaris his Bull, as in the greatest ease and freedom from pain that can be imagined* ; yet nature cries shame of this hypocrisie ; and there are none of those *wise men* they speak of, were ever *such fools* as to try the experiment, and to shew by their actions, that it was indifferent to them, whether they lay'd themselves down upon their beds every night, or were stretcht upon a rack ; which yet ought to have been indifferent to them, had they believed themselves, and really esteemed that, which others account *pain*, to be as happy a condition, as that which is commonly called *ease*.

But we need not trouble our selves to confute so stupid a principle, which is confuted by *nature*, and by every man's *sense* and *experience*. I think we may take it for granted, that freedom from misery is a very considerable part of happiness ; otherwise *heaven* and *hell*, if we consider only the torment of it, would be all one. But certainly it is no small endearment of religion, to the common sense of mankind, that it promiseth to us in the next life, a freedom from all the evils and troubles of this. And by *this* the happiness of heaven is frequently described to us in Scripture, *Esai. 57. 2.* speaking of *the righteous man* ; *he shall enter into peace : they shall rest in their beds.* 2 *Thef. 1. 7.* where the Apostle speaking of the reward of those, who should suffer persecution for religion, *it is a righteous thing with God*, (says he) *to recompense to you, who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels.* And the Apostle to the *Hebrews* frequently describes the happiness of christians by *entering into rest*. And *Rev. 21. 4.* the state of the *new Jerusalem* is set forth to us, by deliverance from those troubles and sorrows, which men are subject to in this world ; *and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are past away.*

Thus it is with us in this world, we are liable to *sorrow* and *pain* and *death* : But when we are once got to heaven, none of *these* things shall approach us. *The former things are pass'd away*, that is, the evils we formerly endured, are past and over, and shall never return to afflict us any more.

And is not this a great comfort, when we are labouring under the evils of this life, and conflicting sorely with the miseries of it ; that we shall one day be past all these, and find a safe refuge and retreat from all these storms and tempests : When we are loaded with afflictions, and even tired with the burden of them, and ready to faint and sink under it ; to think that *there remains a rest for us, into which we shall shortly enter* ? How can it choose but be a mighty consolation to us, whilst we are in this *vale of tears and troubles*, to be assured that the time is coming, when *God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow nor crying* ?

There are none of us, but are obnoxious to any of the evils of this life ; we feel some of them, and we fear more : our outward condition, it may be, is uncomfortable, we are poor and persecuted ; we are destitute of friends, or have many enemies ; we are despoiled of many of those comforts and enjoyments which we once had : our bodies perhaps are in pain, or our spirits troubled ; or though we have no real cause of outward trouble, yet our souls are ill lodg'd, in the dark dungeon of a body ; over-power'd with a melancholy humour, which keeps out all light and comfort from our minds.

And is it no reviving to us, to think of *that happy hour*, when we shall find a remedy and redress of all these evils at once ; of *that blessed place*, where we shall take sanctuary, from all those afflictions and troubles which pursued us in this world ? where sorrow, and misery, and death are perfect strangers, and into which nothing that can render men in the least unhappy, can ever enter ? where our souls shall be in perfect rest and contentment, and our bodies after a while shall be restored and reunited to our souls ; not to cloud and clog them as

they do here, but so happily changed, and refined to such a perfection, that they shall be so far from giving any disturbance to our minds, that they shall mightily add to their pleasure and happiness.

And when we are once landed in those blessed regions, what a comfort will it be to us, to stand on the shore, and look back upon those rough and dangerous seas, which we have escaped? How pleasant to consider the manifold evils and calamities which we are freed from, and for ever secured against? To remember our past labours and sufferings, and to be able to defy all those temptations, which were wont to assault us in this world, with so much violence, and with too much success?

And this is the condition of the blessed spirits above. They find a perfect cessation of all afflictions and troubles, *they rest from their labours*. But this is not all: For,

2. They are not only freed from all the evils and sufferings they were exercised withal in this world; but they shall receive a plentiful reward of all the good they have done in it; *their works do accompany them*. When pious Souls go out of this world, they do not only leave all the evils of the world behind them; but they carry along with them all the good they have done, to reap there the comfort and reward of it. Just as, on the other hand, wicked men when they die, leave all the good things of this world, all the pleasures and enjoyments behind them; but the guilt and remorse of their wicked lives accompany them, and stick close to them, to torment them there, and that there they may be tormented for them.

Thus the Scriptures represent to us the different condition of good and bad men, *Esai. 3. 10, 11. Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Wo unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him.* Which is many times true in *this* world; but however that happen, will most certainly and remarkably be made good in *the other*. And this is most emphatically exprest to us, in the parable of the *rich man* and *Lazarus*, *Luke 16. 25.* where *the rich man* petitions *Abraham* for some ease, and *Abraham* returns him this answer; *Son, remember that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* What a change was here! How comfortable to the one, and how dismal to the other! *Lazarus* found rest from all his labours and sufferings, and his piety and patience accompanied him into the other world, and conveyed him into *Abraham's* bosom. Whereas *the rich man* was parted from all his good things, and the guilt of his sins went along with him, and lodged him in the place of torment.

But my *Text* confines me to the bright side of this prospect; the consideration of that glorious recompense which good men shall receive, for the good works which they have done in this world. Indeed the *text* doth not expressly say, that *their works shall be rewarded*, but that *they shall go along with them*, and that they are *blessed* upon this account; and this implies that *they shall receive a sure reward*. For as the Apostle reasons, *God is not unrighteous to forget our work and labour of love. Verily there is a reward for the righteous*, as sure as there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

But how great and glorious *that* shall be, I am not in any measure able to declare to you. It may suffice, that the Scripture hath assured us in general, that God is the rewarder of good men, and that he will make them happy, not according to what can now enter into our narrow thoughts, but according to the exceeding greatness of his power and goodness. If we are to receive our reward from God, we need not doubt, but it will be very large, and such as is every way worthy of him to bestow. For he is a great King, and of great goodness; and we may safely refer our selves to him, in confidence that he will consider us, not according to the meanness of our service, but according to the vastness of his treasures, and the infinite bounty of his mind. If he hath promised to make us happy, tho' he have not particularly declared to us, wherein this happiness shall

shall consist; yet we may trust *him that made us*, to find out ways to make us happy; and may believe, that he who made us *without* our knowledge or desire, is able to make us happy *beyond* them both.

Only for the greater encouragement of our holiness and obedience, tho' he hath promised to reward every good man, far beyond the proportion of any good he hath or can do; yet he hath declared, that these rewards shall be proportionably greater or less, according to the degree of every man's piety and virtue. So our Saviour tells us, that *they who are persecuted for righteousness sake, great shall be their reward in heaven*, Matt. 5. 12. That there will be a difference between the reward of *a righteous man*, and *a prophet*; that is, of *one who is more publickly and eminently useful for the salvation of others*. And among those who are *Teachers* of others, they that are more industrious, and consequently more likely to be successful in this work, shall have a more glorious reward; as we are told by the Angel, Dan. 12. 3. *And they that be wise, (or as it is in the Margin render'd, they that be Teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever*. So likewise we find in the parable of the *talents*, that he that improv'd his talent to *ten*, was made *ruler over ten cities*. And St. Paul, 2 Cor. 9. 6. speaking of the degrees of mens charity and liberality towards the poor, says expressly, *he that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly; but he that soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully*; which by proportion of reason may be extended to the exercise of all other graces and virtues. 1 Cor. 15. 41, 42. The Apostle there represents the different degrees of glory, which good men shall be invested with at the resurrection, by the different glory and splendor of the heavenly luminaries. *There is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differeth from another star in glory: So also is the resurrection of the dead*. So that the more any man suffers for God, and the more patiently he suffers, the more holily and virtuously, the more charitably and usefully he lives in *this* world; the more good works will accompany him into the *next*, and the greater and more glorious reward he may hope to receive there; which, as the Apostle reasons (in the conclusion of that chapter concerning the doctrine of the resurrection) ought to be a mighty encouragement to every one of us, not only to be *stedfast and unmoveable* (that is, fix'd and resolute in the profession and practice of our religion) but *abounding likewise in the work of the Lord; forasmuch as we know, that our labour is not in vain in the Lord*.

Every degree of diligence and industry, in the work and service of God, will most certainly one day turn to a happy account. *Having therefore such promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*. The more perfectly holy we are here on earth, the more perfectly happy we shall be in heaven, and continue so to all eternity.

I have now done with the *two* reasons, which are here given in the *text*, of the happiness that good men, such as *die in the Lord*, shall be made partakers of in another life; because *they rest from their labours, and their works accompany them*; they are freed from all the evils which they suffer'd, and shall receive the reward of all the good they have done in this life.

I should now have proceeded to make some *inferences* from this discourse; but those I will reserve for another discourse on this subject.

All that I shall add at present, as the *application* of what I have already said, is, that this should stir us to a careful and zealous imitation of those *blessed persons* described in the *text*, who are *dead in the Lord, and are at rest from their labours, and whose works do accompany them*. Let us imitate them, in their faith and patience, in their piety and good works, and in their constancy to God and his truth, which was dearer to them than their lives.

Thus their virtues and sufferings are described in the *visions* of this book, chap. 13. 10. *Here is the patience and the faith of the saints*; and chap. 14. 12. *Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God,*

and the faith of Jesus; and Chap. 12. 11. And they overcame by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

In this way, and by these steps, all the *Saints* and *Martyrs* of all ages have ascended up to heaven, and attained to that blessed state, which they are now possessed of, after all the evils which they suffered in this world. *They are now at rest from their labours*, and all the good works which they have done *are gone along with them*, and they are now, and shall for ever be, receiving the comfort and reward of them. And if we tread in their steps, by a zealous imitation of the piety and holiness of their lives, and of the constancy and patience of their sufferings; we shall one day be translated into their blessed society, and made partakers with them of the same glorious reward. If we *have our fruit unto holiness*, our end shall be *everlasting life*. If we *be faithful unto death*, we shall receive a crown of life.

Let us then, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* exhorts, Chap. 6. 11, 12. *Every one of us shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope, unto the end: and let us not be slothful; but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good word and work, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N XXVI.

The Blessedness of Good Men, after Death.

REV. xiv. 13.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.



IN my explication of these words I told you, that they are, in the general sense and meaning of them, *a solemn declaration of the blessed estate of good men after this life*; but delivered upon a special occasion, as is signified by that expression, *from henceforth*; that is, *from the time of that vision*, in which was represented to St. John, the last and extremest persecution of the faithful servants of Christ, and which should precede the fatal downfall of *Babylon*; *from that time, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord*; that is, considering the extremity, and the cruel circumstances of this last and severest persecution, we may, *from that time forward*, reckon those who are already dead (supposing that *they died in the Lord*), to be very happy; in that they do not live to see and suffer those grievous things, which then will befall the faithful servants of God.

In my former discourse, I consider'd the words according to the general intention of them, abstracting from the particular occasion upon which they were spoken, endeavouring to set forth *the happy estate of good men after this life*, from the two reasons and grounds mentioned in the text, namely, because *they rest from their labours*, and because *their works do follow*, or accompany and go along with them; which two particulars constitute the happiness of the future state.

That

That which farther remains, and to which I now proceed, is to make some *Inferences* from what I have said upon this subject. And in doing this, I shall have an eye on the *special occasion* of the words, as well as on their *general intention*. And the *Inferences* shall be these following:

First, If those that *die in the Lord* are *at rest from their labours* and pains; then the *text* concludes directly against the feigned *Purgatory* of the church of *Rome*, which supposeth a great number of those that *die in the Lord*, and have *obtain'd eternal redemption* by him from hell, not to pass immediately into happiness; but to be detain'd in the suburbs of hell, in great pain and torment, till their souls be purged, and the debt of temporary punishment, to which they are liable, be some way or other paid off and discharged.

Secondly, Here is a mighty encouragement to piety and virtue, to consider, that all the good we do in this world will *accompany* us into the other.

Thirdly, It is a great encouragement to patience under the sufferings and persecutions which attend good men in this world; that how heavy and grievous soever they are at present, they will end with this life, and we shall then *rest from all our labours*.

Fourthly, The consideration of *the* extreme sufferings of Christians in *the last times*, and which perhaps are not far from us, should render us very indifferent to life, and all the enjoyments of it, so as even to esteem it a particular grace and favour of God, to be *taken away from the evil to come*, and by death to prevent (if he sees it good) *those extremities* of sufferings, which seem to be hastening upon the world.

I. If those that *die in the Lord* are *at rest from all their labours* and pains; then this *text* concludes directly against the feigned *Purgatory* of the church of *Rome*, which supposeth a great number, yea the far greatest part of those that *die in the Lord*, and have *obtained eternal redemption* by him from hell, not to pass immediately into happiness, but to be detained somewhere (they are not certain where, but most probably in the suburbs of hell) in great pain and torment, equal in degree to that of hell, and differing only in duration; I say, to be detained there, till their souls be purged from the defilements they have contracted in this world, and the debt of temporary punishments, to which they are liable, be some way or other paid off and discharged.

They suppose indeed some very few holy men to be so perfect at their departure out of this life; that they do immediately, and without any stop, pass into heaven, because they need no purgation; and those likewise who suffer Martyrdom, because they discharge their debt of temporary punishments here: But the generality of Christians *who die in the Lord*, they suppose so imperfect, as to stand in need of being *purged by fire*, and accordingly that they are detained a longer or shorter time, as their debt of temporary punishments is greater or less.

And indeed they have a very considerable and substantial reason, to exempt as few as possibly they can from going to *Purgatory*; because the more they put in fear of going thither, the market of *indulgences* riseth the higher, and the profit thence accruing to the Pope's coffers; and the more and greater legacies will be left to the Priests, to hire their saying of *Masses*, for the delivery of souls out of the place of torments: For tho' the prayers of *friends* and *relations* will contribute something to this; yet nothing does the business so effectually, as the *Masses* and prayers of *Priests* to that end.

But how is it then that St. *John* says, that those that *die in the Lord* are happy, because they *rest from their labours*; if so be the far greatest part of those *who die in the Lord* are so far from *resting from their labours*, that they enter into far greater pains and torments, than ever they endured in this world? And therefore *Bellarmino*, that their doctrine of *Purgatory* may receive no prejudice from this *text*, would have *from henceforth*, in the *text*, to be dated from *the day of judgment*; when he supposeth the pains of *Purgatory* will be at an end. But why, *from henceforth* should take date from the *day of judgment*, he can give no reason, but only to save *Purgatory* from being condemned by this *text*. For

St. John plainly speaks of the happiness of those that should die *after that time*, (whatever it be) which he there describes; but *that time* cannot be *the day of judgment*, because none shall die *after that time*. Just thus *Eftius* (one of their most learned commentators) deals with another *text*, which by the generality of their writers is urged as a plain proof of *Purgatory*; *he shall be saved, yet so as by fire*: Upon which he says, *It is sufficient that there is nothing in this text against Purgatory*. Sufficient, for what? Not to prove *Purgatory*, as they generally pretend from this *text*, but to save it harmless from it; as if we had pretended that this *text* makes against it.

But there are others that make against it with a witness. Not only the perpetual silence of Scripture about it, when there are so many fair occasions of speaking of it; as in the *parable* of the *rich man* and *Lazarus*, where the future state is so particularly described, and yet no mention made, nor the least intimation given of this *third* state: But besides the silence of Scripture about it, there are several passages utterly inconsistent with it; as namely, St. Paul's discourse in the beginning of the *fifth* Chapter of the *second* Epistle to the *Corinthians*, where he plainly declares the assurance he had, that all sincere Christians, so soon as they quit the body, do pass into happiness: *For we know*, (says he) *that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved; we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*. The plain meaning of which is, that so soon as we quit the one, we shall pass into the other. And this consideration, he tells us, made Christians weary of this world, and willing to die; ver. 2. *For in this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven*; and ver. 4. *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened*. But had Christians believed, that the greatest part of them, when they left the body, were to go into *Purgatory*, to be terribly tormented there; they would not have been in such haste to die; but would have protracted the time as long as they could, and have contentedly born *the burden of this earthly tabernacle*, rather than to quit it, for a condition a thousand times more intolerable. But St. Paul expressly says, that Christians *knew* the contrary, and that as soon as ever they went out of the body they should be happy, and *with the Lord*; and that this gave them courage against the fears of death; ver. 6. *Therefore we are always confident*, *δαρμοντες εν παντοτε*, *bono igitur animo sumus*; *Therefore we are always of good courage, knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord*; and ver. 8. *We are of good courage, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord*. The plain sense of which is, that Christians were willing rather to die than to live; because they knew, that so soon as they left the body and departed this life, they should be present with the Lord. But now if the doctrine of *Purgatory* be true, this whole reasoning of St. Paul proceeds upon a gross mistake; and therefore I am certain it is not true: And so does the voice from heaven here in the *text*; *blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labours*: For there is no reason to restrain this general expression, *that die in the Lord*, only to the *martyrs*; for tho' they are certainly included, and perhaps primarily intended in it; yet this phrase comprehends all those *who die in the faith of Christ*, and is most frequently so used in the New Testament.

But let this suffice to have been spoken of this matter; especially since Bishop Fisher and several of their own learned writers, do so frankly acknowledge, that their doctrine of *Purgatory* hath no sufficient ground in Scripture. Other reasons I grant they have for it, which make them very loath to quit it; it is a very profitable doctrine, and therefore they have taken care to have it more abundantly confirm'd, by apparitions of souls from the dead, than any other doctrine whatsoever. In short, how little soever they can say for it, it is in vain to go about to persuade them to part with it. Demetrius the Silver-smith argued as well as he could for his Goddess Diana, from the universal consent of the world in the worship of her; the great Goddess Diana, whom all Asia, and the world worshippeth. But his trusty argument to his workmen was, *Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth, and this our craft is in danger to be set at nought*.

II. Here

II. Here is a mighty encouragement to piety and virtue, to consider that all the good we do in this world will *accompany us* into the other. *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; for their works accompany them.*

When we come to die, we can call nothing our own but the good works which by the grace of God we have been enabled to do in this life. These will stick by us, and bear us company into the other world, when we shall be stript of all other things, and forc'd to part from them, whether we will or no. Our riches and our honours, our sensual pleasures and delights will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay, many times they do not accompany us so far as the grave, but leave us very unkindly and unseasonably, when we have the greatest need and use of them.

There is one way indeed, whereby we may secure our riches, and make sure friends to our selves of them, by laying them out in charity. By this means we may send them before us, and consign them over to another world, to make way for our reception there. So our Lord assures us, *Luke 12. 33. that by giving Alms we provide our selves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which faileth not;* and *Luke 16. 9. that by this way we may make to our selves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness; that when we fail, they may receive us into everlasting habitations. The Mammon of unrighteousness,* What is that? It is what the Scripture elsewhere calls *deceitful riches;* because in other ways, in which men commonly lay them out, they turn to no certain account, but one way or other do deceive and frustrate our expectation: by disposing of them in charity, to the relief of the poor and persecuted, we *make sure friends* of them, and consign the effects of them to our certain benefit and advantage in another world.

And as charity, so likewise all other graces and virtues are *that good part which cannot be taken away from us.* All the good actions that we do in this life, will go with us to the grave, and bear us company into the other world, and will stand by us, when we come to appear before our judge, and through the merits of our blessed Saviour will procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a most ample and eternal reward.

And what an encouragement is this to holiness and virtue, to consider that it will be all our own another day, and turn to our unspeakable advantage at our great account! To be assured, that whoever serves God faithfully, lays up so much treasure for himself, which he may take along with him into the other world; and does provide for himself lasting comforts and faithful companions, which will never leave him nor forsake him; a happiness large as his desires, and durable and immortal as his Soul!

Let us then do all the good that possibly we can, whilst we have opportunity: Let us serve God industriously, and with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do shall be lost and fall to the ground, that no grace and virtue that we practise in this Life, nor any degree of them, shall lose their reward. If we faithfully improve the talents, which are committed to us, to our master's advantage; when he comes to call us to an account, and finds that we have done so, we shall not fail to receive both his approbation and reward. And what a comfort will it be to any one of us, to hear those blessed words from the mouth of our Lord; *well done thou good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful in a little, I will make thee ruler over much; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!* We shall not need to plead our services to him, and put him in mind of them: Our judge himself will celebrate our good deeds upon the theatre of the world, and commemorate them to our advantage; and interpret every good office we have done, to any of his poor and afflicted members, as if it had been a kindness immediately done to himself. So our Lord represents the proceedings of the great judge and king of the world, in the great day of recompence, *Matt. 25. 34. Then shall the king say unto them on his right hand, come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye vi-*
sited

sited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord when saw we thee in any of these circumstances; hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and ministered unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Who would not be ambitious and glad to serve such a prince, who will so benignly interpret, and so bountifully reward the least service we do to him!

III. The consideration of this should likewise be a great argument and support to our patience, under all those evils, and sufferings, and persecutions, which many times attend good men in this world. They are for the present perhaps very heavy and grievous: but there is a time shortly coming, when we shall be at ease, and perfectly freed from them; when we shall find *rest from our labours* and sufferings; when we shall *enter into peace, and rest in our beds, every one walking in his uprightness*; that is, reaping the comfort, and enjoying the reward of his sincerity towards God, and constant suffering for his cause and truth. And therefore it was well said of a good man, *blessed be God that we are to die*; because to good men, *that* is a certain remedy of all the evils of this life, and will unquestionably put an end to them. The grave is a place of rest, and discharge from all trouble, as *Job* elegantly describes it, *Chap. 3. 17, 18, 19. There the wicked cease from troubling: there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there, and the servant is free from his master.*

So soon as we enter into the other world, we are secure against the pursuit and danger of all those evils which afflicted us in this world; and nothing will remain but the joyful remembrance of our sufferings, and the plentiful reward of our constancy and patience under them. And the more our tribulations and persecutions have abounded, the greater will our comfort and happiness then be, which (saith St. Paul) is a manifest token, a clear demonstration, of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be accounted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer; seeing it is a righteous thing with God, to recompense to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels, 2 Thess. 1. 5, 6, 7.

IV. The consideration of the extreme sufferings, which are to fall upon the faithful servants of Christ in the last times, and which seem now to be begun in the world, should make us very contented to leave this world, and glad of any fair opportunity and excuse, to take our leave of it, and to be out of the reach and danger of those violent and more than human temptations, with which our faith and constancy may be assailed: nay, to esteem it a particular grace and favour of God to us, to be taken away from the evil to come, and to prevent (if God sees it good) those extremities of suffering which are coming upon the world.

These seem now to be begun in some part of it: They in our neighbour nation have a bitter cup put into their hands; a cup of astonishment to all those that hear of it. Whether this be that last and extreme persecution spoken of here by St. John, I shall not pretend positively to determine. It is plainly distinguish'd in the visions, from that under the first beast, described Rev. 13. from verse the first, to verse 11. And chap. 17. there is a description of the beast upon which the woman sitteth, on whose forehead is a name written, *Mystery, Babylon the Great*: And this beast is there said to have seven heads and ten horns, which are thus explained by St. John, Chap. 17. 9, 10. And here is the mind which hath wisdom; the seven heads are seven mountains upon which the woman sitteth; and there are seven kings, that is, (as is generally agreed by interpreters) a succession of seven governments: And verse 12, 13, 14. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings which have received no kingdoms as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast; and shall make war with the lamb. And verse 18. And the woman which thou sawest, is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

So that *this beast* is plainly *the Roman empire*; and *the woman that sitteth upon her*, is the *great City* standing upon *seven mountains*, which reigneth over the kings of the earth; which can be no other than *Rome*, as is agreed by interpreters on all sides. *Bellarmino* (*l. 2 c. 2. de Rom. Pontif.*) confesseth that *St. John* in the *Revelations* every where calleth *Rome, Babylon*, as *Tertullian* (saith he) hath noted, and as is plain from chap. 17. where *Babylon* is said to be seated on *seven mountains*, and to have dominion over the kings of the earth: There being no other city than *Rome*, which in the time of *St. John* had dominion over the kings of the earth; and that *Rome* was built upon *seven hills* is famous. Thus much *Bellarmino* acknowledgeth, constrained by the force of truth; and for another small reason; namely, because *St. Peter* writes his first Epistle from *Babylon*, by which if *Rome* be not meant, they have no proof from scripture, that *St. Peter* was ever there.

Indeed they of the church of *Rome* would have it to be only *Rome Pagan*. But that cannot be; because *this beast*, after his last head was wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed, had power given him to continue two and forty Months, or (as it is elsewhere exprest) 1260 days; that is, in the prophetick style, so many years; and likewise because it was not to begin till the ten kingdoms, into which the *Roman empire* upon its dissolution was divided, were set up; which was not till after the western empire was overthrown and destroyed by the *Goths* and *Vandals*. And lastly, because this is that *Rome* or *Babylon*, which should finally be destroyed, and cast as a millstone into the bottom of the sea, never to rise again; which is yet to come. And of *this beast* it is said, that he should make war with the Saints, and overcome them, Chap. 13. ver. 7. that is, that he should raise a long and great persecution against them, which should try their faith and patience; Ver. 10. *Here is the patience, and the faith of the Saints*. The beast then with ten horns must be *Rome*, governing the ten kingdoms, into which the *Roman empire* was broken; and this can be nothing else but *Rome Papal*, to which the ten kings are said to give their power, and to which they were in a most servile manner subject for several ages, as is plain from history.

And to confirm this, it is very observable, that the ancient fathers generally agree, that that which hindered the revealing of the wicked one, (spoken of by *St. Paul*, 2 Theff. 2. 7, 8.) was the *Roman empire*; and that being removed, the man of sin or *Antichrist* was to succeed in its room. I shall produce a few testimonies to this purpose, but very remarkable ones. *Tertullian* expounding what *St. Paul* means by him that withholdeth or letteth, hath these words, *Quis nisi Romanus status*, &c. Who is that but the *Roman state*, which being broken into ten kings, shall bring on *Antichrist*? And then the wicked one shall be revealed. And in his *Apology* he gives this reason, why the christians should pray for the *Roman emperors*, and the whole state of the empire; because the greatest mischief hanging over the world, is hinder'd by the continuance of it. *St. Chrysostom* speaking of that which hinders the revelation of the man of sin; this (says he) can be no other than the *Roman empire*: for as long as that stands, he dares not shew himself; but upon the vacancy or ceasing of that, he shall assume to himself both the power of God and man. *St. Austin*, in his book *de civit. dei*, no man (says he) doubts, but that the successor to the *Roman emperor* in *Rome* shall be the man of sin; and we know who hath succeeded him.

But now after this, another beast is represented coming out of the earth; not succeeding in the place of the first beast, but appearing during his continuance, Ver. 12. and he hath these remarkable characters, by which he may be known.

1. He is said to have but two horns; by which, according to the interpretation of the ten horns, signifying the ten kingdoms, into which the *Roman empire* after its dissolution should be divided, we are in all reason to understand two of these kingdoms, of which this beast, whoever he be, shall be possess'd.

2. He is said to be like a lamb, but to speak like a Dragon; that is, to pretend and make a shew of great lenity and mildness, in his proceedings; but that

really he shall be very cruel. It shall be pretended, that he does all without violence, and without arms; but he shall *speake as a dragon*, that is in truth shall exercise great force and cruelty; either alluding to the cruelty of *the dragon*, literally so called; or perhaps prophetically pointing at *a particular sort of armed soldiers*, called by that name of *dragons*, or, as we according to the *French* pronunciation call them, *dragoons*.

3. He shall arise during the continuance of *the first beast*, and engage in his cause; but *the first beast* shall only stand by and look on, ver. 12. *and he exerciseth all the power of the first beast, before him, and causeth the earth and them that dwell therein, to worship the beast, whose deadly wound was healed*; plainly declaring, that *this persecution* should not immediately arise from the *first beast*, which is said to come out of the sea, which in this prophecy denotes *the state ecclesiastical*; but from *the second beast*, which comes out of the earth, and denotes *the temporal power*. But yet, all this ought to be acted in the sight of *the first beast*, and in his behalf, to compel men to worship him.

4. That he shall be remarkable for causing fire to come down from heaven to earth, in a wonderful manner, to the great terror and amazement of men; ver. 13. *And he doeth great wonders; so that he maketh fire to come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men*.

5. That he would interdict all those, who would not worship *the beast*, all commerce with humane society, the exercise of civil trades and professions; ver. 17. *And he causeth, that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark of the beast*.

6. And, lastly, (which seems to be the most peculiar and characteristical note of all the rest,) that his number should be 666, that is, (as most of the ancients understand it,) that the *numeral letters* of a certain word or name, should, being computed, amount to that number. And it is expressly said to be the number of a man. Ver. 18. *Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man*. And in the verse before, it is said to be the number of his name.

Now to whom all these characters do agree, and especially the last, concerning *the number of his name*, I shall not presume to conjecture; much less positively to determine, whether he be now in being; because it is said to require a particular wisdom and understanding to find it out. *Here is wisdom; let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast*. However the event, when the thing is fully accomplish'd, will clearly discover it. Thus much is certain, that *this extreme persecution*, whenever it shall be, will forerun the final destruction of *Babylon*, which will not then be far off. And concerning *this* it is that St. John speaks, chap. 14. 12. when he says, *here is the patience of the saints, here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus*. And then he immediately adds, as it is in the text, *and I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do accompany them*. Thus much may suffice to have been spoken on this text.

S E R M O N XXVII.

Preached on
All-Saints
day.

The Vanity and Wickedness of Honouring dead Saints,
and Persecuting the Living.

LUKE xi. 49, 50, 51.

Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.

THE latter part of this chapter is a very sharp, but just *inveective*, made by our Saviour against the hypocrisy of the *scribes and pharisees*, of which he gives many instances; and this among the rest for one, that they pretended a great honour and respect for the righteous men, and prophets of former ages, whom their fathers had persecuted and slain; but yet were of the very same spirit and temper, and as ready to persecute good men, as their fathers were. They raised indeed stately monuments to the memory of those saints and martyrs, and adorned them with great art and cost, and it is likely made a great shew of esteem and veneration for them: but all this while they were of the same disposition with their fathers, and bare the same implacable hatred and malice against the prophets and righteous men who then lived among them, (yea against *that great prophet*, whom God had sent into the world, *Jesus the Son of God*,) which their fathers did against the good men of *their* times. And tho' they disclaimed the wickedness and cruelty of their fathers, with never so much zeal and vehemency; yet for all that, they were ready to do the same things. Now this was so gross and odious a piece of hypocrisy in them, that our Saviour doth with great reason denounce so severe a woe against them: *wo unto you; for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.* And then it follows; *therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel, to the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple.*

There are considerable difficulties in both these passages. As to the former, *wo unto you, for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Truly ye bear witness, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres.* The force of this reasoning, is at first sight not easie to be discerned; and therefore expositors have gone several ways to explain it.

Some comparing this with the parallel places in St. Matthew's Gospel (ch. 23. 29.) will not have our Saviour to mean, that by *building the sepulchres of the prophets* they express'd *their approbation of their fathers killing them*. They did indeed testify by their usage of *the righteous men* that liv'd amongst themselves, that they were of the very same temper and spirit, which their fathers had been

of; and that they would have done just as their fathers did, if they had been in the same circumstances with their fathers; so that *they were witnesses to themselves* (as it is in St. Matthew) *that they were children of them which killed the prophets*; they own'd themselves *their children* by descent, and their actions witnessed that they were *their children* also in resemblance; nay, (as it is there farther intimated) they seem'd resolv'd to *fill up the measure of their fathers*: tho' all this while they pretended not to approve their fathers behaviour; and therefore whilst they were *building the tombs of the prophets, and garnishing the sepulchres of the righteous, they said, if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets*. And the interpreters that go this way do accordingly render these words of St. Luke; not as they are in our translation, *ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers*; but, *ye bear witness, and ye allow* (or, *are well pleas'd with*) *the deeds of your fathers*; that is, ye own that they were your fathers, who did these things; and tho' you do not *in words* allow what they did, yet your *inward tempers and dispositions* (whether you know it or no) are the very same with theirs, which you too plainly *testify* by your *actions*; so that when you *build the sepulchres of the prophets*, you only expose the deceitfulness and hypocrisy of your hearts, your *pretenses* and your *actions* directly contradicting each other. Thus some expositors give the sense of this passage.

But others think, that our Saviour intended somewhat more, in St. Luke, namely to retort upon them the honour which they seem'd to do to the prophets, *in building their sepulchres as an argument that they rejoyc'd in their death*; seeing they were so well content to be at the charge of a monument for them; like Herod who when he had murdered *Aristobulus*, made a magnificent funeral for him; or as the Roman historians say of *Caracalla*, tho' he hated all good men, whilst they were alive, yet he would pretend to honour them, when they were dead. This some think our Saviour intended in these words, *truly ye bear witness, that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres*; as if he had said, hereby ye testify, that ye allow and like very well what your fathers did to the prophets. According to which latter exposition, there seems to be more force and greater sharpness in our Saviour's reproof; as not only charging them with the ill usage of the righteous men of their own times; but moreover making them, by *their building the tombs, and garnishing the sepulchres* of the ancient prophets, to become as it were *accessaries* to the murder of them.

But leaving this digression, I now proceed to that which I primarily intended; namely, *First*, to explain the following words, which I have chosen as my present subject, and *then* to make some *observations* upon them.

Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute; that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel, to the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation.

There are *three* considerable difficulties in the words, which I shall endeavour to explain to you.

I. What is here meant by the *wisdom of God*.

II. Who this *Zacharias* was, here mention'd by our Saviour; *from the blood of Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, who perished between the altar and the temple*.

III. In what sense, and with what reason and justice it is here threaten'd, *that the blood of all the prophets and righteous men, shed from the foundation of the world, should be required of that generation*.

I. What is here meant by the *wisdom of God*. *Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, &c.* In St. Matthew our Saviour speaks this in his own name, *wherefore behold I send unto you prophets*: For which reason some think, that by the *wisdom of God*, our Saviour here designed
him-

himself; as if he had said, therefore *I, who am the wisdom of God*, declare unto you. But this is not very probable, our Saviour no where else in the Gospel speaking of himself, in any such style; tho' St. Paul calls him *the power of God*, and *the wisdom of God*. Others think that our Saviour here refers to some prophecy of the old testament, to this purpose; *therefore the wisdom of God hath said*, that is, *the holy spirit of wisdom*, which inspired the prophets in the old testament. But this conceit is utterly without ground; for we find no such passage, nor any thing to that sense, in any of the Prophets of the old testament.

But the most plain and simple interpretation is this, *therefore hath the wisdom of God said*, that is, *the most wise God hath determined* to send among you such messengers and holy men, and I foresee that ye will thus abuse them, and thereby bring wrath and destruction upon your selves. And whereas our Saviour says in St. Matthew, *behold I send unto you prophets*; it is very probable, he speaks in God's name, and that it is to be understood, *behold, says God, I send unto you*. And this phrase of *the wisdom of God*, for *the most wise God*, is very agreeable to other forms of speech, which we meet with in the Jewish writers; as, *dicat norma judicii*, *the rule of judgment says*, that is, *the most just and righteous God*; which serves very well to explain the phrase in the text, *therefore saith the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and Apostles*.

By *Apostles* is here meant, all sorts of divine messengers: For so St. Matthew expresseth it, *I send unto you prophets, and wisemen, and scribes*; that is, several holy and excellent men, endowed with all sorts of divine gifts; *Prophets, and wise men, and scribes*, which were the most glorious and admired titles among the Jews.

And some of them they shall slay and persecute. St. Matthew expresseth it more particularly, *some of them ye shall kill and crucify*; as it was afterwards fulfilled in the two James's, and Stephen, who were slain by them, and in Simon the Son of Cleophas, and before him in Jesus the Son of God, who were crucified; and *some of them ye shall scourge in your synagogues*, as we read they did to Peter and John; and *persecute them from city to city*, as they did Paul and Barnabas. The sending of these messengers of God among the Jews, and this ill usage of them, the all-wise and all-knowing God had determined and foreseen.

II. Who this *Zacharias* was, here mentioned by our Saviour. And there are so many of them, (no less than *four* of this name) to whom it may with some probability be applyed, but especially to *two* of them, that it is very hard to determine which of them our Saviour means. Three *Zacharias's* are mentioned in scripture, and one more in the history of *Josephus*.

There was *Zacharias* the father of *John the Baptist*; but whose *Son* he was we do not read; and tho' of his death the scripture is silent, yet there are two traditions about it; one that he was slain by *Herod's* officers, because he would not tell where his son, *John the Baptist* was, when *Herod* sent for him. But the credit of this relies upon very doubtful authors. The other is mention'd by several of the fathers, and the substance of it is briefly this; that there being a place in the temple, where the virgins by themselves used to pray, *the virgin Mary* coming to that place to pray among the virgins, was forbidden, because she had had a child; and that *Zacharias* for maintaining her virginity, was set upon and killed between the temple and the altar. But this tradition is rejected by St. *Jerome*; and I doubt there is little ground for it.

Zacharias, one of the lesser prophets, was *the son of Barachias*, which agrees so far with St. Matthew's description of him: But there is no mention in scripture that he was slain; nor could he well be in the temple, which was but building in his time; tho' the author of the *Targum* says, that *Zacharias* the son of *Ido*, was slain by the Jews in the house of the Lord's sanctuary, on the day of the propitiation; because he admonisht them not to do evil before the Lord. Now *Zacharias the son of Barachias*, was the grandson of *Ido*; but yet, I think this was only lapse of Memory, and that he means *Zachary* in the *Chronicles*, who was slain by *Joash*.

And *he* is the third *Zacharias* I mention'd, 2 *Chron.* 24. 21. who as he was reproving the people for transgressing the commandment of the Lord, was stoned with stones at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord. And this our Saviour seems more particularly to reflect upon, immediately after the text; *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that stonest the Prophets, &c.* Now this one would think was certainly the person intended by our Saviour, and fit to be mentioned with *Abel*, whose blood is said to have cried to the Lord. For of *Zacharias* it is likewise said, that when he died, he said, the Lord look upon it and require it. And *Drusus* cites a Jewish writer, speaking thus by way of complaint against the Jewish nation; *because in the midst of thee fell the priests of the Lord, and his prophets, and because before the holy temple in the midst of thee was slain the godly and righteous prophet Zacharias, who lay unburied, nor did the earth cover his blood, but to this day it goes up and speaks in the midst of thee.* So that none could have been more fit to have been join'd with *Abel* in this respect.

But as probable as this looks, there are two very great objections against it. One is, that St. *Matthew* calls the *Zacharias* spoken of by our Saviour, the son of *Barachias*; whereas this *Zacharias* slain by *Joash*, was the son of *Jehoiada*: And tho' it be very considerable, which St. *Jerome* observes, that in the *Hebrew* or *Nazarene* gospel, it is *Zacharias* the son of *Jehoiada*; yet it is hard to rely upon that, against all the *Greek* copies. But a more difficult objection, in my opinion, is that our Saviour seems to design to mention the two extremes, the first and last righteous man that was slain, and between them two comprehended the good men of all ages, that were persecuted and slain; and if so, then that *Zacharias* in the *Chronicles*, who was slain so long before, can by no means be the person.

There is yet a fourth *Zacharias*, mentioned by *Josephus*, *Lib.* 4. the son of *Baruch* (which is probably enough the same name with *Barachias*,) who was the last remarkable good man that was slain, immediately before the siege of *Jerusalem*; and that as *Josephus* tells us, in the midst of the temple; which agrees with our Saviour's description of it, *between the altar and the temple*; not the altar of incense, but of burnt-offerings which was in the outward court, before the ascent to the temple. So that *Grotius* thinks this was the man intended by our Saviour, yet so that he does both allude to the history of the former *Zacharias*, and foretel the death of this. And there is but one objection against this; that our Saviour speaks of this as already past; *whom you have slain*; whereas this *Zacharias* was not slain till after our Saviour's death. But I think that a satisfactory answer may be given to this (*viz.*) that our Saviour foretelling those future persecutions, which should fill up the measure of their sins, and bring final Destruction upon them, he speaks of this as already past, because before that destruction should come upon them, it would be true, *they had slain him*: So that speaking of the vengeance coming upon them, well might he say, *that upon them should come the blood of all the righteous men, from Abel to Zacharias, whom they had slain, &c.*

III. The *Third* difficulty remains, and that is, in what sense, and with what reason and justice it is here threatned, *that the blood of all the prophets and righteous men, shed from the foundation of the world, should be required of that generation.* Some understand this more strictly; they should be charged with it, and formally punished for it, because in imitating their cruel predecessors, they should be guilty of all their cruelty. But there is no necessity of this. All that our Saviour seems to intend, is this, that their punishment in the destruction of *Jerusalem*, should be so horrible, as if God had *once for all* arraigned them of all the righteous blood that ever had been shed in the world, and brought the punishment of it upon them; tho' in truth the punishment did not exceed the desert of *their own* sins. And if this be the meaning of it, there is nothing harsh and unreasonable in it. And thus I have explain'd, as well as I can, the several difficulties in the *Text*. I shall make two or three observations from the main scope and design of it, and so conclude.

I. That it hath been the lot of holy and righteous men, in most ages of the world, to meet with very bad usage, to be *persecuted and slain*. The Devil began this work early. When there were but three men in all the world, and two of them brethren; the one *slew* the other, *because he was more righteous*, and served God better than he did. And this trade hath continued, and been practised more or less, in most ages and generations of the world, as might be deduced through the history of the old and new testament, and of most ages since, *though the rod of the wicked hath not always abode upon the back of the righteous*, lest at last piety should be quite discouraged, and *the faithful fail from among the children of men*. The people and the church of God have had many Intervals of peace and prosperity; and sometimes for a long continuance, the favour and countenance of authority, and the powers of the world, and the laws of nations on their side.

But yet there is a continual enmity between the seed of the woman, and the serpent, between the righteous and the wicked, between those that serve God, and those that serve him not; because their ways are contrary one to another, and quite of another fashion, their principles and practices do contradict and clash with one another; the virtues of good men are a continual upbraiding of the bad, a living reproof and reproach to them; so that it is no wonder, that evil men do so violently hate and persecute the good, and do by all means endeavour to remove out of the way those who are so opposite and offensive to them.

II. We may observe likewise hence, how great a sin they are guilty of, who persecute the righteous, and how terrible a vengeance from God waits on them. Particular examples of this have been in all ages: but as the guilt of this sin never went higher, than at this time foretold by our Saviour, when God sent to the Jews such prophets, and wise-men, and scribes, and such a number of them as never upon any occasion were sent into the world, and they used them in that bloody and barbarous manner; no wonder, if the vengeance that came upon them was such as never had been before; and if, after they had filled up the measure of their sins, by crucifying the Lord Jesus, and persecuting his apostles, and stoning and killing all the prophets that were sent unto them, the wrath of God came upon them to the utmost, and such a terrible destruction from the Lord, as never befel any people; insomuch that our Saviour, upon the foresight and mention of it, forty years before it happen'd, could not but weep over them, and express himself in those compassionate words, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate.*

III. From this whole passage of our Saviour, which I have been explaining to you, we may learn how vain it is for men to pretend to honour the dead Saints, when they persecute the living. This was the great hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees among the Jews in our Saviour's time; and is at this day of the rulers and governors of the Roman church among us christians; nay, they exceed the Scribes and Pharisees, not only in their veneration of the ancient saints and righteous men, but also, if it be possible, in their malice and cruelty towards the living. For they not only build costly monuments to their memory, which was the utmost the Scribes and Pharisees did, but they honour them with shrines and rich offerings, with prayers and vows to them, more frequent than to Almighty God himself, and our blessed Saviour; but then they hate and persecute the living, with as great violence and cruelty, as ever was used by any part of mankind towards one another. 'Tis true they do it under the notion of *Heresy*; and so did the Scribes and Pharisees too, as St. Paul witnesseth, *After the way which ye call Heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and in the prophets*. So they call us *Hereticks*; though we receive and believe all that is written in the holy scriptures, only rejecting their additions, whereby they would make the commandment of God of none effect. And as Rome is parallel with Jerusalem in many other respects; so especially in the bloody persecution of righteous men: And as Jerusalem is charged by our Saviour with the blood of

of all the prophets and righteous men of all ages; so St. John in the *Revelation* says of Rome, that *in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth*, chap. 18. 24. Which is no less true of *Rome Christian*, than of *Rome Pagan*. In all the churches and religions in the world, and perhaps in *Rome Pagan* her self, hath not so much innocent blood been shed, as in *Rome Christian* and *Catholick*, and that *under a pretence of religion*: and no doubt there is a day coming, when she shall be called to a heavy account for these things, *when the Heavens shall rejoice over her, and the holy Angels and Prophets, because God hath avenged them on her*.

Preached
on Nov. 5.
1682.

S E R M O N XXVIII.

The Danger of Zeal, without Knowledge.

ROM. x. 2.

I bear them record, that they have a Zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.



Here is nothing more commonly cried up, than *Zeal in Religion*; and yet there is nothing in which men do more frequently and fatally mistake and miscarry, and in the expressions and effects whereof men ought to govern themselves with more care and caution. To speak the truth, *Zeal* is as all other passions are, in its own nature indifferent, and of it self neither good nor bad; but according to the object and degree of it: for *Zeal* is nothing else, but *an earnest concernment for, or against something, and a violent pursuit and prosecution of it*. For if it be applied to a right object, so as we be earnestly concerned for things that are unquestionably good; and against things that are unquestionably evil; and in a due degree; that is, if the expression of it be proportionable to the less or greater good or evil of things; then it is a commendable quality or virtue: but if it be wrong placed, and we be earnestly concerned for that which is evil, and against that which is good, or about things which are of an indifferent or doubtful nature, as to the good and evil of them; or if we notoriously exceed in the degree of it, being more zealously concerned about things, than they deserve, and zealously concerned about lesser things, to the prejudice of greater; in any of these cases, it is so far from being a virtue, that it is a vice, of a most pernicious and mischievous consequence, and many times hath as bad effects, as can proceed from the worst principle or disposition of mind.

It is sometimes used in a good sense; but it is, when it is applied to the best things, in which the honour of God, and the salvation of men is concern'd, to the great and unquestionable duties of religion. As zeal for the honour of God, and the place of his publick worship, in opposition to profaneness, *John 2. 17. The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up*: For an earnest desire of those gifts, whereby we are to edifie the church, *1. Cor. 12. 31. But covet earnestly the best gifts*, so we render the words; *be zealous of the best gifts*, so it is in the Greek: for a forwardness and readiness to relieve the necessities of the Saints, *2 Cor. 9. 2. I know the forwardness of your minds, and your zeal hath provok'd very many*. And to the same purpose is that expression, *Tit. 2. 14. zealous of good works*. And then for a zeal for the salvation of men's souls, *2 Cor. 11. 2. I am zealous of you with a godly zeal*.

But the word is much more frequently in scripture used in a bad sense, for a malicious and furious rage, against the professors of christianity, *Acts 5. 17, 18. Then*

Then the high priest, and they that were with him, were filled with indignation, (the word is zeal) and laid their hands on the Apostles, and put them in prison. And, Chap. 13. 45. it is said, the Jews were fill'd with zeal, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. And, Chap. 17. 5. The Jews which believed not, moved with zeal, gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar.

'Tis frequently reckoned amongst *the works of the flesh*, and mentioned in the company of the greatest vices and crimes; wrath, contention, division, sedition, murthers, tumults, confusions, *Rom. 13. 13. Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and zeal. 1 Cor. 3. 3. Whereas there is among you zeal, and strife, and divisions; are ye not carnal? 2 Cor. 12. 20. Lest there be debates, zeal, wrath, strife. Gal. 5. 19, 20, 21. The works of the flesh are manifest, among which the Apostle reckons, hatred, variance, zeal, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murthers. St. James calls it a bitter zeal. James 3. 14, 15, 16. But if ye have bitter zeal and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lye not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where zeal and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.* By which it appears that *zeal* most frequently goes under a bad name and character in scripture; *zeal*, I mean *in matters of religion*; for of *that* most of the texts I have mentioned speak; and this is that which St. Paul means here in the text, by a *zeal of God*, that is, a *zeal about religion, and divine things. I bear them record, they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.*

In which words, the Apostle being desirous to say the best he could of his countrymen, the *Jews*, he commends *the good meaning* of their *zeal*, and blames the *ill conduct* of it. *I bear them record, μαρτυρῶ αὐτοῖς, I give this testimony on their behalf, that they have a zeal of God*, that is, that by all this fierceness against the christian religion, they intend the honour of God, and think they do him service: but yet this *zeal* is greatly to be condemned; because it is a *mistaken and misguided zeal*, not at all directed as it should be; *they have a zeal of God; but not according to knowledge.*

From which words I shall take into consideration these *three* things.

I. What are the qualifications and properties of a *zeal according to knowledge.*

II. By what marks and characters we may know *that zeal*, which here, and elsewhere in scripture, is condemned, as *not being according to knowledge.*

III. How far the doing of any thing, out of a *zeal for God*, doth mitigate and extenuate the evil of it. For when the Apostle here testifies concerning the *Jews*, that they had a *zeal of God*; he speaks this in favour of them, and by way of mitigation of their faults. When I have handled these *three* particulars, I shall apply my discourse to the present occasion of *this day.*

I. What are the qualifications and properties of a *zeal according to knowledge.* I shall mention these *three.*

1. That our *zeal* be right, in respect of its object.

2. That the measure and degree of it be proportioned to the good or evil of things, about which it is conversant.

3. That we pursue it by lawful ways and means.

1. That our *zeal* be right, in respect of its object; I mean, that those things which we are zealous for, be certainly and considerably good; and that those things which we are zealous against, be certainly and considerably evil. A mistake in any of these quite mars our *zeal*, and spoils the virtue of it: and tho' it be never so much intended for God, it is not at all pleasing and acceptable to him; because it is a blind and ignorant and mistaken *zeal*: and the hotter, the worse; it is not an heavenly fire, *that comes down from above*; but it is like the fire of hell, heat without light. If we mistake good and evil, and be zealously concerned, against that which is good, or for that which is evil; the greater our *zeal* is, the greater is our fault; and instead of doing God and religion

service and credit, we do the greatest mischief and dishonour we can to them both: or if the thing about which our zeal is conversant, be of a doubtful uncertain nature; this is not properly an object of zeal. Men should never be earnest for or against any thing, but upon clear and certain grounds, that what we contend so earnestly for, is undoubtedly good; and that which we are so violent against, is undoubtedly evil: If it be not, we are *zealous for we know not what*, and *that I am sure is a zeal not according to knowledge*.

And if the thing be *certainly* good or evil, which we are so concerned about; it must also be *considerably* so: otherwise it will not warrant our being zealous about it. All truth is good, and all error bad; but there are many truths so inconsiderable, and which have so small an influence upon practice, that they do not deserve our zeal and earnest contention about them; and so likewise are there many errors and mistakes, of so slight and inconsiderable a nature, that it were better men should be let alone in them, than provok'd to quarrel and contend about them.

Thus that great heat that was in the christian church, about the time of observing *Easter*, was, in my opinion, *a zeal not according to knowledge*. They were on both sides agreed in the main, which was to celebrate the memory of our Saviour's resurrection: But there were different customs about the time, which was a matter of no such consideration, as to deserve so much heat and zeal about it, especially considering the uncharitable and mischievous consequences of that difference.

2. That our *zeal* may be *according to knowledge*; the measure and degree of it must be proportioned to the good or evil of things, about which it is conversant. That is *an ignorant zeal*, which is conversant about lesser things, and unconcerned for greater. Such was the zeal of the Scribes and Pharisees, who were mightily concerned about external and lesser matters; but took little or no care of inward purity, and real and substantial goodness; they were very careful, *not to eat with unwash'd hands, and to make clean the outside of the cup and platter*; but then *they were full of extortion, and all unrighteousness: they pay'd tythe of mint, and anise, and cummin; but omitted the weightier things, judgment, mercy, and fidelity*; or, as St. Luke expresseth it, *they pass over judgment and the love of God*.

A zealous strictness about external rites and matters of difference, where there is a visible neglect of the substantial duties of religion, and the great virtues of a good life, is either a gross ignorance of the true nature of religion, or a fulsome hypocrisy. And so likewise is a loud and zealous outcry against rites and ceremonies, and the imposition of indifferent things in religion, when men can release themselves from the obligation of natural and moral duties, and *pass over mercy, and justice, and charity*.

3. A *zeal* that is *according to knowledge*, must be pursued and prosecuted by lawful and warrantable means. No zeal for God and his glory, for his true church and religion, will justify the doing of that which is morally and in it self evil. *Will ye speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him? We do not know what belongs to the honour of God and religion, if we think to promote his glory, by means so dishonourable and offensive to him*. The Apostle pronounceth it *a damnable sin*, for any to charge this doctrine upon christianity, *that evil may be done for a good end, and to promote the glory of God*, Rom. 3. 8. *As we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, let us do evil that good may come; whose damnation is just*.

And yet nothing is more frequent, than for men, out of *a zeal for God and religion*, to over-look the evil and unlawfulness of the means they use, for the advancing so good an end. This is that which hath sanctified those refined arts of lying and perjury, by equivocation and mental reservation; those seditious ways of disturbing the peace of kingdoms, by treason and rebellion, by the excommunicating and deposing of Princes, upon pretence of *heresy*; of extirpating those, whom they please to call *hereticks*, by inquisitions, and croisado's, and massacres; and this, not only in the opinion of private persons, but in the judgment of *Popes*, and of *general councils*. I proceed in the

II. Place to shew by what marks and characters we may know the contrary *zeal*, that which is *not according to knowledge*, which is condemned here in the *text*, and very frequently in other places of scripture: And tho' *this* may be sufficiently known by the contrary marks and properties (which I shall but briefly mention) yet to discover it more fully, I shall add *one* or *two* more very gross and sensible signs and instances of it.

1. It is a *zeal without knowledge*, that is mistaken in the proper object of it, that calls *good evil*, and *evil good*; a zeal for gross errors and superstitions, plainly contrary either to the revelation of God's word, or the light of reason, or to common sense; any or all of these cannot be a *zeal according to knowledge*. A zeal for the worship of images, for praying to Saints and Angels, contrary to the plain law and word of God; a zeal for the sacrilegious depriving of the people of half the Sacrament, contrary to our Saviour's plain institution, and the acknowledged practice of the catholick church, for a thousand years; a zeal for *that most absurd* of all doctrines that ever was taught in any religion, I mean *the doctrine of Transubstantiation*, not only without any sufficient authority from scripture (as is acknowledged by several of the most learned of the *Roman church*) but contrary to reason, and in defiance of the sense of all mankind; a zeal for these, and many more like gross errors and practices, cannot possibly be a *zeal according to knowledge*.

2. That is a *zeal without knowledge*, the degree whereof is manifestly disproportion'd to the good or evil of things about which it is conversant; when there is in men a greater and fiercer zeal for the externals of religion, than for the vital and essential parts of it; for *the traditions of men*, than for *the commandments of God*; for bodily severities, than for the mortification of our lusts; for the means of religion, than for the end of it: a greater zeal against the omission and neglect of some senseless and superstitious practices, than against the practice of the grossest immoralities; and against the deniers of the doctrines of Transubstantiation, and of the Pope's infallibility, and equal, if not a greater zeal (I am sure a more severe prosecution) than against those who deny our Saviour to be the true Messiah, and the son of God: This certainly is not a *zeal according to knowledge*. Nor,

3. That which is prosecuted by unlawful and unwarrantable means. *That* cannot be a *zeal of God according to knowledge*, which warrants *the doing of evil, that good may come*; the violating of truth and faith, and of the peace of humane society, for the cause of the catholick church; and breaking the eternal and immutable laws of God, for the advancing of his glory. Nor,

4. An uncharitable zeal, which is an enemy to peace and order, and thinks it self sufficiently warranted to separate from the communion of christians, and to break the peace of the church, upon every scruple, and upon every fancy and conceit of unlawful impositions, tho' in the most indifferent things; nay upon this single point, *because a thing which they acknowledge lawful, and indifferent in it self, is in the worship of God enjoined by authority*; the most unreasonable Principle that I think ever was avowed among christians; not to do a thing, which otherwise they might do, only because it is enjoined; and to fancy that an indifferent thing becomes presently unlawful, because it is commanded by lawful authority; and that it is a sin to do any thing, in the worship of God, which is not left to their liberty, whether they will do it or not. This is not only a *zeal without knowledge*, but *contrary to common sense*. Nor,

5. A furious and cruel zeal, which St. James calls a *bitter*, or a *wrathful zeal*, and which tends to *confusion and every evil work*, which is blind with its own rage, and makes men, as St. Paul says of himself, when he persecuted the christians, *exceedingly mad* against all that differ from them, and stand in the way of their fierce and outrageous zeal.

6. and *lastly*, A zeal for ignorance, is most certainly *not a zeal according to knowledge*; and *this is a zeal peculiar to the church of Rome*, by such strict laws to forbid people the use of the holy scriptures in a known tongue; nay not so much as to allow them to understand what they do in the service of God; to re-

quire them to be present at their publick prayers, and to joyn with them in them, without letting them know the meaning of them ; to pretend to teach them, by reading lessons to them in an unknown tongue ; and all this under pretence of increasing their devotion ; as if the less men understand of the service of God, the more they would be affected with it, and edified by it.

And yet there is nothing in which the church of *Rome* hath been more zealously concerned, than to keep the people in ignorance : Nothing they have opposed with more obstinacy, against the repeated application of princes and people, at the beginning of the reformation, than to allow the people the use of the Scriptures, and in their publick prayers, in a known tongue. And their obstinacy in this point, was not without reason ; nothing being more certain, than that if the people were once brought to understand the Scriptures, they would soon quit their religion, which in so many things is so directly contrary to the word of God. The

III. And last thing remains to be spoken to, *viz.* How far the doing of things, out of a zeal for God, doth mitigate and extenuate the evil of them. For when the Apostle here testifies concerning the *Jews*, that they had a zeal of God, he speaks this in favour of them, and by way of mitigation of their Fault. *I bear them record* ; I who was once acted by this ignorant and furious zeal, which now possesseth them, and persecuted the Christians in the same outrageous manner, as they still continue to do, and all this with a very good conscience, as I thought, and out of a zeal for God, and the true religion. So he tells us, *Acts* 26. 9. *I verily thought with my self, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.* So that his zeal was sincere, and with a real intention to do service to God and religion ; and yet for all that was very faulty and sinful, and, if he had persisted in it, damnable ; so that his confidence, that he was in the right, and the sincerity of his zeal in acting according to the persuasion of his conscience, did not alter the nature of the actions he did out of this zeal, and make them less wicked in themselves ; tho' it was some mitigation of the fault of the person, and render'd him more capable of the mercy of God by repentance, than if he had done contrary to his conscience, and the clear convictions of his own mind.

And therefore the best way to understand the great evil and wickedness of this furious and blind zeal, will be, to consider the account which *St. Paul*, after his conversion, gives of his own doings, and what load he lays upon himself, notwithstanding the sincerity of his zeal, and that he acted according to his conscience. *Acts* viii, and ix. you have the History at large of his outrageous doings ; how he made havock of the Church, entering into every house, and haling men and women to prison ; how he breathed out threatnings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. *Acts* 22. 4. *I persecuted*, says he, *this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.* And Chap. 26, 10, 11. *Many of the Saints did I shut up in prison, and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them ; and I punished them often in every Synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even to strange cities.* Gal. 1. 13, 14. *Ye have heard*, says he, *of my conversation in times past, in the Jews religion ; how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it, being exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.* 1 Tim. 1. 13. *Who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious.* So that he chargeth himself with the guilt of blasphemy and murder, and a most furious and outrageous persecution of good men ; for which elsewhere he pronounceth himself the chief of Sinners. From whence it evidently appears, that men may do the most wicked and damnable sins, out of a zeal for God.

And this was the case of many of the *Jews*, as our Saviour foretold, that the time should come, when they should kill men, thinking they did God good service. But yet for all this, the Apostles of our Lord make no scruple, to charge them with downright murder : *Acts* 2. 23. speaking of their putting our Saviour to death, *whom ye by wicked hands have crucified and slain.* And *Acts* 7. 52. *The just one, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.*

Yet

Yet notwithstanding their sin was of this high nature in it self, it was some mitigation of the fault of the persons, that they did these things out of *an ignorant zeal*, and rendred them more capable of the mercy of God, upon their repentance. And upon this account our Saviour interceded with God for mercy for them; *father forgive them, for they know not what they do*. St. Peter also pleads the same in mitigation of their fault, *Acts 3. 17. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your Rulers*. And St. Paul tells us, that he found mercy, upon his repentance, on this account, *1 Tim. 1. 13. But I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly, and in unbelief*. But still, for all this, wicked things done out of conscience and zeal for God, are damnable, and will prove so, without repentance.

I shall now draw some *inferences* from this discourse, by way of application.

1. If it be so necessary, that our zeal be directed by knowledge; this shews us how dangerous a thing zeal is in the weak and ignorant sort of people. Zeal is an edge-tool, which children in understanding should not meddle withal; and yet it most frequently possesseth the weakest minds; and commonly by how much *the less knowing* people are, by so much *the more zealous* they are: And in the church of *Rome*, where knowledge is professedly discouraged, and suppressed in the common people, zeal is mightily countenanced and cherished. And they make great use of it; for this blind and furious zeal, is that which inspires them to do such cruel and barbarous things, as were hardly ever acted among the heathen. Zeal is only fit for wise men; but it is chiefly in fashion among fools.

Nay it is dangerous in the hands of wise men, and to be govern'd and kept in with a strict rein; otherwise it will transport them to the doing of undue and irregular things. *Moses*, one of the wisest and best of men, and most likely to govern and manage his zeal as he ought, and to keep aloof from all excess and extravagance, being *the meekest man upon earth*; yet he was so surpris'd, upon a sudden occasion, that *in a fit of zeal*, he let fall the two tables of the law, which he had but just received from God, and dash'd them in pieces. A true emblem of *an ungoverned zeal*, in the transport whereof even good men are apt to forget the laws of God, and let them fall out of their hands, and to break all the obligations of natural and moral duties.

2. From hence we plainly see, that men may do the worst and wickedest things out of *a zeal for God* and religion. Thus it was among the *Jews*, who engroft salvation to themselves, and deny'd the possibility of it to all the world besides; and the church of *Rome* have taken copy by them, as in an arrogant conceit of themselves, so in the blindness, and fury, and uncharitableness of their zeal towards all, who refuse to submit to their authority and directions.

And as the teachers and rulers of the *Jewish Church* did of old, so doth the church of *Rome* now; *they take away the key of knowledge from the people, and will neither enter into the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffer those that would, to enter in*. They brand for *Hereticks* those who make the holy Scriptures the rule of their faith and worship; as St. Paul tells us the *Jews* did in his time, *Acts 24. 14. After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law, and the prophets*. They establish the merit of their own righteousness, not submitting to the righteousness of God, by the faith of Jesus Christ. So St. Paul tells us the *Jews* did, in the verse immediately after the text; *for they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*. And as the *Jews* anathemiz'd and excommunicated the first Christians, and persecuted them to the death, as our Saviour foretold, *that the time would come, when they should put them out of their Synagogues, yea and kill them, thinking they did God good service*; so the Church of *Rome* hath, for many ages, used the sincere professors of the same religion, persecuting them, first with excommunication, and then with fire and faggot: and with all the violence and fury in the world endeavouring the utter extirpation and ruin of them, by bloody *Croisado's* and a barbarous *inquisition*, by treache-

treacherous *Massacres*, and all sorts of *hellish plots and machinations*; witness the monstrous design of *this day*, never to be remembered or mentioned without horror, *to have destroyed at one blow, and have swallowed up in one common ruin, our king, and prince, and nobles, and the representative body of the whole nation*; witness the bloody massacre of *Ireland*, and all their wicked designs and practices continued to this very day.

3. and *lastly*, That *zeal for God and religion*, does not alter the nature of actions done upon that account. Persecution and murder of the sincere professors of religion, are *damnable sins*, and no *zeal for God and religion* can excuse them, or take away the guilt of them; *zeal for God* will justify no action that we do, unless there be *discretion* to justify our *zeal*.

There is nothing oftner misleads men, than a misguided zeal; it is an *ignis fatuus*, a *false fire*, which often leads men into bogs and precipices; it appears in the night, in dark and ignorant and weak minds, and offers it self a guide to those who have lost their way; it is one of the most ungovernable passions of human nature, and therefore requires great knowledge and judgment to manage it, and keep it within bounds. It is like fire, a good Servant, but a bad master; if it once get head, it consumes and devours all before it, and the great danger and mischief of it is, that it is most commonly found where it should not be, and possesses those most, who are least fit to govern it; and most frequently employed about what it should not be; and ten to one but it is either mistaken in the *object*, or in the *measure and degree* of it; and even when it is a virtue, it is a nice and dangerous one; for the wisest men are apt to mingle their own *passions and interests* with their *zeal for God and religion*. So that it is not enough that men are acted by a *zeal for God*, and do sincerely follow the dictates of their consciences; but they must be careful to inform their consciences, and not suffer themselves to be violently transported and hurried on by their own passions and prejudice, and by a blind and furious *zeal without knowledge*.

But what then? Would we have men not follow their own consciences, or act contrary to them? No, by no means: For tho' conscience be not our *rule*; yet it is our *immediate guide*; and he does ill, who does act against his conscience. But men must be careful how they settle their practical judgment of things, and conclude things to be lawful or unlawful, duties or sins, without reason and good ground.

God hath given us understandings to try and examine things, and the light of his word to direct us in this trial; and if we will judge rashly, and suffer our selves to be hurried by prejudice or passion, *the errors of our judgment* become *faults of our lives*: For God expects from us that we should weigh and consider what we do; and when he hath afforded us light enough to discern between *good and evil*, that we should carefully follow the direction of it; that we should be suspicious of our selves, when our zeal carries us to do things that are furious and cruel, false and treacherous, and have a horrid appearance even to the light of nature; we should question *that zeal* which is so contrary to christian goodness and meekness, to peace and charity, and which tends to *confusion and every evil work*.

I will conclude all with that excellent passage of *St. James*, which will shew us how little regard is to be had to many mens pretences of zeal for religion, *James 3. 13. Who is a wise man, and endued with knowledge amongst you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter zeal and strife in your hearts; glory not, and lye not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above; but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where zeal and strife is; there is confusion, and every evil work. But the wisdom which is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easie to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality, and without hypocrisy: and the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

S E R M O N XXIX.

Preached
on Nov. 5.
1686.

The best Men liable to the worst Treatment, from
Mistaken Zealots.

JOHN xvi. 2.

They shall put you out of the Synagogues: Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that he doth God service.



THESE words were spoken by our blessed Saviour, when he was about to leave the world; at the thoughts whereof, finding his disciples to be exceedingly troubled, he comforts them by the consideration of the great benefit and advantage which from thence would accrue to them; he tells them that he was going to heaven to intercede for them, and to make way for their admision there; and withal promiseth, that his Father would send the Holy Ghost, who should abundantly supply the want of *his* presence with them: but he tells them at the same time, that they should meet with very ill entertainment and usage from the world: but so had *he*, chap. 15. 18. *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me, before it hated you*; and why should they expect to be better treated than *he* was? v. 20. *remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater than the Lord; if they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.*

And at the beginning of this chapter he tells them, that he did on purpose forewarn them of these things, to prepare their minds beforehand, and to arm them against the worst that might happen; v. 1. *these things have I spoken to you, that ye should not be offended.* And then he declares more particularly, how far the rage and malice of men should proceed against them, and in what kind they should suffer: *They shall put you out of the Synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service.*

So that our Saviour here foretels two sorts of persecution, which his disciples should be exercised withal, *excommunication*; *they shall put you out of their Synagogues*: And *excision*; *yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service.* And these perhaps were but several kinds and degrees of *excommunication*; for the clearer understanding whereof, it will be requisite briefly to explain the three degrees of *excommunication* among the Jews.

The first call'd *Niddui*, is that which our Saviour here means, by *putting out of the Synagogue*; and which he elsewhere expresseth by ἀποκομιδή, or *separation*. Luke 6. 22. *Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company.* And the effect of this *excommunication* was to exclude men from the communion of the church and people of God, and from his service, which was a great disgrace; because, after this sentence, none of the Jews were to converse with them, but to look upon them as *heathens and publicans*.

The second degree of this censure was called *Cherem*; which included the first, but extended farther, to the confiscation of goods into the sacred treasury, and devoting them to God; after which there was no redemption of them. And of this we find express mention, Ezra 10. 7, 8. where it is said, *that they made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem, unto all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together unto Jerusalem; and that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsels of the princes*
and

and elders, all his substance should be devoted, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away.

The third degree was *Shammatha*, when the rebellious and contumacious person was anathematiz'd and devoted, and, as some conceive, according to the law (*Levit. 27. 29.*) was to be put to death; tho' other very knowing men in the Jewish learning think it amounted to no more than a final sentence, whereby they were left to the judgment of God, by some remarkable judgment of his to be cut off from the congregation of *Israel*.

Of the first and last of these degrees of excommunication, our Saviour seems here to speak; but whether in both instances in the *text*, he alludes in the one to the lowest, and in the other to the highest degree of *excommunication* among the Jews, is not so certain. To the *first* he plainly does, when he says, *they shall put you out of the Synagogues*: and then he adds, that they should proceed much higher against them, even to put them to death; *the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doth God service*; that is, they should not only think it *lawful* to kill them, but look upon it as *a duty*, as a high act of religion, as an acceptable piece of worship, and *a sacrifice well-pleasing to God*. For so indeed the word does not only import, but most properly signify, *whosoever killeth you shall think, λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ Θεῷ, that he offers a sacrifice to God*; for so the word *λατρεία* is sometimes used, for *a sacrifice*; but being joyned with *προσφέρειν* seems necessarily to be determined to that sense.

From the words thus explained, I shall make these following *observations*, very proper for our consideration upon the occasion of *this day*.

1. That the best of men may be separated and excluded from the communion of those who may assume to themselves to be the true and the only true church; yea and suffer under the notion of very bad and criminal persons. This our Saviour here foretold of his Apostles, some of the best men that ever lived: *They shall put you out of the Synagogues*.

2. That they who are thus excommunicated, by the pretended true church, may nevertheless be real members of the true church of Christ. Tho' the Apostles were thus dealt withal by the Jewish church, they did not cease for all that to be members of the true church of God.

3. That from uncharitable censures men do easily and almost naturally proceed to cruel actions. After they had *put* the disciples of our Lord *out of their Synagogues*, and thereby concluded them to be *hereticks* and *reprobates*, they presently proceed to *kill* them, as not worthy to live. *They shall put you out of their Synagogues*; and when they have done that, they will soon after think it a thing not only fit, but pious and meritorious, to put you death; *the time will come, that they will think it a good service to God, to kill you*.

4. That men may do the vilest things, and the most wicked, not only under a *grave pretense* of religion, but out of *a real opinion and persuasion* that they do religiously. Murder is certainly one of the greatest and most crying sins; and yet our Saviour foretels, that the Jews should put his disciples to death, being verily persuaded that in so doing they offered a most acceptable sacrifice to God: *Yea the time shall come, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offers a sacrifice to God*.

5. That such actions are never the less horribly impious and wicked, notwithstanding the good mind with which, and the good end for which they are done. The Jews were not excused from the guilt of persecution and murder, for all they thought they did well in killing the disciples of our Lord.

6. I observe that the corruption of the best things is the worst. Religion is the highest accomplishment and perfection of humane nature; and zeal for God and his truth an excellent quality, and highly acceptable to God: And yet nothing is more barbarous, and spurs men on to more horrible impieties, than a blind zeal for God, and false and mistaken principles in the matter of religion; as is plain from the instances here before us in the *text*. I shall speak as briefly as I can to these *observations*.

1. That the best of men may be separated and excluded from the communion of those, who may assume to be the true and only true church, and that under the notion of very bad and criminal persons. This our Saviour foretels in the *text* should be the fate of his Apostles, some of the best and holiest persons that ever lived; *they shall put you out of the synagogues.*

And what the Jews did in the beginning of christianity, to the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour, hath been too frequently practised since, by some of the professors of christianity towards one another; and very good men have in several ages fallen under the censure of *excommunication*, and have been separated from the external communion of the church, and branded with the odious names of *Hereticks* and *Apostates*, by those who have arrogated to themselves to be *the only orthodox and true church*, and have gotten the external power and management of religion into their hands; witness the case of *Athanasius* and others, in the reign and prevalency of *Arianism*; and the ill treatment, that not only particular persons, eminent for their learning and piety, but whole churches have met with in this kind, from that haughty and uncharitable church, which makes nothing of thundering out this most fearful sentence of *excommunication*, against persons, and churches much better and more christian than herself, and against all that will not submit to her pretended infallibility, and usurped authority over the souls and consciences of men.

But it is our great comfort, that the Apostles and Disciples of our Lord and master were thus used, by a church that made the same pretenses that they do, and upon grounds every whit as plausible, as I could clearly shew, if I were minded to pursue and make out this comparison.

2. They who are thus excommunicated, by the only pretended true church, may nevertheless be true members of the church of Christ. Tho' the Apostles were thus dealt withal by the Jewish church, they did not cease for all this to be real members of the true church of God. For it is not calling *Hereticks* first, that proves them that do so to be no *Hereticks*, or acquits them from the same or greater crimes, than those which they are so forward to charge upon other men; nor will God condemn all those who are excommunicated by men, and deny salvation to every one whom they shall please to separate from their society, and to call by some odious name. Men may be put out of the synagogue, and yet received into heaven; for the *judgment of God* is not according to the uncharitable censures of men, but *according to truth* and right.

The sentence of *excommunication* is certainly very dreadful where it is duly inflicted; and next to the judgment of God, men ought to be afraid of justly incurring the danger of this censure; and it ought to be upon very plain and evident grounds, that men either separate themselves, or endanger their being cut off from the communion of the church they live in: but when it once comes to this, that a church is infected with gross errors and corruptions, plainly contrary to the word of God, especially if that church will impose her errors upon all that are of her communion; then those who refuse to comply, do not *separate themselves*, but *are cut off*; do not *depart* but *are driven out* of the communion of that church; and separation in that case is as innocent and free from the guilt of *schism*, as the cause of it is; for the terms of communion are become such, that those who are convinced of those errors and corruptions can have no salvation, if they continue in that communion, and then I am sure their salvation will not be endangered by leaving it, or being excommunicated out of it; for that would be the hardest case in the world, that men should be damned for continuing in the communion of such a church, and damned likewise for being cast out of it.

Therefore no man ought to be terrified, because of the boldness and presumption of those, who with so much confidence, and so little charity, damn all that are not of their communion; for we see plainly from the *text*, that men may be in the right and surest way to salvation, and yet be excommunicated by those who call themselves the true church, and will not allow salvation to any, but those of their own communion. The disciples of our Lord and Saviour were

certainly very good men, and in a safe way of salvation, tho' they were excommunicated, and put out of the synagogue, by the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish church. I proceed to the

3d *Observation*, which was this, that from uncharitable censures, men do by an easy step and almost naturally proceed to cruel actions. After the Jews had put the Disciples of our Lord out of their synagogues, and thereby concluded them to be *Hereticks* and *reprobates*, no wonder they should proceed to kill those, whom they thought not worthy to live; *they shall put you out of their synagogues*, (says our Saviour) and when they have done that, they will soon think it a thing not only fit and reasonable, but pious and meritorious, and *a good piece of service done to God, to put you to death*. Uncharitableness naturally draws on cruelty, and hardens humane nature towards those, of whom we have once conceived so hard an opinion, that they are enemies to God and his truth.

And this hath been the source of the most barbarous cruelties that have been in the world; witness the severity of the heathen persecution of the christians, which justified it self by the uncharitable opinion which they had conceived of them, that they were despisers of religion and the Gods, and consequently atheists; that they were pertinacious and obstinate in their opinions, that is, in the modern stile, they were *Hereticks*. And the like uncharitable conceit among christians hath been thought a sufficient ground (even in the judgment of the *infallible chair*) for the justification of several bloody *massacres*, and the cruel proceedings of the *inquisition* against persons suspected of heresy; for after men are once sentenced to eternal damnation, it seems a small thing to torment and destroy their bodies.

4. Men may do the vilest and most wicked things, not only under a *grave pretense* of religion, but out of a *real opinion and persuasion of mind*, that they do religiously. Murder is certainly one of the greatest and most crying sins; and yet our Saviour foretels, that the *Jews* should put his Disciples to death, being *verily persuaded* that in so doing they should offer a most acceptable sacrifice to God; *yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you shall think that he offers a sacrifice to God*.

Not but that the great duties and virtues of religion are very plain and easy to be understood; and so are the contrary sins and vices: But then they are only plain to a teachable, and honest, and well-disposed mind; to those *who receive the word with meekness*, and are not blinded with wrath and furious zeal; to those that *receive the truth into an honest heart, and entertain it in the love of it*; they are plain to the humble and meek; *for the humble God will guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways*; such as *these* God seldom suffers to fall into fatal mistakes about their sin, or duty, so as to *call good evil, and evil good; to call light darkness, and darkness light*; to think uncharitableness a virtue, and downright murder a great duty.

But if men will give up themselves to be swayed by self-love and self-conceit, to be governed by any base or corrupt interest, to be blinded by prejudice, and intoxicated by pride, to be transported and hurried away by violent and furious passions; no wonder if they mistake the nature, and confound the differences of things, in the plainest and most palpable cases; no wonder if God *give up* persons of such corrupt minds to *strong delusions to believe lies*. It ought not to be strange to us, if such men bring their understandings to their wills and interests, and bend their judgments to their prejudices, make them to stoop to their pride, and blindly to follow their passions, which way soever they lead them; for God usually leaves such persons to themselves, as run away from him, and is not concerned to secure those from splitting upon the most dangerous rocks, who will steer their course by no compass, but commit themselves to the wind and tide of their own lusts and passions.

In these cases men may take the wrong way; and yet believe themselves to be in the right: they may oppose the truth, and persecute the professors of it, and be guilty of the blackest crimes, and the most horrid impieties, malice and hatred, blasphemy and murder; and yet all the while be *verily persuaded*, that they are serving God, and sacrificing to him.

Of this we have a plain and full instance in the Scribes and Pharisees, the chief Priests and rulers among the Jews, who because *they sought the honour of men, and not that which was from God, and loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God*; because they were prejudiced against the meanness of our Saviour's birth and condition, and had upon false grounds (tho' as they thought upon the infallibility of tradition, and of scripture interpreted by tradition) entertained quite other notions of the *Messias*, from what he really was to be; because they were proud and thought themselves too wise to learn of him; and because his doctrine of humility, and self-denial, did thwart their interest, and bring down their authority and credit among the people; therefore they set themselves against him with all their might, opposing his doctrine, and blasting his reputation, and persecuting him to the death; and all this while did bear up themselves with a conceit of the *antiquity* and *privileges* of their church, and their profound knowledge in the law of God, and a great external shew of piety and devotion, and an arrogant pretence and usurpation of being *the only church* and people of God in the world: and by virtue of these advantages, they thought they might do any thing; and that whosoever opposed the authority of *so ancient and good a church*, must needs be very bad men, and deserve to be proceeded against in the severest manner. As if any pretence of piety could give a privilege to do wickedly, and by how much the wiser and holier any man took himself to be, he might do so much the worse things.

There is another remarkable instance of this in *St. Paul*, who out of a blind and furious zeal, for *the traditions of his fathers*, persecuted the true church of God, by imprisonment or death, and all manner of cruelties; and all this while *he verily thought* that he was in the right, and *that he ought to do* all these things against the name of *Jesus of Nazareth*. And if God had not in a miraculous manner check'd him in his course, and changed his mind, he would have spent his whole life in that course of persecution and cruelty, and would (with *Pope Paul IV.* upon his death-bed) have recommended *the inquisition* (or if he could have thought of any thing more severe) to the chief priests and rulers of the Jewish church.

I will not trouble you with nearer instances; tho' the Jewish church is not the only church in the world, that hath countenanced the destruction and extirpation of those who differ from them, as a piece of very acceptable service to God, and meritorious of the pardon of their sins.

5. I observe that such actions as these are never the less horribly wicked and impious, notwithstanding the good mind with which, and the good end for which they are done. The Jews were not excused from the guilt of persecution and murder, for all they thought they did well, in killing the disciples of our Lord.

For to make an action good and acceptable to God, the goodness of all causes, and of all circumstances, must concur; and any one defect in any of these, does vitiate the whole action, and spoil the goodness of it. We must do it with a good mind, being verily persuaded that what we do is good and acceptable to God; in which sense *St. Paul* saith, that *whatever is not of faith is sin*; and we must do it for a good end, for the honour of God, and the service of religion, and the benefit and edification of men. But there is one thing wanting yet, which is often forgotten, but is mainly considerable, *viz.* what we do with a good mind, and to a good end, must be good and lawful in it self, commanded or allowed, or at least not forbidden by God: If it be; what good circumstances soever may belong to the action, the whole action is stark nought; because the very matter and substance of it is evil, and unlawful, and damnable, tho' done for never so good an end. So *St. Paul* tells us, that they *who said they might do evil, that good might come, their damnation was just*. He tells us indeed, that some would have charged this doctrine upon the christians, and particularly upon himself; but he rejects it, with the greatest detestation; and (which is not unworthy of our observation) in his epistle to the *Roman* church, as if the spirit of God, to whom all times are present, had particularly directed him to give this caution to

that Church, that in future ages they might be warned against so pernicious a principle, and all wicked practices that are consequent upon it.

And we find that St. Paul, after his conversion, did think it no sufficient plea and excuse for himself, and his persecution of the christian profession, that what he did was out of zeal for God, and his true religion, as *he was verily persuaded*; but, notwithstanding that, acknowledgeth himself *a murderer*, and *one of the greatest sinners*; for which, without *the great mercy of God*, he had perish'd everlastingly.

6. and lastly, I observe, that the corruption of the best things is the worst. Religion is certainly the highest accomplishment and perfection of humane nature; and zeal for God and his truth an excellent quality, and highly acceptable to God: and yet nothing is more barbarous, and spurs men on to more horrid impieties, than a blind zeal for God, and false and mistaken principles in the matter of religion.

Our Saviour compares the christian religion, and the ministers and professors of it, to salt and light, the most useful and delightful things in the world. Religion enlightens the minds of men, and directs them in the way wherein they should go; it seasons the spirits and manners of men, and preserves them from being putrified and corrupted; but *if the salt lose its savour*, if that which should season other things, be tainted it self; *it is thenceforth* the most insipid and offensive thing in the world, *good for nothing, but to be cast upon the dunghil: if the light that is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness?*

Mistakes and false principles are no where so pernicious, and of such mischievous consequence, as in religion. A blind and misguided zeal in religion is enough to spoil the best nature and disposition in the world. St. Paul (for ought appears) was of himself of a very kind and compassionate nature; and yet what *a fury* did his mistaken zeal make him! It is hardly credible how madly he laid about him, but that he himself gives us the account of it, *Acts 26. 9, 10, 11. I verily thought with my self, (says he) that I ought to do many things, contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth; which thing I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the Saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests. And when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them; and I punished them oft in every Synagogue, and compell'd them to blaspheme, and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them, even to strange cities.*

I might descend lower, and give instances both of former and latter times, of Emperors and Princes, both heathen and christian, that of themselves were mild and gentle; and yet through a mistaken zeal, and the instigation of their chief priests, have been carried to cruel and bloody things. And indeed nothing gives so keen an edge, even to the mildest tempers, as an erroneous and wild zeal for God and religion, it is like quick-silver in the back of a sword that is not very sharp of it self, which gives a mighty force and weight to its blow, and makes it to cut terribly.

And it is very sad to consider, that the zealous prosecution of mistakes in religion, hath produced sadder and more barbarous effects in the world; and more frequently, than the ordinary corruptions and degeneracy of natural light is apt to do; as the decay of the richest and most generous wines makes the fourest vinegar; so that the Pasquil or libel against Pope Urban VIII. upon occasion of his taking off the brazen roof of the old Capitol (which had held out so many ages, and that notwithstanding Rome had been so often sack'd by barbarous nations) and his selling it to enrich his family [*quod non fecerant Barbari, fecerunt Barberini*] may, with changing the name and occasion, be apply'd to a great many others; that they have been guilty of those cruelties against christians, upon account of difference in religion, which the most barbarous nations never exercised upon one another.

I have done with *the observations* and the *text*; and shall I now need to make any *application* of what hath been said, to the occasion of *this day*? The thing applies it self; since *the horrid design* of *this day* was undertaken and carried on upon the same pretences and principles, upon which the Jews persecuted the disciples

ples of our Lord, and much in the same method ; for they first thundered out an *excommunication* against them, and then took it for granted, that it would be an *acceptable sacrifice to God, to destroy them.*

I will not go about to aggravate *the conspiracy of this day*, it is past my skill ; nor will I extend the blame and guilt of it any farther than the plain evidence and reason of the thing does enforce. It is a thing so scandalous to *humane nature*, and so great a reflection upon any *church and religion*, to be accessary to the contriving or countenancing of any *such design*, that I am very well contented, that it should be confined to as narrow a compass as may be, and none esteemed guilty of it, but those that were openly in it, or have since endeavour'd to excuse it. All that we desire of *others*, is, that they would declare their hearty detestation of such abominable practices, and be as good as their word ; and that they would not account it *a service and sacrifice to God*, to destroy all that cannot be of their mind.

So that the *inference* from all this discourse, in short, shall be this, that men should take great care to inform their consciences aright, and to govern them by the plain rules of good and evil, the law of God written upon our hearts, and revealed in his word, which forbids such practices as I have been speaking of, as clearly as the Sun shines at noon-day ; and that we would always be afraid to do a bad thing, tho' gilded over with never so glorious colours, and specious pretences of zeal for God and his truth. For a man may do a thing with an honest mind, and for a religious end, and be commissioned and countenanced (as *St. Paul* was) by them who take themselves to be *the only true Church* in the world ; and yet at last prove to have been all the while *a blasphemer*, and *a murderer*, and *the greatest of sinners* ; for none of these pretences are sufficient to warrant and sanctifie a wicked action : Before this can be done, the immutable nature of good and evil must be changed.

I will conclude all with that gentle reproof of our blessed Saviour to his disciples, when their zeal for him had transported them to make that cruel request to him, that he would (as *Elias* had done upon a like occasion) *call for fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans* : *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of ; for the Son of man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them* ; hereby declaring to us the true temper and spirit of Christianity, and that they that act contrary to it, are ignorant of the nature of the Christian religion ; *ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of ; for the Son of man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them.*

Preached
on the 29
of May,
1693.

S E R M O N XXX.

The Duty and Reason of Praying for Governours.

I TIM. ii. 1, 2.

I exhort therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: for Kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.



Need not tell any here, that *this day* is appointed by Authority for an anniversary solemnity, in a grateful commemoration of the great mercy of God to these nations, in putting an end to the intestine wars and confusions of many years, in restoring to us our ancient government and laws, and in bringing home, as upon *this day*, the rightful heir of these kingdoms, to the crown and throne of his fathers: And tho' the glory of *this day* hath been not a little fullied and obscured by many things which have happened since that time, fitter now to be buried in silence and oblivion, than to be mention'd and raked up; yet it hath pleased God, in scattering those black clouds, which not long since hung over us, to restore *this day* to its first lustre and brightness; so that we may now with great joy look back upon it, as designed by the wise providence of God, to make way for the happiness which we now enjoy under *their present majesties*, by whom, under God, we have been delivered from that terrible and imminent danger which threatned our religion and laws, and the very constitution it self of our antient government. And to this occasion, no kind of argument can be more proper and suitable, than that which the *text* affords to our consideration, in this injunction of St. Paul to Timothy, to take care that in the publick worship of God, *supplications* and *thanksgivings* be put up to God, *for Kings, and all that are in authority.* *I exhort therefore, &c.*

In which words there are *four* things considerable.

First, The duty here enjoyn'd, which is prayer; expressed to us in several words, which seem to denote the several kinds or parts of prayer; *I exhort therefore, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: For Kings, and for all that are in authority, &c.* Some of these words are of a very near signification; and yet there seems some difference betwixt them, most probably this:

1. By *Δείσεις*, which we render *supplications*, is probably meant that part or kind of prayer, wherein we supplicate God for the pardon of our sins, and for the averting and removing of evils, whether temporal or spiritual, from our selves or others.

2. By *Προσυχὰς*, which we render *prayers*, seem to be meant petitions for blessings and good things from God; and these are most properly called *prayers*.

3. By *Εντεύξεις*, seems to be particularly meant pleadings and *intercessions* on the behalf of others.

4. By *Εὐχαριστίας* is certainly intended praises and *thanksgivings* to God, for his blessings and goodness to our selves and others. This seems to be the difference between them, which whether it be exactly so or not, is not very material, since these are unquestionably the several kinds or parts of prayer. And these several sorts of prayer, St. Chrysostom, in his comment upon this *text*, tells us were publickly used in his time, in the daily service of the Church; "this (says he) all
" com-

“communicants do know is done every day, morning and evening; how that we pray for all the world, *for Kings and all that are in authority.*”

Secondly, for whom we are to pray; in general, *for all men.* Our prayers are one of the greatest and best expressions of our charity, and therefore ought to be as large and extensive as our charity is. We are bound in common charity to love all men, and to wish well to them; but our bare wishes signify nothing, unless we direct them to God, who is able to confer upon them the blessings and good things which we wish to them.

And this is a charity which God hath put into every man's power, and which the poorest man in the world, as well as the richest, is capable of exercising at all times and upon all occasions: For *the ear of God is open to the prayers* of the poor, as well as of the rich, and they are every whit as prevalent with him; nay, the Scripture seems to say, that God hath a more particular regard to the prayers of *the poor.* So that we may be liberal and bountiful in our prayers to those, to whom we are able to give nothing else; and when our hands cannot reach to relieve them, we may pour out our hearts to God for them; we may pray for their spiritual and temporal good, and we may praise God for the good which befalls them, tho' it was out of our power to be any ways instrumental to procure it for them.

Thirdly, For whom we are more especially, and in the first place, to pray; *viz.* for those who have the greatest and most publick influence of all others, upon the peace and happiness of mankind, *for Kings, and for all that are in authority*; that is, for the supreme magistrate, and for all inferior magistrates, who derive their power and authority from the supreme.

Government is necessary to the welfare of mankind, because it is the great band of humane society, the guard of its peace, and the security of every man's person and property; and therefore we are concerned as much as is possible, both to pray for our governors, and to bless God for them; because without them we should be in a most wretched condition. Mankind would be unavoidably miserable without government; humane society would presently disband, and all things would run into confusion. It is a remarkable saying of one of the Jewish masters, *pray for the happiness of the kingdom or government; for if it were not for the fear of that, men would devour one another alive.* And Josephus tells us, that *when the Jews were made subject to the Romans* (tho' it was by Conquest) *twice a day they offered up sacrifices for the life and safety of the Emperor.* And this was very agreeable to what God had commanded that people by his prophet, in a much like case, when the Jews were conquered by the King of *Babylon*, and carried away captives, *Jer. 29. 7. Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.* And surely the reason is much stronger, why we should pray for our *natural* princes and governors. I come now to the

Fourth and Last thing considered in *the text*, and which I principally design to speak to, namely the reason or argument which the Apostle uses, to engage us to pray for our princes, and for all that are in authority, *that we may live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.* The manifold benefits and advantages which redound to us from our governors, is a sufficient argument why we should pray to God for them, and praise him likewise for so great a blessing, and that in the first place; *I exhort therefore first of all* (saith the Apostle,) *Ec.* Now the Apostle here in the *text* expresseth *two* great advantages of government, which upon the matter do comprehend all the rest.

1. That by government we are secured in our civil rights and interests, in the quiet and peaceable possession of what is our own.

2. That we may thereby be protected in the free practice and exercise of religion and virtue.

These are the *two* greatest and most desirable things to man; and neither of these can be had without government. I shall briefly consider these *two* particulars, and then endeavour to shew, what obligation the consideration of them lays upon us, both to pray to God in the behalf of our princes and governors,

nors, and likewise to praise God for them : And then I shall conclude all with a brief *application* of this whole discourse to the solemn occasion of *this day*.

First, I shall begin with the benefits and advantages of Government mention'd in the *text*, namely, these *two*.

1. That by it we are secured in our civil rights and interests, in the quiet and peaceable possession of what is our own.

Without government there could be no such thing as property in any thing beyond our own persons ; for nothing but laws can make property, and laws are the effect of government and authority: Nay, without government, we have no security of our persons and lives, much less of any thing that belongs to us, and is at present in our possession. Were we not protected by laws (which are the effect of government) we could have no safety, no quiet enjoyment of any thing ; but every man must be perpetually upon his guard against all the world, and exposed to continual violence and injuries from those, who are too many, and too strong for him ; so that all our quiet and security from fear and danger, from the fraud and oppression of those who are more crafty and powerful than our selves, from endless confusions and distractions, and from a state of perpetual feud and war with all mankind, is entirely due and owing to civil government.

And this alone is so unspeakable a benefit, that without it, *men*, of all creatures, would be the most miserable ; because all that wit and sagacity, all that cunning and contrivance, which mankind hath above the brute creatures, would but enable them to do so much the more mischief to one another, and to devise and find out more powerful and effectual means and instruments to harm and destroy one another.

In short, that we live, and that we live well, in any tolerable condition either of safety or plenty, and that we are able to call any thing our own for one day, or for one hour ; that we are not in perpetual terror and apprehension of mortal dangers, and that we are at any time free from the invasion of what we at present possess, by the fraud and force of others, is solely the effect of this great blessing and divine appointment of government, to preserve the peace of humane society, and by wise and wholesome laws, to tie up men's hands from mutual injuries and violence. Upon this all the comfort and all the security of human laws does depend. From hence it comes to pass, (that as the Scripture expresseth it) *we may sit down every man under his own vine, and under his own fig-tree, and that there shall be none to make us afraid*. So that if security is necessary to the comfort and happiness of mankind ; then government is so too : For without this, the societies of men would presently dissolve and fall in pieces, and all things would run into confusion and disorder.

2. Another great benefit which may reasonably be expected from government (tho' it does not always so happen) is, that men are protected by it, in the free exercise and practice of religion and virtue. Therefore we should *pray for Kings, and for all that are in authority*, (says the Apostle) *that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty* ; that is, in the practice of piety and devotion towards God ; of sobriety and temperance in regard to our selves ; and of justice and charity toward all men.

It's true indeed, (and so the Apostles and first Christians found it by experience) that the edge and authority of laws may be, and sometimes is turned upon the true religion, and the sincere professors of it : But even then, tho' good men may receive great harms and injuries from persecuting Princes and Governors ; (as the primitive Christians did from several of the *Roman Emperors*) yet then it so happens, that good men have some considerable benefit and protection from the civil government and laws, being for the most part preserved from the fury and rage of the multitude ; so that tho' particular persons undergo the trial of cruel sufferings, yet much great numbers do escape and are preserved.

And which is very considerable in this matter, against several of the main and essential parts of religion, there never was any humane law made; as against inward love, honour, and reverence of Almighty God, and the worshipping him in our hearts, and in secret; of this part of religion, humane laws can take no cognizance: Nay, farther yet, against humility and meekness, against modesty and patience, against temperance and chastity, against peaceableness and obedience to government, against justice and gratitude, against charity and forgiveness of injuries, *against these* and such like virtues, the Apostle has told us, *there is no law*. Against the practice of these (without some of which government could not possibly subsist) no persecution was ever raised, no not by the worst of governours: on the contrary, in the practice of these virtues, good men have been in all ages and times protected by law.

'Tis true indeed, that good men have many times been grievously persecuted by the civil government and authority, *for the external profession of revealed religion*; which was the cause of the christians at that time, when the Apostle commanded them *to pray for Kings and for all that were in authority; that under their protection, they might lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty*. St. Paul knew very well, when he gave this injunction to them, *that supplications and prayers be made for Kings, and for all that are in authority*, that the powers of the world did not at that time favour christianity: But he knew likewise, that government was necessary to the happiness of mankind, and that christians, even in the state of persecution, did enjoy many considerable benefits and advantages by it, so that they were not perpetually exposed to popular rage and cruelty, and the violence of *wicked and unreasonable men*; which would not only have *hindred the progress* of christianity, but would in a short time have endangered *the extinguishing* of it: Besides, that by the favour and protection of government, the christians had many considerable intervals of peace and ease, which gave christianity a breathing time, and opportunity to recover it self; and though the secular authority did for a long time discountenance christianity, and keep it under hatches; that was but an accidental effect and abuse of government, and obedience was still due, and prayers for it so much the more necessary, yea and thanksgivings to God for it very reasonable, upon account of the common benefits and advantages of it to humane society.

Besides that christians did hope and believe, that the civil government might in time be gained, to give its countenance and assistance to christianity, and *that Kings and Princes might become nursing fathers to the church*, as was expressly foretold by the Prophets, and afterwards in God's due time was remarkably accomplished. In the mean time christians were patiently to obey and suffer, in expectation of those glorious rewards in another world, which were promised to their faith and patience; and to pray for the powers that persecuted them, that *they also might be brought to the acknowledgment of the truth*, and might use that power which God had committed to them, for the protection of truth and innocence, and for the continuance and support of the true religion; which, blessed be God, was afterwards the case of christianity for several ages. I proceed in the

Second place, to shew what obligation the consideration of the mighty benefits and advantages of government lays upon us, both to pray to God on the behalf of Princes and governours, and likewise to praise God for them.

Because in their welfare and prosperity the publick peace and happiness doth chiefly consist, and in the publick good consists the good of particular persons; and above all, the piety and goodness of Princes and magistrates (especially those who are in the highest place of authority) have a general good influence upon the manners of men, both for the discountenancing of wickedness and vice, and for the encouragement of religion and virtue, which are the main pillars and foundation of publick peace and prosperity. *A King sitting in the throne of judgment, (saith Solomon, Prov. 20. 8) scattereth away all evil with his eyes*. The pattern of a religious good Prince is *a living law* to his subjects, and more than the example of ten thousand others, to mould and fashion the manners of the people to a conformity to it.

Besides that there is (as one expresseth) a kind of *moral* connexion and communication of evil and of guilt betwixt Princes and people; so that they are many times mutually rewarded for the virtues and good actions, and punished for the sins and faults of one another. Of which proceedings of the divine justice towards the people of *Israel*, there are many remarkable instances in scripture, where God rewarded the piety of good Princes with great blessings upon their people, and punished the personal faults of their Kings with publick judgments upon the whole nation. So that in truth it is the greatest kindness and charity to our selves, to pray for our Princes and governours; because *our* welfare is involved in *theirs*, and we suffer not only in all the misfortunes and calamities which befall them, but many times upon account of their personal faults and miscarriages. *Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi*, the extravagances of princes are punished in the misfortunes of their subjects. Thus *David* (otherwise a very good King) sinned in numbering the people, and the plague fell upon *them*; he was punished in the calamity of his people. And this was in no wise unjust, because there are always sins enough in any nation to deserve punishment, and God may take what occasion he pleases, to send his judgments upon them that deserve them; for Princes and people make but one civil and political body, and what part of it soever is punished, the other suffers. And this is the true ground and reason of the communication of punishments betwixt princes and people.

Another consideration which should engage us to pray for those that are in authority, is, that we reap the great benefit of their care, and pains, and vigilancy for us, *under their shadow we are safe*. Our innocency and our rights are protected by their power and laws, and by the just punishments which they inflict upon evil-doers, and upon those who go about to violate our rights in any kind; so that we ought to pray and to praise God for them, as our great *benefactors*, and the chief instruments of our security and welfare; and therefore not only in *duty*, but in *justice* and *gratitude*, we are bound to wish all good to them, and to intercede with God for them, for the peace and prosperity of their government, and to bless God on their behalf: Yea, we ought to do this out of love to our selves; because *their* good and prosperity is *ours*, *their* goodness and righteousness, *their* personal piety and virtues extend to *us*, and have a mighty influence upon us, to excite and encourage us to follow their good example, and to go and do likewise.

And we ought likewise to do this out of charity and compassion to our Princes and governors, whose condition is in truth rather to be pitied than envied, and whose high place and dignity is much more to be dreaded than desired by a wise man, considering how heavy a burden they sustain, what dangers they are continually exposed to, what cares, and troubles, and censures they daily undergo, for our safety and ease. So that whatever ambitious and inconsiderate men may *think*, wise men do certainly *know* and find by experience, that to discharge with care and faithfulness all the parts of a good governour, is a very difficult and troublesome province. Inferior magistrates find care and trouble enough, in that small share and part of it which they sustain; and if so, then certainly the care and concernment of *the whole*, must needs be a heavy burden indeed; and what abilities are sufficient for it, what shoulders are strong enough to stand under it?

And as upon this account they have the greatest need of our prayers, for God's direction and assistance in the discharge of their high office, so likewise for his powerful grace to preserve them from sin and evil, in the midst of those manifold temptations to which they are continually exposed, in appearance much beyond other men, from the height of their condition, and the extent of their power, which are strong temptations to weak minds, to pride and insolency, to injustice and oppression; from the abundance of all things, which minister to luxury and excess; and from the officious servility of *parasites* and *flatterers*, who soothe them in their faults, and humour them in their passions,

passions, and comply with their corrupt and vicious inclinations, and are always ready at hand, and forward instruments to execute their commands, and to serve their lusts and vices.

And as Princes greatly need our prayers upon these accounts; so it is just matter of praise and thankfulness to God, when a nation hath wise, just, and good Princes, who lay to heart the interests of their people, and endeavour by all the wise methods and honest arts of government, effectually to procure it; who by their authority and due execution of the law, do discountenance, and, as much as in them lies, restrain wickedness and vice; and by their own example encourage virtue and piety in their subjects; and thereby invite, and even provoke them to the like practices: the life of a good Prince is a kind of *publick censure* of ill manners, and reproof of vicious practices. And I do not know whether there be a more delightful sight on this side heaven, than to see those who are in eminent place and power, even if they might do whatever they would, yet continually chusing to do what they ought; as if their power were so far from being a temptation to them to do evil, that on the contrary, the consideration of it is one of the best and strongest arguments to restrain them from it.

Weak minds are apt to measure their *liberty* by their *power*, and to think that the higher and greater they are, so much the greater privilege they have to be more extravagantly bad than others: But if the matter be really considered, the argument runs the other way; and he that reasons wisely, will certainly conclude with *Tully*, *in maximâ quâque fortunâ minimum licere, that they who are in the highest station, and greatest power, have of all others the least liberty to do what they list.* Their power, supposing it never so uncontrollable, and unaccountable, would be so far from being in reason a temptation to them to do what they ought not, that in truth it would set them above the temptation of doing an ill thing; because they would stand in awe of no body, and there would be nothing that could hinder them from doing what is best, if they had a mind to it: and every one ought to have such a mind: and nothing can be more mis-becoming, and more directly contrary to the nature of their office, and the power wherewith they are intrusted, than to give an example of breaking those laws, which they are to put in execution.

God himself, because he hath *all power*, is therefore *all goodness*, and is therefore *holy in all his ways, and righteous in all his works*, according to the reasoning of the author of the book of *wisdom*, who argues thus with God, *It is not* (says he) *agreeable with thy power to condemn him that hath not deserved to be punished;* that is, it is not agreeable with infinite power, to do any thing that is unjust; *for thy power* (saith he to God) *is the beginning of righteousness, and because thou art the Lord of all, it maketh thee to be gracious unto all.* Infinite power is the foundation and principle of goodness and righteousness, and all-powerful Being is good and righteous, not only from *choice*, but from a *necessity of nature*.

And this is the true ground and reason of *that saying* of St. James, that *God cannot be tempted with evil*, because his infinite power sets him above all temptation to it: For what reason can be imagined, why he that hath all power, shall have any inclination to be otherwise than good? What can tempt him thereto? Since he that hath all power can neither have any hopes of being greater than he is, nor any fear of becoming less: and all temptation is founded either in hope or fear, and where neither of these can have any place, there can be no occasion, no possible motive or temptation to evil; for *to be evil*, and *to do evil*, is always an effect of *weakness* and *want of power*.

The sum of what I have said upon this argument, and the design indeed of it, is to shew, that the greater power and authority any one hath, the less liberty he hath to do any thing that is bad. And I have been the larger upon this, because I would fain imprint upon the minds of persons, whom the providence of God hath invested with great power and authority, that as they have

great opportunities of doing more good than others, so they have greater reason, and more advantages of doing it, and are more inexcusable if they do any thing that is bad; not only because their actions are of a more publick influence and observation; but because their temptations to evil, how great soever they may seem to be, are in truth and reality much less than other mens. Happy are those Princes, that wisely consider this, and make their power and authority over others, an argument to be so much better themselves, and to do so much more good to others; and because they are less subject to *the coercive power of law*, do for that reason think themselves so much the more obliged to be *a law to themselves*. Blessed be God for the happiness which we enjoy in this respect; and let us earnestly beseech him that he would be pleased to bestow such a plentiful measure of his grace and holy spirit on our most gracious King and Queen, as may effectually both engage and enable them to use their power to the best purposes for *the publick good*.

And thus I have briefly gone over, and explained to you the several particulars in the *text*; *the duty of prayer* here enjoined; *for whom* we are to pray, in general *for all men*; and for whom more especially, and *in the first place*; *for Kings, and all that are in authority*; and *upon what considerations* we are to pray for them, and to praise God in their behalf; because of the great benefits we receive by them; and because both in respect of the dangers and difficulties of their condition, they stand in need of our prayers above other men; besides that in praying for their welfare and prosperity, we pray for our own peace and happiness.

And now to *apply* this to our selves, and to the occasion of *this day*. By all that hath been said, we cannot but be convinced what cause we have to bless God for *that happy government* which we live under, *that excellent constitution*, under the gentle influences whereof *we* enjoy more liberty, more plenty, and more security from all manner of injury and oppression, than *any nation* this day on the face of the earth. Therefore with what thankfulness should we *this day* commemorate the happy Restoration of this government to us, after the miserable distractions and confusions of twenty years, by the restoration and return of our banish'd *Sovereign*, in so peaceable, and yet so wonderful a manner, that a remembrance of it, even at this distance, is almost still matter of amazement to us!

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who alone doth wondrous things.

And with our joyful praises, let us joyn our most devout and fervent prayers to Almighty God, *for the King's and Queen's Majesties, and for all that are in authority*. And I may truly say, that there was hardly ever greater reason and occasion for it, from both our distractions at home, and our dangers from abroad; never was there greater need of our earnest supplications and prayers, than at *this* time, when our armies and fleets are in motion, and when God seems already to have given us some earnest of good success; blessed be his great and glorious name.

We have indeed a great army, and a more powerful fleet, than ever this nation sent forth; but unless God be on our side, and favour our cause, in vain are all our preparations; for whenever his providence is pleased to interpose, *by strength shall no man prevail*. Have we not reason then to *cry mightily unto God*, when the only strength of the nation is at stake, when our sins and provocations are so many and great, and there lies so heavy a load of guilt upon us? When the person of his sacred Majesty is exposed to so much hazard, not only *in the high places of the field*, but from the *restless attempts* of the malicious and implacable enemies of our peace and religion, *that he would be graciously pleased to go forth with our armies and fleets*, and *not remember our iniquities against us, but save us for his mercies sake*?

We are too apt to murmur and complain of miscarriages, and the ill management of affairs; but surely the best thing we can do, and that which best becomes us, is to look forward, and to turn our censures of our governours and their actions, into humble supplications to God in their behalf, and in behalf of the

the whole nation; that he would be pleased to turn us every one from the evil of our ways, that he may return to us, and have mercy on us, that so Iniquity may not be our ruin; that he may rejoice over us to do us good, and may at last think thoughts of peace towards us, thoughts of good and not of evil, to give us an expected end of our troubles.

Let us then betake our selves to the proper work of this day, hearty prayers and thanksgivings to Almighty God, for the King and Queen, and for all that are in authority; that as he hath been pleased by a wonderful providence, to rescue us from the imminent danger we were in, and from all our fears, by the happy advancement of their majesties to the throne of these kingdoms; so he would of his infinite goodness still preserve and continue to us this light of our Eyes, and breath of our nostrils, princes of that great clemency and goodness, which render them the true representatives of God upon earth, and the most gracious governors of men.

And let us earnestly beseech him, that he would confirm and strengthen them in all goodness, and make them wise as Angels of God, to discern betwixt good and evil, that they may know how to go in and out before this great people; that he would give them the united affections of their people, and a heart to study and seek their good all the days of their lives.

And finally, That he would be pleased to continue so great a blessing to us, and to grant them a long and prosperous reign over us; and that their posterity in this Royal Family may endure for ever, and their throne as the days of heaven; that under them the people of these nations, we and the generations to come, may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty; for his mercies sake in Jesus Christ, who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XXXI.

The Love of God to Men, in the Incarnation of Christ.

Preached
in the
Chappel of
Lambeth-
House on
Christmas-
Day, 1691.

I JOHN iv. 9.

In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.



THESE Words contain a clear and evident demonstration of the love of God to us; *in this was manifested the love of God towards us*; that is, by this it plainly appears, that God had a mighty love for us, *that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him*. In which we may consider this threefold evidence of God's love to mankind.

I. That he should be pleased to take our case into consideration, and to concern himself for our happiness.

II. That he should design so great a benefit to us, which is here exprest by Life; *that we might live through him*.

III. That he was pleased to use such a means for the obtaining and procuring of this benefit for us; *he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might*

might live through him. Each of these singly is a great evidence of God's love to us ; much more all of them together.

I. It is a great evidence of the love of God to mankind, that he was pleased to take our case into consideration, and to concern himself for our happiness. Nothing does more commend an act of kindness, than if there be great condescension in it. We use to value a small favour, if it be done to us by one that is far above us, more than a far greater done to us by a mean and inconsiderable person. This made *David* to break out into such admiration, when he considered the ordinary providence of God towards mankind. *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him! or the son of man, that thou shouldst consider him!* This is a wonderful condescension indeed, for God to be mindful of man.

At the best we are but his creatures, and upon that very account at an infinite distance from him ; so that were not he infinitely good, he would not be concerned for us, who are so infinitely beneath the consideration of his love and pity. Neither are we of the highest rank of creatures ; we are much below the Angels, as to the excellency and perfection of their beings ; so that if God had not had a peculiar pity and regard to the sons of men, he might have placed his affection and care upon a much nobler order of creatures, than we are, and so much the more miserable, because they fell from a higher step of happiness, I mean the lost Angels ; but yet for reasons best known to his infinite wisdom, God pass'd by them, and was pleased to consider *us*. This the Apostle to the *Hebrews* takes notice of, as an argument of God's peculiar and extraordinary love to mankind, that *he sent his Son, not to take upon him the nature of Angels, but of the Seed of Abraham.*

Now that *he*, who is so far above us, and after that we by willful transgression had lost our selves, had no obligation to take care of us, but what his own goodness laid upon him, that he should concern himself so much for us, and be so solicitous for our recovery, this is a great evidence of his kindness and goodwill to us, and cannot be imagined to proceed from any other cause.

II. Another evidence of God's great love to us, is, that he was pleased to design so great a benefit for us. This the Scripture expresseth to us by *life* ; and it is usual in Scripture to express the best and most desirable things by *life* ; because as it is one of the greatest blessings, so it is the foundation of all other enjoyments : And therefore the Apostle useth but this one word to express to us all the blessings and benefits of Christ's coming into the world ; *God sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*

And the expression is very proper in our case ; because *life* signifies the reparation of all that which was lost by the fall of man. For man by his wilful degeneracy and Apostacy from God, is sunk into a state of sin and misery, both which the Scripture is wont to express by *death*. In respect of our sinful state we are spiritually dead ; and in respect of the punishment and misery due to us for our sins, we are judicially dead, dead in law ; for *the wages of sin is death*. Now God hath sent his Son into the world, that in both these respects *we might live through him.*

1. We are spiritually dead, dead in trespasses and sins, as the Apostle speaks, *Eph. 2. 1, 2. You hath he quickned, who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in times past ye walked, according to the course of this world.* Every wicked man, tho' in a natural sense he be alive, yet in a moral sense he is dead. So the Apostle speaking of those *who live in sinful lusts and pleasures*, says of them, that *they are dead while they live*, 1 Tim. 5. 6. What corrupt humours are to the body, that sin is to the Soul, their disease and their death. Now God sent his Son to deliver us from this death, by renewing our nature, and mortifying our lusts ; by restoring us to the life of grace and holiness, and *destroying the body of sin in us, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* And that this is a great argument of the mighty love of God to us, the Apostle tells us, *Eph. 2. 4, 5. God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickned us together with Christ.* It is an argument of the riches of God's Mercy, and of his great love to us, to recover us

out of this sad and deplorable case. It is a kindness infinitely greater, than to redeem us from the most wretched slavery, or to rescue us from the most dreadful and cruel temporal death; and yet we should value this as a favour and benefit, that could never be sufficiently acknowledged: But God hath sent his Son to deliver us from a worse bondage, and a more dreadful kind of death; so that well might the Apostle ascribe this great deliverance of mankind from the slavery of our lusts, and the death of sin, to the boundless mercy and love of God to us. *God who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved us, hath quickned us together with Christ, even when we were dead in sins;* when our case was as desperate as could well be imagined; then was God pleased to undertake this great cure, and to provide such a remedy, as cannot fail to be effectual for our recovery, if we will but make use of it.

2. We were likewise judicially dead, dead in law, being condemned by the just sentence of it. So soon as ever we sinned, eternal death was by the sentence of God's law become our due portion and reward; and this being our case, God in tender commiseration and pity to mankind, was pleased to send his Son into the world, to interpose between the justice of God and the demerits of men; and by reversing the sentence that was gone out against us, and procuring a pardon for us, to rescue us from the misery of eternal death; and not only so, but upon the condition of faith and repentance, of obedience and a holy life, to bestow eternal life upon us; and by this means to restore us to a better condition than that from which we were fallen, and to advance us to a happiness greater than that of innocence.

And was not this great love, to design and provide so great a benefit and blessing for us, *to send his Son Jesus to bless us, in turning away every one of us from our iniquities?* Our blessed Saviour, who came from the bosom of his Father, and knew his tender affection and compassion to mankind, speaks of this as a most wonderful and unparalleld expression of his love to us, *John 3. 16. God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son. God so loved the world, so greatly, so strangely, so beyond our biggest hopes, nay, so contrary to all reasonable expectations, as to send his only-begotten Son, to seek and to save the sinful sons of men.*

If it had only in general been declared to us, that God was about to send his Son into the world upon some great design, and been left to us to conjecture, what his errand and business should be; how would this have alarmed the guilty consciences of sinful men, and fill'd them with infinite jealousies and suspicion, with fearful expectations of *wrath and fiery indignation to consume them!* For considering the great wickedness and degeneracy of mankind, what could we have thought, but that surely God was sending his Son upon a design of vengeance to chastise a sinful world, to vindicate the honour of his despised laws, and to revenge the multiply'd affronts which had been offered to the highest majesty of heaven, by his pitiful and ungrateful creatures? Our own guilt would have been very apt to have filled us with such imaginations as these, that in all likelihood the Son of God was coming to judgment, to call the wicked world to an account, to proceed against his Father's rebels, to pass sentence upon them, and to execute the vengeance which they had deserved. This we might justly have dreaded; and indeed considering our case, how ill we have deserved at God's hands, and how highly we have provoked him; what other weighty matter could we hope for?

But the goodness of God hath strangely out-done our hopes, and deceived our expectation; so it follows in the next words, *God sent not his Son into the world, to condemn the world,* (intimating that this we might justly have imagined and feared) but upon a quite contrary design, *that through him the world might be saved.* What a surprize of kindness is here! that instead of sending his Son to condemn us, he should send him into the world to save us; to rescue us from the jaws of death and hell, from that eternal and intolerable misery which we had incurred and deserved!

And if he had proceeded no farther, this had been wonderful mercy and kindness: But his love stopt not here, it was not contented to spare us, and free us from misery; but was restless till it had found out a way to bring us to happiness; for *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son*, not only *that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but might have everlasting life*. This is the *second* evidence of God's great love to us, the greatness of the blessing and benefit which he had designed and provided for us, *that we might live through him*; not only be delivered from spiritual and eternal death; but be made partakers of eternal life.

III. The last evidence of God's great love to us, which I mentioned, was this, that God was pleased to use such a means, for the obtaining and procuring of this great blessing and benefit; *he sent his only-begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him*. And this will appear to be great love indeed, if we consider these *four* things.

1. The person whom he was pleased to employ upon this design; *he sent his only-begotten Son*.

2. How much he abased him, in order to the effecting and accomplishing of this design, implied in these words, *he sent him into the world*.

3. If we consider to whom he was sent, to *the world*. And,

4. That he did all this voluntarily and freely, out of his meer pity and goodness; not constrain'd hereto by any necessity, nor prevail'd upon by any application or importunity of ours, nor obliged by any benefit or kindness from us.

1. Let us consider the person whom God was pleased to employ in this design, *he sent his only-begotten Son*; no less person than *his own Son*, and no less dear to him, than *his only-begotten Son*.

(1.) No less person than *his own Son*; and the dignity of the person that was employ'd in our behalf, doth strangely heighten and set off the kindness. What an endearment is it of the mercy of our redemption, that God was pleased to employ upon this design no meaner person than *his own Son, his begotten Son*; so he is called in the text, *his Son*, in so peculiar a manner *as no creature is, or can be*; the creatures below man are call'd the works of God, but never his children; the Angels are in Scripture call'd the Sons of God; and *Adam* likewise is call'd the Son of God, because God made him after his own image and likeness in holiness and righteousness, and in his dominion and sovereignty over the creatures below him; but this title of *begotten Son of God* was never given to any of the creatures, Man or Angel; *for unto which of the Angels said he at time, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, as the Apostle reasons, *Heb.*

1. 5. He must be a great person indeed to whom this title belongs, of *the begotten Son of God*; and it must be a mighty love indeed which moved God to employ so great a person, on the behalf of so pitiful and wretched creatures as we are. It had been a mighty condescension for God to treat with us at all; but that no less person than *his own Son* should be the Ambassador, is an astonishing regard of heaven to poor sinful dust and ashes.

(2.) The person was as dear to God, as he was great; he was *his only-begotten Son*. It had been a great instance of *Abraham's* love and obedience to God, to have sacrificed a Son at his command; but this circumstance makes it much greater, that it was his *only Son*; *hereby I know that thou fearest God* (says the Angel) *since thou hast not withheld thy Son, thine only Son from me*. This is a demonstration that God loved us at a stupendous rate, when he would send *his only-begotten Son* into the world for us.

Before this, God had try'd several ways with mankind, and employ'd several messengers to us; sometimes he sent his Angels, and many times his Servants the Prophets; *but in these last days he hath sent his Son*. He had many more Servants to have employed upon this message, but he had but *one Son*; and rather than mankind should be ruined and lost, he would send him. Such was the love of God towards us, that rather than our recovery should not be effected, he would employ in this work the greatest and dearest person to him both in heaven and earth, *his only-begotten Son*; *in this was the love of God manifested, that he sent his only-begotten Son, that we might live through him*.

2. Let

2. Let us consider how much this glorious and excellent person was abased in order to the effecting and accomplishing of this design, which is here express'd by *sending him into the world*; and this comprehends his incarnation, with all the mean and abasing circumstances of it. This the Apostle declares fully to us, *Phil. 2. 6, 7. tho' he was in the form of God, (that is, truly and really God) yet he made himself of no reputation, ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσε, he empty'd himself, was contented to be strangely lessen'd and diminish'd, and took upon him the form of a servant, or slave, and was made in the likeness of men*; that is, did really assume humane nature. Here was an abasement indeed, for God to become man, *for the only-begotten Son of God to take upon him the form of a servant, and to become obedient to death, even the death of the cross*, which was the death of slaves, and infamous malefactors. Here was love indeed, that God was willing that his own dear Son should be thus obscured and diminished, and become so mean and so miserable for our sakes; that he should not only stoop *to be made man, and to dwell among us*, but that he should likewise submit to *the infirmities of our nature, and to be made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted*; that he should be contented to bear so many affronts and indignities from perverse and unthankful men, and *to endure such contradiction of sinners against himself*; that *he who was the brightness of his Father's glory*, should be *despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs*, and rather than we should perish, should put himself into our place, and be contented to suffer and die for us; and that God should be willing that all this should be done to *his only Son*, to save sinners. What greater testimony could he give of his love to us!

3. Let us consider farther to whom he was sent, which is also implied in these words, *he sent his Son into the world*; into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him; and an ungrateful world, that did most unworthily use him.

First, Into a wicked world, that was altogether unworthy of him, that had deserved no such kindness at his hands. For what were *we*, that God should send such a person amongst us, that he should make his Son stoop so low, as to dwell in our nature, and to become *one of us*? We were rebels and enemies, *enemies to God by evil works*, up in arms against heaven, and at open defiance with God our maker. When the world was in this posture of enmity and hostility against God; then he sent his Son to treat with us, and to offer us peace. What can more commend the love of God, than this, that he should shew such kindness to us, when we were sinners and enemies! herein *God hath commended his love towards us*; (says the Apostle, *Rom. 5. 8.*) in that *whilst we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*.

Secondly, Into an ungrateful world, that did most unworthily use him, that gave no becoming entertainment to him (*the foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head*) that heaped all manner of contumelies and indignities upon him, that persecuted him all his life, and at last put him to a most painful and shameful death; in a word, that was so far from receiving him as *the Son of God*, that they did not treat him with common humanity, and like *one of the sons of men*.

4. He did all this voluntarily and freely; *God sent his Son into the world, meo motu*, of his own meer grace and goodness, moved by nothing but his own bowels, and the consideration of our misery; not overpowered by any force; (for what could offer violence to him *to whom all power belongs*?) not constrain'd by any necessity, for he had been happy, tho' we had remained for ever miserable; he might have chosen other objects of his love and pity, and have left us involved in that misery, which we had wilfully brought upon our selves.

Nor was he prevail'd upon by any application from us, or importunity of ours to do this for us. Had we been left to have contrived the way of our recovery; this which God hath done for us, could never have entered into the heart of man to have imagin'd, much less to have desir'd it at his hands.

If the way of our salvation had been put into the hands of our own counsel and choice, how could we have been so impudent as to have begg'd of God, that *his only Son* might descend from Heaven and *become man*, be poor, despised and miserable for our sakes? God may stoop as low as he pleaseth, being secure of his own majesty and greatness; but it had been a boldness in us, not far from blasphemy, to have desired of him to condescend to such a submission.

Nor; *Lastly*, was he pre-oblig'd by any kindness or benefit from us; so far from that, that we had given him all possible provocation to the contrary, and had reason to expect the effect of his heaviest displeasure: And yet though *he* was the *pars lesa*, the party that had been disoblig'd and injured; tho' *we* were first in the offence and provocation, *he* was pleas'd to make the first overtures of peace and reconciliation; and tho' it was wholly *our* concernment, and not *his*; yet he was pleas'd to condescend so far to our perverseness and obstinacy, as to *send his son to us*, and to *beseech us to be reconciled*.

Now *herein*, (says the Apostle, immediately after the *text*) *herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins*: Herein is the love of God manifested, that the kindness began on *his* part, and not on *ours*; that being neither obliged nor desired by us, he did freely and of his own accord, *send his only-begotten son into the world, that we might live through him*.

What now remains but to apply this to our selves?

1. Let us propound to our selves the love of God for our pattern and example. This is the inference which the Apostle makes in the next verse but one after the *text*, *Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another*. One would have thought the inference should have been, *if God so loved us, that we ought also to love him*. But the Apostle doth not speak so much of the affection, as the effect of love, and his meaning is, if God hath bestow'd such benefits upon us, we ought, in imitation of him, to be kind and beneficial one to another. Not but that we ought *to love God with all our hearts, and souls, and strength*; but in this sense we are not capable of it. We cannot be beneficial to him; because he is self-sufficient, and stands in need of nothing; and therefore the Apostle adds this as a reason, why he does not exhort men to love God, but one another; *no man hath seen God at any time*; he is not sensible to us, and therefore none of these sensible things can signify any thing to him. But he hath friends and relations here in the world, who are capable of the sensible effects of our love, and to whom we may shew kindness for his sake; we cannot be beneficial to God, but we may testify our love to him, by our kindness and charity to men who are made after the image of God; and if we see any one miserable, that is consideration enough to move our charity. There was nothing but this in us to move him to pity us, *when we were in our blood, and no eye pitied us*.

God is a pattern of the most generous kindness and charity. Tho' he be infinitely above us, yet he thought it not below him to consider our case, and to employ his only Son to save us; he had no obligation to us, no expectation of advantage from us, and can never be in a possibility to stand in need of us; and yet he loved us, and hath conferred the greatest benefits upon us: so that no man can have deserved so ill at our hands, but that if he be in want, and we in a condition to help him, he ought to come within the compass and consideration of our charity.

And *this* is the proper season for it, when we commemorate the greatest blessing and benefit that was ever conferred on mankind, *The Son of God sent into the world, on purpose to redeem and save us*. And therefore I cannot but very much commend the custom of feeding and relieving the poor, more especially at *this time*, when the poor do usually stand most in need of it, and when we commemorate *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who being rich became poor for our sakes, that we through his poverty might be made rich*.

2. Let us readily comply with the great design of this great love of God to mankind. *He hath sent his Son that we may live through him*. But tho' he hath done

done all this for us, tho' he hath purchased so great blessings for us, as the pardon of our sins, and power against them, and eternal life and happiness; yet there is something to be done on our parts, to make us partakers of these benefits. God hath not so loved us, as to send his Son into the world, to carry men to heaven whether they will or no; and to rescue those from the slavery of the Devil, and the damnation of Hell, who are fond of their fetters, and wilfully run themselves upon ruin and destruction. But the Son of God came to offer happiness to us, upon certain terms and conditions, such as are fit for God to propound, and necessary for us to perform, to make us capable of the blessedness which he offers; as namely, *repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ*; a sincere and constant endeavour of obedience to the laws and precepts of our holy religion.

These are the terms of the gospel; and *the grace of God which brings salvation*, offers it only upon these terms, *that we deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*: then we may expect the blessed hope. But if we will not submit to these conditions, the Son of God will be no Saviour to us; for *he is the author of eternal salvation only to them that obey him*. If men will continue in their sins, the redemption wrought by Christ will be of no advantage to them; such as obstinately persist in an impenitent course, *ipsa, si velit, salus servare non potest, salvation it self cannot save them*.

These are the conditions of our happiness, and if we submit to them we are *heirs of eternal life*; if we refuse, we are *sons of perdition*, eternally lost and undone; for we may assure our selves, that these are the best and easiest terms that can ever be offered to us, because God sent them by *his Son*. This is the last effort of the divine love and goodness, towards the recovery and salvation of men; so the Apostle tells, *Heb. 1. 1, 2. that God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners spake to the fathers, by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*; and if we refuse to hear him, he will speak no more. After this it is not to be expected, that God should make any farther attempts for our recovery; for he can send no greater nor dearer person to us, than *his own Son*; and if we refuse him, whom will we reverence? If after this we still wilfully go on in our sins; *there remains no more sacrifice for sin; but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume us*.

3. With what joy and thankfulness should we commemorate this great love of God to mankind, in *sending his only-begotten son into the world, that we might live through him*!

This is the proper end of the blessed Sacrament, which we are now going to receive, to represent to our minds the incarnation and passion of our dear Lord, by the Symbols of his body broken, and his blood shed for us. With what acknowledgments should we celebrate the memory of this wonderful love, which the Son of God hath shewn to the sons of men; endeavouring to make all the world in love with him, who hath so loved all mankind!

Whenever we see his blood poured forth, and his body broken for us, so moving a sight should raise strange passions in us, of love to our Saviour, and hatred to our sins; and should inspire us with mighty resolutions of service and obedience to him; and whenever the pledges and seals of these benefits are delivered into our hands, the sight of them should at once wound and revive our hearts, and make us to cry out, *Lord, how unworthy am I, for whom thou shouldest do and suffer all this! I am overcome by thy love, and can no longer hold out, against the mighty force of such kindness! I render my self to thee, and will serve thee for ever, who hast redeemed me at so dear a rate*.

Now to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain, to God even our Father, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten from the dead, and the Prince of the Kings of the earth, unto him that hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us Kings and Priests to God and his Father, to him be Glory and Dominion for ever and ever, Amen.

S E R M O N XXXII.

The Sin and Danger of adding to the Doctrine of the Gospel.

GALAT. i. 8, 9.

But though we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.



BEfore I come to handle the words, for the better understanding of them, I shall give a brief account of the occasion of them, which was this. Some false Apostles had made a great disturbance in the churches planted by the Apostles of Christ, by teaching that it was necessary for christians, not only to embrace, and entertain the doctrines and precepts of the christian religion, but likewise to be circumcised, and keep the law of *Moses*. Of this disturbance which was raised in the christian church, you have the history at large, *Acts* 15. and as in several other churches, so particularly in that of *Galatia*, these false Apostles and seducers had perverted many, as appears by this epistle; in the beginning whereof St. *Paul* complains, that those who were seduced into this error of the necessity of circumcision, and keeping the law of *Moses*, had by this new article of faith, which they had added to the christian religion, quite alter'd the frame of it, and made the gospel another thing from that which our Saviour delivered, and commanded his Apostles to teach all nations.

For he tells us, ver. 6. of this chapter, that *he marvelled, that they were so soon removed from him that called them by (or through) the grace of Christ, unto another gospel*, that is so different from that which they had been instructed in by those who first preached the gospel unto them: for the making of any thing necessary to salvation, which our Saviour in his gospel had not made so, he calls *another gospel*. *I marvel, that ye are so soon removed from him that called you by the grace of Christ, unto another gospel, which is not another*, ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰν ἄλλο, *which is no other thing or by which I mean nothing else, but that there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ*; as if he had said, when I say that *ye are removed to another gospel*, I do not mean, that ye have renounced Christianity, and are gone over to another religion, but that ye are seduced by those who have a mind to pervert the gospel of Christ, by adding something to it, as a necessary and essential part of it, which Christ hath not made so: this the Apostle calls a perverting or overthrowing of the gospel; because, by thus altering the terms and conditions of it, they made it quite another thing from what our Saviour delivered it.

And then at the 8th and 9th verses he denounceth a terrible *Anathema* against those, whoever they shall be, yea, tho' it were an Apostle, or an Angel from heaven, who by thus *perverting the gospel of Christ* (that is, by making any thing necessary to be believed or practised, which our Saviour in his gospel hath not made so) should in effect *preach another gospel*; but tho' we, or an Angel from heaven, *preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be Anathema, an accursed thing*. And then to express his confidence and vehemency in this matter, and to shew that he did not speak this rashly, and in a heat,

but

but upon due consideration, he repeats it again in the next verse, *As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

From the words thus explained by the consideration of the context, and of the main scope and design of this Epistle, these following *Observations* do naturally arise.

First, That the addition of any thing to the christian religion, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to salvation, is *a perverting of the gospel of Christ, and preaching another gospel.*

Secondly, That no pretence of infallibility is sufficient to authorize and warrant the addition of any thing to the christian doctrine, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to salvation.

Thirdly, That christians may judge and discern when such additions are made.

Fourthly, And consequently, that since the declaration of the gospel, and the confirmation of it, there is no authority in the christian church to impose upon christians any thing as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so.

Fifthly, That there is no visible judge (how infallible soever he may pretend to be) to whose definitions and declarations in matters of faith and practice, necessary to salvation, we are bound to submit, without examination, whether these things be agreeable to the gospel of Christ, or not.

Sixthly and Lastly, Whosoever teacheth any thing as of necessity to salvation, to be believed or practised, besides what the gospel of Christ hath made necessary, doth fall under the *Anathema* here in the text, because in so doing, *he perverteth the gospel of Christ, and preacheth another gospel.* Now the Apostle expressly declares, *that though we* (that is, he himself, or any of the Apostles) *or an Angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than what we have preached unto you, let him be accursed: as we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

I. That the addition of any thing to the christian religion, as necessary to be believed or practised, in order to salvation, is *a perverting of the gospel of Christ, and preaching another gospel.*

This is evident from the instances here given in this epistle; for the Apostle chargeth the false Apostles with *perverting the gospel of Christ, and preaching another gospel*, upon no other account, but because they added to the christian religion, and made circumcision, and the keeping of the law of *Moses*, an essential part of the christian religion, and imposed upon christians the practice of these things, and the belief of the necessity of them, as a condition of eternal salvation.

That this was the doctrine of those false teachers, we find expressly, *Acts 15. 1. And certain men which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved; and ver. 24. in the letter written by the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, to the churches abroad, there is this account given of it; forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment.* Where you see that this doctrine is declared to be of pernicious consequence, tending to *subvert the souls of men*, and likewise to be an addition to the doctrine of the gospel which was delivered by the Apostles, who here with one consent declare, that *they had given no such commandment*; that is, had delivered no such doctrine as this, nor put any such yoke upon the necks of christians; but on the contrary had declared, that the death of Christ having put an end to the *Jewish* dispensation, there was now no obligation upon christians to observe the law of *Moses*.

And from the reason of the thing it is very plain, that the addition of any thing to the christian religion, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so, is *preaching another gospel*; because it makes an essential change in the terms and conditions of the Gospel-covenant,

covenant, which declares salvation unto men upon such and such terms, and no other. Now to add any other terms to these, as of equal necessity with them, is to alter the condition of the covenant of the Gospel, and the terms of the christian religion, and consequently *to preach another gospel*, by declaring other terms of salvation, than Christ in his gospel hath declared, which is *to pervert the gospel of Christ*.

II. No pretence of infallibility is sufficient to authorize and warrant the addition of any thing to the christian doctrine, as necessary to be believed or practised, in order to salvation. After the delivery of the gospel by the Son of God, and the publication of it to the world by his Apostles, who were commission'd and inspir'd by him to that purpose, and the confirmation of all, by the greatest and most unquestionable miracles that ever were, no person whatever that brought any other doctrine, and declared salvation to men on any other terms than those which are declared in the gospel, was to be credited, what pretence soever he should make to a divine commission or an infallible assistance. The Apostle makes a supposition as high as can be, *though we (says he) or an Angel from Heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be an Anathema*. If the Apostles themselves, who were divinely commission'd, and infallibly assisted in the preaching of the gospel, should afterwards make any addition to it, or declare any other terms of salvation, than those which are declared in the gospel which they had already published to the world, they ought not to be regarded.

And the reason is plain; because what claim soever any person may make to infallibility, and what demonstration soever he may give of it, we cannot possibly believe him, if he contradict himself, and deliver doctrines which so plainly clash with one another: For if he spake true at first, I cannot believe him declaring the contrary afterwards: And if he did not speak true at first, I cannot believe him at all; because he can give no greater proof of his divine commission, and infallible assistance and inspiration, than he did at first.

And the reason is the same, if *an Angel from Heaven* should come and preach a contrary doctrine to that of the gospel, *he* were not to be believed neither; because he could bring no better credentials of his divine commission and authority, than those had who published the gospel, and, consequently, he ought not to be credited in any thing contrary to what they had published before. For tho' a man were never so much disposed to receive a revelation from God, and to submit his faith to it; yet it is not possible for any man to believe God against God himself; that is, to believe two revelations, plainly contradictory to one another, to be from God; and the reason of this is very obvious, because every man doth first, and more firmly, believe this proposition or principle, *that contradictions cannot be true*, than any revelation whatsoever; for if contradictions may be true, then no revelation from God can signify any thing, because the contrary may be equally true, and so truth and falsehood be all one.

The Apostle indeed only makes a *Supposition*, when he says, *though we or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other doctrine unto you*; but by this *supposition* he plainly bars any man, or company of men, from adding to the christian religion any article of faith, or point of practice, as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so; I say, any man, or company of men, whatever authority or infallibility they may lay claim to, because they cannot pretend to a clearer commission, and greater evidence of infallible assistance, than *an Apostle, or an Angel from Heaven*, and yet the text tells us, *that* would not be a sufficient warrant to preach another gospel; it might indeed bring in question that which they had preached before, but could not give credit and authority to any thing plainly contrary to it, and inconsistent with it.

III. Christians may judge and discern when *another gospel is preached*, when new articles of faith, or points of practice, not enjoined in the gospel, are imposed upon christians. This the Apostle supposeth every particular church, and for ought I know, every particular christian, that is duly instructed in the Christian religion, to be a competent judge of, and to be sufficiently able to discern when

when another gospel is preached, and new terms and conditions, not declared in the gospel, are added to the christian religion; for if they be not able to judge of this, the Apostle does in vain caution them against the seduction of those *who perverted the doctrine of Christ, and endeavour'd to remove them from him that had called them by the grace of Christ, unto another gospel.*

It may perhaps be said, that there was no need that they should be able to discern and judge of the doctrines of those false teachers, it was sufficient for them to believe the Apostle concerning the doctrines of those seducers, when he declared to them the falshood and pernicious consequence of them. But the Apostle speaks to them upon another supposition, which does necessarily imply, that they were able to discern and judge what doctrines were agreeable to the gospel, and what not; for he puts the case, that if he himself, or any of the Apostles, or an Angel from heaven, should preach to them another doctrine, contrary to that of the gospel, they ought to reject it with detestation; but this doth necessarily suppose them able to judge, when such doctrines were preached, and consequently that all things necessary to be believed and practised by all christians, are clearly and plainly declared in the gospel; all the doctrines whereof are now contained in the holy scriptures, in which all things necessary to faith and a good life, are so plainly delivered, that any sober and inquisitive person may learn them from thence, and the meanest capacity, by the help and direction of their guides and teachers, may be instructed in them.

And this is not only the principle of Protestants, but the express and constant doctrine of the ancient Fathers of the church, whatever the Church of *Rome*, for the maintaining of her usurped authority over the consciences of men, pretends to the contrary. And if this were not so, that men are able to discern and judge which are the doctrines of the gospel, and what is contrary to them; the doctrine of the gospel was in vain preached, and the holy scriptures containing that doctrine were written to no purpose.

Some things in scripture are granted to be obscure and difficult, on purpose to exercise the study and enquiries of those who have leisure and capacity for it: But all things necessary are sufficiently plain; otherwise it would be impossible to judge *when another gospel is preach'd*, which the Apostle here supposeth the *Galatians* capable of doing. For if the revelation of the gospel be not sufficiently plain in all things necessary to be believed and practised, then christians have no rule whereby to judge what doctrines are agreeable to the gospel, and what not, for an obscure rule is of no use; that is, in truth, is no rule to those to whom it is obscure.

I proceed to the IVth *observation*, which is plainly consequent from those laid down before; namely, that since the declaration of the gospel, and the confirmation given to it, there is no authority in the christian church to impose upon christians any thing, as of necessity to salvation, which the gospel hath not made so.

The commission given by our Lord and Saviour to his Apostles, was *to preach the gospel to all nations*, (or as St. *Matthew* expresses it) *to go and teach all nations, to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them*; and this is that which we call the *Gospel*, viz. that doctrine which Christ commanded his Apostles to preach and publish to the world; and if the Apostles themselves had exceeded their Commission, and added any other points of faith or practice to those which our Saviour gave them in charge to teach and publish to the world, they had, in so doing, been guilty of that which St. *Paul* here in the text chargeth the false Apostles with, viz. of *preaching another gospel*. And if the Apostles had no authority to add anything to the gospel, much less can any others pretend to it, since they have neither so immediate a commission, nor such a miraculous power to give testimony to them, that *they are teachers come from God*.

Now this doctrine of the gospel, which the Apostles preached to the world, is that which christians are so often, and so earnestly by the Apostles in all their epistles exhorted to continue in, and not to suffer themselves to be shaken in mind, by every wind of new doctrine; because that which the Apostles had delivered to them,

them, was the intire doctrine of the gospel, which was never to receive any addition or alteration. This is that which St. *Peter* calls *the holy commandment which was delivered unto them*, 2. Pet. 2. 21. *It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them*, speaking in all probability of those who were seduced by the errors of the *Gnosticks*, from the purity of the christian doctrine delivered to them by the Apostles. This likewise St. *Paul* calls *the common faith*, Titus 1. 4. and St. *Jude* ver. 3. *the common salvation*; that is, the doctrine which contains the common terms of our salvation, and *the faith which was once delivered to the Saints*, that is, by the Apostles of our Lord, who publish'd the gospel; *once delivered*, that is, once for all, so as never afterwards to admit of any change or alteration. This faith he *exhorts* christians *earnestly to contend for*, against those several sects of seducers, which were crept into the christian church, and did endeavour by several arts to *pervert the gospel of Christ*, and to deprave *the faith delivered* by the Apostles.

So that the doctrine of the gospel publish'd by the Apostles, is fix'd and unalterable, and there can be no authority in the church to make any change in it, either by taking from it, or adding any thing to it, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to salvation.

5. It follows likewise from the foregoing observations, that there is no *visible Judge* (how much soever he may pretend to *infallibility*) to whose determination and decision in matters of faith and practice necessary to salvation, christians are bound to submit, without examination whether those things be agreeable to the doctrine of the gospel, or not.

When our Saviour appeared in the world, tho' he had authority enough to exact belief from men, yet because there was a standing revelation of God made to the *Jews*, he appeals to that revelation, as well as to his own miracles, for the truth of what he said, and offered himself, and his doctrine, to be tried by the agreeableness of it to the scriptures of the old testament, and the predictions therein concerning him. And this was but reasonable, it being impossible for any man to receive two revelations, as from God, without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to, and consistent with one another. In like manner the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour, tho' they were guided and assisted by an infallible Spirit, and had an immediate commission from Christ to preach the doctrine of the gospel, did not require from men absolute submission to their doctrines and dictates, without examination of what they delivered, whether it were agreeable to the divine revelation which was contained in the ancient scriptures.

This was St. *Paul's* constant custom and way of teaching among the *Jews*, who had received the revelation of the old testament; he did not dictate to them by virtue of his infallibility, but *reasoned with them out of the scriptures*, and required their belief no further than what he said should, upon examination, appear agreeable to the scriptures. So we find *Acts* 17. 2, 3. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them (speaking of the Jews) and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alledging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is the Christ.* And chap. 18. 28. *he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures, that Jesus was the Christ.* And St. *Paul* was so far from reproving them for examining his doctrine by the scriptures, that he commended it, as an argument of a noble and generous mind in the *Bereans*, that they did not give full assent to his doctrine, till upon due search and examination they were satisfied that what he had said was agreeable to the scriptures, Chap. 17. 11, 12. Where speaking of the *Bereans*, it is said, *That these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word, with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so; therefore many of them believed*; that is, because upon search they found what he delivered to be agreeable to the scriptures; and it was not a flight, but diligent and deliberate search, they took time to examine things thoroughly; for it is said *they searched the scriptures daily.* And here in the text St. *Paul* puts the case, that if he, or any

any other of the Apostles, concerning whose divine commission and assistance they were so fully satisfied, should deliver any thing to them contrary to the Gospel which they had formerly preached, they were to reject it with the greatest abhorrence and detestation; and this necessarily supposeth a liberty to examine what was delivered, even by those whom they believed to be infallibly assisted, and a capacity to discern and judge whether what they said was agreeable to the Gospel at first delivered to them or not.

And after this, shall any person or church (what claim soever they may make to infallibility) assume to themselves an authority to dictate in matters of faith, and that their dictates ought to be received with an absolute submission, and without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to *the faith once delivered to the Saints*; and tho' they add new articles to the christian faith, and of which there is not the least foot-step or intimation in any of the ancient Creeds of the christian church, and do plainly impose upon christians the practice and belief of several things as necessary to salvation, which the Gospel never declared to be so, yet no body shall judge of this, but every man ought without more ado, to believe blindfold, and to resign up his understanding and judgment to the directions of this *visible infallible judge*?

But surely this is not the reasonable *obedience of faith*, but the forc'd submission of slaves to the tyranny of their masters. Christians are expressly forbid to call any man father or master upon earth, because *we have one father and master in heaven*. Now to make an absolute submission of our understandings to any upon earth, so as without examination to receive their dictates in matters of faith, is surely, if any thing can be so, to call such a person father or master, because a greater submission than this we cannot pay to our father who is in heaven, even to God himself. I come now to the

VI and last *observation* from the text, that whosoever teacheth any thing as of necessity to salvation, to be believed or practised, besides what the Gospel of Christ hath made necessary, does fall under the *Anathema* here in the text; because they that do so, do, according to the mind of St. Paul, *pervert the Gospel of Christ, and preach another Gospel*. For the reason why he chargeth the false Apostles with *preaching another Gospel*, and those that were seduced by them, as *being removed from him that called them into the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel*, is plainly this; that they had changed the terms of the christian religion, by adding new articles to it, which were not contained in the Gospel; that is, by making it necessary to believe it to be so, because they taught so. Now St. Paul expressly declares this to be *preaching another Gospel*, because they plainly alter'd the terms of salvation declared in the Gospel, and made that to be necessary to the salvation of men, which the Gospel had not made so.

And whatever person or church does the same, does incur the same guilt, and falls under the *Anathema* and censure here in the text; yea, *tho' he were an Apostle, or an Angel*: And I am sure no Bishop or Church in the world can pretend either to an equal authority or infallibility with *an Apostle, or an Angel from heaven*.

Let us then hear what St. Paul declares in this case, and consider seriously, with what earnestness and vehemency he declares it; *Tho' we (says he) or an Angel from heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed*. St. Paul you see is very earnest in this matter, and very peremptory, and therefore I cannot but think this declaration of his to be more considerable, and every way more worthy of our regard and dread, than all the *Anathema's* of the council of Trent, which in direct affront and contempt of this *Anathema* of St. Paul, hath presumed to add so many articles to the christian religion, upon the counterfeit warrant of tradition, for which there is no ground or warrant from the scripture, or from any antient Creed of the christian church.

And for the truth of this, I appeal to the Creed of Pope *Pius* the IVth, compiled out of the definitions of *the council of Trent*; by which *council* the *Pope* only is authorized to interpret the true sense and meaning of the canons and decrees of that *council*; and consequently his interpretations must be of equal force and authority with that of the *council* it self. So that whatsoever he hath put into his new creed for an article of faith, ought to be received with the same pious affection and veneration, as if the creed had been compiled by the *council* it self; because the *Pope*, it seems, and no body else, understands the true meaning of that *council*, at least is thought fit to declare it. And therefore one may justly wonder at the presumption of those, who after this declaration of the council, have taken upon them to *expound the Catholick faith*, and to *represent* that religion to us, as it is defined in that *council*; because if there be any controversy about the meaning of its definitions (as there have been a great many even betwixt those who were present at the council when those definitions were made) none but the *Pope* himself can certainly tell the meaning of them.

Now in this creed of Pope *Pius*, there are added to the antient creed of the christian church, twelve or thirteen new articles; as concerning *Purgatory*, *Transubstantiation*, *the worship of Images*, *the invocation of Saints*, *the Communion in one kind*, and that *the church of Rome is the mother and mistress of all churches*, and that *there is no salvation to be had out of it*; and several other points, all which have either no foundation in scripture, or are plainly contrary to it, and none of them ever esteemed as *Articles of faith* in the antient christian church for the first five hundred years; and yet they are now obtruded upon christians, as of equal necessity to salvation, with *the twelve Articles of the Apostles Creed*, and this under a pretence of infallibility, which St. *Paul* tells us would not have justified *an Apostle*, or *an Angel from heaven*, in making such additions to the christian religion, and the imposing of any thing as necessary to salvation, which is not so declared by the gospel of Christ.

And all that they have to say for this, is, that *we* do not pretend to be infallible: but there is a necessity of an infallible Judge to decide these controversies, and to him they are to be referred. Which is just as if in a plain matter of right, a contentious and confident man should desire a reference, and contrive the matter so as to have it referr'd to himself, upon a feeble pretence, without any proof or evidence, that he is the only person in the world that hath authority and infallible skill to decide all such differences. Thus the *church of Rome* would deal with us in things which are as plain as the noon-day; as whether God hath forbidden the worship of Images in the second Commandment? whether our Saviour did institute the Sacrament in both kinds? whether the people ought not to read the Scriptures, and to have the publick service of God in a known tongue? these, and the like, they would have us refer to an infallible judge, and when we ask who he is, they tell us that their church, which hath imposed these things upon christians, and made these additions to the Gospel of Christ, is that infallible judge. But if she were as infallible as she pretends to be, even as *an Apostle*, or *an Angel from heaven*, St. *Paul* hath denounced an *Anathema* against her, for *preaching another Gospel*, and making those things necessary to the salvation of men, which are not contained in *the Gospel of Christ*.

The inference from all this discourse in short, is this; that *we should contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the Saints*, and not suffer our selves, by the confident pretences of seducers, to be removed from him that hath called us through *the grace of Christ*, unto another Gospel. The necessary doctrines of the christian religion, and the common terms of salvation are so plain, that if any man be ignorant of them, it is his own fault; and if any go about to impose upon us any thing as of necessity to be believed and practised in order to salvation, which is not declared to be so in the holy Scriptures, which contain the true doctrine of the Gospel, what authority soever they pretend for it, yea, tho' they assume to themselves to be infallible; the Apostle hath plainly told us what we are to think of them; for he hath put the case as high as is possible
here

here in the text, when he says, *Though we, or an Angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*


I will conclude all with that counsel which the spirit of God gives to the churches of *Asia*, Rev. 3. 3. *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast; and Chap. 2. 10. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer, be thou faithful unto the death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

S E R M O N XXXIII.

Honesty the best Preservative against dangerous Mistakes in Religion.

JOHN vii. 17.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.

 Ince there are so many different opinions and apprehensions in the world about matters of religion, and every sect and party does with so much confidence pretend, that *they*, and *they* only, are in the truth; the great difficulty and question is, by what means men may be secured from dangerous errors and mistakes in religion. For this end some have thought it necessary that there should be *an infallible church*, in the communion whereof every man may be secured from the dangers of a wrong belief. But it seems God hath not thought this necessary: If he had, he would have revealed this very thing more plainly than any particular point of faith whatsoever. He would have told us expressly, and in the plainest terms, that he had appointed *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*, and would likewise have told us as plainly who he was, and where we might find him, and have recourse to him upon all occasions; because the sincerity of our faith depending upon him, we could not be safe from mistake in particular points, without so plain and clear a revelation of this *infallible judge*, that there could be no mistake about him; nor could there be an end of any other controversies in religion, unless this *infallible judge* (both that there is one, and who he is) were out of controversy. But neither of these are so: It is not plain from scripture that there is *an infallible Judge and guide in matters of faith*; much less is it plain who he is; and therefore we may certainly conclude, that God hath not thought it necessary that there should be *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*, because he hath revealed no such thing to us: and *that Bishop*, and *that Church* who only have arrogated *infallibility* to themselves, have given the greatest evidence in the world to the contrary; and have been detected and stand convinc'd of the greatest errors: and it is in vain for any man, or company of men, to pretend to *infallibility*, so long as the evidence that *they are deceived* is much greater and clearer than any proof they can produce for their *infallibility*.

If then God hath not provided *an infallible guide and judge in matters of faith*; there is some other way whereby men may be secured against dangerous and damnable errors in religion, and whereby they may discern truth from imposture, and what doctrines are from God, and what not; and this our Saviour declares to us here in the text, namely, that an honest and sincere mind, and

a hearty desire to do the will of God, is the best preservative against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; *ἐάν τις θέλη ποιῆν. If any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

There are *two* dangerous mistakes in religion: To reject any thing which really comes from God; and To receive and entertain any thing as from God, which doth not really come from him.

First, To reject any thing which really comes from God. This mistake the *Jews* frequently fell into, when they rejected the true Prophets which God from time to time sent to them, slighting their message, and persecuting their persons: but they miscarried most fatally and remarkably in their contempt of the true *Messias*, that great Prophet whom they had so long expected, and whom God sent at last, to bring salvation to them; but when he came, they knew him not, nor would receive him, but used him with all the despoight and contempt imaginable, not as *a teacher come from God*, but as a deceiver, and impostor.

Now the danger of rejecting any thing that comes from God, consists in this, that it cannot be done without the highest affront to the divine Majesty. To reject a divine message or revelation, is to oppose God, and *fight against him*. So our Saviour tells the *Jews*, that *in despising him, they despised him that sent him*.

Secondly, There is also another dangerous mistake on the other hand, in entertaining any thing as a revelation from God, which is not really from him. And this likewise the *Jews* were frequently guilty of, in receiving the false prophets which spake in the name of the Lord, when he had not sent them. And this is commonly the temper of those who reject the truth, greedily to swallow error and delusion. So our Saviour tells us of the *Jews*, John 5. 43. *I am come in my father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive.* This prediction of our Saviour's concerning the *Jews*, was fully accomplished; for after they had rejected him, who gave such abundant evidence that he was the true *Messias*, and *a teacher sent from God*, they received others, who really *came in their own names*, and ran after those who pretended to be the *Messias*, and were in great numbers destroyed with them. And this is very just with God, that *those who receive not the truth in the love of it, should be given up to strong delusions, to believe lies.*

Now these being the *two* great dangerous mistakes in religion which men are liable to, my work at this time shall be to shew, how a sincere desire and endeavour *to do the will of God*, is a security to men against both those dangers; and it will appear to be so, upon these *two* accounts.

I. Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things.

II. Because God's providence is more especially concerned to secure such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes in things which concern their eternal salvation. These shall be the *two* heads of my following discourse.

First, Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things, and that for these *two* reasons.

1. Because such a person hath a truer notion of God, and divine things.

2. Because he is more impartial in his search and enquiry after truth.

1. Because such a person hath a truer notion of God and divine things. No man is so likely to have clear and true apprehensions of God, as a good man, because he hath transcribed the divine perfections in his own mind, and is himself in some measure and degree what God is. And for this reason it is, that the scripture so often lays the foundation of all divine knowledge in the practice of religion. *Job* 28. 28. *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, is understanding;* and *Psal.* 111. 10. *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, that is, the principle and foundation of it; a good understanding have all they that do his commandments:* whereas the vices and lusts of men darken their reason, and distort their understandings, and fill the mind with gross and

and sensual apprehensions of things, and thereby render men unfit to discern those truths which are of a spiritual nature and tendency, and altogether indisposed to receive them. For tho' the vices of men be properly seated in their wills, and do not possess their understandings; yet they have a bad influence upon them, as fumes and vapours from the stomach are wont to affect the head.

Nothing indeed is more natural to the mind and understanding of men, than the knowledge of God; but we may abuse our faculties, and render them unfit for the discerning even of their proper objects.

When men by wicked practices, have rendered themselves unlike to God, they will not love to *retain the knowledge of him* in their minds, but will *become vain in their imaginations* concerning him. What clouds and mists are to the bodily eye, that the lusts and corruptions of men are to the understanding; they hinder it from a clear perception of heavenly things; *the pure in heart*, they are best qualified for *the sight of God*.

Now according as a man's notions of God are, such will be his apprehensions of religion. All religion is either *natural*, or *revealed*: *natural religion* consists in the belief of a God, and in right conceptions and apprehensions concerning him, and in a due reverence and observance of him, and in a ready and cheerful obedience to those laws which he hath imprinted upon our nature; and the sum of our obedience consists in our conformity to God, and an endeavour to be like him. For supposing God to have made no external revelation of his mind to us, we have no other way to know his will, but by considering his nature, and our own; and if so, then he that resembles God most, is like to understand him best, because he finds those perfections in some measure in himself, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man so sure a notion of things, as practice and experience. Every good man is in some degree *partaker of a divine nature*, and feels that in himself, which he conceives to be in God: So that this man does experience what others do but talk of; he sees the Image of God in himself, and is able to discourse of him from an inward sense and feeling of his excellency and perfections.

And as for *revealed religion*, the only design of that is, to revive and improve the *natural* notions which we have of God, and all our reasonings about divine revelation are necessarily gathered by our natural notions of religion: And therefore he that sincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be imposed upon by the vain and confident pretences of divine revelation; but if any doctrine be proposed to him, which pretends to come from God, he measures it by those steady and sure notions which he hath of the divine nature and perfections, and by those he will easily discern whether it be worthy of God, or not, and likely to proceed from him: He will consider the nature and tendency of it, and whether it be (as the Apostle expresses it) *a doctrine according to Godliness*, such as is agreeable to the divine nature and perfections, and tends to make us like to God: If it be not, tho' *an Angel from heaven* should bring it, he will not receive it: If it be, he will not reject it upon every idle pretense, and frivolous exception that prejudiced and ill-minded men may make against it; but after he is satisfied of the reasonableness and purity of the doctrine, he will accept of such evidence and confirmation of it, as is fit for God to give to his own revelations; and if the person that brings it, hath an attestation of *miracles* (which is necessary in case it be a new doctrine) and if he carry on no earthly interest and design by it, but does by his life and actions make it evident that he aims at the glory of God, and the good of men; in this case a good man, whose mind is free from passion and prejudice, will easily assent, that this man's *doctrine is of God, and that he does not speak of himself*. This was the evidence which our Saviour offered to the *Jews* in vindication of himself, and his doctrine, *John 7. 18. He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him*; as if he had said, hereby may you distinguish one that really comes from God, from an impostor: If any man *seek his own glory*, you may conclude that *God hath not sent him*, but whatever he pretends, that

that *he speaks of himself*; but he who by his life, and the course of his actions demonstrates that *he seeks the honour of God*, and not any interest and advantage of *his own*, the same is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him; that is, no fallhood or design to deceive (for so the word *adulter* does sometimes signify;) you may conclude such an one to be no deceiver, or impostor. And if any man sincerely desires and endeavours *to do the will of God*, he may by such marks and characters as these, judge of any doctrine that pretends to be *from God*, whether it be so or not. This is the first reason; because he that sincerely desires and endeavours *to do the will of God*, hath the truest notion of God, and of divine things.

2. Such a person is more impartial in his search and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to discern it from error. He that hath an honest mind, and sincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be swayed and byassed by any interest or lust: For his great interest is to please God, and he makes all his other interests and concernments to stoop and yield to that. But if a man be governed by any earthly interest or design, he will measure all things by that, and is not at liberty to entertain any thing that crosses it, and to judge equally of any doctrine that is opposite to his interest. This our Saviour gives for a reason, why the great *Rabbies* and Teachers among the *Jews* did not believe and embrace his doctrine, *John 5. 44. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?* If men have any other design in religion than to please God, and to advance his honour and glory in the world, no wonder if they be apt to reject the most divine truths; because these are calculated, not to approve us to men, but to God.

And as vain-glory, and desire of the applause of men; so likewise doth every other lust make a man partial in his judgment of things, and clap a false bias upon his understanding, which carries it off from truth, and makes it to lean towards that side of the question which is most favourable to the interest of his lusts. A vicious man is not willing to entertain those truths which would cross and check him in his course: He hath made the truth his enemy, and therefore he thinks himself concerned to oppose it, and rise up against it: the light of it offends him, and therefore he shuts his eyes that he may not see it. Those holy and pure doctrines, which are from God, reprove the lusts of men, and discover the deformity of them; and therefore no wonder if bad men be so hard to be reconciled to them. This account our Saviour likewise gives of the fierce enmity of the *Jews* to him, and his doctrine, *John 3. 19, 20. Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil; for every one that doth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.*

The vicious inclinations of men are a dead weight upon their understandings, and able to draw down the scales against the clearest truths: For tho' it be absolutely in no man's power to believe, or to disbelieve what he will; yet men's lives have many times a great influence upon their understandings, to make assent easy, or difficult; and as we are forward to believe what we have a mind to, so are we very backward and slow in yielding our assent to any thing that crosseth our inclinations. Men that allow themselves in *ungodliness and worldly lusts*, will not easily believe those doctrines which charge men so strictly with all manner of holiness, and purity.

This is the way which the Devil hath always used to blind the eyes of men, that the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ might not shine into them. And certainly the most effectual way to keep men in infidelity, is to debauch them in their lives; therefore the Apostle gives this as the reason of the infidelity of men in the last times, *2 Thess. 2. 12. They believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* When men once abandon themselves to lewd and vitious practices, infidelity becomes their interest, because they have no other way to defend and excuse a wicked life, but by denying the truth which opposeth it, and finds fault with it.

That man only stands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the dominion of no vice, or lust; because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to seduce him, or draw him aside in his enquiry after truth; he hath no interest but to find the truth, and follow it: he is enquiring after the way to heaven, and eternal happiness, and he hath the indifferency of a Traveller which is not inclined to go this way rather than another; for his concernment is to find out the right way, and to walk in it: Such an indifferency of mind hath every good man, who sincerely desires *to do the will of God*; he stands ready to receive truth, when sufficient evidence is offered to convince him of it; because he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary proposition should be true. As in *Mathematicks*, a man is ready to give his assent to any proposition, that is sufficiently demonstrated to him, because he hath no inclination or affection to one side of the question more than to the other; all his design and concernment is to find out the truth on which side soever it lies; and he is like to find it, because he is so indifferent, and impartial. But if a man be bias'd by any lust, and addicted to any vicious practice, he is then an interested person, and concerned to be partial in his judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity, when the truths of God are proposed to him; because whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of that doctrine, which is so contrary to his inclination and interest. If the affections and interests of men were as deeply concerned, and as sensibly touched in the truth of *Mathematical* propositions, as they are in the principles of *morality* and *religion*, we should find, that when a proposition stood in their way, and lay cross to their interest, tho' it were never so clearly demonstrated, yet they would raise a dust about it, and make a thousand cavils, and fence even against the evidence of a *demonstration*; they would palliate their error with all the skill and art they could; and tho' the absurdity of it was never so great and palpable, yet they would hold it fast against all sense and reason, and face down mankind in the obstinate defense of it; for we have no reason to doubt, but that they who in matters of *religion* will believe directly contrary to what they see, would, if they had the same interest and passions to sway them in the case, believe contrary to the clearest *mathematical demonstration*; for where there is an obstinate resolution not to be convinc'd, all the reason and evidence in the world signifies nothing.

Whereas he that is biased by no passion or interest, but hath an honest mind, and is sincerely desirous to *do the will of God*, so far as he knows it, is likely to judge very impartially concerning any doctrines that are proposed to him: For if there be not good evidence that they are *from God*, he hath no reason to deceive himself, in giving credit to them; and if there be good evidence that they are *divine*, he hath no interest or inclination to reject them; for it being his great design to *do the will of God*, he is glad of all opportunities to come to the knowledge of it, that he may do it.

Thus you see, how a sincere desire and endeavour to obey the will of God, does secure men against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion; because such persons are hereby better disposed to make a right judgment of divine things, both because they have truer and surer notions of God and religion, and are more impartial in their search and enquiry after truth. This is the *first Account*.

II. Another reason why they who sincerely desire *to do the will of God*, have a great security in discerning truth from error, is, because the providence of God is more especially concerned to preserve such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes in things which concern their eternal Salvation. When men are of a teachable temper, God loves to reveal himself and his truth to them; and such is an humble and obedient frame of mind, *Psal. 25. 9. The meek will he guide in judgment; the meek will he teach his way.* The proper disposition of a Scholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn is, *what is the good and acceptable will of God*, that we may *do it*, for practice is the end of knowledge. *If you know these things* (says our blessed Lord) *happy are ye if you do them.* It is necessary to know the will of God; but we are happy only in

in the doing of it : and if any man be desirous to do the will of God, his goodness is such, that he will take effectual care to secure such an one against dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honest mind, and *would do the will of God*, if he knew it, God will not suffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it, in any necessary points of faith and practice.

St. Paul is a wonderful instance of the goodness of God in this kind. He was undoubtedly a man of a very honest mind ; he had entertained the *Jewish* religion, as revealed by God, and been bred in it ; and out of a blind reverence and belief of his teachers, who rejected Christ and his doctrine, he likewise opposed and persecuted them with a mighty zeal, and an honest intention, being *verily persuaded*, (as he himself tells us) *that he ought to do what he did, against the name of Jesus of Nazareth* ; he was under a great prejudice upon account of his education, and according to the heat of his natural temper, transported with great passion : But *because he did what he did, ignorantly, and in unbelief* ; God was pleased to shew mercy to him, and, in a miraculous manner, to convince him of the truth of that religion which he persecuted. He was sincerely *desirous to do the will of God*, and therefore God would rather work a miracle for his conversion, than suffer him to go on in so fatal a mistake concerning the christian religion.

And as the providence of God doth concern it self to secure good men from dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion ; so by a just judgment he gives up those who allow themselves in vicious practices, to error and infidelity. And this is the meaning of that passage of the prophet, *Isa. Ch. 6. 10.* so often cited by our Saviour, and applied to the *Jews*, of *making the heart of that people fat, and their ears heavy, and closing their eyes, lest they should understand, and be converted.* So again, *Isa. 66. 3, 4.* God threatens the people of *Israel*, That because they were wicked and abominable in their lives, he would abandon them, and give them over to a spirit of delusion ; *they have chosen their own ways, and their Soul delighteth in their abominations ; I also will chuse their delusions.* God is said to chuse those things for us, which he permits us to fall into : So *Rom. 1. 28.* God is said to give over the abominable heathen to a *reprobate Mind.* *As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over* *εἰς ἀδόκιμον νῦν*, *to an injudicious and undiscerning mind.* When men abandon themselves to wickedness and impiety, God withdraws his Grace from them ; and by his secret and just judgment they are deprived of the faculty of discerning between truth and error, between good and evil. *2 Thess. 2. 10, 11, 12.* It is said, that *the man of sin should come with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved :* And that for this cause, God would send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lye ; that they might all be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. And it is just with God, that men of vicious inclinations and practices should be exposed to the cheat of the grossest and vilest impostors. God's providence is concerned for men of honest minds, and sincere intentions : But if men take pleasure in unrighteousness, God takes no further care of them, but *delivers them up to their own heart's lusts*, to be seduced into all those errors, into which their own *vain imaginations*, and their *foolish hearts* are apt to lead them.

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly as I could, to shew that an honest mind, that *sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God*, is the best security against fatal errors and mistakes in matters of religion ; both because it disposeth a man to make a true judgment of divine things, and because the providence of God is more especially concerned for the security of such persons.

There remains an objection to be answered, to which this discourse may seem liable ; but *this*, together with the *inferences* which may be made from this discourse, I shall refer to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XXXIV.

The Second
Sermon on
this text.

Honesty the best Preservative against dangerous Mistakes in Religion.

JOHN. vii. 17.

If any Man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.



Made entrance into these words the last day; in which our Saviour declares to us, that an honest and sincere mind, and an hearty desire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the best security and preservative against dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion; *ἐάν τις θέλη ποιεῖν, if any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

Now there are (I told you) *two* great mistakes in religion: *To reject any thing which really is from God; and to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which is not really from him.* And therefore I proposed from this *text* to shew how a sincere desire and endeavour to do the will of God, is a security to men against both these dangers, namely, upon these *two* accounts.

First, Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right judgment of spiritual and divine things; and that for these *two* reasons.

I. Because such a person hath a truer notion of God, and divine things. He that resembleth God most, is like to understand him best, because he finds those perfections, in some measure, in himself, which he contemplates in the divine nature; and nothing gives a man so sure a notion of things, as practice and experience.

II. Because such a person is more impartial in his search and enquiry after truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to discern it from error. That man only stands fair for the entertainment of truth, who is under the power and dominion of no vice or lust, because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to seduce him and draw him aside in his enquiry after truth: He hath no manner of concernment that the contrary proposition should be true, having the indifferency of a traveller, and no other interest, but to find out the right way to heaven, and to walk in it. But if a man be byassed by any lust, and addicted to any vitious practice, he is then an interested person, and concern'd to make a partial judgment of things, and is under a great temptation to infidelity, when the truths of God are proposed to him; because, whatever the evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of those doctrines, which are so contrary to his inclination and interest.

Secondly, Another reason why they who sincerely desire to do the will of God, have a greater security in discerning truth from error, is, because the providence of God is more especially concern'd to preserve such persons from dangerous errors and mistakes, in things which concern their eternal salvation. When men are of a teachable temper, of an humble and obedient frame of mind, God loves to reveal himself, and his truth to them, *Psal. 25. 9. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.* The proper disposition of a scholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in religion we are to learn, is, *what is the good and acceptable will of God, that we may do it*; for practice is the end of knowledge; *If ye know these things* (saith our Saviour) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is necessary to know the will of God; but we are only happy in the doing of it;

and if any man be desirous to do the will of God, his goodness is such, that he will take effectual care to secure such a one against dangerous and fatal errors. He that hath an honest mind, and would do the will of God, if he knew it, God will not suffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it in any necessary point of faith, or practice. Thus far I have gone.

I shall now proceed to remove an *objection*, to which this discourse may seem liable, and then draw some *inferences* from the whole.

After all that hath been said, some perhaps may ask, Is every good man then secure from all error and mistake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed: But do not we find the contrary in experience? that an honest heart, and a weak head, do often meet together?

For answer to this, I shall lay down these following *propositions*.

First, That if there were any necessity, that a good man should be secured from all manner of error and mistake in religion, this probity of mind, and sincere desire to do the will of God, is the best way to do it; because such a temper and disposition of mind gives a man the best advantages to discern betwixt truth and error; and God is most likely to reveal his will to such persons. But there is no necessity of this: because a man may be a good man, and go to heaven, notwithstanding a great many mistakes in religion about things not necessary. For while we are in this imperfect state, *we know but in part*, and see many things very imperfectly: But when we shall come into a more perfect state, *that which is imperfect shall be done away*; the light of glory shall scatter all those mists and clouds, which are now upon our understandings, and hinder us from a clear sight and judgment of things; we shall then see God, and other things, as they are; and be freed from all that ignorance, and those many childish mistakes, which we are liable to here below; and till then, it is not necessary that we should be secured from them. Humility, under a sense of our ignorance, is better for us, than Infallibility would be.

Secondly, This temper and disposition of mind which I have been speaking of, is a certain security against fatal mistakes in religion, and a final continuance in such errors as would prove damnable; and this is all that this discourse pretends to, or our Saviour hath promised in this *text*. And considering the goodness of God, nothing is more improbable, than that an honest mind that seeks impartially after truth, should miss of it, in things that are fundamentally necessary to salvation. And if we could suppose such a man to fall into such an error, either it would not be fundamental to *him*, having not been, perhaps, proposed to him with sufficient evidence, and would be forgiven him upon a general repentance for all sins and errors known, or unknown; or he would not be permitted to continue in it; but the providence of God would find out some way or other to convince him of his error, and to bring him *to the acknowledgment of the truth, that he might be saved*. God would rather speak to him immediately from heaven (as he did to St. Paul) than suffer him to continue in such an error as would infallibly carry him to hell.

Thirdly, There is no such depth of judgment, and subtilty of wit required, to discern between gross and damnable errors in religion, and necessary and saving truth, but that an ordinary capacity may be able to do it. There is so plain a line drawn between great truth, and gross errors, that it is visible to every capacity; and an ordinary understanding, that is not under a violent prejudice, or blinded by some vice or fault of the will, may easily discern it. Indeed, in matters of lesser moment or concernment, and which have no such considerable and immediate influence upon the practice of an holy life, the difference betwixt truth and error is not always so gross and sensible, as to be obvious to every unprejudiced eye. But we have all the reason in the world to believe, that the goodness and justice of God is such, as to make nothing necessary to be believed by any man, which, by the help of due instruction, may not be made sufficiently plain to a common understanding. God hath so tender a care of good men, who sincerely love him and his truth, that we may reasonably presume, that he will not leave them under an unavoidable mistake concerning

cerning those matters upon which their eternal salvation does depend. *The judge of all the world will do right*; and then we may certainly conclude, that he will not condemn any man for no fault, and make him for ever miserable, for falling into an error, which, with all his care and diligence, he could not possibly either discern or avoid.

Fourthly, God hath made abundant provision for our security from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, by these *three* ways.

I. By an *infallible rule*, sufficiently plain in all things necessary.

II. By sufficient means of instruction, to help us to understand this rule.

III. By an *infallible promise* of security from dangerous errors and mistakes, if with an honest mind and due diligence we will apply our selves to understand this rule, and make use of the means of instruction, which God hath provided for that purpose.

I. God hath given us an *infallible rule*, sufficiently plain in all things necessary. He hath given us the holy scriptures, which were given at first by divine inspiration, *i. e.* by men infallibly assisted in the writing of them, and therefore must needs be an *infallible rule*; and *all scripture divinely inspired, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*, as St. Paul tells us, *2 Tim. 3. 16.* speaking there of the books of the *old Testament*; and there is the same reason as to the inspired writings of the *new*.

Now if the scriptures be an *infallible rule*, and *profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness, i. e.* to teach us to believe, and do; it follows of necessity, that they are sufficiently plain in all things necessary to faith, and a good life; otherwise they could not be *useful for doctrine and instruction in righteousness*; for a rule that is not plain to us in these things, in which it is necessary for us to be directed by it, is of no use to us; that is in truth, it is no rule. For a rule must have these two properties; it must be *perfect*, and it must be *plain*. The scriptures are a perfect rule, because the writers of them being divinely inspired, were infallible: And they must likewise be plain; otherwise, tho' they be never so perfect, they can be of no more use to direct our faith and practice, than a sun-dial in a dark room is, to tell us the hour of the day. For tho' it be never so exactly made, unless the sun shine clearly upon it, we had as good be without it. A rule that is not plain to us, whatever it may be in *it self*, is of no use at all to *us*, till it be made plain, and we understand it.

II. God hath likewise provided sufficient means of instruction to help us to understand this rule. It is not necessary that a rule should be so plain, that we should perfectly understand it at first sight; it is sufficient, if it be so plain that those of better capacity and understanding may, with due diligence and application of mind, come to the true knowledge of it; and those of a lower and more ordinary capacity by the help and instruction of a teacher. *Euclid's Elements* is a book sufficiently plain to teach a man *Geometry*: but yet not so plain that any man at first reading should understand it perfectly; but that by diligent reading, by a due application, and steady attention of mind, a man of extraordinary sagacity and understanding may come to understand the *principles* and *demonstrations* of it, and those of a more ordinary capacity, with the help of a teacher, may come to the knowledge of it. So when we say that the scriptures are plain in all things necessary to faith, and a good life, we do not mean that every man at first hearing or reading of these things in it, shall perfectly understand them; but by diligent reading and consideration, if he be of good apprehension and capacity, he may come to a sufficient knowledge of them; and if he be of a meaner capacity, and be willing to learn, he may, by the help of a teacher, be brought to understand them without any great pains; and such teachers God hath appointed in his church for this very purpose, and a succession of them to continue to the end of the world.

In a word, when we say the scriptures are plain to all capacities, in all things necessary, we mean, that any man of ordinary capacity, by his own diligence and care, in conjunction with the helps and advantages which God hath appointed, and in the due use of them, may attain to the knowledge of every thing necessary

to his salvation; and that there is no book in the world more plain, and better fitted to teach a man any *art or science*, than the *Bible* is to direct and instruct men in *the way to heaven*; and it is every man's fault if he be ignorant of any thing necessary for him to believe, or do, in order to his eternal happiness.

III. Good men are likewise secured from fatal errors in religion, by the *infallible* promise of God, if so be that with honest minds and due diligence they apply themselves to the understanding of this rule, and make use of the means of instruction which God hath provided for that purpose. God hath promised to *guide and teach the humble and meek*; that is, such as are of a submissive and teachable temper, desirous and diligent to be instructed in the truth. *Prov. 2. 2, 3, 4, 5. If thou incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou cryest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.* And here in the text our Saviour assures us, that *If any man be desirous to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether he spake of himself; i. e. he shall be able to discern the doctrines which are from God.*

This is the provision which God hath made for our security from fatal mistakes in religion; and this is in all respects a better security, and more likely to guide and conduct us safely to heaven, than any *infallible church*; and that for these reasons:

First, Because it is much more certain that God hath made this provision which I have mentioned, than that there is *an infallible church* appointed and assisted by him to this purpose. That the Scriptures are *an infallible and adequate rule*, and sufficiently plain in all things necessary, I have already proved; and I add further, that this was the constant judgment of the ancient church, and so declared by the unanimous consent of the fathers of it for many ages; and that all *councils* in their determination of faith, proceeded upon this rule, till the second *council of Nice*.

I have likewise proved, that God hath provided a succession of pastors and teachers in his church, to instruct us in this rule; and that we have God's infallible promise for our security from dangerous errors and mistakes, if with an honest mind and due diligence we apply our selves to understand this rule, and make use of the means of instruction which God hath provided for that purpose.

But that there is *an infallible church* appointed and assisted by God, to declare and determine matters of faith, and to be an infallible interpreter of scripture, is not certain, because there is no clear and express text of scripture to that purpose, that any church whatsoever, much less that the *church of Rome* hath this power and privilege.

Nay, I add further, that it is impossible, according to the principles of the *church of Rome*, that this should be proved from scripture; because, according to their principles, we cannot know either which are the true books of scripture, or what is the true sense of scripture, but from the authority and infallible declaration of that church. And if so, then the infallibility of the church must be first known, and proved, before we can either know the scriptures, or the sense of them; and yet till we know the scriptures, and the sense of them, nothing can be proved by them. Now to pretend to prove the infallibility of their church by scripture, and at the same time to declare, that which are the true books of scripture, and what is the true sense of them, can only be proved by the infallible authority of their church, is a plain and shameful *circle*, out of which there is no way of escape; and consequently that God hath appointed *an infallible church* is impossible, according to their principles, ever to be proved from scripture, and the thing is capable of no other proof. For that God will infallibly assist any society of men, is not to be known, but by divine revelation. So that unless they can prove it by some other revelation than that of the scripture (which they do not pretend to) the thing is not to be proved at all. Yes, they say, by the *notes and marks* of the *true church*; but what those *marks* are, must

must either be known from Scripture, or some other divine revelation, and then the same difficulty returns; besides that one of the most essential *marks of the true Church* must be *the profession of the true faith*; and then it must first be known which is *the true faith*, before we can know which is *the true church*; and yet they say, that no man can learn *the true faith*, but from *the true church*; and this runs them unavoidably into another circle as shameful as the other. So that which way soever they go to prove *an infallible Church*, they are shut up in a plain Circle, and must either prove *the Scriptures* by *the Church*, and *the Church* by *the Scriptures*; or *the true Church* by *the true faith*, and *the true faith*, by *the true Church*.

Secondly, This provision and security which I have mentioned, is more humane, better accommodated and suited to the nature of man; because it doth not suppose and need a standing and perpetual miracle, as the other way of *an infallible Church* doth. All inspiration is supernatural and miraculous, and this infallible assistance which the *church of Rome* claims to her self, must either be such as the Apostles had, which was by immediate inspiration, or something equal to it, and alike supernatural: But God does not work miracles without need, or continue them when there is no occasion for them. When God delivered the *law* to the people of *Israel*, it was accompanied with miracles, and the Prophets which he sent to them from time to time, had an immediate inspiration; but their *supreme judicature*, or their *general council*, which they call the *Sanhedrim*, was not infallibly assisted in the expounding of the *law*, when doubts and difficulties arose about it; no, nor in judging of true and false Prophets; but they determined this, and all other emergent cases, by the standing revelation and rule of their *written law*; and that they were not infallibly assisted, is evident from the great errors they fell into, in *making void the Commandments of God by their traditions*, and in their rejecting and crucifying the true *Messias*, and the *Son of God*.

In like manner the Apostles and first teachers of the christian religion, were immediately inspired, and miraculously assisted in the publishing of the Christian doctrine, and for the speedy and more effectual propagating and planting of it in the world, in despite of the violent prejudices that were against it, and the fierce opposition that was made to it. But when this was done, this miraculous and extraordinary assistance ceased, and God left the christian religion to be preserved and continued by more humane and ordinary ways, the doctrines of it being committed to *writing for a standing rule* of faith and practice in all ages, and an *order* of men appointed to instruct people in those doctrines, with a promise to secure both teachers and people, that sincerely desire to know, and do the will of God, from all fatal errors and mistakes about things necessary to their eternal Salvation; and this is a provision more likely to be made by God, and better suited to the nature of man, than the perpetual and needless miracle of an inspired, or any otherwise *infallible Church*.

Thirdly, This way is likewise more agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. The design of *an infallible Church* is to secure all that continue in the communion of it, against all possibility of error in matters of faith. The question now is not, whether *an infallible Church* would do this? but whether that Church which arrogates *infallibility* to it self, does not pretend to do this? And if they could do it, it would not be agreeable to the nature of religion, and the virtue of faith. For faith, which is the principle of all religious actions, would be no virtue, if it were necessary. A true and right belief can be no virtue, where a man is *infallibly* secured against error. There is the same reason of virtuous and criminal actions; and as there can be no crime or fault in doing what a man cannot help; so neither can there be any virtue. All virtuous actions are matter of praise and commendation; and therefore it can be no virtue in any man, because it deserves no commendation, to believe and own that the Sun shines at noon-day, when he sees it does so. No more would it be a virtue in any man, and deserve praise, to believe aright, who is in a Church wherein he is *infallibly* secured against all errors in matters of faith. Make any thing necessary, and impossible to be otherwise, and the doing of it ceases to be a

virtue.

virtue. God hath so framed religion, and the evidence of truth, and the means of coming to the knowledge of it, as to be a sufficient security to men of honest minds and teachable tempers, against all fatal and final mistakes concerning things necessary to Salvation; but not so, that every man that is of *such a Church*, should be *infallibly* secured against all errors in matters of faith; and this on purpose to try the virtue and disposition of men, whether they will be at the pains to search for truth, and when it is proposed to them with sufficient evidence, tho' not by an *infallible* hand, they will *receive it in the love of it, that they may be saved.*

Fourthly, This is as much security against errors in matters of faith, as God hath provided against sin and vice in matters of practice; and since a right belief is only in order to a good life, a man would be hard put to it, to give a wise reason, why God should take greater care for the *infallible* security of mens faith, than of their obedience. The reason pretended why God should make such *infallible* provision for a right faith, is, for the better security of mens eternal salvation, and happiness. Now the virtues of a good life have a more direct and immediate influence upon *that*, than the most orthodox belief. *The end of the commandment, (i. e. of the declaration of the Gospel) is charity.* In the christian religion that which mainly avails to our justification and salvation is, *a faith that worketh by charity, and the keeping of the commandments of God. He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them* (saith our blessed Lord) *I will liken him to a wise man that built his house upon a Rock; and again, not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, (i. e. makes profession of faith in me) shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven; and again, if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* And the Apostle St. Peter exhorts Christians to *add to their faith knowledge, and virtue, and godliness, and brotherly kindness, and charity, that so an abundant entrance may be ministered to them, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* So that the virtues of a good life have the greatest influence upon our salvation, and the main stress of Christianity is to be laid there. And therefore whatever reason can be assigned, why God should provide for the *infallible* security of our faith, is much stronger, why an equal provision should be made to secure holiness, and obedience of life; because without *this*, faith cannot *infallibly* attain its end, which is *the salvation of our souls.* But *this* it is granted God hath not done, and experience shews it; and therefore it is unreasonable to suppose that he hath done the other. It is sufficient, that in both kinds he hath done that which is sufficient to make us capable of happiness, if we be not wanting to our selves; the rest he hath left to the sincerity of our endeavours; expecting we on our part, *should work out our salvation with fear and trembling, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.* And if God hath made such provision by the Gospel, for all that enjoy the light and advantage of it, that none can miscarry without their own fault; then both his goodness and wisdom are sufficiently acquitted, without an *infallible guide and judge* in matters of faith; and that irreverent way of arguing in the *canon law* might well have been spared; that of necessity there must be an *infallible judge* of controversies in religion; *aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus, otherwise God would not seem to have ordered matters discreetly.*

But what *infallible* security soever they have in the *Church of Rome*, as to matters of faith, they are certainly the worst provided of wholsom and safe directions for the consciences and lives of men, of any church in the world. No religion that I know of in the world, ever had such lewd and scandalous Casuists. Witness the moral divinity of the *Jesuits*, which hath been so exposed to the world, not only by those of *our* religion, but by their own writers also. Nor is this mischief only confined to *that order*; their Casuists in general, and even the more antient of them, who writ before the *order* of *Jesuits* appeared in the world, have given such a liberty, and loose, to great immorality in several kinds, as is infinitely to the reproach of the best and purest religion in the world. Infomuch that Sir *Tho. Moor* himself, who was a great zealot for that religion, could

could not forbear to make a loud complaint of it, and to pass this severe censure upon the generality of their Casuists: "That their great business seem'd to be, not to keep men from sin, but to teach them *quàm propè ad peccatum liceat accedere sine peccato*; how near to sin they might lawfully come without sinning." In the mean time the consciences of men are like to be well directed, when instead of giving men plain rules for the government of their hearts and lives, and clear resolutions of the material doubts, which frequently occur in humane life, they intangle them in niceties and endless scrupulosities, teaching them to split hairs in divinity, and how with great art and cunning they may avoid the committing of any sin, and yet come as near to it as is possible. This is a thing of a most dangerous consequence to the souls of men; and if men be but once encouraged to pass to the utmost bounds of what is lawful, the next step will be into that which is unlawful.

So that unless *faith without works will save men*, notwithstanding the *infallible* security which they pretend to give men of a sound and right belief (if it were really as much as they talk of) the salvation of men would still be in great hazard and uncertainty, for want of better and safer directions for a good life, than are ordinarily to be met with in the casuistical writings of that Church; especially if we consider that the Scriptures are lock'd up from the people in an unknown tongue, where the surest and plainest directions for a good life are most plentifully to be had; insomuch, that a man had better want all the Volumes of casuistical divinity, that ever were written in the world, than to be without the *Bible*; by the diligent studying of which Book alone, he may sooner learn the way to heaven, than by all the Books in the world without it.

Fifthly, and *lastly*, This provision which God hath made, is, when all is done, as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an *infallible Church* could give, if there were one: and it is as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary that they should be prevented, and have an end put to them: And these are the *two* great reasons why an *infallible judge* is so importunately demanded, and insisted upon. I shall speak to *these* distinctly, and severally; but because they will require a longer discourse than the time will allow, I shall not enter upon them at present, but refer them to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XXXV.

Honesty the best Preservative against dangerous Mistakes in Religion.

*The Third
Sermon on
this Text.*

JOHN vii. 17.

If any Man will do his will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.



WHEN I made entrance into these words, I propos'd from this Text,

First, To shew that an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire and endeavour to do the will of God, is the greatest security and best preservative against dangerous errors and mistakes in matters of religion.

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In the next place, I proceeded to remove an *objection*, to which my discourse upon this subject might seem liable. Some perhaps might ask, Is every good man then secure from all error and mistake in matters of religion? This is a mighty privilege indeed. But do we not find the contrary in experience, that an honest heart, and a weak head do often meet together? For answer to this, I laid down several *propositions*;

By the *last* of which I shew'd, that God hath made abundant provision for our security from fatal and dangerous errors in religion, both by *the infallible rule* of the holy Scripture, and by sufficient *means of instruction* to help us to understand this rule, and by his *infallible promise of assisting us*, if with honest minds, and a due diligence we apply our selves to the understanding of this rule, and the use of these means. And *this*, I told you, was in all respects a better security, and more likely to conduct us safe to heaven, than any *infallible Church* whatsoever; and that for *five* reasons; *four* of which I have already treated of, and now proceed to the *fifth*, and last, *viz.*

Because this provision which I have shewn God hath made, is both as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an *infallible Church* could give, if there were *one*: And it is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them. And *these* are the *two* great reasons why an *infallible judge* is so importunately demanded, and insisted upon. I shall speak to these *two* points distinctly, and severally.

First, Because this is as good a security against fatal errors and mistakes in religion, as an *infallible Church* could give, if there were *one*. For an *infallible Church*; if there were such an one upon earth, could not *infallibly* secure particular Christians against errors in faith, any other way, than by the definition and declaration of those who are *infallible* in that Church. And there are but *three* that pretend to it; either the Pope; or a general council; or the Pope and a general council agreeing in the same definitions. Not the Pope by himself, nor the general council without the Pope; because the Church which pretends to *infallibility*, is not agreed, that either of these alone is *infallible*, and therefore their definitions can be no certain, much less *infallible* foundation of faith; no, not to that Church which pretends to *infallibility*. So that if there be an *infallible oracle* in that Church, it must be the Pope and council in conjunction, or the definition of a council confirm'd by the Pope. Now in that case, either the council was *infallible* in its definitions, before they had the Pope's confirmation, or not. If the council was *infallible* in its definitions, before they had the Pope's confirmation; then the council alone, and of it self, was *infallible*, (which a great part of the church of *Rome* deny) and then it needed not the Pope's confirmation to make it *infallible*: Or else a general council is not *infallible* in its definitions, before they receive the Pope's confirmation; and then the Pope's confirmation cannot make it so: For that which was not *infallibly* defined by the council, cannot be made *infallible* by the Pope's confirmation.

But there is another difficulty yet: It is a maxim generally received, and that even in the *Roman Church*, "That the definitions of a general council, confirmed by the Pope, are not obligatory, unless they be received by the Universal Church." From whence these *two* great inconveniencies will unavoidably follow.

I. That no man is obliged to believe such definitions, 'till he certainly know that they are receiv'd by the Universal Church; which how he should certainly, much less infallibly know, I cannot understand; unless he either speak with all the Christians in the world, or the representatives of all particular Churches return back and meet again in council, to declare that the Universal Church hath received their definitions; which I think was never yet done.

II. It will follow, that the definitions of a general council confirmed by the Pope, are not *infallible*, till they be received by the Universal Church. For if they were *infallible* without that, they would be obligatory without it; because

an *infallible* definition, if we know it to be so, lays an obligation to believe it, whether it be receiv'd by the universal church, or not. And if such definitions are not *infallible* till they be received by the universal church, they cannot become *infallible* afterwards; because if the definitions were not *infallible* before, they cannot be received as such by the universal church, nor by the meer reception of them, be made to be *infallible* definitions, if they were not so before.

But if we should pass over all these difficulties, there is a greater yet behind, and that is, supposing the definitions of general councils confirmed by the Pope to be *infallible*, particular christians cannot be secured *infallibly* from error without the knowledge of those definitions. And there are but *two* ways imaginable of conveying this knowledge to them: Either by the living voice of their particular pastors, whom they are implicitly to believe in these matters; but particular pastors are *fallible* (as they themselves grant) and therefore their words can neither be an *infallible* foundation of faith, or an *infallible* means of conveying it; and it is unreasonable, *they* say, for men that own themselves to be *fallible*, to require an implicit belief to be given to them: Or else the knowledge of the definitions of councils must be conveyed to particular christians by writing; and if so, then there will only be an *infallible rule*, but no living *infallible judge*. And if an *infallible rule* will serve the turn, we have the Scriptures which we are sure are *infallible*, and therefore at least as good as any other *rule*. But they say that the definitions of councils give us an *infallible* interpretation of Scripture, and therefore are of greater advantage to us. But do not the definitions of councils sometimes also need explication, that we may know the certain sense of them, without which we cannot know the doctrines defined? Yes certainly, they need explication as much as Scripture, if there be any difference about the meaning of them; and there have been, and still are, great differences among those of their own church about the meaning of them. And if the explications of general councils need themselves to be explained, then there is nothing got by them, and we are but where we were before: For differences about the meaning of the definitions of general councils, make as great difficulties and uncertainties in faith, as the differences about the meaning of Scripture.

Well, but the people have the living voice of their particular pastors to explain the definitions of councils to them. But this does not help the matter neither, for these *two* reasons.

1. Because particular pastors have no authority to explain the definitions of general councils. The council of *Trent*, hath by express decree, reserv'd to the Pope, and to him only, the power to explain the definitions of the council, if any difference arise about the meaning of them. So that if there be any difference about the true sense and meaning of any of the definitions of the council, particular pastors have no authority to explain them; and where there is no doubt or difference about the meaning of them; there is no occasion for the explication of them.

2. But suppose they had authority to explain them, this can be no *infallible* security to the people, that they explain them right; both because particular pastors are *fallible*; and likewise because we see in experience, that they differ in their explications; witness the Bishop of *Condom's Exposition* of the Catholick Faith, and of the definitions of the council of *Trent*, which is in many material points very different from that of *Bellarmino*, and many other famous doctors of that church. And which is more, witness the many differences betwixt *Ambrosius*, *Catharinus*, and *Dominicus à Soto*, about the definitions of that council, in which they were both present, and heard the debates, and themselves bore a great part in them. Now if they who were present at the framing of the definitions of that council, cannot agree about the meaning of them, much less can it be expected from those that were absent.

Secondly, This provision which I have mentioned, is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to controversies in religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them, as any *infallible church*

would be, if there were one: And this is another reason why *an infallible Church* is so much insisted upon, that there may be some way and means for a final decision of controversies, which the Scriptures cannot be, because they are only a *dead rule*, which can end no controversy without a *living judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occasions.

It is not necessary that all controversies in religion should either be prevented, or decided: This the Church which pretends to be *infallible*, cannot pretend to have done; because there are manifold controversies, even in the Church of *Rome* her self, concerning matters of religion, which still remain undecided; and in their commentaries upon Scripture, many differences about the sense of several texts, concerning which she hath not thought fit to give an *infallible* interpretation. And where their Popes, and several of their general councils, have thought fit to meddle with Scripture, they have applied and interpreted texts more improperly and absurdly, than even their private Doctors. And, which is more, in differences about points of faith, which are pretended on both sides to be fundamental, this Church hath not thought fit to put an end to them by her infallible decision, after two hundred years brangling about them. For instance, in that fierce and long difference about *the immaculate conception of the blessed Virgin*, which, on both sides, is pretended to be an *article of faith*, and for which, contrary revelations of their canoniz'd Saints are so frequently pretended; and yet neither Pope, nor general council, have thought fit to exert their *infallibility* for the decision of this controversy. So that if their Church had this talent of *infallibility* ever committed to them, they have, with *the slothful servant*, laid it up in a napkin; and according to our Saviour's rule, have long since forfeited it, for not making use of it.

And whereas it is pretended, that the Scripture is but a *dead rule*, which can end no controversies without a *living judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that rule upon emergent occasions; the same objection lies against *them*, unless a general council, which is *their living judge*, were always sitting. For the definitions of their councils in writing are liable to the same, and greater objections, than the written rule of the Scriptures.

The sum of all is this. In differences about lesser matters, mutual charity and forbearance will secure the peace of the Church, tho' the differences remain undecided; and in greater matters, an *infallible rule* searched into with an honest mind, and due diligence, and with the help of good instruction, is more likely to extinguish and put an end to such differences, than any *infallible judge*, if there were one; because an humble and honest mind is more likely to yield to reason, than a perverse and cavilling temper is to submit to the sentence of an *infallible judge*, unless it were back'd with an *inquisition*. The Church of *Rome* supposeth her self *infallible*, and yet notwithstanding that, she finds that some question and deny her *infallibility*, and then her sentence signifies nothing. And of those who own it, many dispute the sense and meaning of her sentence; and whether they deny the *infallibility* of her sentence, or dispute the sense of it, in neither of these cases will it prove effectual to the deciding of any difference.

But after all this provision which we pretend God hath made for honest and sincere minds, do we not see that men fall into dangerous and damnable errors, who yet cannot, without great uncharitableness, be supposed not to be sincerely desirous to know the truth, and to do the will of God?

To this I shall briefly return these *two* things.

I. That the same errors are not equally damnable to all. The innocent and (humanely speaking) almost invincible prejudices of education in some persons even against a fundamental truth; the different capacities of men, and the different means of conviction afforded to them; the greater and lesser degrees of obstinacy, and a faulty will in opposing the truths proposed to them; all these, and perhaps several other considerations besides, may make a great difference in the guilt of mens errors, and the danger of them.

II. When

II. When all is done, the matter must be left to God, who only knoweth the hearts of all the children of men. We cannot see into the hearts of men, nor know all their circumstances, and how they may have provoked God to forsake them, and give them up to error and delusion, *because they would not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be saved.* And as on the one hand God will consider all mens circumstances, and the disadvantages they were under for coming to the knowledge of the truth, and make allowance to men for their invincible errors, and forgive them upon a general repentance: So on the other hand, he who sees the insincerity of men, and that the errors of their understandings did proceed from gross faults of their lives, will deal with them accordingly. But if men be honest and sincere, God, who hath said, *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine*, will certainly be as good as his word.

It now remains only to draw some *inferences* from this discourse, and they shall be these *three*.

First, From this *text*, and what hath been discoursed upon it, we may infer how slender and ill-grounded the pretense of the church of *Rome* to *infallibility* is; whether they place it in the Pope, or in a general council, or in both. The last is the most general opinion; and yet it is hard to understand how *infallibility* can result from the Pope's confirmation of a general council, when neither the council was *infallible* in framing its definitions, nor the Pope in confirming them. If the council were *infallible* in framing them, then they needed no confirmation: If they were not, then *infallibility* is only in the Pope that confirms them, and then it is the Pope only that is *infallible*. But no man that reads these words of our Saviour, *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine*, would ever imagine that the Bishop of *Rome* (whoever he shall happen to be) were secured from all fatal errors in matters of faith, much less that he were endowed with an *infallible* spirit, in judging what doctrines are from God, and what not: For it cannot be denied, but that many of their Popes have been notoriously wicked and vicious in their lives: Nay, *Bellarmino* himself acknowledgeth, that for a succession of fifty Popes together, there was not one pious and virtuous man that sat in that chair; and some of their Popes have been condemned and deposed for *Heresy*; and yet for all this, the Pope, and the governing part of that church, would bear the world in hand that he is *infallible*. But if this saying of our Saviour be true, that *if any man will do his will, he shall know of his doctrine, whether it be of God*; then every honest man that sincerely desires to do the will of God, hath a fairer pretense to *infallibility*, and a clearer text for it, than is to be found in the whole Bible for the *infallibility* of the Bishop of *Rome*. What would the church of *Rome* give, that there were but as express a *text* in scripture for the *infallibility* of their Popes, as this is for the security of every good man, in his judgment of doctrines; which makes *infallibility* needless? What an insufferable noise, and what endless triumphs would they make upon it, if it had been any where said in the Bible, That if any man be Bishop of *Rome*, and sit in St. *Peter's* chair, *he shall know of my doctrine whether it be of God*? Had there been such a *text* as this, we should never have been troubled with their impertinent citation of *texts*, and their remote and blind inferences from *Pasce Oves*, and *super hanc Petram*; *feed my sheep*; and *upon this rock will I build my church*; to prove the Pope's *infallibility*. And yet no man of sense or reason ever extended the *text* I am speaking to, so far as to attempt to prove from it the *infallibility* of every good man; but only his security from fatal errors and mistakes in religion. The largest promises that are made in scripture of security from error and mistake about divine things, are made to good men, who sincerely desire to do the will of God. And if this be so, we must conclude several Popes to have been the furthest from *infallibility* of any men in the world. And indeed there is not a more compendious way to persuade men that the christian religion is a *fable*, than to set up a lewd and vicious man for the oracle of it.

Nay, I will go farther yet; That there are no other promises made in Scripture, of direction or assistance, or security from mistake, to any church; but the same are made in as full and express terms to every good man that sincerely desires to know the truth, and to practise it. Is it promised to the church, or to the pastors of it, *I will be with you always?* And hath not our Saviour promised the same to every one that is obedient to his word? *John 14. 23. If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* And does not the Apostle apply the same promise to every good christian, *Heb. 13. 5. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?* For where is the difference between these expressions? *I will be with you,* and *I will make my abode with him?* *I will be with you always,* and *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?* Is it promised to the church, that *the Spirit shall lead her into all truth?* And is not the same promise made to every good man? *John 14. 21. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my father; and I will love him, and will manifest my self to him;* that is, God will reveal his will to those that love him, and keep his commandments. Hath God promised *to build his church upon a rock?* And doth not our Saviour use the same metaphor concerning every man that doth the will of God? *Mat. 7. 24. Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, is like a wise man that built his house upon a rock.* So that if *to be built upon a rock* signifies *infallibility*, it belongs to every good man, who sincerely practiseth what he knows, as much as to any church.

When men are enabled by God to work miracles for the confirmation of the doctrines which they deliver, there is great reason to believe that they are *infallibly* assisted in the delivery of those doctrines: But without this, 'tis the vainest thing in the world, for any person or church to pretend to it; because they offer no evidence fit to satisfy any man, that they are so assisted: And I do not hear that the Pope, among all his privileges, does pretend to the power of miracles.

Secondly, From hence likewise we may infer the great reason of error and infidelity in the world. If any man be an infidel, it is not the fault of his understanding, but of his will; it is not because there is not sufficient evidence that the christian religion is from God, but because mens interests and lusts make them partial and incompetent judges of matters of religion. The evidence of the christian religion is such, as recommends it to every man's reason and conscience; so that (as *St. Paul* argues) *if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them,* 2 Cor. 4. 3, 4.

If men did but stand indifferent for the entertainment of truth, and were not swayed by the interest of any lust or passion, I am confident that no man that hath the Gospel fairly proposed to him, would continue an infidel. If men did but truly live up to the principles of natural religion, they would easily be convinc'd, that the christian religion, which is so suitable thereto, is from God.

Thirdly, and lastly, What hath been said, is a great argument and encouragement to obedience, and holiness of life. Do we desire not to be mistaken about the mind of God? Let us heartily endeavour to do his will. If we would not be seduced by the error of the wicked, let us take heed of their vicious practices. The best way certainly to preserve a right judgment in matters of religion, is to take great care of a good life. God's goodness is such, that he will not suffer any man's judgment to be betrayed into a damnable error, without some vice and fault of his will. The principles of natural religion are born with us, and imprinted upon our minds, so that no man can be ignorant of them, nor need to be mistaken about them; and as for those revelations which God hath made of himself to the world, he hath been pleased to accompany them with so much evidence, that an honest and sincere mind may easily discern them from error, and imposture. So our Saviour hath assured us, *That if any man desire to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.*


On the other hand, if we see any oppose the clear truth, or depart from it, and embrace gross errors and delusions, we may almost certainly conclude, that there is some worldly interest or lust at the bottom of it. So our Saviour has likewise told us, *that the reason why men love darkness rather than light, is, because their deeds are evil; and every one that doth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.* I will conclude this whole discourse with St. Peter's exhortation, the 2d of Pet. 3. 17, 18. *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware, lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be Glory, both now and for ever. Amen.*

S E R M O N XXXVI.

The Nature of Covetousness.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

mong all the irregular appetites of men, there is none that is more common and unreasonable, and of a more universal bad influence upon the hearts and lives of men, than this of *Covetousness*; and therefore in speaking of this vice, I shall strike at the root of a great many others; even of Apostasy from God's truth and religion, of which covetousness, and the love of this present world, is one of the most common causes. So that if I can contribute any thing to the cure of this great distemper of mens minds, I shall in so doing remove that, which is the cause and occasion of a great part of the evils and mischiefs which are in the world. And to this end I have pitched upon these words of our blessed Saviour to his hearers; *And he said unto them, take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

In which words are these *three* things observable.

First, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware*; he doubles it, to shew the great need and concernment of it.

Secondly, The matter of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers against, and that is *covetousness*; *take heed and beware of covetousness.*

Thirdly, The reason of this caution, *because a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* Humane life is sustained by a little, and therefore abundance is not necessary, either to the support, or comfort of it. 'Tis not a great estate and vast possessions that make a man happy in this world; but a mind that is equal to its condition, whatever it be.

First, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware.* This is a peculiar kind of caution, and no where else, or upon any other occasion, that I know of, used in Scripture; in which, for the greater emphasis and weight, the words of caution are doubled, as if the matter were of so much concernment, that no caution about it could be too much; to signify to us both the great danger of this sin of *covetousness*, and the great care men ought to use to preserve themselves from it.

I. The great danger of this sin; how apt we are to fall into this vice, and of how pernicious a consequence it is to those in whom it reigns.

1. How apt we are to fall into this vice: And excepting those vices which are immediately founded in a man's natural temper and constitution, there is none that men have a more universal propension to, than this of *covetousness*. For there are *two* things which humane nature does more especially desire to be secured against, which are *want*, and *contempt*: and riches seem to be a certain remedy against both these evils. And because men think they can never be sufficiently secured against these, therefore their desire of riches grows endless and insatiable; so that unless men be very jealous and watchful over themselves, this desire will grow upon them, and enlarge it self beyond all bounds.

2. As men are very apt to fall into this vice, so is it of very pernicious consequence to those in whom it reigns. The mischief of it is very great, and very extensive: So St. Paul tells us, 1 Tim. 6. 8, 9, 10. where he presseth men to be contented with a small competency of the things of this life, because of the great danger and mischief of a covetous mind; *having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich* (that is, they that are bent and resolved upon being rich) *fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil.* But this I shall speak more fully to, when I come to shew the great evil and unreasonableness of this vice.

II. This earnest kind of caution, as it signifies the great danger of this sin of *covetousness*, so likewise the great care that men ought to use to preserve themselves from it; for the greater the danger is in any kind, so much the greater care should be used for the avoiding of it. Men are not so solicitously concerned to defend themselves against a slight mischief; but when a terrible one threatens us, we should be continually upon our guard against it, and summon all our strength and force to resist it. Thus much for the *manner* of the caution.

I proceed to the *Second* thing to be consider'd in the Text, *viz.* The *matter* of the caution, or the vice which our Saviour here warns his hearers against, and that is *covetousness*; *Take heed and beware of Covetousness*. And in speaking of this, I shall consider these *two* things.

I. Wherein the nature of this vice consists.

II. I shall endeavour to shew the great evil and unreasonableness of it. I shall be large in both.

I. For the nature of this vice of *covetousness*. The shortest description that I can give of it is this; that it is *an inordinate desire and love of riches*; but when this desire and love are *inordinate*, is not so easy to be determined. And therefore that we may the better understand what this sin of *covetousness* is, which our Saviour doth so earnestly caution against, it will be requisite to consider more particularly wherein the vice and fault of it doth consist; that whilst we are speaking against *covetousness*, we may not under that general word condemn any thing that is commendable or lawful. To the end then that we may the more clearly and distinctly understand wherein the nature of this vice doth consist, I shall

First, Endeavour to shew what is not condemned under this name of *covetousness*, either in Scripture, or according to right reason: And,

Secondly, What is condemned by either of these as a plain instance or branch of this sin.

First, What things are not condemned under the name of *covetousness*, either in Scripture, or according to right reason, which yet have some appearance of it; namely, these *three* things.

1. Not a provident care about the things of this present life.

2. Not a regular industry and diligence for the obtaining of them: Nor

3. Every degree of love and affection to them. I mention these *three*, because they may all seem to be condemned by Scripture, as parts or degrees of this vice, but really are not.

1. Not a provident care about the things of this present life. This indeed seems to be condemned in Scripture as a branch of *Covetousness*; namely, in our Saviour's Sermon upon the mount, *Matt. 6. 25. Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.* Here our Saviour seems to forbid all care, even about the necessities of life, meat, and drink, and cloathing; much more about the delights and conveniences of it. But this is not absolutely, and in ordinary cases, intended by our Saviour to be condemned, as I shall shew by and by under the next head.

2. Neither is a regular industry and diligence for the obtaining of these things condemned in Scripture; tho' this also seems to be prohibited by our Saviour in the same Chapter, *ver. 26. Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feedeth them;* and *ver. 28. Why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.* In which words our Saviour seems to intimate, that we ought to depend upon the providence of God for food and raiment, and to use no more industry for the obtaining of them, than the *fowls of the air* do, or the *lilies of the field*: And the same may seem to be collected out of this chapter of *St. Luke*: for after our Saviour had in my *text* cautioned them against covetousness, and spoken to them a parable to that purpose, of *a rich man who enlarged his barns, and laid up goods for many years*, he infers from thence, *ver. 22. that men should take no thought for the things of this life, nor use any industry about them; and he said unto his disciples, therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.*

Now to avoid all inconvenience from our Saviour's words, I think that it is commonly said by interpreters, that he does here only condemn a distrustful and anxious care about the things of this life, and an over-solicitous industry and diligence for the obtaining of them; but that he allows a prudent care, and regular industry about these things: And this were very well said, if it would agree with the scope and design of our Saviour's discourse; but the instances which he gives of *the fowls of the air*, and *the lilies of the field*, which are sufficiently provided for without any care and industry of theirs, and which he seems to set before us for a pattern, *behold* (says he) *the fowls of the air*, I say these instances, which he gives, seem to exclude even all regular and ordinary care and diligence about these things.

What shall we say then, that our Saviour intended by his religion to take men off from all labour and industry in their callings? This seems to be unreasonable; and indeed so it certainly were, if our Saviour had given this for a standing and ordinary rule to all Christians; and not only so, but contrary to the Apostles doctrine, who constantly charged Christians to labour with great diligence in their callings, that they might be able to provide for themselves, and their families.

But this discourse of our Saviour's was not intended for a general and standing rule to all Christians; but only designed for his disciples, to take *them* off from all care about the things of this life, that they might attend upon his person, and wholly give up themselves to that work to which he had called them. And therefore *St. Luke* takes notice, that after he had cautioned his hearers in general against *covetousness*, he applies himself particularly to his disciples, and tells them that he would have them so far from this vice of *covetousness*, that they should not so much as use that ordinary care and industry about the things of this life, which is not only lawful, but necessary for men in all ordinary cases, *ver. 22. And he said unto his disciples, therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, what you shall eat.* And this agrees very well with the direction which our Saviour gave to his disciples, when he first sent them forth to preach, *Matt. 10. 9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brags in your purses, neither coat or scrip;* which no man ever understood as a general law to all Christians, but as a particular precept to the Apostles at that time.

And if this be our Saviour's meaning, there is then no reason to think that this caution against *covetousness* does forbid men to use a provident care and regular industry about the things of this life.

3. Nor is every degree of love and affection to the things of this world condemned in Scripture, as any branch, or part of this vice of *Covetousness*; but such a love of the things of this world as is truly consistent with the love of God, and a due and a serious care of our souls, is allowed both by Scripture and reason. St. *John* indeed seems to condemn all love of the world, and of the things of it, as utterly inconsistent with the love of God, 1 *John* 2. 15. *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*: But this is according to the Hebrew phrase and manner of speaking, to forbid things *absolutely*, which are to be understood only *comparatively*. So *Matt.* 6. 19. *Lay not up for your selves treasures upon earth; but lay up for your selves treasures in heaven*; i. e. be not so solicitous for the good things of this world, as for the glory and happiness of the next. And *Luke* 12. 4. *Be not afraid of them that kill the body*; that is, fear them not so much as *him that can destroy both body and soul in hell*: And *Luke* 14. 26. *If any man come unto me, and hate not his father and mother, and all that he hath*; that is, if he do not love me more than all these things, *he cannot be my disciple*: And *John* 6. 27. *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life*; that is, labour not so much for the one as for the other, be not so solicitous about the things of this life, as about the great concerns of eternity. So likewise *Colos.* 3. 2. *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth*; i. e. set them more on things above, than on earthly things. So here, *love not the world, neither the things of the world*; that is, do not over-value them, do not love them so much as not to be able to part with them for Christ; for if any man thus love the world, he does not love God as he ought. So that when the Scripture commands us *not to love the world*, this is to be understood *comparatively*, that we should not love these things in comparison of God, and the great concerns of another world: but it does not forbid us to love these things in a due degree, and with a due subordination to those things which are more excellent, and of infinitely greater concernment to us. For nothing can be more inconsistent than to recommend to men diligence in their worldly callings and employments (as the Scripture frequently does) and that in order to the attaining of the good things of this life; and yet to forbid us to love these things at all. For if men have no degree of love to them, the best argument to diligence for the obtaining of them would be taken away. Besides, that we are commanded in Scripture to be thankful to God for bestowing on us the blessings of this life, and we are to love him upon this account. Now can any man love the giver, for bestowing such gifts upon him, which, if he do as he ought, he must not love?

You see then what those things are, which the Scripture does not condemn as any branch or degree of this vice of *covetousness*; a provident care, and a regular industry, and such a degree of love to the things of this world, as is consistent with the love of God, and the care of our souls.

Secondly, I come now to shew what is condemned in Scripture under the name of *covetousness*; and by this we shall best understand wherein the nature of this sin doth consist. Now *covetousness* is a word of a large signification, and comprehends in it most of the irregularities of men's minds, either in *desiring*, or *getting*, or in *possessing*, and *using* an estate. I shall speak to each of these severally.

I. *Covetousness* in the *desire* of riches, consists in an eager and unsatiable desire after the things of this world. This the Scripture condemns, tho' it be free from injustice, as it seldom happens to be. This insatiable desire of wealth, God plainly condemns by his prophet, *Isa.* 5. 8. *Wo unto them that joyn house to house, and lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth*. And this is that which our Saviour here in the *text* seems to have a more particular respect to, when he cautions men against the sin of *covetousness*, as appears both from the reason which he gives of this caution, and from the parable whereby he illustrates it. From the reason which he gives of this caution, *take heed and beware of covetousness; for the life of man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*. As if he had said, take great care to

set some bounds to your desires after the things of this world. For whatever men may imagine, it is certain in experience, that it is not the abundance of outward things which makes the life of man happy. *Wealth and content* do not always dwell together; nay so far from that, that perhaps they very seldom meet.

And the parable likewise which follows upon this caution, doth sufficiently shew this to be our Saviour's meaning; for he illustrates what he was speaking of, by a rich man whose desire of wealth was never satisfied, but he was continually increasing his estate, and enlarging his barns, to make more room still for his fruits, that he might *lay up goods in store for many years*. The parable does not so much as intimate any indirect and unjust ways of gain; which this man used to increase his estate; but condemns his insatiable desire and thirst after more; so that even *this alone is covetousness*, and a great fault, tho' it were attended with no other; because it is unreasonable, and without end.

II. There is *covetousness* likewise in *getting* an estate; and the vice or evil of this kind of *covetousness* consists chiefly in these *three* things.

I. In the use of unlawful and unjust ways to get or increase an estate. He is a *covetous man*, who by the greediness of gain, is tempted to do any unjust action, whether it be in the way of fraud and deceit, or of violence and oppression. And this perhaps is that which is most frequently in scripture call'd *covetousness*. And this I take to be the meaning of the tenth commandment, *thou shalt not covet*; wherein is forbidden all unjust desire of that which is another man's, and all unjust endeavours and attempts to deprive him of it. For so our Saviour renders it, *Mark 10. 19.* where he says to *the young man* that came to be directed by him, *what good thing he should do, that he might inherit eternal life; thou knowest the commandments, do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness*; and then instead of the tenth commandment, *thou shalt not covet*, or rather by way of explication of it, he adds *μὴ ἀποσέφῃς, defraud not*; as if he had said in a word, be not injurious to thy neighbour in any kind, in desiring or endeavouring to deprive him of any thing that is his. As the *Romans* in their laws were wont to comprehend those crimes which had no proper name, by the general name of *Stellionatus*, and *Dolus malus*; so here in the *Decalogue*, after God had instanced in the chief and most common sorts of injuries which men are guilty of towards their neighbour, as *Murder, Adultery, Theft, bearing of false witness*; he sums up all the rest, which could not so easily be reckoned particularly, in this short and general prohibition, *thou shalt not covet*; that is, thou shalt not be injurious to thy neighbour in any other kind; *in his wife, or servant, or house, or cattle, or any thing that is his*. Covetousness, or any inordinate desire of that which is our neighbour's, being commonly the root and parent of all those kind of injuries.

And for the same reason St. *Matthew*, instead of the tenth commandment, puts this general precept, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*, as being the sense of it in other words: *Matt. 19. 18, 19.* *thou shalt do no murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, honour thy father and thy mother, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*. And this command of *loving our neighbour as our selves*, our Saviour elsewhere tells us was the sum of the duties of the *second table*; and it is the same in sense with that precept of our Saviour, *Matt. 7. 12.* *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them*. That is, as thou wouldest have no man to be injurious to thee in any thing, so be not thou to any other man in any kind. And the Apostle, *Rom. 13. 8, 9, 10.* shews us upon what account this general precept, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*, is the sum of the *second table*. *He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law; for this, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*. And then he adds in the next words, *love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law*. That is, he that truly loves his neighbour, will not be injurious to him in any kind: *therefore love is the sum of the law*.

The design of all this is to shew that he that is injurious to his neighbour in his estate in any kind, is properly guilty of the sin of *Covetousness*, which is forbidden in the *tenth commandment*. So that all arts of fraud and oppression, whereby men endeavour to get and encrease an estate by the injury of their neighbour, is a branch of the sin of *Covetousness*.

2. The vice of *Covetousness* in *getting* wealth, does likewise consist in an anxious and tormenting care about obtaining the things of this life. The regular and due temper of a man's mind about the things of this world, is to commit our selves to the providence of God in the use of honest and lawful endeavours, and to refer the success of all to his good pleasure; and whatsoever is beyond this, is a branch from the evil root of *Covetousness*. We distrust the providence of God, when after we have used our best endeavours, and begg'd his blessing upon them, we torment our selves about the issue and event of things. And as this is sinful, so it is vain, and to no purpose. Diligence in our business is the way to get an estate; but no man was ever the richer for tormenting himself, because he is not so. The reason why men seek the things of this world, and take pains to get them, is to make life convenient and comfortable; and consequently he that torments himself about the getting of these things, contradicts himself in his own design, because he makes his life *miserable*, that he may make it *comfortable*.

3. The sin of *Covetousness* in *getting*, consists in seeking the things of this life, with the neglect of things infinitely better, and which are of far greater and nearer concernment to us. He is a *covetous man*, who so minds the world, as to neglect God, and his soul; who is so busy and intent upon making provision for this life, as to take no care of the other; so concern'd for a few days of his pilgrimage here, as to have no consideration and regard for his eternal abode in another world. God allows us to provide for this life, and considers the necessities which do continually press us while we are in the body: but while we are making provision for these *dying bodies*, he expects that we should remember that we have *immortal souls*: which since they are to have an endless duration in another world, ought to be provided for with far greater care. 'Tis an inordinate desire of riches, when men so lay out all their care and industry for the obtaining of them, as if nothing else were to be regarded, as if no consideration at all were to be had of another world, and of that better part of our selves which is to continue and live for ever. All desires and endeavours after riches, which take men off from the business of religion, and the care of their souls, which allow men neither the leisure and opportunity, nor the heart and affection to love God, and to serve him, are to be referred to the sin of *Covetousness*, which is here condemned by our Saviour in the *text*.

III. There is *Covetousness* likewise in *possessing*, or *using* an estate: And this consists chiefly in these *three* things.

First, When men are sordid towards themselves, and cannot find in their hearts to use and enjoy what they possess; are continually adding to their estate, without any design of enjoyment; and take infinite pains to raise a huge fortune, not that they may use it, but that they may be said to have it. This is a degree of covetousness even beyond that of the rich man in the parable after the *text*: for he, it seems, after he had *enlarged his barns* to his mind, and *laid up goods for many years*, designed at last to have *taken his ease*, and have fallen to the enjoyment of what he had gotten; *to have eat and drank, and to have been merry*; and this, tho' it proved but a foolish design in the issue, he being *cut off in that very instant* when he was come to the point of satisfaction and enjoyment; yet is it infinitely more reasonable, than to take great pains to get an estate with a full resolution never to be the better for it.

Secondly, Men are *covetous* in *keeping an estate*, when they do not use it charitably; when they cannot find in their hearts to spare any thing out of their abundance, to the relief of those who are in want. Tho' a man get an estate without *covetousness*, and have an heart to enjoy it, yet so far he is *covetous*, as he is *uncharitable*. He loves money more than he ought, who having enough to spare,

spare, chuseth rather to keep it, than to do good with it, and to use it to one of the principal ends for which God gives an estate.

Thirdly, They likewise are *covetous*, who place their chief trust and happiness in riches, who (as the expression is, *Job. 31. 24.*) *make gold their hope, and say to the fine gold, thou art my confidence.* And this is the reason why *covetousness* is so often in Scripture call'd *idolatry*; because the *covetous* man sets up his riches in the place of *God*, putting his trust and confidence in them, and setting his whole heart upon them, loving them as he should love *God only, with all his heart, and soul, and strength*: And therefore *Mammon*, which signifies *riches*, is in Scripture represented as a *Deity*, and the *covetous man*, as a servant, or worshipper of *Mammon*.

So that in Scripture he is a *covetous man* who placeth his chief felicity in a great fortune, and will venture to lose any thing, rather than to part with *that*; who will quit his religion, and violate his conscience, and run the hazard of his soul, rather than forfeit his estate, or the hopes of advancing it to his mind.

And this in times of tryal and difficulty, is the great temptation to which the *covetous man* is exposed. When a man may not only save himself, but get considerable advantage by departing from the truth; and in changing his religion, may have a good sum of money to boot, or which is equal to it, a good place; this to a *covetous mind* is a very strong temptation, and almost irresistible. When error and delusion can bid so high, and offer so good terms, no wonder if it gain some Profelytes among the *covetous* and *ambitious* part of mankind. This the Apostle gives warning of, as a great temptation to rich men in times of suffering, *1 Tim. 6. 9, 10.* *They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare: for the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some have lusted after, they have erred from the faith.* The young man in the gospel is a sad instance of this kind, who chose rather to leave Christ, than to part with his great possessions. And such a one was *Demas*, who *forsook the Apostles, and christianity it self, to cleave to this present world.*

Thus I have done with the *First* thing I proposed to speak to, the nature of this vice, which our Saviour in the *text* cautions men so earnestly against; *take heed, and beware of covetousness.* I should now proceed in the *Second* place to shew the evil and unreasonableness of this vice. But that shall be the subject of another discourse.

S E R M O N XXXVII.

The Evil and Unreasonableness of Covetousness.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.



Have made entrance into a discourse upon these words, in which I told you there are *three* things observable.

First, The manner of the caution which our Saviour here gives, *take heed and beware.*

Secondly, the matter of the caution, or the sin which our Saviour here warns his hearers against, *take heed, and beware of covetousness*: And

Thirdly, The reason of this caution, because *a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

In discoursing of the *Second* of these, *viz.* the *Matter* of the caution, I proposed,

1. To consider wherein the nature of this vice of *Covetousness* does consist.
2. To shew the evil and unreasonableness of it.

The *First* of these I have dispatched, and now go on to the *Second*, *viz.* To shew the great evil and unreasonableness of the vice of *Covetousness*.

Now *Covetousness* will appear to be very evil, and unreasonable, upon these following accounts.

- I. Because it takes men off from religion, and the care of their souls.
- II. Because it tempts men to do many things which are inconsistent with religion, and directly contrary to it.
- III. Because it is an endless and insatiable desire.
- IV. Because the happiness of humane life doth not consist in riches.
- V. Because riches do very often contribute very much to the misery and infelicity of men.

First, *Covetousness* takes men off from religion, and the care of their souls. The *covetous man* is wholly intent upon this world; and his inordinate desire after these things, makes him to neglect God, and the eternal concerns of his soul. He employs all his time, and care, and thoughts about these temporal things, and his vehement love and eager pursuit of these things steals away his heart from God, robs him of his time, and of all opportunities for his soul, and diverts him from all serious thoughts of another world, and the life to come. And the reason of this is that which our Saviour gives, *Matth. 6. 24.* *No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God, and Mammon.* No man can serve two masters so different as God and the world are; because they will give cross commands, and enjoin contrary things. God calls upon us to mind the duties of his worship and service, to have a serious regard to religion, and a diligent care of our souls: but the cares of the world, and the importunity of business, and an eager appetite of being rich, call us off from these divine and spiritual employments, or disturb us in them. God calls upon us to be charitable to those that are in want, to be willing to distribute, and ready to communicate to the necessities of our brethren: But our covetousness pulls us back, and hales us another way, and checks all merciful and charitable inclinations in us. God calls us to self-denial, and suffering for the sake of him, and his truth, and commands us to prefer the keeping of faith and a good conscience, to all worldly considerations whatsoever: but the world inspires us with other thoughts, and whispers to us *to save our selves, not to be righteous over much*, and rather to trust God with our souls, than men with our bodies and estates.

If we set our hearts and affections strongly upon any thing, they will partake of the object which they are conversant about; for *where our treasure is* (as our Lord hath told us) *there will our hearts be also*. If a great estate be our chief end and design, if riches be our treasure, and our happiness, our hearts will be found *among the stuff*. We cannot bestow our affections freely upon *two* objects. We cannot intensely love God, and the world; for no man can have *two* ultimate ends, *two* principal designs. Our *riches may encrease*; but if we *set our hearts upon them*, and give them the chief place in our affections, we make them our Lord and master. Whatever we make our ultimate end, we give it a sovereignty and empire over us; we put our selves under its dominion, and make our selves subject to all its commands. So that if *it bid us go, we must go; come, we must come; do this, we must do it; because we are under authority*: The world is our master, and we are its slaves. Now he that is under the rule and dominion of this master, must withdraw his obedience from God, and in many cases decline obedience to his laws.

This worldly covetous disposition was that which made those in the parable to make so many excuses, when they were invited to the supper, *Luke 14. 18.* *One had bought a farm, and he could not come: Another had bought so many yoke of Oxen, and therefore he desired to be excused.* Riches do so fill the covetous man's heart, and

and the cares of the world so possess his mind, that he hath no room left in his soul for any other guests: *Intus existens prohibet alienum, that which is full already can receive no more.* The covetous man's heart is taken up with such things as keep out God, and Christ, and better things. If any man love the world, and the things of it, to this degree, St. John tells us that *the love of the father is not in him.* In the parable of the sower, Matt. 13. 7. our Saviour represents to us *the cares of the world, which choak the word of God, by thorns which sprung up among the seed, and stifled the growth of it.* The cares of the world will not suffer the word of God to take deep root in our hearts, and to have any permanent effect upon them: And Ezek. 33. 31. God gives this as a reason why the people of Israel would not hearken to the words of his Prophet, because their hearts were upon the world. *They come unto thee, (says God there to the Prophet) as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.* A heart that is deeply engaged in the world, will stand out against all the invitations, and promises, and threatenings of God's word. When the word of God invites such persons, it is like making love to those who have already fix'd their hearts and affections elsewhere; the promises and threatenings of the Gospel signify but very little to such men, because their hearts are set upon worldly things, and all their affections are bent that way; all their hopes and desires are worldly; to be rich, and abound in wealth; and all their fears are of poverty and loss. Now such a man can only be moved with the promises and threatenings of temporal things; for no promises have any effect upon us, but such as are of some good, which we care for and value: nor are any threatenings apt to move us, but such as are of some evil which we dread, and are afraid of. And therefore when eternal life, and the happiness of another world, are offer'd to a worldly-minded man, he does not desire it, he is not at all sensible of the value of it; the man's heart is full already of other hopes and desires, and *the full soul loatheth the honey-comb.* Promise to such a man the kingdom of heaven, and the pleasures of God's presence, and the joys of eternity, this does not signify to such a man any good or happiness that he is sensible of, or knows how to relish. And on the other hand, threaten him with the loss of God, and eternal separation from the fountain of happiness, and with the unspeakable anguish and torments of a long eternity; these things, tho' they be terrible, yet they are at a distance, and the covetous man is inured to sense, and is only to be moved with things present and sensible; he cannot extend his fears so far as another world, so long as he finds himself well and at ease, as to the things of this present life.

If we would affect such a man, we must offer to his consideration something that is fit to work upon him; threaten him with breaking open his house, and rifling his coffers, and carrying away his full bags; with questioning his title to his estate, or starting a precedent mortgage, or something of the like nature: these things indeed are dreadful and terrible to him; now you speak intelligibly to him, and he understands what you mean: Tell him of a good bargain, or an advantageous purchase, offer him decently a good bribe, or give him notice of a young heir that may be circumvented, and drawn in, then you say something to him that is worthy of his regard and attention; the man may be tempted by such offers and promises as these: But discourse to him *with the tongue of men and Angels*, of the excellency of virtue and goodness, and of the necessity of it, to the obtaining of a glory and happiness that shall neither have bounds nor end; and lo! thou art unto him as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an instrument; for he hears thy words, but he will not do them; as the Prophet expresseth it, Ezek. 33. 32. Such discourses as these they look upon as fine talk, or a melodious sound, that vanisheth into air, but leaves no impression behind it. Perhaps even these

dull and stupid kind of men are affected a little for the present with the liveliness of the romance, and the poetical vein of the preacher; but these things *pass away like a tale that is told*, but have no lasting effect upon them. So effectually doth *covetousness* and *the love of this present world*, obstruct all those passages, through which the consideration of religion and heavenly things should enter into our minds.

Secondly, As covetousness hinders men from religion, and takes them off from a due care of their souls; so it many times tempts and engageth men to do many things contrary to religion, and inconsistent with it: It is the natural source and fountain of a great many evils, and the parent of most of the worst of vices. He that will engage deep in the world, must use much more guard and caution than most men do, to do it without sin. How many temptations is the covetous man exposed to in the *getting*, and in the *securing*, and in the *spending* and *enjoying* of a great estate? It is no easie task to reckon them up, and much more difficult to escape or resist them, and yet each of these temptations bring him into the danger of a great many sins. For,

I. In the getting of an estate, he is exposed to all those vices which may seem to be serviceable to this design. Nothing hath been the cause of more and greater sins in the world, than *covetousness*, and *making haste to be rich*. It is Solomon's observation, *Prov. 28. 20. He that maketh haste to be rich, shall not be innocent*. He does not say he *cannot* be innocent, but he speaks as if there were all the probability in the world that he will not prove to be so; but being in so much *haste*, will almost unavoidably fall into a great many oversights and faults. And the *heathen* Poet makes the same observation in more words:

*Inde ferè scelerum causæ, nec plura venena
Miscuit, aut ferro grassatur sapius ullum
Humane mentis vitium, quàm seva cupido
Immodici Censûs: nam dives qui fieri vult,
Et citò vult fieri; sed quæ reverentia legum,
Quis metus aut pudor est unquam properantis avari?*

“ This, says he, is the cause of most sins: nor is there any vice of which
“ the mind of man is capable, that hath been guilty of more murders and poi-
“ sonings, than a furious desire of immoderate wealth; for he that *will be*
“ *rich*, will *make haste* to be so: And what reverence of laws, what fear of
“ shame, was ever seen in any man that was in haste to be rich?” And this
is the sense of what the Apostle says concerning this vice of *covetousness*,
this peremptory resolution of being rich, *1 Tim. 6. 9, 10. They that will be*
rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts,
which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of
all evil. If this vice of *covetousness* once reign in us, if we have once fix'd
our end, and set up this resolution with our selves, that *we will be rich*, we
shall then make every thing stoop and submit to this design. A *covetous*
man will make his principles and his conscience to bend to his resolution of
being rich, and to bow to that interest. The eager desire of riches makes
men to pursue them in indirect and uncharitable ways, by falsehood and perjury,
by undermining and over-reaching, by dissembling and flattery, by corrupting
and imbasing of commodities, by false weights and measures, by taking fees
with both hands, and making use of their power and wit to oppress and defraud
their brother, by imposing upon his ignorance and simplicity, or by making a
prey of his poverty and necessity.

Covetousness many times makes men cruel and unjust; nay, it makes them
guilty of the worst sort of cruelty and oppression. For (as one says well) the
covetous man oppresseth his neighbour, not for any good to himself; for he
does

does not enjoy what he tears and rends from others; so that he is of that most hateful kind of beasts of prey, that kill other creatures, not to eat them, but that they may see them lie dead by them. Lions and wolves kill out of hunger; but the covetous man, like a serpent or scorpion, stings and bites others to death, not for his need, but for his pleasure and recreation. *Covetousness* is the parent of the most monstrous sins; because it fixeth a man in a resolution of getting an estate by any means. If falseness and deceit, violence and oppression will further this end; the earnest desire of the end tempts men to use any sort of means whereby the end may be compassed; and tho' a man may have some averfeness from them at first, yet that wears off by degrees, and the strong desire of the end, reconciles a man at last to the love and liking of the means, how wicked and unwarrantable soever. *Covetousness* tempted *Achan* to steal the accursed thing, and *Gebazi* to lye to the Prophet, and *Abab* to oppress and murder *Naboth*. Nay, a small sum tempted the covetous mind of *Judas* to betray his master, and his Saviour. And how do many men every day strain their consciences to get an estate, and hazard their souls for money; nay exchange their souls, which are of more value than the whole world, for a very small portion of it?

II. There are likewise many other temptations which a covetous man is exposed to in the *keeping* and *securing* of an estate, when he hath got it. A covetous and worldly-minded man, when it comes to the tryal, is in great danger of quitting his religion, and *making shipwreck of faith and a good conscience*. When his estate comes to be in hazard, he is very apt to fall off from the truth; 'tis an hundred to one but in these circumstances, he will chuse rather to violate his conscience, than to forfeit his estate. What the devil falsely said of *Job*, is true of the covetous man, *he does not serve God for nought*. Upon these terms it was that Christ and the young man parted; *he had great possessions*, and it troubled him to part with them. When *Demas* was brought to the tryal, and put to it, whether he would stick to the profession of the Gospel, or his worldly possessions, he quitted St. *Paul*, and declared for the world, the 2d of *Tim.* 4. 10. *Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world*. So far had his covetous humour befotted him, as to make him prefer his present interest in these temporal things, before those eternal rewards which the Gospel offered.

III. There are likewise many temptations which men are exposed to in the *enjoying* and *spending* of a great estate. It is hard to have a great estate, and not to be master'd by the love of it; nor to have our cares and thoughts, our hearts and affections swallowed up by it. 'Tis no easie thing for a man that hath riches, not to overvalue them, and love them more than he ought; not to be puff'd up by them, and so place his trust and confidence in them. *Prov.* 18. 11. *The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit*. The covetous man setteth up his riches in the place of God, and is apt to fall down before this golden calf, and worship it: To say to the Gold, thou art my hope, and to the fine Gold, thou art my confidence: To rejoice, because his wealth is great, and because his hand hath gotten much.

Riches are a great temptation to irreligion and atheism. Upon this account *Agur* wisely prays to God for a moderate estate, because of the danger of both the extreams of riches and poverty; because of the great and violent temptations which men are exposed to in both these conditions, *Prov.* 38. 9. *Give me neither poverty nor riches, but feed me with food convenient for me*. Why not riches? *Lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord?* And much more do riches tempt men to pride and insolence towards others, *Prov.* 18. 23. *The poor useth entreaties, but the rich answereth roughly*. Mens spirits are commonly blown up and bloated with their fortunes, and their pride, and stomach, and passion, do usually increase in proportion to their wealth.

And many times riches tempt men to luxury and intemperance, and all manner of excess. Rich men have a mighty temptation to allow themselves all manner of unlawful pleasures; because he who hath a great estate, is furnished with that to which hardly any thing can be denied. And this is not inconsistent with a covetous humour; for there are, many times, men who are covetous in getting, for no other end and reason, but that they may *spend it upon their lusts*. As covetousness sometimes starves other vices, so sometimes it serves them, and is made subordinate to a man's ambition, or lust, or some other reigning vice. There is no such absolute inconsistency between riches and virtue, but that it is possible that a man that is very rich may be very good. But yet if we consult experience, I doubt it will be found a true observation, that there are but very few rich men, who are not insupportable, either for their *vanity*, or their *vices*; so that our Saviour had reason for that severe question, *How hard is it for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God?* And well might he upon this account pronounce the *poor* (*the poor in estate, as well as the poor in spirit*) *blessed*, as we find he does, *Luke 6. 20. Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.* They oftner enter there than the rich.

Thirdly, Covetousness is likewise evil and unreasonable, because it is an endless and insatiable desire. A covetous mind may propose to it self some certain bounds and limits, and a man may think that when he is arrived to such an estate, and hath raised his fortune to such a pitch, that he will then sit down contented and satisfied, and will seek after no more. But he deceives himself in this matter; for when he hath attained to that which he proposed to himself, he will be never the nearer being satisfied. So *Solomon* tells us, *Eccles. 5. 10. He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase*; for no degree of wealth can satisfy a covetous mind. He may think so before-hand, that if he had so much it would be enough; but when he hath attained it, he will be still reaching after more; for *covetousness* is a disease of the mind, and an unnatural thirst, which is inflamed by that which should quench it. Every desire that is natural, is satisfied and at rest, when it hath once obtained the thing it desired. If a man be hungry, he is satisfied when he hath eaten; or if he be thirsty, the thirst is allay'd and quench'd when he hath drank to such a proportion as nature doth require; and if he eat and drink beyond this measure, nature is oppress'd, and it is a burthen to him. But *covetousness* is not the thirst of nature, but of a diseased mind. It is the thirst of a fever, or of a dropsie; the more a man drinks, the more he desires, and the more he is inflamed. In like manner, the more the covetous man encreaseth his estate, the more his desires are enlarged and extended, and he finds continually new occasions and new necessities; and every day as he grows richer, he discovers new wants; and a new poverty to be provided against, which he did not think of before, comes into his mind: *Et minus hæc optat, qui non habet; and he that is without these things, covets them less than he that hath them.* So far is a covetous man's attaining to riches from giving him satisfaction, that he who hath scarce any thing at all, is many times much nearer to contentment, than he that hath got so much; nay, so unreasonable is this appetite, as to desire more, even when the man knows not how to bestow what he hath already. This *Solomon* observed long since, (for the vices and humours of men are much the same in all ages) *Eccles. 4. 8. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother; yet there is no end of all his labour, neither is his eye satisfied with riches, neither saith he, for whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity, yea it is a sore travel.* And indeed what can be greater vanity and folly, than to be at certain pains and labour all the days of a man's life, and yet to be uncertain all the while, for whom it is that he drudgeth, and taketh all these pains.

And if this be the nature of this vice, the more it gets, still to covet the more; then nothing can be more unreasonable, than to think to gratify this appetite,

appetite, because at this rate, the man can never be contented, because he can never have enough ; nay so far is it from that, that every new accession to his fortune, sets his desires one degree farther from rest and satisfaction: For a covetous mind having no bounds, it is very probable that the man's desire will increase much faster than his estate ; and then the richer he is, he is still the poorer, because he is still the less contented with his condition. However, it is impossible that the man's desire should ever be satisfied ; for desire being always first, if the man's desire of riches advanceth and goes forward as fast as riches follow, then it is not possible for riches ever to overtake the desire of them, no more than the hinder wheels of a Coach can overtake those which are before : because as they were at a distance at first setting out, so let them go never so far, or so fast, they keep the same distance still.

So that it is the vainest thing in the world, for a man to design his own satisfaction by the perpetual increase of his fortune, because contentment doth not arise from *the abundance of what a man hath*, but it must spring from the inward frame and temper of our minds ; and the true way to it, is not to enlarge our estate, but to contract our desires ; and then it is possible that a man's money and his mind may meet ; otherwise the pursuit is endless, and the farther a man follows contentment, it will but flee so much the farther from him ; and when he hath attained the estate of a prince, and a revenue as great as that of *France*, or the *Turkish* Empire, he shall be farther from being satisfied, than when he began the world, and had no more before-hand than would just pay for his next meal.

I should now have proceeded to the *fourth* thing, whereby the unreasonableness of *covetousness* doth appear ; because the happiness of humane life doth not consist in riches. And this is the argument which I shall more especially insist upon, because it is that which our Saviour useth here in the *text*, to take men off from this vice. *The life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* And this certainly is one of the best and most reasonable considerations in the world, to moderate mens affections towards these things. Every reasonable desire propounds some end to it self. Now to what purpose should any man desire to increase his wealth so vastly beyond the proportion of his necessities, and real occasions ? What benefit and advantage would it be to any man, to have a hundred times more than he knows what to do withal ? But I shall not enlarge upon this argument at present, but refer it to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XXXVIII.

The Evil and Unreasonableness of Covetousness.

*The Third
Sermon on
this Text.*

LUKE xii. 15.

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of Covetousness ; for a Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.



AFTER I had, in my first discourse upon this subject, given you an account of the *nature* of the vice of *covetousness*, I proceeded in the next place to represent the great evil and unreasonableness of it.

First, Because it takes men off from religion, and the care of their Souls.

Secondly,

Secondly, Because it tempts men to many things which are inconsistent with religion, and directly contrary to it.

Thirdly, Because it is an endless and insatiable desire. Thus far I have gone; I proceed to the

Fourth thing, whereby the unreasonableness of *covetousness* will yet farther appear: Namely, because the happiness of humane life doth not consist in riches, and abundance. And this I shall insist upon somewhat the more largely, because it is the argument which our Saviour makes use of here in the *text*, to take men off from this sin. *The life of man consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Therefore take heed and beware of covetousness.* And this certainly is one of the best and most reasonable considerations in the world, to moderate our affections towards these things. For every reasonable desire propounds some end to it self. Now to what purpose should any man desire to increase his wealth so vastly, and beyond the proportion of his necessities and real occasions? What benefit and advantage can it be to any man, to have an hundred, or perhaps a thousand times more than he knows what to do withal?

And as for the other world, no man ever pretended that the heaping up riches here, would be useful to him there; *riches will not deliver him in the day of wrath.* No man was ever so senseless, as to imagine that he could take his estate along with him into the other world; or if he could, that heaven was to be bought with money; or that a great estate, or a great many Lordships would recommend him to the favour of God. 'Tis true indeed, a man may so use riches in this world, as thereby to promote and further his happiness in the next. But then it is likewise as true, that a man may so demean himself in a poor and low condition, as thereby to render himself as acceptable to God, and capable of as great a reward, as the richest man can do. The poor woman's *two mites*, cheerfully given to pious and charitable uses, will go as far in the other world, and find as great a reward there, as the rich man's *thousands of gold and silver.* And a man may be as truly generous and charitable out of a little, as out of the greatest fortune. Besides that the poor man's contentedness in a mean condition, is more admirable in it self, and more valuable with God, than for a rich man to be so.

So that the great use of riches respects this world, and the best use of them is in ways of charity; and the poor man's charity, tho' it cannot be of so great an extent in the effects of it, yet in the degree of its virtue and merit it may be equal to it.

Now the *two* great designs of men, in regard to this world, are these.

1. To maintain and support our lives as long as we can.
2. To make our lives as truly happy and comfortable as we can.

To the *first* of these ends, namely, the support of our lives, a very little will suffice; and 'tis not much that is necessary to the *other*, to render our lives as truly comfortable as this world can make them; so that a vast estate is not necessary to either of these ends; for a man may *live* by having what is necessary, and may *live comfortably* by having that which is convenient.

No man lives the longer by having abundance; it is many times an occasion of shortening a man's life, by ministering to excess and intemperance; but seldom of prolonging it. And setting aside the vain fancy and conceit of men, no man lives the more happily, for having more than he hath real use and occasion for.

These *two* heads, I shall at present speak to, to make out the full force of this reason, which our Saviour here useth; namely, *that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

I. That riches do not contribute to the support of our lives; nor

II. To the happiness and comfort of them. That is, they are not necessary to either of these ends. For by *riches* I mean, *whatever is beyond a sufficient compe-*

competency of those things, which are requisite to the real uses and occasions of humane life.

First, Riches and abundance do not contribute to the support of our lives. And this our Saviour very well represents to us in the parable immediately after the text, of *the rich man*, who was continually encreasing his estate, so that *he had goods laid up for many years*; but he lived not one jot the longer for being provided of the conveniencies of life for so long a time beforehand; for whilst he was blessing himself, as if he had secured his happiness sufficiently for this world; he was uncertain of his continuance in it; God having decreed to take him out of this world, at that very time when he had determined to enter upon the enjoyment of those things, which he had been so long laying up. God says to him, *thou fool, this night shall thy Soul be required of thee; and then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?* that is, what good then will all these things do thee, when thou hast no further use of, and occasion for them? So that if he had been the poorest man in the world, and had not been provided for the next meal, he might have lived as long as he did with all his stores. You see then that in this sense, *a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*. For notwithstanding all his great barns, and the abundance of fruits he had stowed in them, he did not live one jot the longer, than the poorest man might have done.

Secondly, Nor do riches contribute to the happiness and comfort of our lives. Happiness is not to be bought and purchased together with great Lordships; it depends upon a great many causes, among which a competency of the things of this world is one; but the riches and abundance is none of them. The happiness of this world consists in these *two* things.

1. In the enjoyment of good. And,
2. In a state of freedom from evil.

Now riches do not necessarily make a man happy in either of these respects.

First, For the enjoyment of good, a competent estate suitable to the condition and station in which God hath set us in this world, will give a man whatever nature and reason can desire; and abundance cannot make a man happier. If a man had an hundred times more than he needed, he could but enjoy it according to the capacity of a man; for if he consulted his own happiness, and would truly enjoy what he hath, he must eat and drink within the bounds of temperance and health, and must wear no more cloaths than are for his convenience. 'Tis true, he hath wherewithal to put on a new suit every day; which is to be uneasy all the days of his life: and may drink, if he please, every time out of a new cup; which would be a vain expence, and a great trouble to his servants, without any manner of convenience to himself.

But then if riches fall into the *covetous* man's hands, they can be no happiness to him, because he hath no heart to enjoy them. He hath indeed the estate of a rich man, but he wants the comfort of it, because he hath the mind of a poor man; and enjoyment is all the felicity that is in a great fortune; what we enjoy is ours, but what we lay up, is from that time not ours, but some body's else. He that heaps up riches, and enjoys them not, is rich only for his heir, but a beggar for himself.

We are apt to pity poor men, and too apt to despise them; but surely no man's condition is more to be deplored than his, who starves himself in the midst of plenty, and being surrounded with the blessings of God, turns them into the greatest curse; for it is a much greater curse, not to use an estate when one has it, than not to have it. It is like a plentiful table without an appetite.

But it may be it is a great happiness to have a great estate, tho' a man never use it; the pleasure of seeing it, and telling it over, may be like the removing of billets; which may warm a man as much as if he had spent and consumed them. But *this is real*, and the other only *imaginary*. I doubt not, many covetous men take a great deal of pleasure in ruminating upon their wealth,

and

and in re-counting what they have ; but they have a great deal of tormenting care and fear about it, and if they had not, it is very hard to understand where the reasonable pleasure and happiness lies of having things to no end. It is at the best, like that of some foolish birds, which, they say, take pleasure in stealing money, that they may hide it ; as if it were worth the while for men to take pains to dig silver out of the earth, for no other purpose, but to melt it down and stamp it, and bury it there again.

But many necessities may happen, which we cannot foresee, and it is good to provide against them. There is nothing so bad, but something may be said in excuse of it ; and I do not deny, but that a provident care against the common accidents of humane life is very commendable ; but it is unreasonable to think of providing against all possibilities, which it is impossible either to foresee or prevent. 'Tis very possible, that after a man hath gotten the greatest estate imaginable, he may lose it all by some fatal accident ; and then to what purpose was all this provision made, when that which was so long a time a getting and laying up, is lost at once ?

Besides, that it is not easie to conceive what necessity can happen to a *covetous* man, to give him an occasion of using his estate ; he cannot find in his heart to bestow it upon himself in such things as are convenient, nay, almost necessary for the support of his life ; for no man can feed his servants more penuriously than he does himself ; all the religion he values himself upon, is a strict observance of the *Lessian* diet, which he recommends to those few that can deny themselves to dine with him, in hopes to make better meals upon his estate when he is gone. And if he be so penurious to himself, the necessities of others are not like to move him to be liberal. I can but imagine one occasion that could tempt such a man to lay out what he hath ; namely, when one part of his estate is in danger, to spend the other to secure it. And yet even in that case, if his cause were not very clear and good, he would go nigh to lose it, using it as he does himself ; that is, by starving it. And if this be all, then a man had as good be without an estate, and save himself the trouble either of getting it, or securing it ; for if it were all gone, he might live as well as he does, and that with half the care and pains.

Secondly, The happiness of this world consists in a state of freedom from evil. Now the great evils that men are liable to in this world, are such as are incident to them, either in the course of their lives, or at the time of their death ; and riches do not contribute to mens happiness, by freeing them from either of these. I shall speak to these severally.

I. Not from the evils which are incident to men in the course of their lives. These are of *two* kinds, *inward*, or *outward*.

1. *Inward* evils, by which I mean those of the mind ; and our greatest troubles are from within, from the anxiety of our minds, and the guilt of our consciences, from the vicious inclinations of our wills, and the irregularity and disorders of our passions. Now riches were an admirable thing indeed, and worth our coveting, if they would help to cure these distempers of our minds ; but they are the least fitted for such a purpose of any thing in the world : for not he that hath the greatest estate, but he that hath the fewest and most reasonable desires, and the best govern'd passions, and the most virtuous inclinations, is the happiest man, and dwells nearest to satisfaction. *Nemo malus felix, no bad man can be happy*, tho' he were possess'd of the whole world ; because he hath that within him, which frets and discontents him, which galls his spirit, and keeps his mind restless and uneasy ; and he that does not enjoy *himself*, can enjoy nothing else.

Did but men know how much happiness hath been enjoyed by many a pious and virtuous man in a mean fortune, how quiet and easy their minds have been, how much fuller of joy and pleasure, than the heart of any *covetous* worldling ever was in his most prosperous estate, and when *his corn, and*
wine

wine, and oyl abounded; did we (I say) but know this, we should not envy the men of mighty fortunes. *Nam neque divitibus contingunt gaudia solis. Rich men are not the only happy people in the world.* If they be not good as well as rich, happiness is a greater stranger to their dwellings, than to the cottages of poorer men.

Now riches are so far from helping to make men good, that they are one of the greatest temptations to them in the world to be otherwise; which is the reason why our Saviour says, *it is so very hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*; because considering the powerful, and almost irresistible temptations of a great estate, and the impotency and weakness of humane nature to govern it self in a plentiful fortune, it is very hard for a rich man, to be so good as he ought, it requires a great force and firmness of resolution, a very solid and vigorous constitution of mind, to bear a great fortune, and not to be corrupted by it; and a man hath never more reason to implore God's gracious help and assistance, and to consult his own best and coolest thoughts, to know what he ought to do, and how he ought to demean himself, than when the outward blessings of this life flow in amain upon him; *felicitate corrumpimur, nothing sooner debaucheth men than prosperity*; and he is a very happy man, whom wealth and a good fortune do not make licentious and dissolute; because these tempt men with the power and opportunity to do all the ill that their wicked hearts can design, or desire.

The temptation of riches, and the power that goes along with them, is so forcible and prevalent, that the Devil, who is a sagacious Spirit, and hath great and long experience in this kind, when he was making the experiment, whether Christ was a meer man, or the Son of God, reserved this for his last temptation, resolving, if that would not do, to try him no farther. After he had assaulted him in several kinds, he represents to him at last that which was sufficient to have surfeited two of the most insatiable desires of humane nature, *ambition and covetousness, even all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them in a moment, or point of time*; he brings all the rays of this glory to one point, that the temptation might kindle and take hold the sooner; and says to him, *all this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* He supposed with great probability, that if he were but a meer man, the strongest and most resolved mind would bend and yield to so dazzling a temptation as this; but when he saw that this temptation was rejected, he found himself baffled, and gave him over; since this did not move him, he concluded now, that he was *the Son of God indeed*, and that it was in vain to tempt him any farther.

From all this it appears, that riches are so far from making men virtuous, that nothing is more dangerous to virtue, than a full condition; if men have not a great degree of grace, as well as discretion, to manage it. *Solomon tells us, that the prosperity of fools destroyeth them.*

And yet how do most of us court this temptation, and are forward to thrust and venture our selves upon it? there are a great many other things, in which most men make a right judgment of themselves, and will readily acknowledge that they are altogether unfit for them. Every man will not take upon him to be a physician, or a lawyer, to prescribe medicines in dangerous cases, and to give counsel to men in knotty and difficult points about their estates; but every man thinks himself fit enough to be rich, and sufficiently qualified to manage a great estate, if he can but get it; when perhaps there are few things in the world, which men are more insufficient for, than to wield and govern a great fortune, nor wherein there is greater danger of miscarriage. It is not every body's talent to be wealthy and wise, rich and innocent.

2. As for the *outward* evils of this life, such as want and contempt, bodily pains and diseases, unhappiness in friends and relations, a great estate is by no means a sufficient security or remedy to a *covetous* man against these.

(1.) As for want. And surely one would think, that if riches were good for any thing, they are a very proper remedy against this evil, and a most certain and infallible cure of it; but experience tells us quite otherwise. *Socrates was*

wont to say, that, "To want nothing, is the privilege of the deity, and proper to God alone; but to stand in need of as few things as may be, is the privilege of a wise and good man, and a state of happiness, next to that of God himself; because he that hath the fewest wants is the most easily supplied, and is next to him that is self-sufficient." Now a man of moderate desires hath infinitely fewer wants than a *covetous* man; and because his desires are moderate, a moderate estate will satisfy them: But the wants of a *covetous* mind are never to be supply'd, because it hath order'd the matter so cunningly, as to want even that which it hath; such a man does not get riches to supply his wants, but is content to want that he may be rich; inasmuch that he hath not the heart to use his estate for the supply of his real necessities. How many do almost starve themselves in the midst of plenty and abundance? There is no greater sign of poverty, than to be deeply in debt; now the *covetous* man lives and dies in debt to himself. Some men have been so shamefully penurious and stingy to themselves, as even to die to save charges, which yet perhaps is the most generous thing they ever did in their whole lives, in respect to the world; because by this means some body may come to the enjoyment of their estates; and that great dunghil which they have been so long in raking together, may by this means come to be spread abroad for the publick benefit.

So that if a *covetous* man were possess'd of the wealth of both the *Indies*, all this would not free him from want. A poor man's wants may be satisfied, when he hath obtained what he wants: But the *covetous* man labours of an incurable want; because he wants that which he hath, as well as that which he hath not.

(2.) As for contempt, riches will not secure a *covetous* man against this neither; nay so far is it from that, that he is commonly more ridiculous and despised for living poor in the midst of abundance, than if he were really so. Did I say really so? He is the most really poor of all other men. For as one says well, *The rich poor man is emphatically poor.*

(3.) Neither will riches free men from bodily illness and pain. The rich are liable to as many diseases, and as sharp pains, as the poor, and they have commonly less patience to bear them than the poor; because they have not been inured to other sorts of evils. They that have been accustomed to labour, are generally best fitted to bear pain; the rich are commonly more tender and delicate, and have a quicker sense of pain, more matter, and greater quantity of humours to feed a disease, and to enflame it to a greater height.

I must not here forget that there is a sort of rich men, I mean the penurious misers, who starve themselves more than the poor, and fare many times more hardly; and for this reason, tho' they be not in danger of the diseases that come from intemperance, and a plentiful table; yet they are liable to the diseases which proceed from starving and emptiness; which the physicians say are more dangerous than the other: So that neither the prodigal nor the niggardly rich man is secured from bodily pains and diseases, by a great estate.

(4.) Neither will riches secure a man from being unhappy in his friends and relations. A great estate will not make a man's children either more dutiful or wise, than the children of meaner persons; and if they be not so, his estate cannot be so great an happiness to him, as they may prove an affliction. *Solomon* tells us that the very fear and apprehension of this did very much embitter the fruit of all his labour; and he seems to speak it sensibly, and very probably with a melancholy reflection upon his son *Rehoboam*, *Eccles.* 2. 18, 19. *Yea I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun, because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me; and who knows whether he shall be a wise man, or a fool? Yet shall he have rule over all my labour, wherein I have labour'd, and wherein I have shew'd my self wise under the sun.* Who knows whether he shall be a wise man, or a fool? he seems to speak doubtfully: but he had a very shrewd guess what kind of man his son would make; for he speaks more despondingly in the next words, (*ver.* 20, 21.) *therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun*; that is, when I thought seriously of it, I began to think that all the pains I had taken to get an estate, would be but to little purpose;

purpose; *for there is a man* (saith he) *whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity,* (that is, who by wise and honest means hath rais'd a great estate) *yet to a man that hath not labour'd therein* (that is, to a man who is endowed with none of these qualities) *shall he leave it for his portion; this also is vanity, and a great evil.*

And as for friends, tho' the rich man have many that will call themselves so, yet he had almost as good have none; for he can hardly ever know whether they be so or not, unless he chance to fall into poverty, and then indeed the change of his condition may give him that advantage and opportunity, which otherwise he is never like to have, of discerning between his friends and his flatterers. Thus you see that riches are no security against the most considerable evils which attend us in the course of our lives.

II. When we come to die, nothing will minister less comfort to us, at that time, than a great estate. It is then a very small pleasure to a man, to reflect how much he hath gotten in the world, when he sees that he must leave it; nay, like the young man in the gospel, *he goes away* so much the more *sorrowful, because he hath great possessions.* All the things of this world seem very inconsiderable to a man, when he approaches to the confines of the other: for when he sees that he must leave this world, then he would fain make a virtue of necessity, and begins to change his apprehensions of these things, and to have very slight and mean thoughts of them, when he is convinc'd he can enjoy them no longer. What the Philosopher was wont to say of the pleasures of this world, is as true of riches, and all the other enjoyments of it; That, "if they did but put on the same countenance, and look with the same face, when they come to us, that they will do, when they turn from us, and take their leave of us, we should hardly entertain them."

Now if a man have placed his chief happiness in this world, as the *covetous* man does in his riches, his great trouble when he comes to die, will be, that he must leave them. Nothing could be more severely said to the *covetous* man, than that which God says to the *rich man* in the parable; *thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, and then whose shall these things be?* For of all things in the world, such men cannot endure to think of parting with these things, or that what they have got with such great care and labour, should come to the possession of another.

And therefore when we are so hot and eager in the pursuit of these things, we should do well to consider, *how they will appear to us in a dying hour.* And this consideration well imprinted upon our minds, will make us very careful, to treasure up other kind of comforts to our selves against such a time, and to labour after those things which we shall never grow out of conceit withal, but shall value them to the last, and then most of all when we come to die, and leave this world. For as a Poet of our own says excellently,

'Tis not that which first we love:

But what dying we approve.

Thus I have done with the *fourth* thing, whereby the evil and unreasonableness of *covetousness* doth appear; namely, that the happiness of human life doth not consist in a great estate; *the life of man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* The great ends of *religion*, and *covetousness*, are very different. The great end which *religion* proposeth to it self, is *happiness*: but the great end which *covetousness* proposeth is *riches*; which are neither a necessary nor a probable means of *happiness*. I should now have proceeded to the *fifth* and *last* particular; namely, that riches are so far from being the happiness of human life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow; as will appear, if we consider these *four* things.

First, The labour and care which *covetous* men are at in the getting of a great estate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of losing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of having lost it; and,

Fourthly, The dreadful and heavy account which every man must give of a great estate. But these particulars, together with the *application* of this whole discourse, I shall refer to another opportunity.

SERMON XXXIX.

The Fourth
Sermon on
this Text.

The Evil and Unreasonableness of Covetousness.

LUKE xii. 15.

And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.



IN my two last discourses on this subject, I have represented the evil and unreasonableness of the vice of *covetousness* in *four* particulars. I proceed now to the *fifth* and last particular, whereby I told you the evil and unreasonableness of it would appear; *viz.*

That riches are so far from being the happiness of humane life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow; as will evidently appear, if we consider these *four* things.

First, The labour and care which the *covetous* man is at in the getting of a great estate.

Secondly, The anxiety of keeping it, together with the fears of losing it.

Thirdly, The trouble and vexation of having lost it.

Fourthly, The heavy and dreadful account which every man must give of a great estate.

First, The labour and care which the *covetous* man hath in getting a great estate. He, that will be rich, must sweat for it, and refuse no pains and trouble; he must *rise up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread of carefulness*. A Slave that digs in the mines, or rows in the galleys, is not a greater drudge, than some *covetous* worldlings are; only with this difference, that the *covetous* man thinks that he labours and takes all these pains for himself; whereas the slave understands the matter more truly, and thinks that he does it for another.

But besides the pains he takes, he is full of care and anxiety. How is he, through the greedy desire of *having*, rack'd between the hopes of getting, and the fear of missing what he seeks? The Apostle observes what tormenting cares accompany this vice: 1 Tim. 6. 10. *The love of money (saith he) is the root of all evil*; not only of the evil of sin, but of the evil likewise of trouble and disquiet. For it follows, *which while some coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows*: variety of troubles attend them that *will be rich*.

Secondly, If we consider the anxiety of keeping what they have got, together with the fear of losing it again, this is another great part of a *covetous* man's infelicity. The rich man here in the parable after the *text*, when he saw his estate coming upon him so fast, cries out, *what shall I do?* poor man! who would not pity his condition, to see him put to this difficulty and distress, and to hear him make as heavy a moan as the poorest man could do! now that he hath a plentiful harvest, and his crop hath answered, if it were possible, his *covetous* desire, he is in a great deal of perplexity, and almost at his wits end how to dispose of it; he was horribly afraid lest any of it should be lost for want of a secure place to store it up in. *What shall I do, because I have no room, where to bestow my fruits?* where was the difficulty of this? why, he was loath to lose his fruits, and he was loath to lay out money to secure them. But upon farther consideration, he resolves of the two evils to choose the least; and he said, *this will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits, and my goods*. But why could he not let the barns he had stand, and build more? No that

that he did not think so well, he loved to see all his good things at one view, and what a goodly show they would make together. Besides that, it is the humour of *covetousness*, when it breaks out into expence, to over-do; the *miser's buildings* are like his *feasts*, always extravagant. The *covetous* man (as to the business of expence) is like a coward as to fighting, he declines it as long as he can; but when he is push'd to the last necessity, he grows desperate and lays about him.

*Tantis parta malis, curâ majore metuque
Servantur, misera est magni custodia census.*

Riches which are got with so much trouble, are not kept without greater fear and care. A covetous man is in nothing more miserable, than in the anxiety and care of disposing and securing what he hath got. When a man's desires are endless, his cares and fears will be so too.

Thirdly, As great an evil as any of the former, is the vexation of having lost these things. If by any accident the man happens to be deprived of them, then he takes on heavily, hangs down his head and mourns, *as a man would do for his first-born*; and is ready to cry out with *Micah*, *they have taken away my Gods, and what have I more?* Upon every little loss the *covetous* man is undone, tho' he have a hundred times more left than he knows what to do withal. So deeply are the hearts of earthly-minded men many times pierced with earthly losses, as with *Rachel* to refuse to be comforted. Nay *St. Paul* observes, that *the sorrow of the world sometimes worketh death*, 1 Cor. 7. 10.

Fourthly, But the saddest consideration of all is, that heavy and dreadful account that must one day be given, both of the getting and using of a great estate. They that have got an estate by fraud and falsehood, or by oppression and grinding the face of the poor, may read their doom at large, *James* 5. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. *Go to now ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you; your riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten; your gold and silver is canker'd, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire: ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cryeth, and the cries of them which have reaped, are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth; ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton, ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter.*

And we must be accountable likewise for the using of our estates. God gives them to us in trust, and the greater they are, the more we are to account for; so much as we need is *ours*, but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our families, in the rank God hath placed them; all that is given to us, that we may give it to *others*; and indeed it is not *ours*; we are the *Proprietors* of it in respect of men, but in respect of God we are but *Trustees*, and *Stewards*, and God will require an account of us how we have disposed of it.

And can there be a more reigning madness among men, than to take care only to increase their account more and more, by receiving much; whereas our great care and concernment should be to clear our account, by laying out what we receive, according to the trust reposed in us. How much we shall receive of the things of this world, is in the care and will of our master; but our care and fidelity is seen in laying it out as we ought. Among *men* (says one) it is well enough if a steward can give an account of so much laid out, and so much in cash, and upon this he shall have his discharge: But we cannot this way clear our account with *God*; for it is not offering him *his own again* that will satisfy him, as we may learn from the parable of the *talents*. So that upon the whole matter, we should be so far from envying the rich, that we should rather envy the safety and happiness of those who are not intrusted with such dangerous blessings, and who are free from the temptations of a plentiful fortune, and the curse of a *covetous* mind, and from the heavy account of a great estate.

I come now, in the last place, to make some *application* of this discourse to our selves.

1. Let our Saviour's *caution* take place with us, let these words of his sink into our minds, *take heed and beware of covetousness*. Our Saviour, I told you, doubles the *caution*, that we may double our *care*. It is a sin very apt to steal upon us, and slyly to insinuate it self into us under the specious pretense of industry in our callings, and a provident care of our families: But however it may be coloured over, it is a great evil, dangerous to our selves, and mischievous to the world. Now to kill this vice in us, besides the considerations before-mentioned taken from the *evil* and *unreasonableness* of it, I will urge these *three* more.

1. That the things of this world are uncertain.
2. That our lives are as uncertain as these things: And,
3. That there is another life after this.

1. The uncertainty of the things of this world. This should very much cool our affections toward them, that after all our care and diligence for the obtaining of them, we are not sure to enjoy them; we may be deprived of them by a thousand accidents. This consideration *Solomon* urgeth, to take men off from an over-eager pursuit of these things, *Prov. 23. 5. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? riches certainly make to themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle towards heaven*. After we have sat brooding over an estate many years, it may all on a sudden, before we are aware, take wing, and *fly away, like an eagle towards heaven*, soaring suddenly out of our sight, and never to return again.

And the same argument *St. Paul* useth, to take off mens affections from the world, *1 Cor. 7. 31. because the fashion of this world passeth away*; Παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τῆ κόσμος τούτου. He compares the things of this world to a *Scene*, which is presently changed, and vanisheth almost as soon as it appears. Now seeing these things are so uncertain, we should take heed how we fix our hearts too much upon them; we should not make love to any thing that is so fickle and inconstant as this world is. We should be afraid to contract too near and intimate a friendship with any thing which will forsake us, after we have courted it with so much importunity, and purchas'd it with so much pains, and endeavour'd to secure it with so much caution and tendernefs.

2. Our lives are as uncertain as these things. If our estates remain with us, we are continually in danger of being removed from them. And (as one says) it is folly to build our hopes upon a match, where both parties are so uncertain and inconstant. Why should we place our dearest affections upon things which we are not sure to enjoy one moment? *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, and then whose shall those things be?* I remember *Seneca* tells us a real story, just answerable to the *rich man* in the parable, of an acquaintance of his, who by long and great industry had arrived to a vast estate; and just when he began to enjoy it, after one of the first good meals which perhaps he ever made in his life, that very night *his Soul was taken from him*, for presently after supper he died. *In ipso actu bene sedentium rerum, in ipso procurrentis fortune impetu. In the height of his prosperity, and in the full career of his good fortune.*

But if we live to enjoy for any time what we have got, we should remember that our life is but a passage through the world, that we are but *Pilgrims and strangers in the world, as all our fathers were, that we have here no abiding place, no continuing city*, but are travelling towards our own country. And why should we load our selves whilst we are upon our journey, and cumber our selves with those things which will be of no use to us there, where we are going.

But the great wonder of all is, that this vice should so strongly reign, and even grow upon men in old age, and get strength, as weakness creeps upon us. This very thought, *that we are to die*, should work in us a great indifferency towards the things of this world. But when men are convinc'd they cannot live long, and that every step they take, they are in danger of stumbling into the grave, this one would think should wean our affections from this world; and yet usually none take so fast hold of it, and embrace it so kindly, as old men; like friends, who tho' they know they must leave one another, yet are loath to part. Do we not see many pursue these things with as much eagerness and appetite,

petite, when they are leaving the world, as if they were to stay in it a hundred years longer? so that in this sense also, they are *children again*, and are as fond of these toys, as if they were just beginning the world, and setting out for their whole life.

3. There is another life after this, to be seriously thought on, and provided for with great care: and did men firmly believe this, they would not with *Martha, busie themselves about many things, but would mind the one thing necessary*, and with *Mary chuse that better part, which could not be taken from them*. They would overlook the trifles of this world, and scarce take notice of *the things which are seen*, but be only intent upon *the things which are not seen*; because *the things which are seen are but temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal*. The great concernments of another world would employ their utmost care and their best thoughts.

Whilst we are in this world, we should remember that *this is not our home, nor the place of our rest*; and therefore as men do in an *Inn*, we should make a shift with those indifferent accommodations which the world will afford us, and which we can have upon easy terms, without too much trouble and stir, because we are not to continue long here; and in the mean time we should cheer up our selves with the thoughts of the pleasure and the plenty of *our father's house*, and of that full contentment and satisfaction which we shall meet withal, when we come to those *everlasting habitations*.

So that our great care should be to provide for eternity. If we have unbounded desires, let us place them upon such objects as are worthy of them. Let us *earnestly covet the best things*, and seek after *the true riches*. We should so mind the world, as to make heaven our great care; as to make sure to *provide our selves bags that wax not old; a treasure in the heavens, that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth*, as our Saviour adviseth, *Luke 12. 33*. To the same purpose is the counsel of *St. Paul*, *1 Tim. 6. 17, 18, 19*. *Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be rich in good works, willing to distribute, ready to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation*, (or, as the word *θεμελίον* may also be rendred, *a good treasure*) *against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life*.

I have told you that all these things will fail in a short space; we shall either be stripp'd of them, or separated from them when we come to die, and shall look over to that vast eternity which we must shortly enter upon; this world, and all the enjoyments of it, will then be as nothing to us, and we shall be wholly taken up with the thoughts of another world, and be heartily sorry that the things of this world have taken up so much of our time and care, and that the great and weighty concernments of all eternity have been so little minded and regarded by us. Now seeing all these things shall be, pardon me, if I earnestly beg of you in the midst of all your worldly cares, to have some consideration for your immortal souls, which are in no wise provided for by a great estate, but are design'd for nobler enjoyments than this world can afford. When you are taking care to feed and cloath these dying bodies, remember that better part of your selves which is to live for ever. Let not all your enquiry be, *what shall I eat? or what shall I drink? or wherewithal shall I be cloathed?* But sometimes ask your selves this question, *what shall I do to be saved?* I have an immortal spirit, it is but fit some care should be taken of that, to train it up to eternity, and to make it *fit to be made partaker of an inheritance among them that are sanctified*.

The firm belief and serious consideration of the great things of another world cannot surely but cool the heat of our affections towards these dying and perishing things, and make us resolved not to do any thing whereby we may violate the peace of our consciences, or forfeit our interest and happiness in another world.

II. By way of remedy against this vice of *covetousness*, it is good for men to be contented with their condition. This the Apostle prescribes as the best cure of this vice, *Heb. 13. 5*. *Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have*; ἀνεμείνητε τοῖς παρῶν, being contented with the present

present, and thinking that sufficient. A *covetous* man cannot enjoy the present, for fear of the future; either out of fear that he shall come to want, or out of a sickness and uneasiness of mind, which makes that nothing pleaseth him: but if we could bring our minds to our condition, and be contented with what we have, we should not be so eager and impatient after more.

This contentedness with our present condition doth not hinder, but that men by providence, and industry, and lawful endeavours, may lay the foundation of a more plentiful fortune than they have at present. For provided a man use no indirect and dishonest ways to increase his estate, and do not torment himself with anxious cares, do neither make himself guilty, nor miserable, that he may be rich; provided he do not neglect better things, to attain these; and have not an insatiable appetite towards them; provided he do not idolize his estate, and set his heart upon these things; and if he can find in his heart to enjoy them himself, and to be charitable to others; nothing hinders but that he may be contented with his present condition, and yet take all fair opportunities which the providence of God puts into his hands of enlarging his fortune. It is a good character which the Poet gives of *Aristippus*,

*Omnis Aristippum decuit color, & status, & res;
Tentantem majora, ferè præsens equum.*

“ Every state and condition became him; for tho’ he endeavoured after more, yet his mind was always in a manner equal to his present condition.

But if a man be discontented with the present, and restless because he hath no more, the whole world will not satisfy him; and if God should raise him from one step to another, he would never think his fortune high enough, and in every degree of it would be as little contented as he was at first. Our Saviour represents this sort of men by the *rich man* here in the parable, who when his barns were full, and ready to crack, his mind was not fill’d; therefore he pulls them down and builds greater; and if he had lived till these had been full, they must have gone down too, and he would still have built greater. So that tho’ he designed when he had raised his estate to such a pitch, to have sat down, and taken his ease, yet his *covetous* humour would have been stirring again, and still have slept in between him and contentment, and for ever have hindered him from arriving at it.

III. By way of direction, I would persuade those who are rich, to be charitable with what they have. If God hath blest us with abundance, and we would not be like this *rich man* here in the parable, we must lay out of our estates, in ways of piety and charity, for the publick good, and for the private relief of those who are in want; for that is the ἀποδοσις, or moral of the parable; *so is he that layeth up treasures for himself, and is not rich towards God*. So shall he be; such an issue of his folly may every one expect, (to be taken away from his estate before he comes to enjoy it) *who layeth up treasures for himself, but is not rich towards God*; but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? By works of mercy, and charity. This our Saviour calls *laying up for our selves treasure in heaven*; Matt. 16. 20. And at the 33d verse of this chapter, he calls giving of alms, *providing for our selves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which faileth not*: they who do thus, who are rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, are said to *lay up for themselves a good treasure against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life*, 1 Tim. 6. 18, 19. *Extra fortunam est quicquid donatur*; “whatsoever we give to the poor is safely disposed, and put out of the reach of fortune, because it is laid up in heaven, where we may expect the return and recompense of it.” Charity to our poor brethren is a certain way of transmitting our riches into the other world, to make way for our reception there. So our Lord tells us, Luke 16. 9. *I say unto you, make to your selves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail* (that is when ye shall leave this world, and the enjoyments of it) *they may receive you into everlasting habitations*.

At

At the great day of Judgment, when we shall appear before God, and, according to our Saviour's representation of the proceedings of that day, shall hear him thus expoſtulating with men, *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye cloathed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye viſited me not*; what would we then give, how much of our Eſtates, if we had them then at our command, would we not be willing to part withal, to have that comfortable ſentence paſt upon us; *Come ye bleſſed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world!* But if we be found among thoſe who would ſpare nothing out of their abundance to any charitable uſe and purpoſe, I have not the heart to tell you how miſerable the condition of ſuch perſons will be, and how dreadful a doom will be paſſed upon them.

It is a ſad conſideration, that there are ſome perſons in the world, who ſeem to be only defective in this duty; like the young man in the Goſpel, who lacked but *this one thing* to make him perfect; *he had kept the commandments from his youth*, and preſerved himſelf from thoſe groſs ſins which the law did plainly forbid; and yet for want of *this one thing* he parted from his Saviour, and, for any thing we know, fell ſhort of eternal life. There are many who are very devout and religious, much in prayer and faſting, and all the other frugal exerciſes of piety, which coſt them no money; but yet are very defective in alms and charity, which in Scripture are ſo frequently joyn'd with the faſtings and prayers of good men; and by this means, all their devotion and diligence in the other parts of religion is loſt, and will not bring them to heaven. And is it not great pity, that they who *are not far from the kingdom of God, ſhould fall ſhort of it*? that they, who in moſt other things bid ſo fair for heaven, ſhould break with God upon this ſingle point?

I know men have ſeveral ways to deceive their own hearts, and to defend themſelves againſt all theſe aſſaults.

Fiſt, They ſay, they are injurious to no man, in not being charitable. And 'tis true, that in human courts the poor can have no action againſt the rich for want of charity to them; but yet for all that, they do injuriouſly detain that which doth not of right belong to them. They are cruel and hard-hearted, and they are guilty of high breach of truſt, in reſpect of God, whoſe ſtewards they are, and who hath dealt ſo liberally with them in the things of this life, on purpoſe to oblige them to be ſo to others. That which thou ſtoreſt up, without regard to the neceſſities of others, is unlawfully detained by thee, ſince God intended it ſhould have been *for bread to the hungry, and cloaths to the naked*, and for help and relief of *thoſe who are ready to periſh*. For why art thou rich, and another poor; but that thou mighteſt exerciſe thy charity upon thoſe fitting objects which the providence of God preſents to thee? It had been eaſie for God (ſince *the earth is his, and the fulneſs thereof*) ſo to have contrived things, that every man ſhould have had a ſufficiency, and have been in a moderate condition; but then a great many virtues would have been ſhut out of the world, and loſt, for want of opportunity to exerciſe them. Where then had been the poor man's patience, and the rich man's pity? and the contentedneſs of men of moderate fortune?

Secondly, Men ſay that they have children to provide for. And do ſo in God's name, for he allows us to do it liberally; but unleſs their condition and wealth ſet them above an ordinary calling, do not chuſe ſo to provide for them, as to take them off from all employment, leſt you put them in the ready way to be undone; have a care of leaving them no other buſineſs, but to ſpend what you have left them; if you do ſo, they will in all probability do that work very effectually, and make as much haſte to be poor, as you did to make them rich. If men could be but contented to do that which is beſt for their children, they might do a great deal better for themſelves, by diſpoſing what they have to ſpare in charity.

Thirdly, Others would fain excuse themselves from this duty at present by telling what they intend to do when they come to die, that is, when they can keep what they have no longer. It seems then thou wilt leave it to thy executor to do good in thy stead. This shews thou hast no great heart to the business, when thou deferrest it as long as ever thou canst. But why wilt thou trust another with the disposal of thy charity, rather than thy self? This is hardly to offer either a *reasonable*, or a *living sacrifice to God*, to do good only when we are dead. It is well that God hath made all men mortal, and that *it is appointed for all men once to die*; otherwise some men would never do good at all.

Wherefore setting aside these, and all other excuses, which will not be admitted, nor will any of us have the face to plead them at the day of judgment; I say, setting aside all excuses whatsoever, let us resolve to do good with what we have whilst we can; and to that end let us lay aside some portion of what God has blest us withal, for the uses of piety, and charity, and let it bear some decent proportion to what God hath given us.

There is never want of proper objects for our largest charity, and now less than ever. Besides these at home, which present themselves to us in great numbers every day, God hath sent us many from abroad, who call loud upon us for our pity and help, both as they are reduced to the greatest extremity, and are sufferers in the best cause, that of our common religion, which ought now to be dearer to us than ever. Let us shew mercy now, as we expect mercy from others, in any day of our distress in this world, and as ever we hope, whenever we come to appear before the Judgment seat of Christ, *to find mercy with the Lord in that day*.

Consider what I have said upon this argument, and let this extraordinary kind of caution, which our Saviour here gives, make a deep impression upon your minds; *Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*.

S E R M O N XL.

Religion, our first and great Concernment.

MATT. VI. 33.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.



IN the latter part of this chapter, our Saviour doth in a long discourse caution his Disciples against an inordinate care about the things of this life, which he concludes with a strict charge to make religion their first and great concernment, and above all things to take care to secure to themselves the happiness of another life; *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, &c.* In the handling of which words, I shall do these four things.

First, I shall explain what is here meant by *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*.

Secondly, What by *seeking* of these.

Thirdly, I shall lay down some necessary and plain directions, which if we observe, we cannot miscarry in this matter.

Fourthly, I shall set before you some of the most proper and powerful motives and encouragements to the minding of this great interest and concernment; among which, I shall particularly consider the argument or encouragement here used in the text, *and all these things shall be added unto you.*

First, I shall explain to you what is here meant by *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*.

I. What is meant by *the kingdom of God*. And there are two famous acceptations of this phrase, and both of them very frequent in the new Testament. Sometimes it is used to signify the state of the Gospel, or the christian religion, which by the Jews was called *the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of the Messias*, Mark I. 15. *The kingdom of God is at hand*; that is, the state or dispensation of the Gospel is now approaching, and ready to take place. Luke 17. 20. the Pharisees demanding of our Saviour, *when the kingdom of God should come*, that is, when the reign of the Messias should commence; he answers them, *the kingdom of God cometh not with observation*; that is, not with any temporal pomp and splendor, so as to draw the eyes of people after it, as the Jews did vainly imagine; but *the kingdom of God, ἐν τῷ ὑμῶν ἐστίν, is among you*; not *with-in you*, as our translation hath improperly render'd it; *the kingdom of God* (he tells them) is already come unto you, the Messias is among you, and ye are not aware of him. In the like sense this phrase is used, Matt. 21. 43. *The kingdom of God* (that is, the Gospel) *shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof*. And so likewise the phrase of *the kingdom of heaven* is used, Matt. 11. 11. where speaking of John the Baptist, our Saviour saith, that *among them that were born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist*; that is, there was no greater person than he, under the Jewish dispensation, and yet he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, that is, under the dispensation of the Gospel, is greater than he.

Now tho' this sense of *the kingdom of God* be not wholly excluded in the text, yet there is another sense of this phrase very usual likewise in the Scripture, and which is more agreeable to the scope of our Saviour's argument and discourse, and so it signifies that future state of happiness and glory which good men shall be advanced to in another world, in opposition to this life, and the enjoyments of it, which our Saviour had before forbidden his Disciples to be so solicitous about. *Take ye no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or*

wherewithal shall we be cloathed? And then it follows in direct opposition to this inordinate and sollicitous care about worldly things, *but seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.* That is, be not so sollicitous about the conveniencies and necessities of this life, as about the happiness of the other, and the means to it. And this sense of this phrase of *the kingdom of God* is so very frequent in the new Testament, that I shall not need to give particular instances of it.

II. What is meant by righteousness; *seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.* *Righteousness*, in the strictest and most proper sense of the word, signifies the particular virtue of justice; and very frequently in the old Testament it is used for charity to the poor, or almsgiving, *Psal. 37. 25, 26. I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread; he is ever merciful, and lendeth;* and *Psal. 112. 9. he hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor, his righteousness endureth for ever.* But *righteousness* in its largest and most extended sense, comprehends all the virtues of a good man; and so it signifies here in the text, and in many other places of Scripture.

So that *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, comprehends the whole business of religion, our *last end*, which is *eternal life and happiness* in another world; and *the way and means* to this end; which is *righteousness*, or that universal goodness which God requires of us, and whereof he himself is a pattern and example to us; for which reason 'tis call'd *his righteousness*. And in this sense of *our last end*, and *the way and means* to it, *the kingdom of heaven, and righteousness*, are used in another place, even of this Sermon of our Saviour's upon the mount, *Matt. 5. 20. Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven;* where *righteousness* is made the necessary means and condition of eternal life. I proceed in the

Second place, to explain what is meant by *seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.* And this signifies the greatest intention of mind, and earnestness of endeavour about the business of religion, in order to our attaining of eternal happiness; such a seriousness and earnestness of endeavour as earthly-minded men use about the things of this world. *For after all these things* (says our Saviour immediately after the text,) *do the Gentiles seek;* τὰ ἔθνη ἐπὶ ζῆτι, which words signify an intense care, and vigorous endeavour; *but seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;* that is, be ye, who profess your selves christians, as intent upon the business of religion, and the salvation of your souls, as the heathen, who are in a great measure ignorant of God and another life, are about the things of this life.

And here are two things to be explained.

- I. What is here meant by *seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness;* and,
- II. What by *seeking them in the first place.*

For the *first*: A sincere and earnest *seeking of the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, does imply in it these four things.

I. A fix'd design and resolution as to the end; that we do not only propound to our selves the eternal happiness and salvation of our souls as our chief end, but that we be immovably fixt upon it, and always have it in our aim and design; that here we set up our resolution, if it be possible, to be happy for ever; that we have this end always in our eye, and be firmly resolved to do all that we can towards attaining of it.

Not that we are obliged always actually to think upon it; but to have it frequently in our minds, and habitually to intend and design it, so as to make it the scope of all our endeavours and actions, and that every thing we do be either directly and immediately in order to it, or some way or other subservient to this design, or however not inconsistent with it; like the term and end of a man's journey, towards which the traveller is continually tending, and hath it always habitually in his intention, tho' he doth not always think of it every step that he takes, and tho' he be not always directly advancing and moving towards it, yet he never knowingly goes out of the way. And tho' he bate and lodge
by

by the way, and does many other things which do not directly set him forward, yet they are all subservient to his journey, or in prosecution of it; or at least no wilful deviations from it. Thus it should be with us, while we are sojourning in this world; our fix'd aim and design should be to get to heaven, and thither we should be continually tending in our desires and endeavours.

And if this resolution be deeply rooted and fix'd in our minds, it will govern all our actions, and keep them steady to their main end. Whereas, if we be uncertain and unresolv'd upon our great end, and be divided between the happiness of the next life, and the present enjoyments of this, we shall be fickle and unsteady in all our motions. He that hath two ends, can pursue neither vigorously, but while he is moving towards the one, he leans and inclines to the other; and like a needle between two loadstones, is always in a doubtful and trembling condition; inclines to both, but is constant to neither: And this is the meaning of that aphorism of St. *James, the double minded man is unstable in all his ways.* He that is unresolv'd as to his main end, hath two minds, and can prosecute nothing vigorously: But if our mind be once fix'd and resolv'd, that will determine and govern all our motions, and inspire us with diligence, and zeal, and perseverance in the prosecution of our end.

2. *Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, implies incessant care and diligence as to the means; that we make religion our business, and exercise our selves in the duties of it, both in publick and private, at proper times and seasons, with the same seriousness and application of mind, as men do in their callings and professions, for the gaining of wealth and preferment; especially on the *Lord's-day*, which God hath taken to himself, and set apart for the duties of his worship and service. Not that we are excused from minding religion at other times; but that those who are prest and straiten'd by the necessary cares of this life, may be sure to mind it then, and may have no colour of excuse for the neglect of it at that time, which God hath allotted for that very purpose, and which it is unlawful to employ about our worldly affairs. God expects that we should serve him at other times, that we should live in an habitual sense of him, and (as *Solomon* expresseth it, *Prov. 23. 17.*) *Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*; so as to be careful not to offend or transgress in any thing, and so as to redeem all opportunities for the exercise of piety, and devotion; but *this day* he peremptorily challengeth to himself, and expects we should imploy it in his service, and dedicate it to religion, to the contemplation of God and heavenly things, and the care of our immortal Souls, with the same seriousness and diligence, as we do upon other days *labour for the bread which perisheth*; and the less leisure we have upon other days for this purpose, the more entirely should we devote and consecrate *this day* to the purposes and duties of religion.

Not but that our whole life, and all the actions of it, should be under the government of religion, and directed by the laws and rules of it; and it should be our continual care and endeavour to please God in all things, and we should take as much pains, and be as heartily concerned to be good men, as the men of the world are to grow rich and great in this world; nay so much more, by how much it is a better and nobler design to improve in grace and virtue, than to prosper and thrive in our temporal estate; and we do not in good earnest *seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, if this be not our great study and endeavour, to subdue our lusts, and govern our passions, and, in a word, to reform whatever is amiss in the inward frame and temper of our minds, and in our outward conversation. And indeed nothing does require greater diligence, and attention, and care, than for a man to become truly and thoroughly good; to be meek, and humble, and patient, and contented, and resigned to the will of God in every condition; to be peaceable, and charitable, and placable, and ready to forgive; these are great and difficult things, and whatever we think, not the work of a wish, or the effect of a sudden resolution before the receiving of the holy Sacrament, no, nor the fruit of frequent and fervent prayers, without the hearty concurrence of our own care and endeavour, to render our lives such, as we pray God by his grace to assist and enable us to be.

3. *Seeking*

3. *Seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, does further imply zeal and earnestness in the pursuit of this design: And this is a degree above diligence; for zeal is an ardour and fervency of mind in the prosecution of a thing for which you are greatly concerned, and which we vehemently desire to obtain; it is the hottest and most intense degree of our affection towards any thing, of our desire and love, mixt with anger at every thing that stands in our way and hinders us from obtaining what we seek after; such an heat as ambition does commonly inspire men withal, in the pursuit of power and preferment. Such ought to be the temper of our minds, and the edge of our spirits, in *seeking the kingdom of God*, as does usually possess men in seeking the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them. We must remember, that it is *a kingdom* which we seek for, and aspire after; not like the unstable and tottering kingdoms of this world, but *a kingdom which cannot be shaken*, as the Apostle calls it.

So that the greatness of the design, and the excellency of what we seek after, will justify and warrant the highest degree of a discreet zeal and fervour in the prosecution of it; and therefore no wonder that the Scripture in this matter useth words that import the greatest vehemency and earnestness, bidding us *to strive to enter in at the strait gate, to labour and watch, to run, and wrestle, and fight*, and, in a word, *to give all diligence, to make our calling and election sure*.

Lastly, *Seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, does imply patience and perseverance in our endeavours after them, and that we never cease our pursuit of them, 'till we have obtained them; and this, notwithstanding all the difficulties and discouragements, the opposition and persecution that we meet with *for righteousness sake*: For this we must expect, and reckon upon beforehand, to encounter many difficulties, and find many discouragements in the ways of religion; for *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life*, as our Lord himself hath told us: nay we must count to be grievously *persecuted for righteousness sake*, and, if God see it good for us, *to pass through many tribulations*, before we shall enter *into the kingdom of God*; and therefore we had need to be armed with a great deal of patience, and a very firm and obstinate resolution, to enable us to bear up, and to hold out against all these; for this is a necessary qualification for our *seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*. So our Lord hath told us, *Matt. 10. 22. he that endureth to the end, shall be saved*; if we *hope to receive the crown of life*, we must *be faithful to the death*, *Rev. 2. 10*. And to the same purpose St. Paul declares, *Rom. 2. 7. that they only shall be made partakers of eternal life, who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality*.

You see what is meant by *seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; it remains briefly to be shewn, in the *second place*, what is meant by *seeking these first*; *seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; that is, let this be your main and principal design, so as to take place of all others in your esteem and affections, in your aim and endeavour; in comparison of this, mind nothing else, not the comforts and conveniencies, no, not the necessities of life, *what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed*. These you see our Saviour instanceth in before the text, as not to be regarded and taken care of, when they come in competition with *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*. And our Saviour tells us elsewhere, that not only none of the comforts and necessities of life are to be valued against him, and his religion, but that even this temporal life it self, as dear as it is to us, is to be parted withal, and given up, rather than to quit the profession of his truth and religion, *Matt. 10. 37, 38. He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me*. He instanceth in the nearest relations, those towards whom we have the most tender and relenting affections, and yet he tells us, that the consideration of his truth and religion ought to take place of these, nay even of life it self; for so it follows, and *he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me*. St. Luke expresseth it more strongly and vehemently, *Luke 14. 26. If any man com to me (that is, take upon him the profession of my religion) and hate not his*

his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. When these come in competition with our religion, and the great interest of our eternal Salvation, we are to regard and value them no more than if they were the objects of our hatred, but to set aside all consideration of affection to them, so far as it would tempt us from constancy in our religion, and the care of our souls.

So that when our Saviour bids us *first to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, his meaning is, that religion, and the concerns of our Souls, and the eternal happiness of them in another world, should be our first and chief care; and that all other things should be made subordinate and subservient to this great design, and be no further minded by us, than they really are so: For that which is our great end, will subdue all other things, and bring them into subjection to it, and will reject them, and throw them aside, if they be inconsistent with it. If heaven be our utmost aim, and in order to that, it be our great study and endeavour to be righteous and holy, this resolution and design, sincerely entertained, will over-rule all other considerations, and make all the things of this world to stoop and give way to that which is our chief end, the eternal happiness and salvation of our Souls. And thus I have done with the *second* thing I proposed, namely, what is meant by *seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; and what by *seeking them first*.

I proceed in the *third* place, to lay down some plain rules for our direction and furtherance *in seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; that is, in the great business of religion.

First, Let us always live under a lively and powerful sense of another world; that we are placed here in this world, but for a little while, and *that* wholly in order to our preparation for a better and happier life. Let this thought be often in our minds: That eternity is the most considerable duration, and the next world the place of our everlasting abode, where we must dwell and continue for ever; and therefore our present state is but of little moment and consideration to us, but only in order to our future and everlasting condition. We may please our selves here for a little while with toys and trifles, with dreams and shadows of pleasure and happiness, and may be exercised with some troubles and afflictions for a short space, *for a moment* (as the Apostle calls it) *our light afflictions which are but for a moment*, and so indeed it is, compared with all eternity; but the substantial and durable happiness or misery remain for men in the other world, and will certainly be their portion, according as they have demeaned themselves in this world.

Now the serious consideration of this cannot fail to put us upon vigorous preparations for another world, and to make us wholly intent upon our eternal concerns, and to resolve, whatever becomes of us in this world, to take effectual care that we may be happy for ever. He that firmly believes the immortality of the Soul, and a life after death, which will never have an end, must needs take into consideration his whole duration, and bend all his care and thoughts, how he may avoid the greatest and most lasting misery, and secure to himself an immortality of bliss and happiness.

Secondly, Let us always be under a conviction of the absolute and indispensable necessity of holiness and righteousness, as the only way and means whereby the kingdom of God is to be attained, and that holiness and happiness are not to be separated, the one being a necessary condition and qualification for the other; and consequently, that it is the vainest thing in the world for any man to hope to enter into the *kingdom of God*, without endeavouring after *his righteousness*; there is so strong a connexion between them, that a man may as reasonably expect to be well and at ease without health, as to be happy without holiness; for this makes us like to God, and our likeness and conformity to God, is that alone which can make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of God. We must be *partakers of the divine nature*, in order to our participation of the divine blessedness. And the consideration of this will effectually engage

us to *seek the righteousness of God*, without which we shall never enter into his kingdom; and to *follow holiness*, without which no man shall see the Lord.

Thirdly, Let us always remember that *righteousness* is of a great extent, and comprehends in it all goodness; it takes in all the duties of religion, and the practice of all of them; it is a complication of all graces and virtues, of all the parts and ingredients, of all the duties and offices of a good man. To denominate a man *righteous*, all causes must concur; all the essential principles and parts of religion and goodness must meet together; knowledge and practice, faith and good works, right opinions and real virtues, an orthodox profession and a holy life, abstaining from sin and doing of righteousness, purity of heart and unspotted manners, godliness and honesty, the bridling of our tongue, and the government of our passions, and *above all things charity, which is the band of perfection*.

For *righteousness* is our conformity to the law of God, as *unrighteousness* and sin is the transgression of it: Now this, if it be real and sincere, will be uniform and universal, equally respecting all the laws of God, and every part of our known duty, and will not content it self with an especial regard to one or two precepts of the law, tho' never so considerable, and then allow it self in the neglect and violation of the rest, no, nor with the observation of the duties of one table of the law, if it overlook the other; no, nor with obedience to all the commandments of God, one only excepted. St. James hath put this very case, and determined it, *That he that shall keep the whole law, save only that he offend in one point, is guilty of all*; that is, he is not sincere in his obedience to the rest: And therefore if we *seek the righteousness of God*, our righteousness must be universal; *as he that hath called us is holy, so must we be holy in all manner of conversation*, in the tenor of our actions, and the whole course of our lives: and any one reigning sin and vice, any gross and notorious defect in the virtues of a good life, will spoil our *righteousness*, and will effectually shut us out of *the kingdom of heaven*.

Fourthly, Let us wisely subordinate the several parts and duties of religion to one another, according to the intrinsical worth and value of them, that so we may mind every part of religion in its due place, and according to the true nature and importance of it. Knowledge and faith are in order to practice, and a good life; and signify nothing, unless they produce that; the means of religion, such as prayer and fasting, diligent reading and hearing the word of God, reverent and devout receiving of the blessed Sacrament, are of less account and value, than that which is the end of all these, which is to make us inwardly and really good, and *fruitful in all the works of righteousness, which by Jesus Christ are to the praise and glory of God*. And therefore the means of religion which I have mentioned, are to be regarded and used by us, in order to the attaining of these ends, without which they are meer formality and hypocrisy, and instead of finding acceptance with God, they are, *an abomination to him, and his Soul hates them*.

And so likewise the circumstances of religion are less considerable than the substantial means and instruments of it. And therefore all rites and ceremonies are in religion of less consideration, than the substance of God's worship, and ought always to be subordinate to it. I like manner, the moral duties of religion, comprehended under *the two great commandments of the love of God, and our neighbour*, because they are of eternal and indispensable obligation, are to be preferr'd to matters of meer positive institution; and where they cannot stand together, that which is positive ought to be set aside, and to give way for the present to that which is moral and good in its own nature, and not only because it is commanded and enjoyned; for in this case God hath expressly declared, that *he will have mercy, and not sacrifice*. Upon which ground our Saviour declares, that the law of the *Sabbath* ought to give place to *works of mercy*. Upon the same account peace and charity are to be valued above matters of nicety and scruple, of doubtful dispute
and

and controversy; because the former are unquestionably good, the latter doubtfully and uncertainly so.

All these things ought to be consider'd, and are of great moment to make a man sincerely and wisely religious. For men may keep a great stir about some parts of religion, and be very careful and diligent, zealous and earnest about the means and instruments of religion; and in the exercises of piety and devotion, and yet be destitute of the power and life of it, and fall short of that inward, and real, and substantial *righteousness*, which alone can qualify us for *the kingdom of God*.

The *fifth* and last direction I would give, is this; That we have a particular regard to the great duty of charity, or alms-giving, this being very frequently in Scripture called *righteousness*, as being an eminent part of religion, and a great evidence of the truth and sincerity of our piety. And this our Saviour particularly directs to, as the way to *the kingdom of God*, Luke 12. 33. After this general exhortation, to *seek the kingdom of God*, he instanceth in *charity*, as the direct way to it; *give alms, provide for your selves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens, that faileth not*. And elsewhere our Saviour speaks of this grace and virtue, as that which, above all others, will make way for our admission into heaven, Luke 16. 9. *I say unto you, make to your selves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you (or ye may be received) into everlasting habitations*. And St. Paul calls it, *laying up in store for our selves a good foundation*; or (as the word may better be render'd in this place) *a good treasure against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life*, 1 Tim. 6. 19. St. James speaks of it, as a main and most essential part of religion, and the great evidence of a true and sincere piety; *Jam. 1. 27. Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the father, is this; to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction*. Finally, our Lord instanceth in this, as the very thing which will admit us into, or shut us out of heaven; by the performance whereof we shall be absolved, and for the neglect whereof we shall be condemned in the judgment of the great day, *Matt. 25*. So that this part of righteousness or religion, ought in a more especial manner to be regarded by us; because upon the performance or neglect of this duty, our eternal happiness doth so much depend.

The *fourth* and last thing only remains to be spoken to; which is, to set before you the most proper and powerful motives and encouragements, to the minding of this great interest and concernment. But this will be the subject of another discourse.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N XLI.

Religion, our first and great Concernment.

MATTH. vi. 33.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.



THESE words, which I began to discourse upon the last day, are a strict charge and command to all christians, to mind the business of religion in the first place, and to take all imaginable care to secure the happiness of another life; *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

In the handling of which argument,

First, I explained what is meant by *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.*

Secondly, I shew'd what is meant by *seeking* these; and what by *seeking them first.*

Thirdly, I laid down some rules for our direction and furtherance in this great business.

I shall now proceed to represent to you, in the

Fourth and last place, some of the most proper and powerful arguments and encouragements, to engage us to the minding of this great interest and concernment; amongst which, I shall in the last place particularly consider the encouragement here given in the text, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

First, My first argument shall be from the worth and excellency of the things we seek, *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; which are certainly the greatest and best things we can seek. *The kingdom of God*, is the eternal salvation of our souls, everlasting life and happiness in another world, which, to animate our endeavours, and to tempt our ambition the more, are set forth to us under the notion of a *kingdom*. And what will not men do to obtain that? what pains will they not take? what hazards will they not run? what difficulties will they not grapple with, to break through if they can, to come to a *kingdom*? which when they have obtained, they are exposed to as many, and commonly to more cares and fears, to greater difficulties and dangers in the keeping, than they were for the getting of it: And yet all this men will do for a *corruptible crown*, for one of the petty kingdoms and principalities of this world, which are continually tottering, and ready to be overturned by open violence, or to be undermined by secret treachery. But *the kingdom* which I am speaking of, and persuading you and my self to seek after, is not like the kingdoms of men, and of this world; it is called *the kingdom of God*, to signify to us the excellency and stability of it; as much beyond any of the kingdoms of this world, as the heavens are high above the earth, and as God is greater than man; *a kingdom which cannot be shaken, a crown which fadeth not away, a scepter which cannot be wrested from us.*

But to quit the metaphor, and speak to the thing; *the kingdom of God* imports the eternal salvation of our souls; I say of our *souls*, which both in respect of the dignity of our nature, and their immortal duration, are infinitely more valuable than any of the perishing things of this world, and ought to be much dearer to us. Other things are without us, they neither constitute our being, nor are essential to our happiness; but our souls are our selves, and the loss of them is our utter ruin and destruction. So that nothing is to be regarded by

by us with equal care and concernment; as the salvation of our immortal souls; that is, that we may be rescued from eternal misery, and everlastingly happy in another world. And can we be at too much cost and pains upon such a design, to escape so dismal a condition, so dreadful a ruin, as that of body and soul to all eternity? Can any man be concerned enough to bring about so great a good to himself? or, can he purchase it too dear, whatever he give or part with for it? a good so desirable, and so durable, as our being happy for ever. When we purchase the things of this world, the riches and honours of it, at the expence of so much time, and care, and trouble, we pay dear for trifles and fancies; but eternal happiness is a jewel of so inestimable a price, that a wise merchant will have it at any rate, and *sell all that he hath to purchase it.*

Of such value is *the kingdom of God*; and next to it is *righteousness*, which is the only way and means whereby this *kingdom* is to be attained, and therefore to be fought by us with the greatest diligence and earnestness: For that which is the only means to a great and desirable end, and which alone can make us capable of that end, and which in truth is a degree of it, is valuable next to the end, and almost equally with it; and such is *righteousness*, in respect of *the kingdom of God*; it is the only means to it, it is that alone which qualifies us, and makes us capable of happiness; nay, it is an essential ingredient into it, and that which does in a great measure constitute the happiness of heaven: for that temper of mind, that conformity and likeness to God, which holiness and righteousness brings us to, is the true foundation of our happiness, and according to the best apprehensions we have now of it, is the very formal cause and essence of our blessedness. So St. John tells us, *1 John 3. 2. It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him*; that is, we do not now distinctly understand wherein the happiness of the next life consists, we are not able to frame a clear and perfect idea of it; but this we know in general, that it consists in our likeness to God, in a conformity to the moral perfections of the divine nature, which are expressed by the name of *purity* and *holiness*; and therefore every one that hopes for the happiness of heaven, must endeavour after holiness; *every man that hath this hope in him, must purify himself, even as he is pure.*

So that the things which I am pressing you to seek after, are most effectually recommended, by telling you what they are; *the kingdom of God* is eternal life and happiness, and *his righteousness* is universal holiness and goodness, without which no man is qualified for this blessed state. Now if there be any thing better than goodness, any thing more desirable than a happiness which hath no bounds, nor no end; do not mind them, nor look after them: But if there be not; then certainly these are worthy of the care and endeavour of our whole life.

Secondly, Another consideration that should very much excite and quicken our endeavour and diligence in seeking these things, is the difficulty of obtaining them. This, I confess, is no encouragement, but it is a very good motive and argument to whet our industry in seeking these things, when we plainly see that they are not to be had upon other terms. And this consideration our Saviour useth to quicken us to *strive* and to contend earnestly for eternal life, *Matt. 7. 14. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it: And Luke 13. 24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

Seeking here, in opposition to *striving*, is a faint and weak endeavour, which will not carry us thro' this narrow and difficult passage; and this is the reason why many miscarry, who make some attempts towards heaven; but they do not *strive*, they do not put forth any vigorous endeavours to get thither.

Now the difficulty of attaining eternal happiness, ariseth from the difficulty of the way and means to it; and it is therefore hard to attain *the kingdom of God*, because it is hard to attain *his righteousness*. As desirable as it is, it must be acknowledged very difficult for a man to raise himself to that temper and disposition of mind, so to subdue his lusts, and govern his passions, to bridle his tongue, and order all the actions of his life, as is necessary to qualify him

for happiness, and to make him fit to be admitted into *the kingdom of God*.

And this difficulty is chiefly in our selves, but greatly increased by temptation and opposition from without: Chiefly, I say, in our selves, from the strong by-asse of our evil and corrupt inclinations, and the strong power of vicious habits and customs, which when they are grown inveterate, do tyrannize over us, and make us perfect slaves, and lead us captive at their pleasure; so that our nature must be quite changed, and as the Apostle expresseth it, we must be *renewed in the spirit of our minds*, our souls must be new moulded and fashioned, we must be, as it were, *created*, and *born again*, before we can *enter into the kingdom of God*. In this our Saviour is positive and peremptory, *John 3. 33. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*. This difficulty indeed is greatest at first, but it is considerable afterwards, 'till a thorough change be made, and new inclinations planted in us, and the contrary habits of grace and virtue be super-induced.

And that which increaseth the difficulty is outward temptation and opposition from the world, and the Devil; which to withstand and resist, requires great courage and resolution, great watchfulness and guard over our selves. But yet for our comfort, these difficulties are not insuperable to that grace and assistance, which God is always ready to afford to us upon so good an occasion, and to so good a purpose; *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world*. And this, I am sure, is matter of great encouragement to us, that tho' the difficulty of *working out our salvation* be great, yet if we do in good earnest set about it, God is ready to assist and second our sincere endeavours, *to work in us both to will and to do of his own goodness*, and so to prevent us with his gracious favour, and to further us with his continual aid, that finally by his mercy we may obtain eternal life.

Thirdly, Another powerful argument to care and diligence, is the fatal danger of miscarriage in a matter of so great concernment. We may do many things in religion, and take some pains to get to heaven, and yet fall short of it. The rich young man in the Gospel, our Saviour tells us, *was not far from the kingdom of God*, and he broke with our Saviour only upon one point, he was too much addicted to the world, and loath to part with his great possessions, and distribute them in charity to the poor, and thereupon he left our Saviour, and, for any thing we can find, never returned to him again.

If the world govern and bear sway in our hearts, if we *mind earthly things* first, and make these our chief care and design, *the kingdom of God and his righteousness* shall not *be added unto us*; if we will not mind them *in the first place*, they are too good to be accessaries.

And if upon any one point we miscarry, either out of love to the world, or affection to any other lust or vice that we are loath to part withal, our miscarriage is fatal, and the ruin which we bring upon our selves irreparable; for the soul once lost, is lost for ever. If we have neglected the opportunity of *working out our own salvation*, while we are in this world, it will never return into our power again, death will shut the door against us, and we shall never *see the kingdom of God*.

Fourthly, It is a mighty encouragement to us to consider, that if we sincerely *seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, there is not only a fair probability of obtaining them, but all the security we can desire. Men may be in good earnest for the things of this world, may love them with all their hearts and souls (as we see too many do) and seek them with all their might and strength, and yet after all their endeavours may be shamefully frustrated and disappointed of their end. There are many examples of this kind daily before our eyes, and yet men are not discouraged from seeking these things. A fair probability, nay, almost a possibility of attaining them, is enough to a worldly-minded man to drudge and toil for them. Why; the same affection, the same zeal, the same unwearied endeavour to serve God, and to save our souls, would infallibly bring us to heaven. It was a sad, but true saying of Cardinal *Wolsey*, when he was leaving the world, "Had I been but as careful to please God, as I have
" been

“ been to serve my Prince, he would not have forsaken me now in the time of
“ my gray hairs.”

Nay, it is to be hoped, that less diligence and care about the concernments of our souls, and another life, than many men use about the things of this life, will secure our eternal happiness, or else it is to be feared, that but very few would be saved: And who would not place his industry and endeavour upon a design in which he is sure not to miscarry, if he do but heartily and in good earnest pursue it? especially when it will be of infinite greater advantage to him, than any design he can propound to himself for this world. If a man may be certainly happy for ever, upon the same, or easier terms, than he can ordinarily compass any of those little designs which men propose to themselves in this world, who would not seek that which is most worthy the having, and which he is surest to obtain?

Fifthly, and lastly, The encouragement here in the text is not inconsiderable; that if we *seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all these things shall be added unto us.* This certainly is a very tempting consideration; for who would not be glad to reconcile the enjoyment of this world with the hopes of heaven and eternal happiness? But men do not generally like our Saviour's method, they would seek the things of this world in the first place, and get to heaven at last; they would be content to seek the one, and have the other cast in and conferred upon them, without their seeking. But this will not be granted, this way will not do. And yet our Saviour hath gone as far as one would think could in reason be desired; he hath promised that if we will make religion, and the salvation of our souls, our first and chief care, that *all these things shall be added unto us.* So that the design of going to heaven, and being happy for ever, is no ways inconsistent with a competent portion of the things of this life. *Godliness* (the Apostle tells us) *hath the promise of this life, and of that which is to come.* The business of religion, the practice of a holy and virtuous life, is no hindrance to a man's thriving in his temporal estate; nay, in many respects it is apt to promote and advance it; by engaging us to diligence in our calling, and by deriving the blessing of God upon our honest and lawful endeavours; by obliging us to the strict and constant practice of truth, and justice, and fidelity in all our dealings and commerce, which are the best way to establish a clear and solid reputation, and good esteem among men, which is an unspeakable advantage in business, and, at the long run, one of the best and most lasting instruments of prosperity and success.

Besides, that religion frees a man from those passions and vices, which do naturally tend to dissipate and ruin men's estates; as intemperance and lewdness, which are every way chargeable vices, and do not only take men off from business, and render them unfit for it; but waste their estates, and bring many other inconveniencies upon their persons and families. Religion makes men meek, and peaceable, and inoffensive in word and deed, which is a great security against chargeable suits and contentions, and all sorts of injuries and affronts from others. Among all the beatitudes of our Saviour, he only promiseth temporal happiness to meekness, *blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.* They who provoke and offend no body, are likely to be least disturbed and disquieted by others in their possessions and enjoyments; *Who will harm you* (saith the Apostle, 1 Pet. 3. 13.) *if ye be followers of that which is good?* Some may be so perverse as to persecute a man for his goodness; but it rarely happens; most men have not only a kindness, but a veneration for true goodness.

By all these ways religion naturally tends to the temporal prosperity of men, and the promoting of their welfare and happiness even in this world; besides that the providence of God is very peculiarly concerned for good men, and a special blessing attends them in all their undertakings. So that excepting the case of persecution (which God will particularly consider, and reward in another world) the religious and good man, who sincerely *seeks the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, stands as fair, and is upon as good terms, for all the lawful enjoyments of this world, as he that makes it his only design to be rich and

great

great in this world ; nay, as to the necessaries of this life, and a competency of outward things, he hath a much greater and better security from the providence and promise of God, than the men of the world have by all their care and pains.

Besides, that he hath this considerable advantage, by mingling these things only as accessaries, that if he miss of them, he hath something better to support him in the want of them ; being secure of a happiness which this world can neither give nor take from him. But now the worldly man, if he be defeated in his designs, is of all men most miserable, because he hath nothing else to comfort him, nothing else to trust to ; he fails of his hopes as to this world, and hath done what in him lies to make his case desperate as to the other.

Upon all these considerations and encouragements, you see how reasonable it is, that we should make religion, and the concernment of another life, our great care and business. And yet how are these neglected by the greatest part of mankind ! and by the best of us (God knows) not minded as they ought, and as they deserve ! What can we say for our selves in excuse of so intolerable a folly ? There are two or three things which men commonly pretend, if not in justification, yet in mitigation and excuse of this great neglect.

First, They pretend great difficulties and discouragements in the ways of religion. This I have already acknowledged to be true, so far as to awaken our care, and to whet our industry ; but by no means to make us despond and give over all care of so great a concernment, because of the difficulties it is attended withal. Men who have no mind to a thing, are apt to imagine great difficulties in the attaining of it, and to magnify them in their fancies beyond reason. As the people of *Israel*, when they were to enter into *Canaan* (which was the type of the kingdom of heaven) represented the inhabitants of the Land, whom they were to conquer, more terrible than in truth they were ; reporting to one another, that the land was full of Giants, and sons of *Anak*, men of prodigious stature, and cities walled up to heaven. And this the wise man observes to be the perpetual excuse of the *slothful* ; when they have no mind to a thing, they say *there is a lion in the way* ; that is, they fancy to themselves dangers and terrors which are not. Thus men who are averse from religion, and have no mind to be at the trouble and pains to get to heaven, are apt to complain of the monstrous and insuperable difficulties of religion, and how hard it is for a man to mortifie his lusts, and subdue his appetites, and govern his passions, and to do all those things which are necessary to bring him to heaven. Well ! it is acknowledged to be difficult, and is it not so to get an estate, and to rise to any thing in this world ? The true pains which men take about these things, shew that they are difficult ; only when men have a mind to a thing, and their heart is set upon it, they do not stand to complain of the difficulty, but buckle to it, and grapple with it.

Is religion difficult ? And what is not so, that is good for any thing ? Is not the law a difficult and crabbed study ? Does it not require great labour, and perpetual drudging to excel in any kind of knowledge, to be master of any art or profession ? In a word, is there any thing in the world worthy the having, that is to be gotten without pains ? And is eternal life and glory the only slight and inconsiderable thing, that is not worth our care and industry ? Is it fit that so great a good should be exposed to the faint and idle wishes, to the cheap and lazy endeavours of slothful men ? For what reason ? Nay, with what conscience can he bid less for heaven and eternal life, than men are contented to give for the things of this world ; things of no value in comparison, not worthy the toiling for, not sure to be attained by all our endeavours ; things which *perish in the using*, and which, when we have them, we are liable to be deprived of by a thousand accidents ? One fit of a fever may shatter our understandings, and confound all our knowledge, and turn us into fools and idiots ; an inundation or a fire may sweep away and devour our estates ; a succession of calamities may in a few hours make the richest and greatest man as poor as *Job*, and set him upon a dunghill.

But be the difficulty what it will of attaining *the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, they are to be sought at any rate ; because they are absolutely necessary,

fary, and we miserable and undone if we have them not. And therefore not to dissemble in the matter, the difficulties of religion are considerable; but then they are much greater at first, and will every day abate and grow less, and the work by degrees will become easy, and turn into pleasure and delight; a pleasure so great, as none knows but he that hath it; and he that hath it, would not exchange it for all the sensual pleasures and enjoyments of this world.

Secondly, Others pretend want of time for the minding of so great a work. And 'tis very true, that all persons have not equal leisure for this purpose; some are much more straiten'd than others, and more taken up with the necessary cares of this life: But God hath put no man upon this hard necessity, that for want of time he shall be forced to neglect his body and his health, his family and estate, to save his soul. And yet if any man were brought to this distress, it were well worth his while to secure his eternal salvation, tho' it were with the neglect and loss of all other things. But those who are most straiten'd for time, have so much as is absolutely necessary: for there is a considerable part of religion which does not require time, but resolution and care: Not to commit sin, not to break the laws of God, not to be intemperate, *to make no provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*, does not spend time, but saves it for better purposes; so that every man hath time not to do that which he ought not to do: And for the *positive* part of religion, whether it consists in the exercise of our minds, or in the external acts of religion; no man is so distressed, but he hath time to think of heaven, and eternity; time to love God, to esteem him, and delight in him above all things. And this a man may do very frequently, and very acceptably, while he is labouring and travelling about his worldly affairs, while his hand is upon the plough, his heart may be with God; and while he converseth here upon earth, his thoughts and affections may be in heaven. Every man hath time to pray to God every day, for his mercy and forgiveness, for his grace and assistance, for his preservation and support, and to thank him heartily for all his blessings and benefits. And a little time seriously employed in this kind, would have the same acceptance with God, as the more solemn and longer devotions of those who have more leisure and opportunities for them. To be sure, we have all of us time to serve God upon his own day, and to employ it wholly in the exercises of piety, and in the care and consideration of our souls.

But this, when all is said, is the case but of very few; most of us have no colour for this complaint; *non inopes temporis, sed prodigi sumus*, (as Seneca says) "we are not poor, but prodigal of our time, and lavish it away profusely upon folly and vanity." Our vices and lusts, our pleasures and diversions, consume and divert those precious hours, which should be employed to these better purposes; nay many times time oppresseth us, and is a burthen to us, and lies upon our hands, and we know not how to get rid of it; and yet we chuse rather to let it run waste, than to bestow it upon religion, and the care of our souls; insomuch that I fear this will be the condition of many, that when they were at a loss what to do with their time, and knew not how to spend it, they would not lay it out upon that which was best and most necessary; for this surely is the very best use that can be made of time, to prepare and provide for eternity.

Thirdly, Others pretend it will be time enough to mind these things hereafter. But this (as bad excuses seldom hang together, and agree with one another) directly contradicts the former pretense, which supposeth so much time necessary, and more than many have to spare; and yet now they would make us believe that a very little time will suffice for this work, and that it may be done at any time, even just when we are going out of this world. But this, of all other, is the strangest interpretation of *seeking the kingdom of God, and his righteousness first*, to put it off to the very last. This surely is a greater error on the other hand, to think that the business of religion is so quickly to be dispatched, and that the great work of our lives can be crowded into so narrow a corner of it, that the time of sickness and old-age, nay, the hour of death, well employ'd

ploy'd to this purpose, will be sufficient. Alas! what can we then do that is good for any thing? that can in reason be thought either acceptable to God, or available for our selves? When we have not sense and understanding enough to dispose of our temporal concerns, and to make our wills, do we think we shall be fit to repent of the sins and miscarriages of our whole lives, and to make our peace with God? Every man must not expect to have *Saul's* fortune, who when he was wearied with seeking his Father's Asses, met with a kingdom. We must not think when we are tired with pursuing the follies and vanities of this world, to retire into heaven, and to *sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

Our Saviour hath taken care to caution us against this desperate folly, by a parable to this very purpose, of the *foolish Virgins*, who having trifled away their time till the Bridegroom was coming, and neglected to get *Oyl into their Lamps*, (by which we are to understand all those good preparations and dispositions which are necessary to qualify us for the kingdom of God) I say, having neglected their opportunity of getting this *Oyl*, while they were looking after it too late, the door was shut against them; they thought to have repaired all at last, by borrowing of others, and supplying themselves that way.

And thus many deceive themselves, hoping to be supply'd out of another store, when they have no grace and goodness of their own; out of the treasure of the Church, from the redundant merit of the Saints, and the works of supererogation? of which some believe (I know not for what reason) that there is a great stock which the *Pope* may dispose of, to supply those who have taken no care to get *Oyl into their Lamps*. But I know not for what reason works of supererogation are supposed; *the wise Virgins* knew not of any merit they had to spare, it was *the foolish Virgins* only that entertained this senseless conceit. I am sure the parable insinuates the quite contrary, that the best and holiest persons (which are represented by the *wise Virgins*) have nothing to spare for the supply of others, who have been careless of their Souls; *the foolish said unto the wise, give us of your Oyl, for our Lamps are gone out; but the wise answered, saying, not so, lest there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for your selves.* It seems they had no works of supererogation that they knew of, but they do ironically send them to a market that was set up somewhere, and where these things were pretended to be sold; but how they sped the conclusion of the parable tells us, that whilst they were running about in great haste to make this purchase of the merits and good works of others, *the Bridegroom came*, and the wise Virgins that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the rest were shut out.

And there are those likewise among our selves, who having been careless to qualify themselves for *the kingdom of God*, hope to be supplied out of the infinite treasure of Christ's merits: But this also is a vain hope. For tho' there be merit enough in the death and sufferings of Christ to save all mankind, yet no man can lay claim thereto, who does not perform the conditions of the Gospel.

Others think by sending for the minister, when the physician hath given them over, to receive in a few hours such advice and direction, as will do their business as effectually, as if they had minded religion all their lives long; and that a few devout prayers said over them when they are just imbarking for another world, will, like a magical wind, immediately waft them over into the regions of bliss and immortality.

But let us not deceive our selves; we may defer the business so long, 'till we shall get nothing by our late application to God, and crying to him, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, but that severe answer, *Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I know ye not whence ye are.* If we would not have *this* our doom, let us first seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, that so having our fruit unto holiness, our end may be everlasting life.

S E R M O N XLII.

The Wisdom of Religion.

PSAL. cxix. 96.

I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.



HIS *Psalm* seems to have a great deal more of poetical number and skill in it, than at this distance from the time and age in which it was written, we can easily understand: the main scope and design of it is very plain and obvious; namely, to magnifie the law of God, and the observation of its precepts, as that wherein true religion doth mainly consist. And indeed, if we attentively read and consider it, every part of this *Psalm* does with great variety of expression, and yet very little difference of the sense, descant upon the same ground, *viz.* the excellency and perfection of the law of God. And the words of the *text* seem to be as full and comprehensive of the sense and design of the whole *Psalm*, as any one sentence in it; *I have seen an end of all perfection; but thy commandment is exceeding broad.*

These words are variously rendred, and understood by interpreters, who yet in this variety do very much conspire and agree in the same sense. The *Chaldee* paraphrase renders the words thus, *I have seen an end of all things, about which I have employ'd my care; but thy commandment is very large.* The *Syriac* version thus, *I have seen an end of all regions and countries* (that is, I have found the compass of this habitable world to be finite and limited) *but thy commandment is of a vast extent.* Others explain it thus, *I have seen an end of all perfection*, that is, of all the things of this world, which men value and esteem at so high a rate; of all worldly wisdom and knowledge, of wealth, and honour, and greatness, which do all perish and pass away; *but thy law is eternal, and still abideth the same*; or, as the scripture elsewhere expresseth it, *the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

Thy law; that is, the rule of our duty natural and revealed; or, in a word, religion, which consists in the knowledge and practice of the laws of God, is of greater perfection, than all other things which are so highly valued in this world: for the perfection of it is infinite, and of a vast influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole man, to the happiness of body and soul; to our whole duration both in this world, and the next, of this life, and of that which is to come. And this will clearly appear, if we consider the *reasonableness* and the *wisdom of religion*, which consists in the knowledge of God, and the keeping of his laws.

First, The *reasonableness of religion*, which is able to give a very good account of it self, because it settles the mind of man upon a firm basis, and keeps it from rolling in perpetual uncertainty; whereas atheism and infidelity wants a stable foundation, it centers no where but in the denial of God and religion, and yet substitutes no principle, no tenable and constituent scheme of things in the place of them; its whole business is to unravel all things, to unsettle the mind of man, and to shake all the common notions and received principles of mankind; it bends its whole force to pull down and to destroy, but lays no foundation to build any thing upon, in the stead of that which it pulls down.

It runs upon that great absurdity which *Aristotle* (who was always thought a great master of reason) does every where decry, as a principle unworthy of a

Philosopher; namely, a progress of causes *in infinitum*, and without end; that this was the cause of that, and a third thing of that, and so on without end, which amounts to just nothing; and finally resolves an infinite number of effects into no first cause; than which nothing can be more unskilful and bungling, and less worthy of a Philosopher. But this I do not intend at present to insist upon, having treated largely on the same subject upon another * occasion. I shall therefore proceed in the

* Vide
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Second place, to consider the wisdom of religion. The fear of the Lord is wisdom, so saith the *Psalmist*; it is true wisdom indeed, it is *the beginning of wisdom, caput sapientiæ*, the top and perfection of all wisdom. Here true wisdom begins, and upon this foundation it is raised and carried on to perfection; and I shall in my following discourse endeavour to make out these *two* things.

First, That true wisdom begins and is founded in religion, in the fear of God, and in the keeping of his commandments.

Secondly, That this is the perfection of wisdom; there is no wisdom without this, nor beyond it.

First, True wisdom begins and is founded in religion, and the fear of God, and regard to his laws. This is the first principle of wisdom, and the foundation upon which the whole design of our happiness is to be built. This is in the first place to be supposed, and to be taken into consideration in all the designs and actions of men: this is to govern our whole life, and to have a main influence upon all the affairs and concerns of it. As the first principle of humane society, and that which is to run through the whole frame of it, is the publick good; this was always to be taken into consideration, and to give law to all laws and constitutions about it: so religion is the first principle of humane wisdom, by which all our actions are to be conducted and govern'd; and all wisdom which does not begin here, and lay religion for its foundation, is preposterous, and begins at the wrong end; and is just as if in the forming of humane society, every one in the settlement of the constitution, and the framing of laws, should have an eye to his own private and particular advantage, without regard to the publick good, which is the great end of society, and the rule and measure of government and laws, and in the last issue and result of things, the only way to procure the settled welfare, and to secure the lasting interests of particular persons, so far as that is consistent with the publick good. And it would be a very preposterous policy to go about to found humane society upon any other terms, and would certainly end in mischief and confusion.

And such is all the wisdom of men, in relation to their true happiness, which does not begin with religion, and lay its foundation there: which does not take into consideration God and his providence, and a future state of rewards and punishments after this life. All wisdom which does not proceed upon a supposition of the truth and reality of these principles, will certainly end in shame and disappointment, in misery and ruin; because it builds a house upon the sand, which when it comes to be try'd by stress of weather, and assaulted by violent storms, will undoubtedly fall, and the fall of it will be great.

And this error every man commits, who pursues happiness by following his own inclination, and gratifying his irregular desires, without any consideration of God, and of the restraint which his laws have laid upon us, not for his own pleasure, but for our good. For when all things are duly consider'd, and all accounts cast up, it will appear upon a just calculation of things, that all the restraints which the laws of God lay upon men, are highly reasonable, and greatly for their benefit and advantage, and do not abridge us of any true pleasure or happiness; but are wise and merciful provisions of heaven, to prevent our harm and mischief; so that we are not wise, if we act without regard to God, and his laws, and are not willing to be govern'd by him, who loves us better than we do our selves, and truly designs our happiness, and commands us nothing but what directly tends to it. For the laws of God are not arbitrary

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constitutions, and meer instances of sovereign will and power; but wise rules and means to procure and advance our happiness.

And in like manner, all that wisdom which men use to compass their worldly designs, of riches and greatness, without consideration of the providence of God, and dependance upon it for the success of our affairs, is all perfect folly and mistake. For tho' the design be never so well laid, and vigorously prosecuted, and no means which humane wisdom can devise for the attaining of our end, have been omitted by us; yet if we leave God out of the account, we forget that which is principal, and signifies more to the success of any design, than all other things put together. For if God favours our designs, the most improbable shall take effect; and if he blow upon them, the most likely shall miscarry. Whenever he pleaseth to interpose, to cross the counsels and designs of men, *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to all.*

So that it is great folly not to consider the providence of God in all our designs and undertakings, not to implore his favour and blessing, without which nothing that we take in hand can prosper. That which is principal to any purpose, ought to be considered in the first place, nothing being to be attempted either without, or against it. And such is the providence of God in all humane affairs; it is more considerable to the promoting or hindering of any event, than all things in the world besides; and therefore all policy, which sets aside God and his providence, is vain; because *there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.*

So likewise all that wisdom which only considers and regards this short life, and the narrow concerns of it, and makes provision only for our welfare in this world; and therefore can only be tempted with the hopes of temporal advantages, and terrified only with the danger of temporal evils and sufferings; but hath no sense of an immortal spirit within us, no prospect of a life after death, no consideration of a happy or miserable eternity, of rewards and punishments, infinitely greater than all the temptations and terrors of time and sense; I say, all this is a preposterous and pernicious wisdom, and proceeds upon a false supposition, and a quite contrary scheme of things to what really is; and consequently our whole life, and all the designs and actions of it, do run upon a perpetual mistake, and a false stating of our own case; and whatever we do pursuant to this mistake is foolish and hurtful, and so far from conducing to our true interest, that it is all either besides it, or contrary to it; because we act upon a supposal only of this life, and a being only in this world, and that there is nothing either to be feared or hoped for beyond it; and being thus grossly mistaken, we set our hearts only upon temporal things, and study our present security and satisfaction, and in all our counsels and actions are swayed only by the consideration of temporal good and evil, of the present ease and pleasure, the disturbance and pain of our fleshly and sensual parts; without any sense of our own immortality, and of that everlasting state which remains for us in another world.

But there is (my brethren) most certainly, there is another life after this; we are not *beasts*, if we do not make our selves so; and if we die, we shall not die like them, neither shall our last end be like theirs. For whatever we may think or wish, it shall not be in our power to extinguish our own beings when we have a mind to be rid them, and to chuse whether or no we shall live for ever.

And if this be a false scheme of things which we have framed to our selves, and proceed upon, (as undoubtedly it is) then our whole life is one great error, and a perpetual mistake, and we are quite wrong in all that we design to do. Our wisdom hath begun at the wrong end, and we have made a false calculation and account of things, and have put our case otherwise than it is; and the farther we proceed upon this mistake, our miscarriage will be so much the more fatal in the issue. But if our wisdom begin at the right end, and our case

be truly stated, that God hath put into these frail and mortal bodies of ours, immortal spirits that shall live for ever; and hath sent us into this world to sojourn here for a little while, and to be disciplin'd and train'd up for eternity; and that after a short proof and tryal of our obedience, we shall be translated into an everlasting state of unspeakable happiness or misery, according as we have demeaned our selves in this world; if we believe this to be truly our case, our interest is then plainly before us, and we see where our happiness lies, and what remains for us to do, in order to the obtaining of it, and what we are to expect to suffer, if we do it not.

Now this foundation being laid, it is evident, that the best thing we can do for our selves, is to provide for our future state, and to secure the everlasting happiness of another life. And the best way to do that, is to live in obedience to those laws which our maker and our sovereign hath prescribed to us; and according to which he will one day sentence us to eternal rewards or punishments.

It is evident likewise, that all our sensual appetites and desires are to be bound by the rules of reason and virtue, which are the laws of God; and that no present ease and pleasure, trouble and suffering, are to be consider'd and regarded by us, in competition with the things which are eternal; and that sin is of all other the greatest evil, and most mischievous to our main interest, and therefore with all possible care to be avoided; and that the favour of God is to be sought, and the salvation of our souls to be provided for, at any pains and expense whatsoever, and even with the hazard and loss of our dearest interests in this world, yea and of life it self.

And now if this matter hath been rightly stated, then religion, and the fear of God, is the first principle and foundation of true wisdom, and that which we are to consider, and take along with us in all the designs and actions of our lives, and all wisdom which does not begin here, is preposterous, and will prove folly in the issue.

Secondly, As religion is the beginning of wisdom, so it is the perfection of it, it is the highest point of wisdom in which we can be instructed. *The fear of the Lord* (says Solomon, Prov. 15. 33.) *is the instruction of wisdom.* *A good understanding* (says David, Psal. 111. 10.) *have all they that do his commandments.* The practice of religion is the perfection of wisdom; and he understands himself best, who lives most according to the laws of God. And this I might shew, by instancing in particular virtues, the practice whereof is much wiser, and every way more for our interest, than the contrary vices; but this is too large an argument to engage in, and therefore I shall content my self at present, briefly to shew, that the chief characters and properties of wisdom do all meet in religion, and agree to it.

The first point of wisdom is to understand our true interest, and to be right in our main end; and in this, religion will best instruct and direct us. And if we be right in our main end, and true to the interest of it, we cannot miscarry: But if a man mistake in this, he errs fatally, and his whole life is vanity and folly.

Another property of wisdom is to be steady and vigorous in the prosecution of our main end; to oblige us hereto, religion gives us the most powerful arguments, the glorious happiness, and the dismal misery of another world.

The next point of wisdom is, to make all things stoop and become subservient to our main end. And wherever religion bears sway, it will make all other things subordinate to the salvation of our souls, and the interest of our everlasting happiness; as the men of this world make every thing to submit and give way to their covetous, and ambitious, and sensual designs.

Another part of wisdom is to consider the future and to look to the last end and issue of things. It is a common folly among men, to be so intent upon the present, as to have little or no regard to the future, to what will be hereafter. Men design and labour for this present life, and their short continuance here in this world, without taking into serious consideration their main duration,

tion, and their eternal abode in another world. But religion gives us a clear prospect of a life after death, and overlooks time, and makes eternity always present to us, and minds us of making timely provision and preparation for it. It takes into consideration our whole duration, and inspires us with wisdom, to look to the end of things, and to what will be hereafter, as well as to what is present.

It is likewise a great property of wisdom to secure the main chance, and to run no hazard in *that*. And this religion directs us to take care of, because the neglect of it will prove fatal.

Another mark of wisdom is, to lay hold of opportunities, those especially, which, when they are once past, will never return again. There are some seasons wherein great things may be done, which if they be let slip, are never to be retrieved. A wise man will lay hold of these, and improve them: and religion inculcates this principle of wisdom upon us, that this life is the opportunity of doing great things for our selves, and of making our selves for ever; this very day and hour may, for ought we know, be the last and only opportunity of repentance, and making our peace with God: therefore *to day, whilst it is called to day*, let us set about this necessary work, *lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*; to-morrow it may be too late to begin it, and the justice of God may cut us off whilst we are wilfully delaying it; and the opportunities of saving our immortal souls, may vanish, and be for ever hid from our eyes.

The next property of wisdom, is to foresee dangers, and to take timely care to prevent them. *The prudent man* (saith Solomon) *foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself*; that is, shelters and secures himself against it; *but the simple pass on, and are punished*; that is, the evil overtakes them, and their folly is punish'd in their fatal ruin. Now the greatest danger is from the greatest power; even from *him who is able to save and to destroy*; *I will tell you* (says the wisdom of God) *whom ye shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, can destroy both body and soul in hell*.

Again, another main point of wisdom, is to do as little as we can to be repented of, trusting rather to the wisdom of prevention, than to that of remedy. Religion first teacheth men innocency, and not to offend; but in case we do, (as *in many things we offend all*) it then directs us to repentance, as the only remedy. But this certainly is folly, to sin in hopes of repentance, that is, first to make work for repentance, and then run the hazard of it; for we may certainly sin, but it is not certain that we shall repent. And if it were, yet it is great folly to lay in before-hand, and to make work for trouble; *næ tu stultus homuncio es, qui malis veniam precari, quam non peccare*, was a wise saying of old Cato; *thou art* (says he) *a silly man indeed, who chusest rather to ask forgiveness, than not to offend*. If a man had the best remedy in the world, he would not make himself sick to try the virtue of it; and it is a known comparison, and a very fit one, that repentance is *tabula post naufragium, a plank after shipwreck*. But I am greatly afraid that thousands of souls, who have trusted to it, have perished before they could get to land, with this plank in their arms.

The last character of wisdom I shall mention is, in all things to consult the peace and satisfaction of our own minds, without which nothing else can make us happy; and this obedience to the laws of God does naturally procure. *Great peace have they* (says David) *that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them. The work of righteousness, says the Prophet, shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever*. The fear of God, and the keeping of his commandments, is the best preservative against the troubles of a guilty conscience, and the terrifying apprehensions of a future judgment. And this is the great wisdom of religion, that whosoever liveth according to the rules and precepts of it, prevents the chief causes of discontent, and lays the surest foundation of a perpetual satisfaction of mind, a jewel of inestimable price, which none knows but he that has it; and he that hath it, knows the value of it too well to part with it for *the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season*, and which
always

always prove *bitterness in the end*, and for the little sweetness which they yielded, leave a terrible sting behind them.

Thus have I briefly represented the *reasonableness* and *wisdom of religion*. It is of infinite perfection, and of a vast influence and extent, it reacheth to the whole man, the happiness of soul and body; and to our whole duration, the happiness of this world and the next; for *godliness* (that is, true religion and piety) *hath the promise of this life, and of that which is to come*.

But now where are the effects of true religion, in the full compass and extent of it, to be found? such real effects as do in any measure bear a proportion to the power and perfection of their cause? for nothing certainly is more excellent and amiable in its definition than true religion is; but alas! how imperfect is it in the subject? I mean in us, who ought to shew forth the power and perfection of it, in the practice and actions of our lives, the best demonstration of the excellent frame and temper of our minds.

What a conflict and struggling do the best men find between their inclination and their duty? how hard to reconcile our practice and our knowledge, and to make our lives agree with the reason of our minds, and the clear conviction of our consciences? how difficult for a man in this dangerous and imperfect state, to be in any measure either so wise or good as he ought? how rare is it for a man to be good-natur'd, gentle, and easy to be entreated, without being often betray'd into some weakness and sinful compliances, especially in the bad company of our betters? how next to impossible is it to be strict and severe in our lives, without being sour? to govern our lives with that perpetual caution, and to maintain that evenness of temper, as not to be sometimes peevish and passionate? and when we are so, not to be apt to say with *Jonah*, *we do well to be angry*.

There are *two* precepts in the new Testament, that seem to me to be the nicest of all other, and hardest to be put in practice. One is that of our blessed Saviour, *be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves*. How hard is it to hit upon the just temper of wisdom and innocency; to be wise, and hurt no body; to be innocent, without being silly? The other is, that of the Apostle, *be angry and sin not*. How difficult is this, never to be angry but upon just cause? and when the cause of our anger is just, not to be transported beyond due bounds, either as to the degree of our anger, or as to the duration and continuance of it; this is so very nice a matter, that one would be almost tempted to think that this were in effect a prohibition of anger in any case; *be ye angry, and sin not*; be ye so, if ye can without sin. I believe whosoever observes it, will find that it is as easy to suppress this passion at any time, as to give way to it, without offending in one kind, or other. But to proceed,

How hard a matter is it, to be much in company, and free in conversation, and not to be infected by it? to live in the midst of a wicked world, and yet to keep our selves free from the vices of it? to be temperate in the use of things pleasing, so as neither to injure our health, nor to lose the use of our reason, nor to offend against conscience? to fast often, without being conceited of it, and bargaining as it were with God for some greater liberties in another kind; and without censuring those who do not tie up themselves to our strict rules either of piety or abstinence? when perhaps they have neither the same opportunities of doing it, nor the same reason to do it that we have; nay perhaps have a much better reason for not doing just as we do: for no man is to prescribe to others his own private method, either of fasting, or of devotion, as if he were the *rule*, and his example a kind of *proclamation*, enjoyning all his neighbours the same days of fasting and prayer which he himself, for reasons best known to himself, thinks fit to observe.

And then how hard is it to be chearful without being vain? and grave and serious without being morose? to be useful and instructive to others in our conversation and discourse, without assuming too much authority to our selves? which is not the best and most effectual way of doing good to others; there being something in the nature of man, which had rather take a hint and intimation

tion from another, to advise himself, and would rather chuse to imitate the silent good example which they see in another, than to have either his advice or his example imposed upon them.

How difficult is it to have a mind equal to every condition, and to be content with mean and moderate things? to be patient in adversity, and humble in prosperity, and meek upon sudden and violent provocations? to keep our passions free from getting head of our reason, and our zeal from out-running our knowledge? to have a will perfectly submitted and resigned to the will of God, even when it lies cross and thwart to ours, so that whatever pleases God, should please us? to be resolute, when our duty happens to be difficult and dangerous; or even to believe that to be our duty (though it certainly be so) which is very inconvenient for us to do? to hold out and be unwearied in well-doing? to be careful to preserve our lives, and yet upon a great occasion, and whenever God calls for them, to be content to lay them down?

To be *wise and innocent; men in understanding, and yet in malice children?* to have many great virtues, and not to want that which gives the great lustre to them all, I mean real and unaffected *modesty and humility?* In short,

How difficult is it, *to have regard to all Gods commandments, and to hate every evil and false way?* to have our duty continually in our eye, and ready to be put into practice upon every proper occasion? to have God, and the consideration of another world always before us, present to our minds, and operative upon our practice? to live as those that know they must die, and to have our thoughts perpetually awake, and intent upon the great and everlasting concerns of our immortal souls?

These are great things indeed, easy to be talk'd of, but hard to be done; nay not to be done at all, without frequent and fervent prayer to God, and the continual aids and supplies of his grace; not without an earnest endeavour on our parts, a vigorous resistance of temptations, and many a sore conflict with our own perverse wills and sensual inclinations; not without a perpetual guard and watchfulness over our lives, and our unruly appetites and passions.

Little do unexperienc'd men, and those who have taken no great pains with themselves, imagine what thought and consideration, what care and attention, what resolution and firmness of mind, what diligence and *patient continuance in well-doing*, are requisite to make a truly good man; such a one as St. Paul describes, that is, *perfect and entire, and wanting nothing; that follows God fully, and fulfils every part of his duty, having a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man.* Who is there among us, that is either wise enough for his own direction, or good enough for the peace and satisfaction of his own mind; that is so happy as to know his duty, and to do it; as to have both the understanding and the will to do in all things as he ought?

After our best care, and all our pains and endeavours, the most of us will still find a great many defects in our lives, and cannot but discern great and manifold imperfections in our very best duties and services; insomuch that we shall be forced to make the same acknowledgment concerning them, which Solomon does concerning the imperfection of all things under the sun; *that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be number'd.* And when all is done, we have all of us reason to say, not only that *we are unprofitable servants, having done nothing but what was our duty to do;* but have cause likewise, with great shame and confusion of face, to acknowledge that we have been in many respects *wicked and slothful servants*, and so very far from having done what was *our duty to do*, that the greatest part of the good which the most of us have done, is the least part of the good which we might and ought to have done.

The practice of religion, in all the parts and instances of our duty, is work more than enough for the best and greatest mind, for the longest and best order'd life, *the commandment of God is exceeding broad;* and an obedience in any good measure equal to the extent of it, extremely difficult. And after all, as the man in the gospel said *with tears* to our Saviour, concerning the weakness of his own faith, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief,* Mark 9. 24. So the best of
men

men may say, and say it with *tears* too, concerning every grace and virtue wherein they excel most, "Lord, I aspire, I endeavour after it, be thou pleased to assist my weakness, and to help me by thy grace continually to do better.

The sum of all is this, If we be careful to do our best, and make it the constant and sincere endeavour of our lives to please God, and to keep his commandments, we shall be accepted of him: For God values this more than *whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices*, more than *thousands of rams*, and *ten thousands of rivers of oyl*; because this is an essential part of religion, *To love God with all our hearts, and minds, and strength, and to love our neighbours as our selves*. The duties comprehended in these two great commandments, sincerely practised by us (though with a great deal of imperfection) will certainly be acceptable in the sight of God, in and through the merits and mediation of *Jesus Christ the righteous*. *Blessed are they* (saith St. John very plainly, in the conclusion of that obscure book of his Revelation) *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life*, Rev. 22. 14.

I speak now to a great many who are at the upper end of the world, and command all the pleasures and enjoyments of it; but the time is coming, and (whether we think of it or not) is very near at hand, when we shall *see an end of all perfection*, and of all that is desirable upon earth, and upon which men are apt to value themselves so much in this world; and then nothing but religion, and the conscience of having done our duty to God and man, will stand us in stead, and yield true comfort to us. When we are going to leave the world, how shall we then wish that we had made religion the great business of our lives; and in the day of God's grace and mercy, had exercised repentance, and made our peace with God, and prepared our selves for another world; that after our departure hence, we might be admitted into *the presence of God, where is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore*?

Let no man therefore, of what rank or condition soever he be in this world, think himself too great to be good, and too wise to be religious, and to take care of his immortal soul, and his everlasting happiness in another world; since nothing but this will approve it self to be *true wisdom* at the last. All other things will have an end with this life; but religion and the fear of God is of a vast extent, and hath an influence upon our whole duration, and, after the course of this life is ended, will put us into the secure possession of a happiness which shall never have an end.

I will conclude this whole discourse with those words of our Blessed Saviour, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. Which thou, who art the eternal spring of truth and goodness, grant that we may all know and do in this our day, for thy mercies sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever. Amen.*

S E R M O N XLIII.

The Nature and Influence of the Promises of the Gospel.

*The First
Sermon on
this Text.*

2 PETER i. 4.

*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and pretious Promises;
that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature.*



THE connexion of these words with the former is somewhat obscure, but it seems to be this. The Apostle had in the verse before said, *that the divine power of Christ hath by the knowledge of the Gospel given us all things that pertain to life and godliness*; that is, by the knowledge of the Gospel we are furnish'd with all advantages which conduce to make men happy in the next life, and religious in this; and then it follows, *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and pretious promises*. *Whereby*; this seems to refer to the whole of the foregoing verse; as if it had been said, "Christ by the Gospel hath given to us all things that conduce to our future happiness; and in order thereto, all things which tend to make men holy and good." Or *life and godliness* are, by a *Hebraism* frequent in the new Testament, put for *a godly life*. And then among all those things which conduce to a godly life, the Apostle instanceth in the *promises* of the Gospel, which do so directly tend to make men *partakers of a divine nature*.

In the handling of these words, I shall,

First, Consider the promises here spoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and pretious promises*.

Secondly, The influences which these promises ought to have upon us; *that by these ye might be made partakers of a divine nature*.

First, We will consider the promises, which are here spoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and pretious promises*. And because the chief promises of the Gospel are here intended, I shall take occasion from this text to handle the doctrine of the promises, which is frequently discours'd of in divinity, but not always so clearly stated. And to this purpose, it will be proper to take into consideration these *four* things.

I. What the promises are which are here spoken of; *whereby are given unto us promises*.

II. Why they are said to be so great and pretious; *exceeding great and pretious promises*.

III. We will consider the tenour of these promises.

IV. When men are said to have a right to them, so as they may apply them to themselves. These *four* heads will comprehend what I have to say upon this argument.

I. What the promises are which the Apostle here speaks of; *whereby are given unto us promises*. And, no doubt, the Apostle here intends those great and excellent promises which Christ hath made to us in the Gospel. So that to satisfy our selves in this enquiry, we need only to consider what are the principal promises of the Gospel. Now the great promises of the Gospel are these *three*.

1. The promise of the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance.

2. The promise of God's grace and holy Spirit to assist our obedience.
3. The promise of eternal life to reward it.

1. The promise of the pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance. The Gospel hath made full and clear promises to this purpose; that if we believe the Gospel, and will forsake our sins, and amend our wicked lives, all that is past shall be forgiven us, and that Christ died for this end, to obtain for us remission of sins in his blood. The light of nature, upon consideration of the mercy and goodness of God, gave men good hopes, that upon their repentance God would forgive their sins, and turn away his wrath from them. But mankind was doubtful of this, and therefore they used expiatory sacrifices to appease the offended Deity. The *Jewish* religion allowed of no expiation, but for legal impurities, and involuntary transgressions, such as proceeded from ignorance and inadvertency; but not for *sins of presumption*, and such as were committed *with an high hand*. If men sinn'd wilfully, there was no sacrifice appointed by the law for such sins. But the grace of the Gospel justifies us from the greatest sins, upon our faith and sincere repentance. So St. Paul tells the Jews, Acts 13. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.* There was no general promise of pardon, nor way of expiation under the law; perfect remission of sins is clearly revealed, and ascertain'd to us only by the Gospel.

2. Another great promise of the Gospel is the promise of God's grace and holy Spirit to assist our obedience. Our blessed Saviour hath promised, that *our heavenly father will give his holy spirit to them that ask him.* 'Tis true indeed, there was a peculiar promise of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles and christians of the first ages, which is not now to be expected; namely an extraordinary and miraculous power, whereby they were qualified to publish the Gospel to the world, and to give confirmation to it. But now that the christian religion is propagated and settled in the world, the great end and use of these miraculous gifts is ceased: But yet the Spirit of God doth still concur with the Gospel, and work upon the minds of men, to excite and assist them to that which is good. And tho' this operation be very secret, so as we cannot give an account of the manner of it, yet the effects of it are very sensible, and this influence of God's holy Spirit is common to all christians in all ages of the world. This proposition is universally true, and in all ages and times; *If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

It must be acknowledged, that the Spirit doth not now work upon men in that sudden and sensible manner, as it did in the first times of christianity: because then men were strongly possess'd with the prejudices of other religions, which they had been brought up in; and therefore as more outward means of conviction were then necessary, so likewise a more powerful internal operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, to concur and bear down those prejudices, and to subdue them to the obedience of faith. But now the principles of religion and goodness are more gradually instill'd into the minds of men, by the gentle degrees of pious instruction and education; and with these means the Spirit of God concurs in a more humane way, which is more suited and accommodated to our reason, and offers less violence to the nature of men. So that this promise of God's holy Spirit is now made good to us, as the necessity and circumstances of our present state do require. God does not use such extraordinary means for the producing of those effects, which may be accomplish'd in a more ordinary way. The assistance of God's holy Spirit is still necessary to men, to encline and enable them to that which is good; but not in that manner and degree that it was necessary at first: Because the prejudices against christianity are not now so great, and many of those advantages which were necessarily wanting at first, are now supplied in an ordinary way; and therefore it is not reasonable now to expect the same extraordinary operation of the

the spirit of God upon the minds of men, which we read of in the first beginnings of christianity.

3. There is likewise the promise of eternal life to reward and crown our obedience. And this the Scripture speaks of as the great promise of the Gospel, *1 John 2. 25. This is the promise which he hath promised us, even eternal life.* And upon this account, the new covenant of the Gospel is prefer'd before the old covenant of the law, because it is *established upon better promises.* All the special and particular promises of the law were of temporal good things, and these were the great encouragements that were given to obedience, under that imperfect dispensation: But now *godliness hath not only the promise of the life that now is, but of that which is to come;* as the Apostle tells us, *1 Tim. 4. 8.* The Gospel hath clearly revealed to us a happy state of immortality after this life, of which men had but very obscure and doubtful apprehensions. So the Apostle tells us; *2 Tim. 1. 10. That it is now made manifest, by the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel.* Holy men had good hopes of it before; but they had no sure distinct apprehensions of it, no such full assurance concerning it, no such clear and express promises of it, as the Gospel hath given us.

Thus you see what those great promises are which the Gospel hath given us, namely the promise of the free pardon and forgiveness of our sins, upon our faith and repentance; the promise of God's grace and holy Spirit to assist our obedience, and the promise of eternal life and happiness to reward it. These are the *three* eminent promises of the Gospel, and in all probability those which the Apostle here calls *great and pretious promises;* which brings me to the

II^d Thing which I propounded to consider, namely, why they are said to be *exceeding great and pretious*, τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, *the greatest and the most valuable promises.* And to satisfy us that they are such, the very consideration of the blessings and benefits that they carry in them will be sufficient. If we consider the condition that mankind was in, when God was pleased to make these gracious declarations to us, we shall see great reason to set a high value upon every one of these promises. Mankind was extremely degenerated, *all flesh had corrupted its ways,* and *the whole world was guilty before God,* and liable to all that misery which the sinner had reason to apprehend from the incensed justice of the Almighty. We had forfeited that happiness to which our immortal nature was designed, and, which made our condition more sad, we were *without strength* to recover our selves out of it, by our repentance for what was past (if God would have accepted of it) and by our future obedience. Now the promises of the Gospel offer relief to us in all these respects, and thereby obviate all the difficulties and discouragements which mankind lay under.

The gracious promise of pardon frees us from guilt, and secures us from the terrible wrath of God, which our guilty consciences did so much dread; and without this promise, mankind would have been under the greatest doubts and discouragements. For when men are afraid *their sins are greater than will be forgiven them,* they are apt to fall into despair, and despair is an effectual bar to repentance; for when men think their condition is desperate, they care not what they do.

And the promise of God's grace and holy spirit, to assist and enable us to do our duty, does fully answer all the discouragements and objections from our own weakness, and the power of temptation. We may *do all things through Christ strengthening us;* and how weak soever we are of our selves, we are *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.* If God be for us, who, or what, can stand against us? The Devil is a very powerful enemy, and much too strong for flesh and blood to encounter in its own strength; but there is another principle in the world, which is mightier and more powerful than he, the holy Spirit of God, who is always ready to help, when we do not repulse and refuse his assistance; *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world,* says the Apostle, *1 John 4. 4.* The Spirit of God dwells in all those who are willing to

admit him, and is ever ready to assist those who comply with his blessed motions, and do vigorously put forth their own endeavours.

And then the promise of eternal life, *that* answers all the difficulties of our obedience, and sets us above any thing that the world can threaten us withal, for our constancy to God, and his truth. A wise man will be content to suffer any thing, or to quit any thing, upon terms of far greater advantage: And what greater consideration can be offered to encourage our constancy and obedience, than an eternity of happiness? So that the Apostle had reason to call these *exceeding great and valuable promises*; so valuable, that if any one of them had been wanting, our redemption and recovery had either been absolutely impossible, or extremely difficult. I proceed to the

III. Thing I propounded, which was to consider the tenour of these promises; that is, whether God hath made them absolutely to us, without requiring any thing to be done on our part, or upon certain terms and conditions to be performed by us. That God may (if he please) make an absolute promise of any blessing or benefit to us, there is no doubt; and that God's Grace does prevent many, and is before-hand with them, is as little to be doubted: the Spirit of God goes along with the Gospel, moving and inclining men to yield obedience to it, many times before any inclination and disposition thereto on their parts. But as to this promise of God's Grace and holy Spirit, the great question is not about the first motion of it, but the continuance of this assistance, and the increase of it; and this, I think, may safely be affirmed, is promised only conditionally, as also the pardon of sin, and eternal life. And concerning each of these, the matter may quickly be decided, by plain texts of Scripture.

Concerning the promise of the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit the Scripture takes notice of *two* conditions. *First*, that we beg it earnestly of God: And this our Saviour expresseth by *asking, seeking, and knocking*, which signifies the importunity of our requests; *Our heavenly Father will give his holy Spirit to them that thus ask it*. And then *secondly*, That we improve and make use of the grace which God affords us; *To him that hath, shall be given, and from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seems to have*. That is (as appears plainly from the scope of the parable) to him that useth that grace, and those advantages which God affords him, more shall be given; but from him that makes no use of them, and therefore is as if he had them not, shall be taken away that which he but seems to have, because he makes no use of it.

Concerning the pardon of sins; the Scripture plainly suspends that upon the general condition of repentance, and the change of our lives; *Repent, that your sins may be forgiven you*: and upon the condition of our forgiving others; *If ye forgive men their trespasses, then will your heavenly father also forgive you; but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses*, says our Saviour, *Matt. 6. 14, 15*.

And then the promise of eternal life, is every where in Scripture suspended upon the condition of faith and repentance, and perseverance in well doing. *He that believes* (says our Saviour,) *shall be saved*, which indeed implies the whole condition of the Gospel. *He that believes*, that is, he that effectually assents to the doctrine of Christ, and is so persuaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, *shall be saved*. But if obedience were not included in the Scripture notion of faith, yet the Scripture elsewhere expressly makes it the condition of our eternal salvation. *Heb. 5. 9*. Christ is there said to be *the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*; thereby implying that none shall be saved by Christ, but those that obey the Gospel. *Heb. 12. 14*. *Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*. *Rom. 2. 7, 8, 9*. *To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, God will give eternal life; but to them that are contentious, and obey not the truth*, (that is, the Gospel) *but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil*.

I cannot well imagine what can reasonably be answered to such plain texts; but I will tell you what is commonly answer'd; namely, That God gives the condition

condition which he requires ; and therefore though these promises run into a conditional form, yet in truth they are absolute ; because he that makes a promise to another, upon a condition which he will also perform, doth in effect make an absolute promise. As if a man promised another such an estate, upon condition he pay such a sum for it, and does promise withal to furnish him with that sum, this in effect amounts to an absolute promise of the estate.

And this is very well argued, if the case were thus. But God hath no where promised to work the condition in us, without the concurrence of our own endeavours. God may, and oftentimes doth, prevent men by his grace ; but he hath no where promised to *give his holy Spirit*, but *to them that ask it of him*. And he hath no where promised to continue his grace and assistance to us, unless we will use our sincere endeavours ; nay, in case we do not, he hath threatened to take away his grace and assistance from us. And if this be so, then the promises of the Gospel, do not only *seem* to be conditional, but are *really* so. And it is a wonder that any man should doubt of this, who considers how frequently in the New Testament the Gospel is represented to us under the notion of a *Covenant*, such a covenant in the very nature of it doth imply a mutual obligation between the parties that enter into it. But if the Gospel contain only blessings which are promised on God's part, without any thing required to be done and performed on our part, in order to the obtaining of those blessings, then the Gospel is nothing else but a *promise*, or *deed of gift*, making over certain benefits and blessings to us ; but can in no propriety of language in the world be called a *Covenant* : But if there be some things required on our part, in order to our being made partakers of the promises which God hath made to us (as the Scripture every where tells us there is) then the promises are plainly *conditional*. To instance in the promise of forgiveness of sins ; *repent, that your sins may be blotted out* ; that is, upon this condition that ye repent of your sins, they shall be forgiven ; and not otherwise. Can there be any plainer condition in the world, than is in those words of our Saviour ? *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive your trespasses ; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly father forgive your trespasses.*

This is so far from being any prejudice to the freeness of God's grace, who is infinitely gracious in offering such great blessings to us upon any condition that we can perform ; that it were one of the absurdest things in the world to imagine that God should grant to men forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, let them behave themselves as they will.

IV. The last thing I proposed for the explaining of this doctrine of the promises of God, was to consider when men may be said to have a right to these promises, so as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themselves : And the answer to this is very plain and easy ; namely, when they find the conditions of these promises in themselves ; and not till then.

When a man hath truly repented of his sins so as to forsake them, and lead a new life ; and when he does from his heart forgive those that have offended him, and hath laid down all animosity against them, and thoughts of revenge ; then hath he a right to the promise of pardon and forgiveness, and may apply to himself in particular what the Scripture saith in general, that *God will blot out all his transgressions, and remember his iniquities no more*. When a man doth constantly and earnestly implore the assistance of God's holy Spirit, and is ready to yield to the motions of it, and does faithfully make use of that strength and assistance which God affords him, then he may expect the continuance of his Grace, and further degrees of it. When a man makes it the constant and sincere endeavour of his life, to please God, and *to walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless, and is effectually taught by the grace of God to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world*, then he may with comfort and joy wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ ; then he may with confidence depend upon God, *in sure and certain hope of that eternal life,*
which

which God, that cannot lie, hath promised. When he can say with St. Paul, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*, then he may likewise triumph, as he did, *henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of righteousness, which God the righteous Judge shall give me in that day.*

Upon these terms, and in these cases, men may upon good grounds apply to themselves these *exceeding great and precious promises* of the Gospel; and so far as any man is doubtful and uncertain of the performance of the conditions which the Gospel requires, so far he must necessarily question his right and title to the blessings promised. And if any man think this doctrine too uncomfortable, and be willing to reject it upon this account, I shall only say this, that men may cheat themselves, if they please, but most certainly they will never find any true and solid comfort in any other. This is a plain and sensible account of a man's confidence and good hopes in the promises of God; but for a man to apply any promise to himself, before he finds the condition in himself, is not *faith*, but either *fancy* or *presumption*.

And therefore it is a very preposterous course which many take, to advise and exhort men, with so much earnestness, to apply the promises of God to themselves, and to tell them that they are guilty of great unbelief in not doing it. That which is proper to exhort men to, is to endeavour to perform the condition upon which God hath promised any blessing to us; and when men find the condition in themselves, they will without any great persuasion take comfort from the promise, and apply it to themselves; but till they discern the condition in themselves, it is impossible for a man that understands himself, to apply the promise to himself; for till the condition be performed, he hath no more right to the promise, than if such a promise had never been made. And 'tis so far from being a sin in such a man, to doubt of the benefit of such a promise, that it is his duty to do so; and no man that understands himself, and the promises of God, can possibly do otherwise.

Therefore 'tis a vain and groundless trouble which perplexeth many people, that they cannot apply the promises of God to themselves; whereas the true ground of their trouble should be this, that they have not been careful to perform the condition of those promises which they would apply to themselves; the other is an endless trouble; let them but look to the condition, and the promise will apply it self. I speak all this on purpose to free men from those perplexities wherewith many have entangled themselves, by false apprehensions of the promises of God, either as if they were not made to us upon certain conditions to be performed by us, or as if any man could comfortably apply them to himself, before he hath performed those conditions upon which God hath made such promises. For if men will believe that which is not true, or expect things upon such terms as they are not to be had, they may trouble themselves eternally, and all the world cannot help it.

I have now done with the *first* thing I propounded to speak to, namely the promises which are here spoken of. The *second* thing, (*viz.*) what influence these promises ought to have upon us, *that by them we may be made partakers of the divine nature*, I shall reserve to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XLIV.

The Nature and Influence of the Promises of the Gospel.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

2 PETER i. 4.

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and pretious Promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature.



Made entrance into these words the last day, in the handling whereof I proposed to do these *two* things ;

First, To consider the *promises* here spoken of ; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and pretious promises.*

Secondly, The influence which these promises ought to have upon us ; *that by these ye might be partakers of a divine nature.*

The *first* of these I have done with, and proceed now to the

Second, viz. The influence which these promises ought to have upon us ; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and pretious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of a divine nature.* Not that we can *partake of the essence and nature of God*, as some have blasphemously affirmed, pretending, in their canting and senseless language, to be *Godhed with God, and Christed with Christ.* In this sense it is impossible for us to *partake of the divine nature* ; for this would be for *men* to become *Gods*, and to be advanced to the state and perfection of the Deity. But the word *ϋοις* doth frequently in Scripture signifie a *temper and disposition* ; and to be *partakers of a divine nature*, is to be of *a divine temper and disposition*, to have our corrupt natures rectified and purged from all sinful lusts, and irregular passions, and from all vicious and corrupt affections ; and therefore it follows in the text, *having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust ; and besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity.* So that we are *made partakers of a divine nature*, as the Apostle here explains it, these *two* ways ; by cleansing our selves from the lusts of the flesh, which the Apostle here calls the *corruption or defilement which is in the world through lust* ; and by a diligent endeavour after all Christian graces and virtues, faith, and temperance, and patience, a sincere love of the brethren, and an universal charity and good-will towards all men.

And that this is the proper influence and efficacy of the great promises of the Gospel upon the hearts and lives of men, the Apostle St. Paul fully declares to us, 2 Cor. 7. 1. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit ; that is, from the lusts of the flesh, and of uncleanness, and from all evil and corrupt affections of the mind, such as wrath, envy, malice, hatred, strife, revenge, cruelty, pride, and the like ; perfecting holiness in the fear of God ; that is, continually aspiring still more and more after further degrees of holiness, and virtue, and goodness, which are the great perfections of the divine nature. And thus by a constant and sincere endeavour to cleanse our selves from all impurity of flesh and spirit, and by practising all the virtues of a good life, we shall by degrees raise and advance our selves*

to

to a *Godlike temper and disposition*, imitating in all our actions the goodness, and mercy, and patience, and truth, and faithfulness of God, and all those other perfections of the divine nature, which are comprehended under the term of *holiness*. This is that which the Apostle here calls *partaking of a divine nature*; or, as our blessed Saviour expresseth it, *to be perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect*.

This the Gospel designs to raise us to; and one of the great instruments whereby this is effected, are those *exceeding great and precious promises* which I have insisted upon: And they are capable of effecting it these *two* ways.

First, By way of internal efficacy and assistance; and,

Secondly, By way of external motive and argument: Both these ways, some or other of these promises have a mighty influence upon us (if we be not wanting to our selves) to raise us to a Godlike temper and disposition, that is, to the greatest perfection of virtue and goodness which we are capable of in this life.

First, By way of internal efficacy and assistance. And this influence the promise of God's holy Spirit and of the gracious help and assistance thereof, hath upon the minds of men, inclining them to that which is good, and enabling them to do it. For the holy Spirit is promised to us, in consideration and commiseration of that impotency and weakness which we have contracted in that degenerate and depraved condition into which mankind is sunk; to help us, who are *without strength*, to recover our selves out of that evil and miserable state into which by wilful transgression we are fallen; to *quicken us who are dead in trespasses and sins*, (as the Scripture expresseth the condition of unregenerate persons) to *raise us to a new life*, and to cherish this principle of spiritual life, which is commonly weak at first, and to carry it through all discouragements and oppositions; to excite us continually to our duty, and to enable us to the most difficult parts of obedience, such as are most contrary to our natural inclinations, and against the grain of flesh and blood; to bear down the strength of sin and temptation; and in all our conflicts with the world, and the flesh, the devil, and all the powers of darkness, to make us victorious over them; and in a word, to be a principle within us, more mighty and powerful than the lusts and inclinations of our evil hearts, than the most obstinate and inveterate habits of sin and vice, and than all the temptations and terrors of sense. So that if we will make use of this assistance, and lay hold of this strength which God affords us in the Gospel, and (as the Apostle expresseth it) *be workers together with God*, we need not despair of victory and success; for our strength will continually encrease, and the force and violence of our lusts will be abated, God will give us more grace, and we shall *walk from strength to strength*, and *our path will be* (as Solomon says of *the way of the righteous*) *as the light which shines more and more unto the perfect day*.

For the holy Spirit of God conducts and manageth this great work of our sanctification and salvation from first to last, by opening our hearts to let in the light of divine truth upon our minds, by representing to us with advantage such arguments and considerations as are apt to persuade us to embrace it, and yield to it; by secret and gentle reprehensions softening our hard hearts, and bending our stiff and stubborn wills to a compliance with the will of God, and our duty. And this is that great work which the Scripture calls our *regeneration* and *sanctification*, the *turning us from darkness to light*, and *from the power of Satan unto God*, a *new creation*, and a *resurrection from the death of sin, to the life of holiness*. And then by leading and directing us in the ways of holiness and obedience; by quickening our devotion, and stirring up in us holy desires and dispositions of soul, rendring us fit to draw near to God in prayer, with a due sense of our own wants and unworthiness, and an humble confidence in the goodness of God, that he will grant us those good things that we ask of him; in supporting and comforting us in all our afflictions and sufferings, especially for truth and righteousness sake; and by sealing and confirming to us the blessed hopes of eternal life. Thus the Spirit of God carries on the work of our sanctification,

etification, and makes us *partakers of a divine nature*, by way of inward efficacy and assistance.

Secondly, The promises of the gospel are apt likewise to have a mighty influence upon us by way of motive and argument, to engage and encourage us to *cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.* For,

First, A full pardon and indemnity for what is past, is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our duty, and a forcible argument to keep us to it for the future. For since God, who hath been so highly injured and affronted by us, is so willing and ready to forgive us, as not only to provide and purchase for us the means of our pardon, by the grievous sufferings of his dear Son, but to offer it so freely, and invite us so earnestly to accept of it, and to be reconciled to him; the consideration of this ought in all reason, ingenuity, and gratitude, to melt us into sorrow and repentance for our sins, and a deep sense of the evil of them, and to inflame our hearts with a mighty love to God, and our blessed redeemer, *who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*; and to make us extremely unwilling, nay, most firmly resolved never more to offend that merciful and gracious God, who is so slow to punish, and so forward to forgive; and effectually to engage us to a dutiful, and constant, and chearful obedience to God's holy laws and commandments, lest by our wilful transgression and violation of them, we should run our selves into a deeper guilt, and aggravate our condemnation. Now that by the tender mercies of our God we are *made whole*, we should be infinitely afraid *to sin any more, lest worse things come to us*; lest we relapse into a more incurable state, and bring a heavier load of guilt and misery upon our selves.

Secondly, The promise of God's grace and holy Spirit is likewise a very powerful argument and encouragement to holiness and goodness, engaging us *to cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, that our souls and minds may be a fit temple for the Holy Ghost, which will not dwell in an impure soul: and likewise encouraging us hereto, by this consideration, that we have so unerring a guide to counsel and direct us, so powerful an assistant *to strengthen us with all might in the inner man*, to stand by us in all our conflicts with sin and Satan, and make us (as the Apostle expresseth it) *more than conquerors* over all our spiritual enemies. For tho' we be weak, and our lusts strong, our enemies many, and temptations mighty and violent; yet we need not be dishearten'd, so long as we know that *God is with us*, and *the grace of his Holy Spirit sufficient for us*, against all the strength of sin and Hell; tho' our duty be hard, and our strength small, yet we cannot fail of success, if we be sure that the omnipotent grace of God is always ready to second our sincere, tho' never so weak, endeavours. So that when we see all the enemies of our salvation drawn up in array against us, we may encourage our selves, as the Prophet *Elisha* did his servant, when he told him that *an host compassed the city with horses and chariots*, and said *Alas! my master, how shall we do?* And he answered, *fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them*; 2 Kings 6. 16. Or, as *Hezekiah* comforted the people, when they were afraid of the mighty force of the King of *Assyria*, 2 Chron. 32. 7, 8. *Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight for us.* This is the case of every christian; the force that is against us is finite and limited; but the Almighty God is on our side, and fights for us; and every one of us may say with *St. Paul*, Philip. 4. 13. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

Thirdly, The promise of eternal life and happiness, if duly weighed and considered, hath a mighty force in it to take us off from the love and practice of sin, and to encourage our obedience, and *patient continuance in well-doing*. The assurance of enjoying unspeakable and endless happiness in another world, and of escaping extrem and eternal misery, is a consideration of that weight, as one

would think could not fail of its efficacy upon us, to put all temptations to sin out of countenance, and to bear down before us all the difficulties and discouragements in the way of our duty. And if this make no impression upon us, if Heaven and Hell be of no weight with us, it will be in vain to use any other arguments, which, in comparison of this, are *but as the very small dust upon the balance*. For if on the one hand the hopes of perfect comfort, and joy, and felicity, perpetual in duration, and vast beyond all imagination, *such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath enter'd into the heart of man to conceive*: and if on the other hand, the dread of the terrible wrath of God, and of the vengeance of eternal fire, together with the insupportable torments of a guilty conscience, and the perpetual stings of bitter remorse and anguish for the wilful folly of our wicked lives, and the rage of horrible despair of ever getting out of so miserable a state; if neither of these considerations, if both of them will not prevail upon us *to cease to be evil, and to resolve to be good*, that we may obtain one of these conditions, and may escape the other; there is no hope that any words that can be used, any arguments and considerations that can be offered, should work upon us, or take place with us. He that is not to be tempted by such hopes, nor to be terrified by such fears, is proof against all the force of persuasion in the world.

And thus I have done with the *two* things which I propos'd to consider from these words; the nature of these *promises*, and the influence they are apt, and ought to have upon us, to raise us to the perfection of virtue and goodness, which the Apostle here calls our being *partakers of a divine nature*. All that now remains is, to make some useful reflections upon what hath been discours'd upon these *two* heads.

First of all, If we expect the blessings and benefits of these *exceeding great and precious promises* of the gospel, we must be careful to perform the conditions which are indispensably required on our parts. It is a great mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the souls of men, to imagine that the gospel is all promises on God's part, and that our part is only to believe them, and to rely upon God for the performance of them, and to be very confident that he will make them good, tho' we do nothing else but only believe that he will do so. That the christian religion is only a declaration of God's good will to us, without any expectation of duty from us; this is an error which one could hardly think could ever enter into any who have the liberty to read the Bible, and do attend to what they read, and find there.

The *three* great promises of the gospel all are very expressly contain'd in our Saviour's first sermon upon the mount. There we find the promise of *blessedness* often repeated; but never absolutely made, but upon certain conditions, and plainly required on our parts; as repentance, humility, righteousness, mercy, peaceableness, meekness, patience. *Forgiveness of sins* is likewise promised; but only to those that make a penitent acknowledgment of them, and ask forgiveness for them, and are ready to grant that forgiveness to others, which they beg of God for themselves. *The gift of God's holy Spirit* is likewise there promised; but it is upon condition of our earnest and importunate prayer to God. The gospel is every where full of precepts, enjoyning duty and obedience on our part, as well as of promises on God's part, assuring blessings to us; nay, of terrible threatenings also if we disobey the precepts of the gospel. St. Paul gives us the sum of the gospel in very few and plain words, declaring upon what terms we may expect that salvation which the gospel offers to all men, *Tit. 2. 11, 12, 13, 14. The grace of God which bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* And then he adds, *these things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority*; intimating, that tho' men were very averse to this doctrine,

ctrine, it ought to be inculcated with great authority and earnestness, and those who opposed and despised it, to be severely rebuked: and with great reason, because the contrary doctrine does most effectually undermine and defeat the whole design of the christian religion.

Secondly, From hence we learn, that if the promises of the gospel have not this effect upon us, to make us *partakers of a divine nature*, it is our own fault, and because we are wanting to our selves. God is always ready to do his part, if we do not fail in ours. There is a divine power and efficacy goes along with the gospel, to make way for the entertainment of it in the hearts of men, where they put no bar and obstacle to it. But if men will resist the motions of God's blessed Spirit, and quench the light of it, and obstinately hold out against the force of truth; God will withdraw his grace and holy Spirit from them. The gospel would raise us to the perfection of all virtue and goodness, and the promises of it are admirably fitted to relieve the infirmities and weakness of humane nature, and *to renew us after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness*; to take us off from sin and vice, and to allure us to goodness, and to assist and encourage us in the practice of it: but if we will not comply with the gracious design of God in the gospel, and suffer these promises to have their due influence and efficacy upon us; we wilfully deprive our selves of all the blessings and benefits of it, *we reject the counsel of God against our selves, and receive the grace of God in vain*; and by rejecting and despising his promises, we provoke him to execute his threatenings upon us.

Thirdly, and lastly, If the promises of the christian religion are apt in their own nature to work this great effect upon us, to make us like to God, and to bring us to so near a resemblance of the divine perfections, to make us good, and just, and merciful, and patient, and *holy in all manner of conversation, to purge us from our iniquities, and to make us a peculiar and excellent people, zealous of good works*; I say, if this be the proper tendency of the gospel, and the promises of it, how doth this upbraid the degenerate state of the christian world at this day, which does so abound in all kind of wickedness and impiety? so that we may cry out as he did, upon reading the gospel; *profecto aut hoc non est Evangelium; aut nos non sumus Evangelici*; "Either this is not the gospel which we read, and the christian religion which we profess; or we are no christians." We are so far from that pitch of goodness and virtue which the christian religion is apt to raise men to, and which the Apostle here calls the *divine nature*, that a great part of us are degenerated into beasts and devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy lusts, indulging our selves in those devilish passions of malice and hatred, of strife and discord, of revenge and cruelty, of sedition and disturbance of the publick peace to that degree, as if *the grace of God* had never *appeared* to us to *teach* us the contrary. And therefore it concerns all those who have the face to call themselves christians, to demean themselves at another rate, and for the honour of their religion, and the salvation of their own souls, *to have their conversation as becometh the gospel of Christ*; and by departing from the vitious practices of this present evil world, to do what in them lies to prevent the judgments of God which hang over us; or if they cannot do that, *to save themselves from this untoward generation*.

The First
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N XLV.

The Support of Good Men under their Sufferings for Religion.

I PETER IV. 19.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

THIS epistle was written by St. Peter, who was the Apostle of the circumcision, to the dispersed Jews, who were newly converted to christianity; and the design of it is to confirm and establish them in the profession of it; and to instruct them how they ought to demean themselves toward the heathen, or gentiles, among whom they lived; and more particularly to arm and prepare them for those sufferings and persecutions, which he foretels would shortly overtake them for the profession of christianity, that when they should happen, they might not be surpris'd and startled at them, as if some strange and unexpected thing were come upon them; at the 12th verse of this chapter, *beloved think it not strange concerning the fiery tryal which is to try you; that is, do not wonder and be not astonish'd at it, as if some strange thing happen'd unto you.*

And then he instructs them more particularly, how they ought to behave themselves under those tryals and sufferings, when they should happen; not only with patience, which men ought to exercise under all kinds of sufferings, upon what account and cause soever; but with joy and chearfulness; considering the glorious example, and reward of them, ver. 13. *But rejoice, in as much as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy:* and at the 14th verse he tells them, that besides the encouragement of so great an example, and so glorious a reward, they should be supported and assisted in a very extraordinary manner by the Spirit of God resting upon them in a glorious manner, as a testimony of the divine power and presence with them; v. 14. *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you;* or, as it is in the best copies, *for the spirit of glory and of power, even the spirit of God resteth upon you;* that is, the glorious power of the divine Spirit is present with you, to comfort and bear up your spirits under these sufferings. But then he cautions them, to take great care, that their sufferings be for a good cause, and a good conscience; v. 15. *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil-doer,* (that is, as an offender in any kind against humane laws, made to preserve the peace and good order of the world) *or as a busy body in other mens matters;* that is, as a pragmatistical person, that meddles out of his own sphere, to the disquiet and disturbance of humane society: for to suffer upon any of these accounts, would be matter of shame and trouble, but not of joy and comfort; but if they suffer'd upon account of the profession of christianity, this would be no cause of shame and reproach to them; but they ought rather to give God thanks for calling them to suffer in so good a cause, and upon so glorious an account, v. 16. *Yet if any man suffer as a christian (if that be his only crime) let him not be ashamed, but let him glorifie God on this behalf; for the time is come, that judgment must begin at the house of God;* that is, the wise and just providence

dence of God, hath so order'd it at this time, for very good reasons and ends, that the first calamities and sufferings should fall upon christians, the peculiar people and church of God, for their tryal, and a testimony of the truth of that religion, which God was now planting in the world: *And if it first begin at us, (that is, at us Jews, who were the antient people of God, and have now embraced and entertained the revelation of the gospel) what shall the end be of them, that obey not the gospel of Christ?* (That is, how much more severely will God deal with the rest of the Jews who have crucified the Son of God and still persist in their infidelity and disobedience to the Gospel?) *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?* (That is, if good men be saved with so much difficulty, and *must through so many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God*, what will become of all ungodly and impenitent sinners? where shall they appear? how shall they be able to stand in the Judgment of the great day?) From the consideration of all which, the Apostle makes this inference or conclusion, in the last verse of this chapter, *wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

Thus you see the connexion and dependance of these words, upon the Apostle's foregoing discourse. I shall explain the several expressions in the text, and then handle the main points contained in them.

The expressions to be explained are these: What is meant by *those that suffer according to the will of God*; what by *committing the keeping of our souls to God unto a faithful Creator*; and what by *well-doing*.

First, What is meant by *suffering according to the will of God*. This may be understood by suffering in a good cause, such as God will approve: but this is not so probable; because this is mentioned afterwards, in the following expressions of *committing the keeping of our souls to God in well-doing*; that is, in suffering upon a good account: And therefore the plain and genuine sense of this expression seems to be this; that those who, according to the good pleasure of God's will, and the wise dispensation of his providence, are appointed to suffer for his cause, should demean themselves so and so: *let them that suffer according to the will of God*; that is, those whom God thinks fit to call to suffering. And this agrees very well with the like expression, *chap. 3. of this epistle, ver. 17. For it is better, if the will of God be so, (that is, if God have so appointed it, and think it fit) that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing.*

Secondly, What is here meant by *committing the keeping of our souls to God, as to a faithful Creator*. That is, to deposit our lives, and all that belongs to us, in a word, our selves, in the hands and custody of his merciful care and providence who made us, and therefore we may be sure will faithfully keep what we commit to him: For as we are his creatures, he is engaged to take care of us, and will not abandon the work of his own hands. Besides that he hath promised to be more especially concerned for good men, to support them in their sufferings for a good cause, and to reward them for it; *and he is faithful that hath promised.*

And therefore there is great reason and great encouragement, in all our sufferings for God's cause and truth, to commit our souls to his care and custody: Our souls, that is, (as I said before) our lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, our selves: for so the word *soul* is frequently used both in the old and new Testament; *Psal. 7. 5. Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it*: that is, my life; for so it follows in the next words; *yea, let him tread down my life upon the earth.* And *Psal. 54. 3. Oppressors seek after my soul.* And *Psal. 59. 3. They lie in wait for my soul*; that is, my life. And *Psal. 16. 10. Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell*; *My soul*, that is, *my self*; thou wilt not suffer me to continue in the grave, and under the power of death, but wilt raise me up to life again. And so likewise in the new Testament, *Mar. 8. 35. Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospels, the same shall save it.* The same word which is here rendered *life*, in the very next verse is rendered *soul*: *For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole*

whole world, and lose his own soul? that is, his life. And so likewise, *Joh. 12. 25.* *He that loveth his life, shall lose it: and he that hateth his life in this world,* (in the original the word signifies *soul*) *He that hateth his life in this world* (that is, who neglecteth and exposeth his life in this world, for the sake of Christ) *shall keep it unto life eternal.* And *Luke 9. 25.* that which the other Evangelist renders by the word *soul*, or *life*, he renders *himself*; for *what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself?* and so here in the text, *to commit the keeping of our souls to God*, is to commit *our selves* to his care and providence.

Thirdly, What is here meant by *committing our selves to him in well-doing*: By *well-doing* is here meant, a fix'd purpose and resolution of doing our duty, notwithstanding all hazards and sufferings; which is called by *St. Paul*, *Rom. 2. 7.* *A patient continuance in well-doing.* It signifies sometimes acts of goodness and charity; but in this epistle it is taken in a larger sense, for constancy and resolution in the doing of our duty; as *chap. 2. 15.* *For so is the will of God, that with well-doing* (that is, by a resolute constancy in a good course) *ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.* And *ver. 20.* *But if when ye do well, and suffer for it* (that is, if when ye suffer for well-doing) *ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.* And *chap. 3. ver. 6.* *As long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement*; that is, are resolute and constant in doing your duty, notwithstanding all threatenings and terrors. And *ver. 17.* *For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing*; that is, for your religion and constancy in so good a cause, as christians, and not as criminals upon any other account.

So that the plain meaning of the words is, as if the Apostle had said, wherefore being forewarned of suffering and persecution for the cause of religion, the sum of my direction and advice upon the whole matter is this; that since it is the will of God that ye should suffer upon this account, commit your selves, in the constant discharge of your duty, and a good conscience, to the particular care and providence of almighty God, and your faithful creator.

And now I come to handle the particular points contained in the words; and they are these *three*.

First, That when men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, they may with confidence commit themselves (their lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more especial care of the divine providence.

Secondly, Always provided, that we do nothing contrary to our duty, and a good conscience; for this the Apostle means, *by committing our selves to God, in well doing.* If we step out of the way of our duty, or do any thing contrary to it, God's providence will not be concerned for us, to bear us out in such sufferings.

Thirdly, I shall consider what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of God, as *a faithful Creator*, affords to us in all our sufferings for a good cause, and a good conscience.

First, When men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, and God's truth, they may with confidence and good assurance commit themselves, (their lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more especial care of his providence. In the handling of this, I shall consider these *three* things.

I. When men may be said to suffer really and truly for the cause of religion; and when not.

II. How far they may rely upon the providence of God, to bear them out in these sufferings.

III. What ground and reason there is to expect the more particular and especial care of God's providence, in case of such sufferings.

I. When men may be said to suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, and God's truth; and when not. In these cases,

First, When men suffer for not renouncing the true religion, and because they will not openly declare against it, and apostatize from it. But it will be said, that in all these cases the question is, What is the true religion? To which

which I answer; that all discourses of this nature, about suffering for religion, do suppose the truth of some religion or other. And among christians, the truth of the christian religion is taken for granted, wherever we speak of mens suffering persecution for it. And the plainest case among christians, is, when they are persecuted, because they will not openly deny and renounce the christian religion. And this was generally the case of the primitive christians; they were threaten'd with tortures and death, because they would not renounce Jesus Christ, and his religion, and give demonstration thereof, by offering sacrifices to the heathen Gods.

Secondly, Men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they are persecuted, only for making an open profession of the christian religion by joyn-
ing in the assemblies of christians for the worship of God; tho' they be not urged to deny and disclaim it, but only to conceal and dissemble the profession of it, so as to forbear the maintenance and defence of it upon fitting occasions, against the objections of those who are adversaries of it. For to conceal the profession of it, and to decline the defence of it, when just occasion is offer'd, is *to be ashamed of it*, which our Saviour interprets to be a kind of *denial* of it, and is opposed to *the confessing of him before men*, Matt. 10. 32, 33. *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my father which is in Heaven: But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my father which is in Heaven.* And this by St. Mark is express'd by *being ashamed of Christ*; that is afraid and ashamed to make an open profession of him, and his religion; Mark 8. 38. *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his father, with the holy Angels.*

And this likewise was the case of the primitive christians under the moderate emperors, when the persecution of them was not so hot, as to drive them to a denial of Christ, provided they would be contented to conceal and dissemble their religion, in that case they did not hunt them out, nor prosecute them to renounce their religion, if they made no discovery of themselves. But yet they who suffered, because they would not conceal their profession of christianity, did truly suffer for the cause of religion.

Thirdly, Men do likewise truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for not betraying it, by an indirect and unworthy means; such as among the primitive christians was the delivering up their bibles to the heathen, to be burnt and destroyed by them: For to give up that holy book, which is the great instrument of our religion, is in effect to give up christianity it self, and to consent to the utter extirpation of it.

And such likewise is the case of those, who suffer in any kind for not contributing to break down the fences of religion in any nation, where the providence of God hath given it a legal establishment and security; or, in a word, for refusing to countenance and further any design, which visibly tends to the ruin of religion: For to destroy religion, and to take away that which hinders the destruction of it, are in effect much the same thing.

Fourthly, Men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for the maintenance and defence of any necessary and fundamental article of it, tho' they be not requir'd to renounce the whole christian religion; for what St. Paul says of the article of *the resurrection of the dead*, is true of any other necessary article of the christian religion, that the denial of it is a subversion of the whole christian faith; because it tends directly to the overthrowing of christianity, being a wound given to it in a vital and essential part. And this was the case of those, who in any age of christianity have been persecuted by *Hereticks*, for the defence of any article of christianity.

And I cannot but observe by the way, that after the heathen persecutions were ceased, persecution was first begun among the christians by *Hereticks*; and hath since been taken up, and carried much beyond that bad pattern, by the church of *Rome*; which, besides a standing *inquisition* in all Countries, which are entirely of that religion; (a court, the like whereto, for the clancular and

secret

secret manner of proceeding, for the unjust and arbitrary rules of it, for the barbarous usage of men's persons, and the cruelty of its torments, to extort confessions from them, the Sun never saw erected under any government in the world, by men of any religion whatsoever) I say, which, besides this court, hath by frequent *Croisadoes* for the extirpation of hereticks, and by many bloody *massacres* in *France* and *Ireland*, and several other places, destroyed far greater numbers of christians, than all the ten heathen persecutions; and hath of late revived, and to this very day continues the same or greater cruelties, and a fiercer persecution of protestants, if all the circumstances of it be considered, than was ever yet practised upon them; and yet whilst this is doing almost before our eyes, in one of our next neighbour nations, they have the face to complain of the cannibal laws and bloody persecutions of the church of *England*, and the confidence to set up for the great patrons of liberty of conscience, and enemies of all compulsion and force in matters of religion.

Fifthly, Men do truly suffer for the cause of God and religion, when they suffer for asserting and maintaining the purity of the christian doctrine and worship; and for opposing and not complying with those gross errors and corruptions, which superstition and ignorance had, in a long course of time, brought into the christian religion. Upon this account many good people suffered in many past ages, for resisting the growing errors and corruptions of the church of *Rome*, which at first crept in by degrees, but at last broke in like a mighty flood, which carried down all before it, and threaten'd ruin and destruction to all that opposed them. Upon this account also, infinite numbers suffered among the *Waldenses* and *Albigenses*, in *Bohemia*, and in *England*, and in most other countries in this *Western* part of christendom. And they who suffered upon this account, suffer'd in a good cause, and for the testimony of the truth.

Sixthly, and *Lastly*, Men do truly suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer for not disclaiming and renouncing any clear and undoubted truth of God whatsoever; yea though it be not a fundamental point and article of religion.

And this is the case of those many thousands, who ever since the IVth council of *Lateran*, which was in the year 1215, (when *Transubstantiation* was first defin'd to be an article of faith, and necessary to salvation to be believ'd) were persecuted with fire and sword, for not understanding those words of our Saviour, *this is my body*, (which are so easily capable of a reasonable sense) in the absurd and impossible sense of *Transubstantiation*. And though this disowning of this doctrine, be no express and direct article of the christian religion; yet it is a fundamental article of right reason and common sense: because the admitting of *Transubstantiation*, does undermine the foundation of all certainty whatsoever, and does more immediately shake the very foundation of christianity it self. Yea, tho' the christian religion were no ways concerned in this doctrine, yet out of reverence to reason and truth; and a just animosity and indignation at confident nonsense, a man of an honest and generous mind, would as soon be brought to declare or swear, that twice two do not make four, but five, as to profess his belief of *Transubstantiation*.

And tho' all truths are not of equal consequence and concernment, yet all truth is of God; and for that reason, tho' we are not obliged to make an open profession of all truths at all times, yet we are bound not to deny or renounce any truth, nor to make profession of a known falshood or error: for it is meerly because of the intrinsical evil of the thing, that *it is impossible for God to lie*; and the Son of God thought it worth his coming into the world, and laying down his life, *to bear witness to the truth*. So he himself tells us, *Joh. 18. 37. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth.*

Thus have I shewn you in these plain instances (to which most other cases may be reduced) when men may be said to suffer truly for the cause of religion, and truth.

I shall mention two or three cases wherein men may seem to suffer for the cause of religion, but cannot truly be said to do so.

First, When men rashly expose themselves to danger, and run upon sufferings for the sake of religion. Thus several of the primitive christians voluntarily exposed themselves when they were not called in question, and in the heat of their affection and zeal for God and religion, offered themselves to martyrdom, when none enquired after them. This, in the gracious interpretation of God, who knowing the sincerity of their zeal, was pleased to overlook the indiscreet forwardness and rashness of it, might be accepted for a kind of *martyrdom*: but cannot in reason be justified, so as to be fit to be made a pattern, and to be recommended to our imitation. For though God may be pleased to excuse the weakness of a well-meaning zeal: yet he can approve nothing but what is reasonable.

To suffer chearfully for the cause of God and his truth, when he calls us *to fight this good fight of faith, and to resist unto blood*; and when we are reduced to that strait, that we must either die for God and his truth, or deny them; to suffer, I say, in this case with courage and patience, is one of the noblest of all the christian virtues. But to be perfect volunteers, and to run our selves upon sufferings, when we are not called to them, looks rather like *the sacrifice of fools*; which tho' God may mercifully excuse, and pardon the evil of the action, for the good meaning of it; yet he can never perfectly approve and accept of it. But I think there is little need now-a-days to caution men against this rashness; it is well if they have the grace and resolution to suffer when it is their duty, and when they are called to it.

Secondly, Nor can men be truly said to suffer for the cause of religion, when they suffer not for their faith, but their fancy, and for the wilful and affected error of a mistaken conscience. As when men suffer for indifferent things, which in heat and passion they call *superstition* and *idolatry*; and for their own false opinions in religion, which they mistake for *fundamental articles* of the christian faith. In this case, their mistake about these things will not change the nature of them, nor turn their sufferings into martyrdom; and yet many men have certainly suffered for their own mistakes. For as men may be so far deluded, *as to think they do God good service, when they kill his faithful servants*; so likewise may they be so far deceived, as to sacrifice their lives, and all that is dear to them, to their own culpable errors and mistakes. But this is zeal without knowledge, not *the wisdom which descends from above*, but that which comes from beneath, and is like the fire of hell, which is heat without light.

Thirdly, and lastly, Nor can men truly be said to suffer for the cause of God and religion, when they suffer for the open profession and defence of truths not necessary. For tho' a man be obliged to make an open profession of all *fundamental and necessary truths*; yet he is under no such obligation to make profession of truths *not necessary* at all times; and unless he be called to deny them, he is not bound either to declare or defend them; he may hold his peace at other times, and be silent about them, especially when the open profession of them will probably do no good to others, and will certainly do hurt to our selves, and the zealous endeavour to propagate such truths will be to the greater prejudice of charity, and the disturbance of the publick peace of the church.

It was a good saying of *Erasmus* (if we understand it, as I believe he meant it, of truths not necessary) *adeo invisæ sunt mihi discordiæ, ut veritas etiam contentiosa displiceat*: I am (says he) *so perfect a hater of discord, that I am even displeased with truth, when it is the occasion of contention*. As a man is never to deny truth, so neither is he obliged to make an open profession of truths not necessary at all times; and if he suffer upon that account, he cannot justify it to his own prudence, nor have comfort in such sufferings; because he brings them needlessly upon himself; and no man can have comfort, but in suffering for doing his duty.

And thus I have done with the *first* thing I proposed to enquire into; namely, when men may be truly said to suffer for the cause of religion.

I proceed now to the

II. Enquiry; namely, how far men may rely upon the providence of God, to bear them out in such sufferings?

To which I answer; That provided we do what becomes us, and is our duty on our part, the providence of God will not be wanting on his part, to bear us out in all our sufferings for his cause, one of these *three* ways.

First, To secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for human strength and patience; Or,

Secondly, In case of such extraordinary temptation and tryal, to give us the extraordinary supports and comforts of his holy Spirit; or else,

Thirdly, In case of a temporary fall and miscarriage, to raise us up by repentance, and a greater resolution and constancy under sufferings. I shall speak severally to these.

First, Either the providence of God will not be wanting to secure us from that violent degree of temptation and suffering, which would be too strong for human strength and patience to bear. And this is a great security to good men, against the fears of final miscarriage, after all their labours, and pains, and sufferings in a religious course, by being over-born at last by the assault of a very violent and powerful temptation. Not but that the best of men ought always to have a prudent distrust of themselves, so as to keep them from security; according to the Apostle's caution and counsel; *be not high-minded, but fear*; and *let him that stands, take heed lest he fall*; because till we come to heaven, we shall never be out of the danger and possibility of falling; but yet for all this, we may hope, by the sincerity and firmness of our resolution, under the usual influences of God's grace, to *acquit our selves like men*, in ordinary cases of temptation and suffering.

And to this end, we should represent to our selves *those exceeding great and precious promises*, which he hath made to good men, and his merciful providence, which continually watcheth over them, and steers their course for them in this world, among those many rocks, which they are in danger to split upon; that he is able to *stablish us in the truth*, and to keep us from falling, and to *present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy*, and to *preserve us to his heavenly kingdom*; and that if we do not forsake him, and forfeit his care and protection, he will *keep us by his mighty power through faith unto salvation*; either by his merciful foresight and prevention of those temptations which would probably be too hard for us; or if he thinks fit they should befall us, by supporting us under them in an extraordinary manner.

For I doubt not, but that the best men do owe their security and perseverance in goodness, much more to the merciful providence of God, preventing the assaults of violent and dangerous temptations, than to the firmness and constancy of their own resolutions. For there are very few persons of so firm and resolute virtue, but that one time or other, a temptation might assault them upon such a disadvantage, as would, in all probability, not only stagger them, but bear them down. Now herein the providence of God towards good men is very remarkable, in securing them from those temptations which are too strong for them to grapple withal; like a kind and tender father, who, if he be satisfied of the dutiful disposition of his child towards him, will not try his obedience to the utmost, nor permit too strong a temptation to the contrary to come in his way. So the *Psalmist* represents God's tender regard and consideration of the frailty and infirmity of his children, *Psal. 103. 13, 14. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: For he knoweth our frame, he remembreth that we are but dust*; that is, he considereth us as men, and deals with us accordingly. Provided we be sincere, he will not suffer us to be set upon by temptations that are too big for us. And therefore our blessed Saviour makes it one of the petitions of that excellent prayer, which he hath recommended to us; *Lead us not into temptation*; that is, we should every day beg of God, that his providence would keep us out of the way of great and dangerous temptations, as knowing that this will be a greater security to us, than any strength and resolution of our own.

Secondly,

Secondly, Or in case of such violent and extraordinary temptations, the providence of God will not be wanting to give us the extraordinary support and comfort of his holy Spirit, to bear us up under them. The providence of God did take care of good men in all ages, and did afford comfort to them under great tryals and sufferings; but God never made so express and general a promise of this, to all good men, as he hath done by the christian religion. Never was so constant a presence and influence of the divine Spirit vouchsafed and assured to men under any dispensation, as that of the Gospel; wherein the Spirit of God is promised to all that sincerely embrace the christian religion, to reside and dwell in them; not only to all the purposes of sanctification and holiness, but of support and comfort under the heaviest pressures and sufferings. For which reason the Gospel is called *the ministration of the spirit*; and is upon this account said to be *more glorious* than any other revelation which God had ever made to mankind.

We are naturally apt to be very much dishearten'd and cast down at the apprehension of great sufferings, from the consideration of our own weakness and frailty; but the Spirit of Christ dwells in all true christians, and the same glorious power, which raised up Jesus from the dead, works mightily in them that believe. St. Paul useth very high expressions about this matter, *Eph. i. 19. That ye may know* (saith he, speaking to all christians) *what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand.* So that every christian is endowed with a kind of omnipotence, being able (as St. Paul speaks of himself) *to do and to endure all things, through Christ strengthening him.* Of our selves we are very weak, and the temptations and terrors of the world are very powerful; but there is a principle residing in every true christian that is able to bear us up against the world, and the power of all its temptations. *Whatsoever is born of God* (saith St. John) *overcometh the world; for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* The holy Spirit of God which dwells in all true christians, is a more powerful principle of resolution, and courage, and patience, under the sharpest tryals and sufferings, than the evil spirit which rules in the world is, to stir up, and set on, the malice and rage of the world against us. *Ye are of God, little children;* (he speaks this to the youngest and weakest christians) *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome, because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* The malice and power of the Devil is very great; but the goodness and power of God is greater. And therefore in case of extraordinary temptation, good men, by virtue of this promise of God's holy Spirit, may expect to be born up and comforted in a very extraordinary and supernatural manner, under the greatest tribulations and sufferings for righteousness sake.

And this was in a very signal and remarkable manner afforded to the primitive christians, under those fierce and cruel persecutions to which they were exposed. And this may still be expected, in like cases of extraordinary sufferings for the testimony of God's truth. *If ye be reproached* (saith St. Peter in this 4th chap. ver. 14.) *for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.* The Spirit of God is here promised to strengthen and support all that suffer for the name of Christ, in a very conspicuous and glorious manner, according to that prayer of St. Paul, *Col. i. 11.* that christians might be *strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness.* For when God is pleased to exercise good men with tryals more than human, and such sufferings as are beyond the common rate of human strength and patience to bear, he hath engaged himself to endue and assist them with more than human courage and resolution. So St. Paul tells the *Corinthians*, who had then felt the utmost rage of persecution, *1 Cor. 10. 13.* *No temptation or trial hath yet befallen you, but what is common to man;* that is, nothing but what is frequently incident to human nature, and what by human strength, with an ordinary assistance of God's grace, may be grappled withal.

withal. *But, in case God shall call you to extraordinary sufferings, he is faithful that hath promised, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*; that is, as he hath ordered and appointed so great a temptation or tryal to befall you, so he will take care that it shall have a happy Issue, by enabling you to bear it, by affording you grace and strength equal to the violence and power of the temptation. For as *he is said to fall into temptation*, that is conquered by it; so he is said *to get out of it, or escape it*, who is enabled to bear it, and, in so doing, gets the better of it. And for this we may rely upon the faithfulness of God, who hath promised *that we shall not be tried above our strength*; either not above the strength which we have, or not above the strength which he will afford us in such a case.

And why then should we be daunted at the apprehension of any suffering whatsoever, if we be secured that our comfort shall be encreased in proportion to our trouble, and our strength in proportion to the sharpness and weight of our sufferings? or else,

Thirdly, In case of temporary falling, the providence and goodness of God will give them the grace and opportunity of recovering themselves from their fall by repentance. For the providence of God may sometimes, for wise ends and reasons, see it fit to leave good men to their own frailty, and to faint and fall shamefully under sufferings, so as to renounce and deny the truth; sometimes to punish their vain confidence in themselves, as in the case of *Peter*, who declared more resolution, and bore it out with a greater confidence than any of the Disciples, when he said to our Saviour, *tho' all men forsake thee, yet will not I*; and yet after this he fell more shamefully than any of the rest, so as to deny his master with horrid oaths and imprecations, and *this*, tho' our Saviour had prayed particularly for him, *that his faith might not fail*. From which instance we may learn, that God doth not engage himself absolutely to secure good men from falling, in case of a great temptation and tryal; but if they be sincere, he will not permit them to fall finally, tho' he may suffer them to miscarry grievously for a time, to convince them of the vanity of their confidence in themselves and their own strength.

Sometimes God may suffer good men to fall, in order to their more glorious recovery, and the greater demonstration and triumph of their faith and constancy afterwards, which was the case of that happy instrument of our reformation here in *England*, Arch-bishop *Cranmer*, who after he had been so great a champion of the reformation, was so overcome with fear, upon the apprehension of his approaching sufferings, as to subscribe those errors of the Church of *Rome*, which he had so stoutly opposed a great part of his life: But he did not long continue in this state, but by the grace of God, which had not forsaken him, was brought to repentance; and when he came to suffer, gave such a testimony of it, and of his faith and constancy, as was more glorious, and more to the confirmation of the faith of others, than a simple martyrdom could have been, if he had not fallen; for when he was brought to the stake he put his right hand (with which he had signed the recantation) into the fire, and with an undaunted constancy held it there, till it was quite burnt, for a testimony of his true repentance for that foul miscarriage; and when he had done, gave the rest of his body to be burnt, which he endured with great courage and chearfulness to the last. So that he made all the amends possible for so great a fault; and the goodness of God, and the power of his grace was more glorified in his repentance and recovery, than if he had never fallen.

But what shall we say, when, notwithstanding these promises of extraordinary comfort and support, in case of extraordinary sufferings, so great numbers are seen to faint in the day of tryal, and to fall off from their steadfastness? Of which there were many sad instances, among the primitive Christians, and have likewise been of late in our own times, and in places nearer to us. This I confess is a very melancholy consideration, but yet I think is capable of a sufficient answer.

And

And *first* of all, let this be establish'd for a firm and undoubted principle, *that God is faithful to his promise*; and therefore we ought much rather to suppose in all these cases, that there is some default on our part, than any failure and unfaithfulness on God's part. Thus St *Paul* determines in a like case, when the promise of God seem'd not to be made good to the *Jews*, he lays the blame of it on their unbelief, but acquits God of any unfaithfulness in his promise, *Rom. 3. 3, 4. For what if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the faith (or fidelity) of God without effect? God forbid: Yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.* This I confess does not answer the difficulty; but yet it ought to incline and dispose us to interpret what can fairly be offer'd for the removal of it, with all the favour that may be on God's side. I say then,

Secondly, That when good men fall in case of extraordinary temptation, and recover again by repentance, and give greater demonstration afterwards of their constancy and resolution, in the cause of God and his truth, the faithfulness of God in his promises is sufficiently vindicated, as in the cases I mentioned; because the promise of God is not absolute, that good men shall be preserv'd from falling; but that *the temptation shall have a happy issue*, and that they shall not *finally* miscarry. For promises of this nature are to be interpreted by us, and understood as we do our Saviour's prayer for *Peter* before his fall, *that his faith should not fail finally*; but though he fell through too much confidence in himself, he should through the grace of God assisting him be enabled to recover by repentance.

Thirdly, The sincerity or insincerity of men in the profession of the true religion, is a thing which we cannot certainly know, because we do not see into men's hearts; but *he who knows the heart, and tries the spirits of men in a balance*, cannot be deceived in this matter; and where men are not sincere, the promise of God is not concerned to hinder them from discovering themselves; and the fall of such persons is no reflection upon the faithfulness of God. And it is reasonable enough to presume, that this may be the case of not a few, and that (like *Simon Magus*) after they have made a very solemn profession of Christianity, *their hearts may not be right in the sight of God.*

Fourthly, If we put the case at the hardest, that some that were very sincere, after they have held out a great while, under the extremity of torments, have at last faint'd under them, and yielded to the malice and cruelty of their persecutors, and in this amazement and distraction have not long after expired, without any testimony of their repentance: In this case, both reason and charity ought to restrain us from passing any very positive and severe sentence upon the state of such persons. For what do we know, but God, whose goodness will certainly make all the allowance to human frailty that reason can require; (*for he knows whereof we are made; and remembers that we are but dust*; he mercifully considers every man's case, and weighs all the circumstances of it in an exact balance;) I say, who can tell, but that in such a case as I have mention'd, God may graciously be pleas'd to accept such a degree of constant suffering of great torments for so long a time, for a true *Martyrdom*, and not expect a more than human patience and resolution, where he is not pleas'd to afford more than human strength and support; and whether he may not look upon their falling and miscarriage at last, in the same rank with the indeliberate actions of men in a frenzy, and besides themselves?

And thus God may be said *with the temptation to make a way to escape, or, to give a happy issue to it*; since they were *enabled to bear it*, 'till being distracted by their torments, their understandings were thrown off the hinges, and incapable of exercising any deliberate acts of reason. And without some such equitable consideration of the case of such persons, it will be very hard to reconcile some appearances of things with the goodness of God, and the faithfulness of his promise.

However, it will become us to abstain from all uncharitableness and peremptory censure of the final estate of such persons, especially till we our selves have given greater and better testimony of our constancy; and in the mean time, to

leave them to the righteous and merciful sentence of *their* master and *ours*, to whose judgment we must all stand or fall.

I am sure it will very ill become those, who by the providence of God have escaped those sufferings, and are at present out of danger themselves, to sit in judgment upon those who are left to endure this terrible conflict, and have perhaps held out as long, or longer, than they themselves would have done in the like circumstances. Let us rather earnestly beg of *the God of all grace and patience*, that he would endue us with a greater measure of patience and constancy, if he see fit to call us to the exercise of it, and (which we lawfully may, after the example of our blessed Saviour) *that if it be his will, he would let this Cup pass from us*, and not try us with the like sufferings, *lest we also be weary, and faint in our minds*. I come now to the

III. And last enquiry which I proposed; What ground and reason there is, for good men to expect the more peculiar and especial care of God's providence in case of such sufferings.

The providence of God extends to all his creatures, according to that of the Psalmist, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*. But he exerciseth a more particular providence towards mankind; and more peculiar yet towards those who study to please him, by obeying his laws and doing his will. He that is assured of his own heart, that he loves God, and would do or suffer any thing for him, can have no cause to doubt but that God loves him, and is concerned for his happiness. No man was ever afraid of God, that was not conscious to himself that he had offended him, and by the wilful breach of his laws had put himself out of the care of his providence. But on the contrary, if our hearts give us this testimony, that we have made it our sincere endeavour to please him, we are naturally apt to have good assurance and confidence of his favour and good-will towards us. This comfort the mind of every good man is apt to give him, from his own reason, and the natural notions which he hath of God.

But to free us from all doubt in this matter, God himself hath told us so, and given us plentiful assurance of it in his word. *Psal. 11. 7. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright*; that is, he will be favourable unto them. *Psal. 33. 18. Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy. The eye of God signifies his watchful care and providence over good men*. So that besides the sure and well-grounded reasonings, from the essential perfections of the divine nature, the mercy and goodness of God; *we have a more sure word of promise*, in the express declarations of God's word, and more particularly in the case of great temptations and sufferings. For can we think, that the Scripture saith in vain, *Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart? Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all? The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways; tho' he fall, he shall not utterly be cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand? The Salvation of the righteous cometh of the Lord, he is their help in time of trouble?* The same promises we find in the New Testament. *All things shall work together for good, to them that love God. God is faithful, who hath promised, that he will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape. And to mention no more; hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, he is faithful that hath promised; viz. to support you under sufferings, and to reward them.*

Thus much for the *first* point, namely, that when men do suffer truly for the cause of religion, they may with confidence commit themselves to the more peculiar care of the divine providence.

S E R M O N XLVI.

The Support of Good Men under their Sufferings for Religion. The Second Sermon on this Text.

I PETER IV. 19.

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.



FROM these words I propos'd to consider these *three* points.

First, That when men do suffer really and truly for the cause of religion, they may with confidence commit themselves (their lives, and all that is dear to them) to the peculiar and more especial care of the divine providence.

Secondly, This we may do, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid sufferings, nor to rescue our selves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty and a good conscience; for this is the meaning of *committing our selves to God in well-doing*.

Thirdly, To shew what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of God, under the notion of a *faithful Creator*, does afford to us, under all our sufferings for a good cause and a good conscience.

The *first* of these points I have treated on at large in my former discourse. I proceed now to the

Second, Namely, when in all our sufferings for the cause of religion, we may with confidence and good assurance, commit our selves to the peculiar and more especial care of God's providence; this is to be understood, always provided that we be careful of our duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid sufferings, nor to rescue our selves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our duty, and a good conscience. And this I told you was the meaning of *committing our selves to God in well-doing*; for if we either neglect our duty, or step out of the way of it, by doing things contrary to it, the providence of God will not be concern'd to bear us out in such sufferings. So that in our sufferings for the cause of God and religion, *to commit our selves to him in well-doing*, may reasonably comprehend in it these following particulars.

I. Provided always, that we neglect no lawful means of our preservation from sufferings, or our deliverance out of them: In this case, men do not commit themselves to the providence of God, but cast themselves out of his care and protection; they do not trust God, but tempt him, and do as it were try whether he will stand by us, when we desert our selves, and bring us out of trouble, when we would take no care, would use no endeavours to prevent it. If we will needlessly provoke trouble, and run our selves upon suffering; if we will neglect our selves, and the lawful means of our preservation; if we will give up, and part with those securities of our religion, which the providence of God, and the laws of our country have given us; if we our selves will help to pull down the fence which is about us; if we will disarm our selves, and by our own Act expose our selves naked and open to danger and sufferings; why should we think in this case, that God will help us, when we would not help our selves by those lawful ways, which the providence of God hath put into our hands?

All trust in God, and dependance upon his providence, does imply, that we joyn prayer and endeavour together ; faith in God, and a prudent and diligent use of means : If we lazily trust the providence of God, and so *cast all our care upon him*, as to take none at all our selves, God will take no care of us. In vain do we rely upon the wisdom, and goodness, and power of God ; in vain do we importune and tire heaven with our prayers, to help us against our enemies and persecutors, if we our selves will do nothing for our selves : In vain do we hope that God will maintain and defend our religion, against all the secret contrivances, and open assaults of our enemies, if we, who are united in the profession of the same religion, and in all the essentials of faith and worship, will for some small differences in lesser matters, which are of no moment, in comparison of the things wherein we are agreed : I say, if for such slight matters, we will divide and fall out among our selves ; if when the enemy is at the gates, we will still pursue our heats and animosities, and will madly keep open those breaches, which were foolishly made at first ; what can we expect, but that the common enemy should take the advantage, and enter in at them ; and whilst we are so unseasonably and senselessly contending with one another, that they should take the opportunity which we give them to destroy us all.

2. Provided likewise, that we do not attempt our preservation or deliverance from suffering, by evil and unlawful means : We must do nothing that is contrary to our duty, and to a good conscience ; nor comply with any thing, or lend our helping hand thereto, that apparently tends to the ruin of our religion, neither to divert nor put off sufferings for the present, nor to rescue our selves from under them ; because we cannot with confidence commit our selves to the providence of God, but *in well-doing*.

This is an eternal rule, from whence we must in no case depart, *that men must do nothing contrary to the rules and precepts of religion, no not for the sake of religion it self* : We must not break any law of God, nor disobey the lawful commands of lawful authority, to free our selves from any sufferings whatsoever ; because the goodness of no end can sanctify evil means, and make them lawful : We must not *speak deceitfully for God*, nor *lye*, no, *not for the truth* ; nor *kill men*, though we could thereby *do God and religion the greatest service*. And tho' all the Casuists in the world should teach the contrary doctrine, (as they generally do in the Church of *Rome*) yet I would not doubt to oppose to all those, the single authority of *St. Paul*, who expressly condemns this principle, and brands it for a *damnable doctrine, that evil may be done by us, that good may come*, Rom. 3. 8. *And not as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, let us do evil, that good may come, whose damnation is just*. *St. Paul*, it seems, looked upon it as a most devilish calumny, to insinuate that the christian religion gives the least countenance to such damnable doctrines and doings as these ; and pronounceth *their damnation to be just*, who either teach any such principle, as the doctrine of Christianity, or practise according to it.

Let those look to it, who teach, that a right intention, and a good end, will render things, which are otherwise evil and unlawful, not only lawful to be done by us, but in many cases meritorious ; especially where the good of the Church, and the extirpation of heresy are more immediately concerned. Of this nature are the doctrines of equivocation and mental reservation, and the lawfulness of such artificial ways of lying, to avoid the danger of the law, when they are brought before heretical magistrates ; and this is the common doctrine of the most learned Casuists of all orders in the Church of *Rome* : And such likewise are their doctrines, of the lawfulness of extirpating hereticks, by the most barbarous and bloody means, and of breaking faith with them, tho' given by Emperors and Princes, in the most publick and solemn manner ; both which are the avowed doctrines of their general councils, and have frequently been put in practice, to the destruction of many millions of Christians, better and more righteous than themselves. *But we have not so learned Christ, who have*
heard

heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus. They who are rightly instructed in the christian religion, are so far from thinking it lawful to do any thing that is evil, to bring others under suffering, that they do not allow it in any case whatsoever, no, not for the cause of God and religion, and to free themselves from the greatest sufferings that can be inflicted upon them.

3. Provided also, that we do trust the providence of God, and do indeed *commit our selves* to it; relying upon his wisdom and goodness, and entirely submitting and resigning up our selves to his will and disposal, both as to the degree and the duration of our sufferings; believing that he will do that for us which upon the whole matter, and in the final issue and result of things, will be best for us. That blessing, wherewith *Moses* the man of God blest the people of *Israel* before his death, doth belong to good men in all ages: *he loveth his people, and all his saints are in his hand*, Deut. 33. 3. Innumerable are the promises in scripture concerning the merciful providence and goodness of God, towards those *who trust in him, and hope in his mercy*. Psal. 32. 10. *Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about*. Psal. 33. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. *Behold the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy: to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him: because we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee*. Psal. 34. 22. *The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate*. Psal. 37. 39, 40. *But the salvation of the righteous is of the Lord, he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them because they trust in him*. Psal. 31. 19. *O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!* Psal. 55. 22. *Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved*. Psal. 125. 1. *They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever*. Isa. 26. 3, 4. *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength*.

4. Provided yet further, that we pray earnestly to God for his gracious help and assistance, for his merciful comfort and support under sufferings; that he would be pleased to strengthen our faith, and to encrease and lengthen out our patience, in proportion to the degree and duration of our sufferings.

All the promises which God hath made to us are upon this condition, that we earnestly seek and sue to him for the benefit and blessing of them. Psal. 50. 15. *Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorifie me*. Ezek. 36. 37. After a great deliverance, and many blessings promised to them, this condition is at last added, *thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them*. And this likewise is the tenor of the promises of the new Testament, Matt. 7. 7. *Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you*. And in this very case that I am speaking of, God expects that we should apply our selves to him for spiritual wisdom and grace, to behave our selves under sufferings as we ought: Jam. 1. 2, 3, 4. Where speaking of the manifold temptations that christians would be exercised withal, he directs them to pray to God for wisdom to demean themselves under persecutions, with patience, and constancy, and chearfulness. *My brethren, account it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations; (meaning the temptations and tryals of suffering in several kinds) knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work. And because this is a very difficult duty, and requires a great deal of spiritual skill, to demean our selves under sufferings as we ought, therefore he adds in the next words: If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

And this earnest application we are to make to God, for *his grace and seasonable help in time of need*; not to put him in mind of his promise, but to testify our dependence upon him, and expectation of all good from him. And we must likewise use great importunity in our prayers to God, to assist us and stand by us in the day of tryal, and the hour of temptation. And therefore our Saviour heaps up several words, to denote the great earnestness and importunity which we ought to use in prayer, bidding us *to ask, and seek, and knock*. And to shew that he lays more than ordinary weight upon this matter, and to encourage our importunity, he spake two several parables to this purpose; the first, *Luke 11. 5.* of the man who by *meer importunity* prevailed with his friend to rise at midnight to do him a kindness, which our Saviour applies to encourage our importunity in prayer, *v. 9. And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* The other is the parable of the importunate widow, and unjust judge, related by the same Evangelist, *Luke 18. 1.* with this preface to it; and *he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* And to speak the truth, they seem at first sight two of the oddest of all our Saviour's parables, as if the design of them were to insinuate to us, that God is to be prevailed upon by the *meer importunity* of our prayers to grant our requests: But our blessed Saviour, who best knew his own meaning, tells us, that all that he design'd by it, was only to signify, *that we ought always to pray, and not to faint*; that is, *to continue instant in prayer*, and not to give over after once asking, as if we despaired of prevailing. Not that *meer importunity* prevails with God to give us those things which he is otherwise unwilling to grant; but because it becomes us to be fervent, and earnest, to testify our faith and confidence in the goodness of God, and the deep sense we have of our own weakness, and wants, and unworthiness; and likewise that we set a true value upon the blessings and favours of God, as worth all the earnestness and importunity we can use: And in this decent and sober sense, the success of our prayers may truly be said to depend upon our *importunity*; not that it is necessary to move God to grant our requests, but that it becomes us to be thus affected, that we may be the more fitly qualified for the grace and mercy which God is willing to confer upon us.

I have been the longer upon this, to give us a right notion of this matter, and that we may the more distinctly understand the true reason why our Saviour does require so much earnestness and importunity of prayer on our part; not at all to work upon God, and to dispose him to shew mercy to us (for that he is always inclinable to, whenever we are fit for it) but only to dispose and qualify us to receive the grace and mercy of God, with greater advantage to our selves.

5. Provided moreover, that we be not confident of our selves, and of the force and strength of our own resolution. We know not our selves, nor the frailty and weakness of our own resolution, till we are tried. 'Tis wise advice which *Solomon* gives us, and never more seasonable than in the day of tryal, *Prov. 3. 5, 6, 7. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thy own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths; be not wise in thine own eyes*; that is, be not conceited and confident of thine own wisdom and strength or ability in any kind; there is a secret providence of God, which mingles it self with the actions and spirits of men, and disposeth of us unknown to our selves; and what we think to be the effect of our own strength and resolution, of our own wisdom and contrivance, proceeds from an higher cause, which unseen to us, does steer and govern us. So the wise man observes, *Prov. 20. 24. Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a man then understand his own ways?* And therefore we have reason every one to say with the Prophet, *Jer. 10. 23. O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Our feet will soon slip, if God do not uphold us by his hand. Remember how shamefully the chief of our Lord's disciples miscarried, by too much confidence in himself, I mean *St. Peter*; in whose fall we may all see our own frailty; if God do but permit the Devil

Devil to have the winnowing of us, there will be a great deal of chaff found in the best of us. What St. Paul said of himself, *2 Cor. 12. 10. When I am weak, then am I strong*, we shall all find true, when it comes to the tryal; we are then strongest, when, in a just sense of our own weakness, we rely most upon the strength and power of God.

6. Provided furthermore, that according to our ability, we have been much in the exercise of alms and charity. For *well-doing*, or *doing good*, is sometimes taken in a narrower sense, not improper here to be mentioned, tho' perhaps not so particularly intended here in the text, for *works of charity and alms*. As *Heb. 13. 16. But to do good, and to communicate* (that is, to the necessities of the poor) *forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*. This kind of *well-doing* is a special preservative in times of evil; there is no kind of grace or virtue to which there are in scripture more special promises made of our protection and preservation from evil and suffering, of support and comfort under them, and deliverance out of them, than to this of a charitable and compassionate consideration of those who labour under want or suffering. *Psal. 37. 3. Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed: And ver. 19. speaking of righteous or merciful men, they shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. Psal. 41. 1, 2. Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth; and, thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies.*

There are likewise in the Apocryphal books excellent sayings for the encouragement of charity, as that which will be particularly considered and rewarded to us in the times of danger and distress, in the days of affliction and suffering. *Tob. 4. 7, 8, 9, 10. Give alms of thy substance, and turn not thy face from any poor man, and the face of God shall not be turned away from thee; if thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly; if thou hast but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little, for thou layest up for thyself a good treasure against the day of necessity, because that alms do deliver from death, and suffereth not to come into darkness. Eccus. 3. 31. Speaking of him that gives alms, and is ready to do kindness to others; He is mindful of that which may come hereafter; and when he falleth he shall find a stay. And chap. 29. 11, 12, 13. Lay up thy treasure according to the commandment of the most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold; shut up alms in thy store-houses, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction, it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield, and strong spear.*

I have often said it, and am verily perswaded of it, that one of the best signs of God's mercy and favour to this poor nation, is, that God hath been pleased of late years to stir up so general a disposition in men to works of alms and charity, and thereby to revive the primitive spirit of christianity, which so eminently abounded in this grace, and taught those who believed in God to be careful to maintain and practise good works. And nothing gives me greater hopes that God hath mercy still in store for us, than that men are so ready to shew mercy; there are great objects to exercise our charity upon in this time of the general suspension of trade and business, from an apprehension of approaching troubles; by reason whereof, both the numbers and necessities of our poor are greatly and daily encreased among us; and besides the poor of our own nation, God has sent us great numbers from abroad, I mean those who are fled hither for shelter, from that violent storm of persecution which hath lately fallen upon them for the cause of our common religion. According to the compassion we shew to them, we may expect that God will either preserve us from the like sufferings, or graciously support us under them. What do we know, but that God is now trying us, and hath purposely put this opportunity into our hands, of preventing, or mitigating, or shortening our own sufferings, according as we extend our charity and pity to those who have suffered so deeply for the cause of God, and his truth.

7. Provided in the last place, and above all, that we be sincere in our religion, and endeavour to be universally good, and *holy in all manner of conversation, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.* This is the largest sense of *well-doing*, and the most necessary of all the rest, to prepare us for sufferings, and to give us courage and constancy under them; and likewise to engage the providence of God to a tender care of us, and concernment for us, if he shall see it fit to bring us into a state of suffering.

But if we live in open contempt and violation of God's laws, if we make no conscience of our ways and actions, we cannot possibly have any well grounded trust and confidence in God, for *he hates all the workers of iniquity, and his providence sets it self against them for evil.* Bad men draw many mischiefs and inconveniencies upon themselves, as the natural consequences of their actions; but besides this, the vengeance of God haunts and pursues evil-doers, and his just providence many times involves them in many difficulties and dangers, besides and beyond the natural course of things: *Upon the wicked (says David) he will rain snares:* So that as we ever expect the comfortable effects of the divine care and providence, we must live in a dutiful obedience to God's holy will and laws.

Bad men may make a profession of the true religion, and may in some sort believe it, tho' they do not live according to it; and yet perhaps for all this, out of a meer generosity and obstinacy of mind, they cannot bear to be threatened and terrified out of the profession of the truth; and will endure a great deal of trouble and inconveniencies, before they will renounce it; knowing themselves to be so far in the right, that they stand for the truth, and hoping perhaps thereby to make some amends for their bad practice. But when all is done, nothing gives a man true courage and resolution, like the testimony of our own hearts, concerning our own sincerity, and the conscience of well-doing. And on the contrary, he that hath not the resolution and patience to mortify his lusts, and to restrain his appetites, and to subdue his irregular passions, for the sake of God and religion, will not easily bring himself to submit to great sufferings upon that account. There is considerable difficulty in the practice of religion, and the resolute course of a holy life; but surely it is much easier *to live* as religion requires we should do, than *to lay down our lives* for it; and (as I have told you upon another occasion) he that cannot prevail with himself *to live a saint*, will much more hardly be persuaded *to die a martyr.* I proceed to the

Third point, namely, what ground of comfort and encouragement the consideration of God, under the notion of *a faithful creator*, does afford to us under all our suffering for a good conscience and a good cause. *Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful creator.* And in this I shall be very brief.

And this is a firm ground of comfort and encouragement to us, under all our sufferings for God, to consider him as the author of our beings, or as it is express'd in the text, *as a faithful creator*; one that is not fickle and inconstant in his affection and kindness to his creatures; but is true to his own design, and will not abandon and forsake the work of his own hands: So great a benefit as that of our beings, freely conferr'd upon us, is but an earnest of God's further kindness to us, and future care of us; if by our ill carriage towards him, we do not render our selves unworthy and incapable of it: That we are God's creatures, is a demonstration that he hath a kindness for us: if he had not, he would never have made us; as it is excellently said in the Wisdom of Solomon, Chap. 11. 23, 24. *Thou hast mercy upon all, for thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made: For never wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it.* And ver. 26. *Thou sparest all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of souls.*

To whom then may we with so much confidence commit our selves, as to him who freely gave us our being? From whom may we expect so tender a regard

gard and consideration of our case, and all the circumstances of it; as from this great founder and benefactor? For *he that made us knows our frame, and whereof we are made*, and how much we are able to bear; he considers our strength, or rather our weakness, and what courage and resolution he hath endued us withal, and what comfort and support we stand in need of in the day of tribulation. And as they who make armour, are wont to try that which they think to be good and well temper'd, with a stronger charge, not to break and hurt it, but to prove and praise it: so God exerciseth those whom he hath fitted and temper'd for it, with manifold temptations, *that the tryal of their faith, as St. Peter expresseth it, 1 Pet. 1. 7. being much more pretious than of gold tried in the fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

So that this consideration that we are God's creatures, does (as I may say) oblige him in faithfulness to his own act, and in consequence of his bringing us into being at first, to be concern'd for us afterwards, so as never to abandon us, nor quite to take away his loving-kindness and mercy from us; 'till we are good for nothing, and do in a manner cease to be what he made us, that is *reasonable creatures*. A person or people must have proceeded to the utmost degree of degeneracy, when God will consider them no longer as his creatures, nor shew any pity or favour to them; things must be come to extremity, when God deals thus with us, as he threaten'd the people of Israel, *Isa. 27. 11. When the boughs are withered, they shall be broken off, and set on fire; for it is a people of no understanding: therefore he that made them, will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them, will shew them no favour.*

And now I have done with the *three* points which I propos'd to handle from this text, and the discourse which I have made upon them, does all along apply it self, by directing us how we ought *to commit our selves* to the providence of God, in all cases of danger and suffering, especially for the cause of God, and his truth, *viz.* in the faithful discharge of our duty and a good conscience, and by a firm trust and confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the divine providence, not doubting but that *he who made us, and knows our frame*, will have a tender care of us, and *not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

And as to our present danger, and that terrible storm which threatens us, let us pray to God, if it be his will, to divert it; but if otherwise he hath determined, to fit and prepare us for it. And let us be fervent and earnest in our prayers to him, not that he is moved by our importunity, but that we may thereby be qualified and made fit to receive the mercy which we beg of him.

And let us take this occasion to do that which we should have done without it, *to break off our sins by repentance, and to turn every one of us from the evil of our ways*; that hereby we may render God propitious to us, and put our selves under the more immediate care and protection of his providence; that we may prevent his judgments, and turn away his wrath and displeasure from us, as he did once from a great and sinful city and people, upon their sincere humiliation and repentance, *Jonah 3. 10.* where it is said of the people of Nineveh, *that God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them, and he did it not.* Above all, let us be sincere in the profession of our religion, and conscientious in the practice of it; nothing will bear us up under great tryals and sufferings, like *the testimony of a good conscience, void of offence towards God and towards men.*

I will conclude this whole discourse with those apostolical blessings and prayers, *Colos. 1. 10, 11. That ye may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, strengthen'd with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness.* And *2 Thes. 2. 16, 17. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good work. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

S E R M O N XLVII.

Of the Work assign'd to every Man, and the Season for doing it.

JOHN ix. 4.

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: The night cometh, when no man can work.

TH E S E words our blessed Saviour spake of himself, whilst he was upon earth; in which he tells us, that he was sent by God into the world, and had a certain work and employment appointed him during his abode in it. A great work indeed! to instruct, and reform, and save mankind. A work of great labour, and pains, and patience, not to be done in a short time; and yet the time for doing it was not long, after he came into the world: it was a good while before he began it; and after he began it, the time of working was not long, before the night came and put an end to it: *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

But that which our Saviour here speaks of himself, and which properly belongs to him, and no other; may yet be accommodated to every man, with some allowance for the difference and disproportion. For tho' every man be not sent by God into the world after so particular a manner, and upon so particular and vast a design: yet upon a general account, every man is sent by God into this world, and hath a work given him to do in it, which he is concern'd vigorously to mind and to prosecute with all his might. And tho' every man be not sent to save the whole world, as the Son of God was, yet every man is sent by God into the world, *to work out his own salvation*, and to take care of that in the first place, and then to promote the salvation of others, as much as in him lies. So that every one of us may, in a very good sense, accommodate these words of our Saviour to himself: *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

I shall therefore at this time take the liberty to handle these words according to this moral accommodation of them, and apply what our Saviour here says of himself, to every man that cometh into the world: and this I shall do, by shewing these *three* things.

First, That every man hath a work assigned him to do in this world, by him that sent him into it; and may in some sense say, as our blessed Saviour did of himself, *I must work the works of him that sent me.*

Secondly, That there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in. *While it is day.*

Thirdly, That after this season is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working. *The night cometh, when no man can work.*

First, Every man hath a work assigned him to do in this world, by him that sent him into it, and may in some sense say, as our blessed Saviour did of himself, *I must work the works of him that sent me.* God who made man a reasonable creature, and hath endowed him with faculties, whereby he is capable of knowing and serving him; hath appointed him a work and service suitable to these faculties: and having infused an immortal soul into this earthly body, hath certainly designed him for a state beyond this life, in which he shall be for ever

ever happy or miserable, according as he useth and demeans himself in this world.

So that the work which every one of us hath to do in this world, is to prepare and fit our selves for that eternal duration which remains for us after death. For the life which we live now in this world is a time of exercise, a short state of probation and tryal, in order to a durable and endless state, in which we shall be immutably fix'd in another world. This world, into which we are now sent for a little while, is as it were God's school, in which immortal spirits cloathed with flesh, are trained and bred up for eternity; and therefore the best, the only sure way to be happy for ever, is, so to improve the short and uncertain time of this life, that we may approve our selves to God in this world, and enjoy him in the next; or (as St. Paul expresseth it) *that having our fruit unto holiness, our end may be everlasting life.*

And this work consists in these *three* things.

I. In the care of our own salvation.

II. In doing what we can, to promote the salvation of others.

III. And in order to both these, in the careful improvement and good husbandry of our time.

I. In the care of our own salvation. And this consists in *two* things.

1. In the worship of Almighty God.

2. In the careful and conscientious practice and obedience of his holy laws.

1. The care of our own salvation consists in the pious and devout worship of Almighty God; that we honour him, and pay him that homage and respect, which is due from creatures to him that made them, and is the great sovereign and judge of the world, that we have an inward reverence and esteem of him, and that we express this by all solemn external acknowledgments of him; as by praying to him for the supply of our wants; by praising him for all the blessings and benefits which we have received at his hands; and that we set apart constant and solemn times for the performance of these duties; and then when we are employed in them, we be serious, and hearty, and attentive to what we are about, and perform every part of divine worship with those circumstances of reverence and respect, which may testify our awful sense of the divine majesty, and our inward and profound veneration of him, with whom we have to do. And this is that which is directly and properly *religion*.

2. This care of our own salvation does consist likewise in the conscientious and constant obedience and practice of all God's holy laws, in the conformity of our lives and actions to the laws which he hath given us, whether they be natural, or written upon our hearts, or made known to us by the revelation of his word; that we govern our passions by reason, and moderate our selves in the use of sensual delights, so as not to transgress the rules of temperance and chastity; that we demean our selves towards others, and converse with them with justice and fidelity, with kindness and charity.

These are the sum of the divine laws, and the heads of our duty towards our selves and others; all which are more powerfully enforced upon us by the revelation of the gospel, and the plain promises and threatenings of it; the faith of Christ being the most firm and effectual principle both of piety towards God, and of universal obedience to all his particular commands.

And this is the great work which God hath sent us to do in the world. So the wise man sums up our duty, *Eccles. 12. 13. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.* The fear and reverence of the divine majesty is the great foundation and principle of religion; but obedience to God's laws is the life and practice of it. God does not expect that we should spend the greatest part of our time in the immediate acts of religion, and in the solemn duties of his worship and service; but only that we should allot a fitting portion of our time to these, according to the circumstances of our condition in this world, and the example of holy and good men that are in the like circumstances with our selves. For such is the goodness of God, that he does not only allow us to provide for the necessities and conveniencies of this life; but

but hath made it our duty so to do. It is one of the precepts of the gospel, which the Apostle chargeth the bishops and teachers of the gospel to inculcate frequently upon christians, *that they which have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works*; that is, to employ themselves in the works of an honest calling: *for necessary uses*; that is, for the support of their families, and the relief of those who are in want and necessity. And the Apostle lays great weight and stress upon this, as a very great duty, *Tit. 3. 8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men*; that is, of general benefit and advantage to mankind.

So that no man's calling is a hindrance to religion, but a part of it; and by performing the duties of piety in their proper seasons, and spending the rest of our time in any honest and useful employment, we may make our whole life a perpetual serving of God; we may *glorify God* in our *eating and drinking*, and in all other lawful and useful actions of life. In serving the occasions and necessities of life, with sobriety and temperance, and in managing our worldly commerce with justice and integrity, we may serve God, and perform considerable duties of religion.

So that provided we do nothing that is sinful, and manage the actions and concerns of this life with a due regard and subserviency to the great Interests of eternity, we may do the work of God all the while we are providing for our selves, and employed in the works of an honest calling: for God, who hath designed this life in order to the other, considers the necessities of our present state, and allows us to make provision for it.

There are some persons indeed, whose birth and condition sets them above the common employments of life, and the works of an ordinary calling: but these also have a work given them to do; for God hath sent no man into the world to no purpose, and only *to take his pastime therein; neque enim ita generati sumus à natura, ut ad ludum & jocum facti esse videamur; sed ad severitatem potius, & quaedam studia graviora atque majora*: For we are not (says Tully, *de off. lib. 1.*) *so framed by nature, as if we were made for sport and jest, but for more serious employments, and for greater and weightier business*; and those who are tied to no particular calling, may allow so much larger portions of their time to religion, and the service of God; and God likewise expects from them, that they should be useful to mankind in some higher and nobler way, according to the publickness of their station and influence. Such persons may be serviceable to their country, and the affairs of government, and in the care of public Justice, and may employ their time in preparing and rendering themselves more fit for this service. They may find a great deal of work to do in the good government of their families, and in the prudent care and management of their estates, and in reconciling differences among their neighbours, and in considering the necessities of the poor, and providing for their supply.

So that besides the proper work of religion, and the more immediate service of God, every man in the world, how exempt soever his condition be from the common care and drudgery of human life, may find work enough wherein he may usefully employ all his time, and provide for his own, and for the common benefit of mankind; and God expects it as a duty from such, that every man should employ himself in some work or other, suitable to the station in which God hath placed him in this world.

II. The work which God hath given us to do in the world, consists in doing what we can to further and promote the salvation of others. This chiefly lies upon us, who are *the ministers of God, and to whom the word of reconciliation is committed*. We are more especially commission'd and appointed for this work, and are *ambassadors for Christ, to beseech men in his stead to be reconciled to God*. We are sent by God in a more peculiar manner, and appointed for this very work, *to watch for mens souls*, and to be instruments and means of their eternal happiness. And therefore we who are sent by God in a more peculiar manner, and have this work assigned us to do in the world,

ought

ought to be very vigorous and industrious in it; and this, whether we consider the nature of our employment, or the glorious reward of it.

1. If we consider the nature of our employment, both in respect of the honour and the happiness of it. 'Tis the most honourable work that mortal man can be employed in; 'tis the same in kind, and in the main end and design of it, with that of the blessed Angels; for we also are *Ministring Spirits, sent forth by God to minister for the good of those who shall be heirs of salvation*. We are the messengers and Ambassadors of God to men, sent to treat with them about the terms of their peace and reconciliation with God, to offer salvation to them, and to direct them to the best ways and means of procuring it. Nay, we have the honour to be employed in the very same work that the Son of God was, when he was upon the earth, *to seek and to save them that are lost*; and *to call sinners to repentance*; and to carry on that work, whereof he himself laid the foundation, when he was in the world. And what greater honour can be put upon the sons of men, than to help forward that glorious design and undertaking of the Son of God, for the salvation of mankind?

And 'tis an employment no less happy than honourable; 'tis not to drudge about the mean and low concerns of this life, a perpetual toil and care about *what we shall eat and drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed*, which is the business of a worldly employment; but it is a direct and immediate seeking of the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and a continual endeavour to promote these. It does not consist in the labour of our body, and in bodily toil; but in the delightful exercise of our minds, about the best and noblest objects, God, and heaven, and eternity; in an earnest and faithful endeavour by all wise ways and means to gain souls to God, and *to turn sinners from the errors of their ways*, and to prevent their eternal ruin and destruction; and next to the procuring of our own happiness, to be instrumental to the happiness of others, which is certainly the most pleasant and noble work that we can possibly be employed in; especially if we consider, that by the very nature of our employment, we do at the same time, and by the very same means, carry on both these designs, of the salvation of our selves and others. So St. Paul tells Timothy, when he exhorts him upon this very consideration, *to give himself wholly to this blessed work*; because, says he, *in doing this, thou shalt both save thy self, and them that hear thee*, 1 Tim. 4. 16. And when two of the greatest and best designs in the world, our own happiness, and the salvation of others, do so happily meet in one, and are jointly carried on by the same labour: this ought to be a great spur and incitement to us, to be vigorous and unwearied, and *abundant in the work of the Lord*; and a mighty encouragement to us *to preach the word, to be instant in season, and out of season, and to be examples to others, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*; as St. Paul chargeth Timothy in the most solemn and awful manner, *before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his kingdom*, 1 Tim. 4. 12. and 2 Tim. 4. 1. And then,

2. If we consider the glorious reward of this work. If we be faithful and industrious in it, it will advance us to a higher degree of glory and happiness in the other world. *They that be wise* (says the Prophet, Dan. 12. 3.) *shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever*. They that are industrious in this work, as they are *worthy of double honour* in this world, so they shall shine with a double glory and lustre in the other.

But tho' this work of promoting the salvation of others, be chiefly incumbent upon those whose office it is to attend upon this very thing; yet we are all of us concerned in it, according to the advantages and opportunities we have for it. Every man is concern'd to help forward the salvation of his brother, and not to let him perish, if we can help it; and it is in every man's power to contribute something to this blessed work of saving others, by seasonable counsel and advice, by kind and gentle reproof, but especially by a holy and exemplary conversation, by a shining virtue, which hath a silent power of persuasion,

suasion, and I know not what secret charm and attraction to draw and allure others to the imitation of it.

III. And in order to both these, the saving of our selves and others, this work, which God hath given us to do in the world, consists in the careful use and good husbandry of our time; for without this, neither the one, nor the other can be promoted and carried on to any purpose. Time is the season and opportunity of carrying on of any work, and for that reason is one of the most valuable things; and yet nothing is more wastefully spent, and more prodigally squandered away by a great part of mankind than this, which next to our immortal souls is of all other things most pretious; because upon the right use or abuse of our time, our eternal happiness or misery does depend. Men have generally some guard upon themselves, as to their money and estates, and will not with eyes open suffer others to rob and deprive them of it: But we will let any body almost rob us of our time, and are contented to expose this pretious treasure to every body's rapine and extortion, and can quietly look on, whilst men thrust in their hands, and take it out by whole handfuls, as if it were of no greater value than silver was in *Solomon's* days, no more than *the stones in the street*. And yet when it is gone, all the silver and gold in the world cannot purchase and fetch back the least moment of it, when perhaps we would give all the world for a very small part of that time, which we parted with upon such cheap and easy terms.

Good God! what a stupid and senseless prodigality is this! do we consider what we do, when we give away such large portions of our time to our ease and pleasure, to diversion and idleness, or trifling and unprofitable conversation, to the making and receiving of impertinent visits, and the usual and almost inseparable attendants thereof, spiteful observations upon them that are present, and slandering and backbiting those that are absent; (for the great design of most people in visits, is not to better one another, but to spy and *make* faults, and not to *mend* them; to get time off their hands, to shew their fine cloaths, and to recommend themselves to the mutual contempt of one another, by a plentiful impertinence;) when we part with it by wholesale in sleep and dressings, and can spend whole mornings between the comb and the glass, and the afternoon at Plays, and whole nights in gaming, or in riot, and lewdness, and intemperance; in all which people commonly waste their money and their time together!

Nay how do even the best of us misplace this pretious treasure; and tho' we do not employ it to wicked purposes, and in works of iniquity, yet we do not apply it to the best and noblest use, to the glory of God, and the good and salvation of men! By thus laying out this treasure, we might *lay up for our selves treasures in heaven*, and help others on in the way thither.

Thus our blessed Saviour employed his pretious time, in *going about doing good*, in all kinds and upon all occasions, healing the bodies, and enlightning the minds, and saving the souls of men: This was his business, and this was his delight; it was *his meat and drink*, and his very life, he spent himself in it, and sacrificed his ease, and his safety, and his life to these great ends, for which he came into the world; he considered the goodness and the greatness of this work, and the little time he had to do it in, which made him incessantly industrious in it, and to run the race which was set before him with great speed, and *to work while it is day*, because he knew *the night would come when no man can work*. And this brings me to the

Second thing I observed from the text, namely, that there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this work in; *while it is day*. *I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day*. And this *day* comprehends all the opportunities of our life, which will soon be over, and therefore had need to be well spent. A great part of our life is past before the season of working begins; it is a great while before the use of our reason begins, and we come to have our senses exercised to discern between good and evil; before our understandings are ripe for the serious consideration of God and religion, and for

the due care of our souls, and of the eternal concernment of another world; so that this first part of our life is in a great measure useles and unprofitable to us, in regard to our great design. For infancy and childhood are but the dawns of this day, and no fit time to work in; and youth, which is as the morning of this day, tho' it is the flower of our time, and the most proper season of all other, for the remembrance of God, and the impressions of religion; yet it is usually possess'd by vanity and vice; the common custom and practice of the world, hath devoted this best part of our age to the worst employments, to the service of sin and of our lusts. How very few are there that lay hold of this opportunity, and employ it to the best purposes? And yet the following course of our lives, doth in a great measure depend upon it; for most persons do continue and hold on in the way in which they set out at first, whether it be good or bad. And those who neglect to improve this first opportunity of their lives, do seldom recover themselves afterwards. God's grace may seize upon men in any part of their lives; but according to the most ordinary methods of it, the foundations and principles of religion and virtue are most commonly laid in a pious and virtuous education. This is the great opportunity of our lives, which settleth and fixeth most men, either in a good or bad course, and the fortune of their whole lives does usually follow it, and depend upon it.

'Tis true indeed our day continues many times a great while longer, and we are to work while it continues; and 'tis never too late to begin to do well, and to enter upon a good course: But there is no such proper and advantageous season for the beginning of this work, as in our youth and tender years. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation.* God's grace is then most forward and ready to assist us; and we are then least of all indispos'd for the receiving of the impressions of it; and the impressions of it do then go deepest into our minds, and are most lasting and durable. But if we neglect this opportunity, we provoke God by degrees to withdraw his Grace, and to take away his holy Spirit from us, and by degrees we settle in vitious habits, and are every day more and more *harden'd through the deceitfulness of sin.* It is never too late to work while the day lasts; but the sooner we begin this work, and set about it in good earnest, the easier we shall find it; if we defer it late, every step will be up the hill, and against the grain.

Thirdly, After this season is expired, there will be no further opportunity of working; when this day is once at an end, then *cometh the night when no man can work.* The night is a time unfit for work, when we can hardly do any thing, if we had never so great a mind to it; and there is such a night coming upon every one of us, and Wo be to us if we have our work to do when the night overtakes us.

There is usually an evening before this night, when it will be very difficult for us, and next to impossible, to do this work; and this is the time of sickness and old age, in which men are commonly unfit for any work; but most of all, that which requires the whole force and vigour of our minds, the business of religion. If we attempt this work then, we shall go very heartlessly about it, and do it very imperfectly, and be forc'd to flubber it over, and to huddle it up in great haste and confusion, and so as we can hardly hope that God will accept it. For how unfit are men to do any thing, when they are full of the sense of their own infirmities, and life it self is become so great a burthen to them, that they are hardly fit to stand under it! How incapable shall we then be of doing the greatest and most momentous work of our lives, when our faculties are almost quite spent and worn out, and all the powers of life are decay'd in us; when our understandings are dark and dull, our memories frail and treacherous, and our *hearts hard and deceitful above all things!* When sickness and old age overtake us, we shall then find to our sorrow that *sufficient for that day is the evil thereof;* we shall have need then of nothing else to do, but to bear our infirmities with patience and decency; and it is well if we can rally together, of the broken forces of our reason, so much as may be a sufficient guard to us against peevishness and discontent; we had need then have nothing else to do, but to be old and weak, to be sick and die.

Besides, how can we expect that God should accept of any work that we do at such a time? With what face can we put off God with the dregs of our life? or how

can we hope that he will be pleas'd with the service of those years, which we our selves take no pleasure in? if we offer the lame in sacrifice, is it not evil? and if we offer the blind, is it not evil? offer it now to thy Governor, and see if he will be pleas'd with thee?

And sickness is commonly as bad a time as old age, and usually incumber'd with greater difficulties, and clog'd with more indispositions. If a violent distemper seize upon us, it many times takes away the use of our reason, and deprives us of all opportunity of consideration; it makes us both insensible of the danger of our condition, and incapable of using the means to avoid it. And if we have neglected religion before, and have put off the great work of our life to the end of it, our opportunity is irrecoverably lost; for there is nothing to be done in religion, when our reason is once departed from us; *the night is then come* indeed, and *darkness hath overtaken us*; and tho' we be still alive, yet are we as unfit for any work, as if we were naturally dead.

And this is no such rare and extraordinary case; for it happens to many; and every man that wilfully defers the work of religion and repentance to a dying hour, hath reason to fear that he shall be thus surprized in his sin and security, and by the just judgment of God depriv'd of all the opportunity of life and salvation, while he is yet in the land of the living.

But if God be more merciful unto us, and visit us with such a sickness, as leaves us the use of our understandings, yet all that we do in religion at such a time, proceeds from so violent a cause, from the present terror of death, and the dreadful apprehension of that eternal misery which is just ready to swallow us up, that it is one of the hardest things in the world, not only for others, but even for our selves, to know whether our resolutions, and this sudden and hasty fit of repentance be sincere or not: For it is natural, and almost unavoidable, for a man to repent, and be sorry for what he hath done, when he is going to execution: But the great question is, What this man would do, if his life were spared? Whether his repentance would hold good, and he would become a new man, and change his former course of life, or relapse into it again? And it is by no means certain, that he would not be as bad as he was before: Because we see many, who, when they lie upon a sick bed, give all imaginable testimony of a deep sorrow, and a hearty repentance for their sins, who yet upon their recovery return to their former sins with a greater appetite, and make themselves *ten times more the children of wrath than they were before*. So that all the work that we can do at such a time, ought not to be much reckoned upon, and can give us little or no comfort; because it is so infinitely uncertain whether it be real and sincere, and whether the effect of so violent a cause would last and continue if the cause were removed. Therefore *we should work while it is day*; for whatever we do in this evening of our lives, will be done with very great difficulty, and with very doubtful success.

But besides this evening, there is *a night coming when no man can work*: Death will seize upon us, and then our state will be irrecoverably concluded; after that it will be impossible for us to do any thing towards our own salvation, or to have any thing done for us by others; the prayers of the living will not avail the dead, *as the tree falls, so it lies*; *there is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor device in the grave whither we are going*; therefore, according to the counsel of the wise man, *what our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might*.

This counsel concerns all ages and persons. I will apply it to the young, in the words of the wise preacher, *Eccles. 12. 1. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them*. To them who are in the vigour of their age, in the words of the Prophet, *Isa. ch. 55. 6. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near*. And to them that are old, in the words of another Prophet, *Jer. 13. 16. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he causeth darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness*. And let us every one of us, of what age or condition soever, apply it to our selves, in the words of our blessed Saviour here in the text, *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work*.

S E R M O N XLVIII.

Of the great Duties of Natural Religion, with the Ways and Means of knowing them.

MICAH vi. 6, 7, 8.

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow my self before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with Calves of a year old?

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of Oyl? shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?



IN the beginning of this chapter, the Prophet tells the people of *Israel*, that *the Lord had a controversy with them*; and that he might direct them how to take up this quarrel, he brings in one making this enquiry in the name of the people; *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow my self before the high God?* That is, by what kind of worship or devotion may I address my self to him in the most acceptable manner? by what means may I hope to appease his displeasure? To satisfy this enquiry, he first instanceth in the chief kinds of sacrifices and expiations that were in use among the *Jews and Heathens*: *Shall I come before him with burnt offerings?* the constant sacrifice that was offered to God by way of acknowledgment of his dominion over the creatures: *with Calves of a year old?* which was the sin-offering which the high-priest offered for himself. Or will he rather accept of those great and costly sacrifices which were offered upon solemn and publick occasions, such as that was which *Solomon* offered at the dedication of the Temple? *Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of Oyl?* Or if none of these will do, shall I try to atone him after the manner of the *Heathen*, by the dearest thing in the world, the first-born of my Children? *Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?* If God was to be appeased at all, surely they thought it must be by some of these ways, for beyond these they could imagine nothing of greater value and efficacy.

But the Prophet tells them that they were quite out of the way, in thinking to pacify God upon these terms; that there are other things which are much better and more pleasing to him than any of these sacrifices. For some of them were expressly forbidden by God, as *the offering up of our Children*; and for the rest, they were not good in themselves, but meerly by virtue of their institution, and because they were commanded. But the things which he would recommend to them, are such as are good in their own nature, and required of us by God upon that account. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

So that in these words you have,

First, An enquiry which is the best way to appease God when he is offended?
Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow my self before the high God?

Secondly,

Secondly, The way that men are apt to take in this case ; and that is by some external piece of religion and devotion ; such as sacrifice was both among *Jews* and *Heathens*. *Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, &c.* By which questions the Prophet intimates that men are very apt to pitch upon this course.

Thirdly, The course which God himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, &c.*

The *first* being a meer question, there needs no more to be said of it ; only that it is a question of great importance ; what is the most effectual way to appease God when we have offended him ? For who can bear his indignation, and who can stand before him, when once he is angry ? Let us consider then, in the

Second place, the way that men are apt to take to pacify God ; and that is by some external piece of religion and devotion, such as were sacrifices among the *Jews* and *Heathens*. *Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings ?* This is the way which men are most apt to chuse. The *Jews*, you see, pitch'd upon the external parts of their religion, those which were most pompous and solemn, the richest and most costly sacrifices ; so they might but keep their sins, they were well enough content to offer up anything else to God ; they thought nothing too good for him, provided he would not oblige them to become better.

And thus it is among our selves, when we apprehend God is displeased with us, and his Judgments are abroad in the earth, we are content to do anything, but to *learn righteousness* ; we are willing to submit to any kind of external devotion and humiliation, to fast, and pray, to afflict our selves and to cry mightily unto God ; things some of them good in themselves, but the least part of that which God requires of us.

And as for the Church of *Rome*, in case of publick judgments and calamities, they are the most inquisitive and (as they pretend) the most skilfull people in the world to pacify God ; and they have a thousand solemn devices to this purpose. I do not wrong them, by representing them enquiring after this manner. “ Shall I go before a *Crucifix*, and bow my self to it, as to the *high God* ? And because the Lord is a *great King*, and it is perhaps too much boldness and arrogance to make immediate addressees always to him ; to which of the *Saints* or *Angels* shall I go to mediate for me, and intercede on my behalf ? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of *Pater-Nosters*, or with ten thousands of *Ave-Marys* ? Shall the *Host* travel in procession, or my self undertake a tedious *Pilgrimage* ? Or shall I list my self a Soldier for the *holy war*, or for the *extirpation of hereticks* ? Shall I give half my estate to a *Convent* for my transgression, or chastise and punish my body for the sin of my soul ? ” Thus men deceive themselves, and will submit to all the extravagant severities, that the petulancy and folly of men can devise and impose upon them. And indeed it is not to be imagined, when men are once under the power of superstition, how ridiculous they may be, and yet think themselves religious ; how prodigiously they may play the fool, and yet believe they please God ; what cruel and barbarous things they may do to themselves and others, and yet be *verily persuaded they do God good service*.

And what is the mystery of all this, but that men are loath to do that, without which nothing else that we do is acceptable to God ? They *hate to be reformed* ; and for this reason, they will be content to do any thing, rather than be put to the trouble of mending themselves ; every thing is easy in comparison of this task, and God may have any terms of them, so he will let them be quiet in their sins, and excuse them from the real virtues of a good life. And this brings me to the

Third thing, which I principally intended to speak to. The course which God himself directs to, and which will effectually pacify him. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God ?* In the handling of which, I shall,

First,

First, Consider those several duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us.

Secondly, By what ways and means God hath discovered these duties to us, and the goodness of them; *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, &c.*

I. We will briefly consider the several duties which God here requires of us, and upon the performance of which he will be pacified towards us. *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*

It was usual among the *Jews* to reduce all the duties of religion to these three heads, *justice, mercy, and piety*; under the first two, comprehending the duties which we owe to one another; and under the third, duties which we owe to God.

I. *Justice*. And I was going to tell you what it is, but I considered that every man knows it, as well as any definition can explain it to him. I shall only put you in mind of some of the principal instances of it, and the several virtues comprehended under it. And,

First, Justice is concerned in the making of laws, that they be such as are equal and reasonable, useful and beneficial, for the honour of God and religion, and for the publick good of human society; this is a great trust, in the discharge of which, if men be byassed by favour or interest, and drawn aside from the consideration and regard of the publick good, it is a far greater crime, and of worse consequence than any private act of injustice between man and man.

And then, justice is also concerned in the due execution of laws; which are the guard of private property, the security of publick peace, and of religion and good manners. And,

Lastly, In the observance of laws and obedience to them; which is a debt that every man owes to human society.

But more especially justice is concerned in the observance of those laws, whether of God or man, which respect the rights of men, and their mutual commerce and intercourse with one another. That we use honesty and integrity in all our dealings, in opposition to fraud and deceit; truth and fidelity, in opposition to falshood and breach of trust; equity and good conscience, in opposition to all kind of oppression and exaction. These are the principal branches and instances of this great and comprehensive duty of justice; the violation whereof is so much the greater sin, because this virtue is the firmest bond of human society, upon the observation whereof, the peace and happiness of mankind does so much depend.

2. *Mercy*, which does not only signifie the inward affection of pity and compassion towards those that are in misery and necessity, but the effects of it, in the actual relief of those whose condition calls for our charitable help and assistance; by feeding the hungry, and cloathing the naked, and visiting the sick, and vindicating the oppressed, and comforting the afflicted, and ministering ease and relief to them if it be in our power. And this is a very lovely virtue, and argues more goodness in men than mere *justice* doth. For *justice* is a strict debt; but *mercy* is favour and kindness. And this perhaps may be the reason of the different expressions in the text, that when God barely commands us *to do justly*, he requires we should *love mercy*, that is, take a particular pleasure and delight in the exercise of this virtue, which is so proper and agreeable to mankind, that we commonly call it *humanity*, giving it its name from our very nature. In short, it is so excellent a virtue, that I should be very sorry that any religion should be able to pretend to the practice of it more than our own.

3. *Piety; to walk humbly with thy God. To walk humbly in the fear of the Lord*; so the *Chaldee* paraphrase renders these words. And this phrase may comprehend all those acts of religion which refer immediately to God; a firm belief of his being and perfections; an awful sense of him, as the dread Sovereign and righteous Judge of the world; a due regard to his service, and a reverent behaviour of our selves towards him in all acts of worship and religion, in opposition

sition to Atheism and a prophane neglect and contempt of God and religion; a new and monstrous kind of impiety! which of late years hath broke in upon us, and got head among us, not only contrary to the example of former ages, but in despite of the very genius and temper of the nation, which is naturally devout and zealous in religion.

Or else this phrase of *walking humbly with God*, may refer more particularly to the posture and condition of the people of *Israel* at that time, who were fallen under the heavy displeasure of God for their sins. And then the duty required is, that being sensible how highly God hath been offended by us, by the general corruption and vitiousness of the age, which like a Leprosy hath spread it self almost over the whole body of the nation, and by that open lewdness and those insolent impieties which are daily committed amongst us; I say, that being deeply sensible of this, we do with all humility acknowledge our sins to God, and repent of them, and implore his mercy and forgiveness, and resolve by his grace *to turn every one from the evil of our ways, and from the wickedness that is in our hands*; which God grant we may every one do ** this day*, according to the pious design and intention of it. And if we be sincere in this resolution, *who can tell but God will turn and repent, and turn away his anger from us, that we perish not*. Nay, we have great reason to believe, that he will be pacified towards us. So he hath declared, *Isa. i. 16. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wooll*. But if we continue unreformed, God will say to us, as he does there to the people of *Israel*, *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? your calling of assemblies I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting; and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; when ye make many prayers, I will not hear*. To which, let me add that excellent saying of the Son of *Syrach* to this purpose, *Ecclesiast. 34. 25, 26. He that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what availeth his washing? So is it with a man that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same things. Who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?*

II. Let us consider by what ways and means God hath made known these duties to us, and the goodness and the obligation of them. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee?* I shall mention five ways whereby God hath discovered this to us.

1. By a kind of natural instinct.
2. By natural reason.
3. By the general vote and consent of mankind.
4. By external revelation.
5. By the inward dictates and motions of God's Spirit upon the minds of men.

First, By a kind of natural instinct, by which I mean a secret impression upon the minds of men, whereby they are naturally carried to approve some things as good and fit, and to dislike other things, as having a native evil and deformity in them. And this I call a *natural instinct*, because it does not seem to proceed so much from the exercise of our reason, as from a natural propension and inclination, like those instincts which are in brute creatures, of natural affection and care toward their young ones. And that these inclinations are precedent to all reason and discourse about them, evidently appears by this, that they do put forth themselves every whit as vigorously in young persons, as in those of riper reason; in the rude and ignorant sort of people, as in those who are more polish'd and refin'd. For we see plainly that the young and ignorant have as strong impressions of piety and devotion, as true a sense of gratitude and justice and pity, as the wiser and more knowing part of mankind. A plain indication, that the reason of mankind is prevented by a kind of *natural instinct* and *anticipation* concerning the good or evil, the comeliness or deformity of these things.

And

* This Sermon was Preach'd upon occasion of a publick Fast.

And though this do not equally extend to all the instances of our duty, yet as to the great lines and essential parts of it, mankind hardly need to consult any other oracle, than the meer propensions and inclinations of their nature; as, whether we ought to reverence the divine nature, to be grateful to those who have confer'd benefits upon us, to speak the truth, to be faithful to our promise, to restore that which is committed to us in trust, to pity and relieve those that are in misery, and in all things to do to others as we would have them do to us. And this will further appear, if we consider these two things :

1. That men are naturally innocent or guilty to themselves, according to what they do in these things. So the Apostle tells us, *Rom. 2. 14, 15. When the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves, and do show the effect of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts by turns,* (that is, according as they do well or ill) *accusing or excusing them.* There is a secret comfort in innocence, and a strange pleasure and satisfaction in being acquitted by our own minds for what we do. But on the contrary, when we contradict these natural dictates, what uneasiness do we find in our own breasts? Nay even before the fact is committed, our conscience is strangely disquieted at the thoughts of it. When a man does but design to do a bad thing, he is as guilty to himself, as if he had committed it. Of this we have a considerable instance, in the first violence that was offered to nature, *Gen. 4. 6. The Lord said unto Cain, why art thou wroth, and why is thy countenance fallen?* The very thought of that wickedness which he did but then design, did disorder his mind, and make a change in his very countenance. Guilt is the natural concomitant of heinous crimes, which so soon as ever a man commits, his spirit receives a secret wound, which causeth a great deal of smart and anguish. For guilt is restless, and puts the mind of man into an unnatural working and fermentation, never to be settled again but by repentance. *The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest;* which plainly shews that the mind of man hath a kind of *natural sense* of good and evil; because when ever we offend against nature, our consciences are touched to the quick, and we receive a sting into our Soul, which shoots and pains us, when ever we reflect upon what we have done. I appeal to that witness which every man carries in his breast, whether this be not true.

2. Men are naturally full of hopes and fears, according as they follow or go against these natural dictates. A good conscience is apt to fill men with confidence and good hopes. It does not only give ease, but security to the mind of man, against the dread of invisible powers, and the fearful apprehensions of a future Judgment. Whereas guilt fills men with dismal apprehensions of danger, and continual misgivings concerning their own safety. Thus it was with *Cain* after he had slain his brother; *It shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me.* Nay, when a man hath done a secret fault, which none can accuse him, of, yet then is he haunted with the terrors of his own mind, and cannot be secure in his own apprehensions; which plainly shews that men are conscious to themselves, when they do well, and when they do amiss; and that the same *natural instinct* which prompts men to their duty, fills them with good hopes when they have done it, and with secret fears and apprehensions of danger when they have done contrary to it.

Secondly, God shews man what is good, by natural reason; and that *two* ways; by the convenience of things to our nature; and by their tendency to our happiness and interest.

First, Reason shews us the convenience of things to our nature; and whatever is agreeable to the primitive design and intention of nature, that we call *good*; whatever is contrary thereto, we call *evil*. For example, *to honour and love God*. It is natural to honour great power and perfection, and to love goodness wherever it is. So likewise, *gratitude* is natural, to acknowledge benefits receiv'd, and to be ready to requite them, and the contrary is monstrous, and universally abhorred; and there is no greater sign that any thing is contrary to nature, than if it be detested by the whole kind. It is agreeable also to na-

ture to be *just*, and *to do to others, as we would have them do to us*; for this is to make our own natural inclinations and desires, the rule of our dealing with others; and *to be merciful*; for no man that hath not divested himself of humanity, can be cruel and hard-hearted to others, without feeling a pain in himself.

Secondly, Reason shews us the tendency of these things to our happiness and interest. And indeed the notion of *good* and *evil* does commonly refer to the consequences of things, and we call that *good*, which will bring some benefit and advantage to us, and that *evil* which is likely to produce some mischief and inconvenience; and by this rule reason discovers to us that these duties are *good*.

To begin with *piety* towards God. Nothing can more evidently tend to our interest, than to make him our friend, upon whose favour our happiness depends. So likewise for *gratitude*; it is a virtue, to which if nature did not prompt us, our interest would direct us; for every man is ready to place benefits there where he may hope for a thankful return. *Temperance* does apparently conduce to our health, which, next to a good conscience, is the most pleasant and valuable thing in the world; whereas the intemperate man is an open enemy to himself, and continually making assaults upon his own life. *Mercy* and *pity* are not more welcome to others, than they are delightful and beneficial to our selves; for we do not only gratify our own nature and bowels, by relieving those who are in misery, but we provoke mankind by our example to the like tenderness, and do prudently bespeak the commiseration of others towards us, when it shall be our turn to stand in need of it. And if we be wise enough, our reason will likewise direct us to be *just*, as the surest art of thriving in this world; it gives a man a reputation, which is a powerful advantage in all the affairs of this world; it is the shortest and easiest way of dispatching business, the plainest, and least entangled; and though it be not so *sudden* a way of growing rich, as fraud and oppression: yet it is much *surer* and more *lasting*, and not liable to those terrible back-blows and after-reckonings, to which estates got by injustice are.

And natural reason does not only shew us that these things are *good*, but that *the Lord requires them of us*, that is, that they have the force and obligation of *laws*. For there needs nothing more to make any thing a *law*, than a sufficient declaration, that it is *the will of God*; and this God hath sufficiently signified to mankind by the very frame of our natures, and of those principles and faculties which he hath endu'd us withal; so that whenever we act contrary to these, we plainly disobey the will of him that made us, and violate those laws which he hath enacted in our natures, and written upon our hearts.

And this is all the *law* that the greatest part of mankind were under, before the revelation of the Gospel. From *Adam* to *Moses*, the world was almost solely governed by the *natural law*; which seems to be the meaning of that hard text, *Rom. 5. 13. For until the law sin was in the world*, that is, before the *law* of *Moses* was given, men were capable of offending against some *other law*, for otherwise sin could not have been imputed to them, for *sin is not imputed where there is no law*. And then it follows; *Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression*; that is, during that space from *Adam* to *Moses*, men sinned against the *natural law*, and were liable to death upon that account, though they had not offended against an express revelation from God, as *Adam* had done; for *that* the Apostle seems to mean, by *sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression*.

Thirdly, God hath shewn us what is good by the general vote and consent of mankind. Not that all mankind do agree concerning virtue and vice; but that as to the greater duties of *piety*, *justice*, *mercy*, and the like, the exceptions are but few in comparison, and not enough to infringe a general consent. And of this I shall offer to you this threefold evidence.

1. That these virtues are generally prais'd and held in esteem by mankind, and the contrary vices generally reprov'd and evil spoken of. Now to praise any thing, is to give testimony to the goodness of it, and to censure any thing, is to declare that we believe it to be evil. And if we consult the history of all ages,

ages, we shall find that the things which are generally prais'd in the lives of men, and recommended to the imitation of posterity, are piety and devotion, gratitude and justice, humanity and charity; and that the contrary to these are marked with ignominy and reproach; the former are commended even in enemies, and the latter are branded even by those who had a kindness for the persons that were guilty of them. So constant hath mankind always been in the commendation of virtue, and in the censure of vice. Nay we find not only those who are virtuous themselves giving their testimony and applause to virtue, but even those who are vicious; not out of love to goodness, but from the conviction of their own minds, and from a secret reverence they bear to the common consent and opinion of mankind. And this is a great testimony, because it is the testimony of an enemy extorted by the meer light and force of truth.

And on the contrary; nothing is more ordinary than for *vice to reprove sin*, and to hear men condemn the like, or the same things in others, which they allow in themselves. And this is a clear evidence, that vice is generally condemned by mankind, that many men condemn it in themselves; and those who are so kind as to spare themselves, are very quick-sighted to spy a fault in any body else, and will censure a bad action done by another, with as much freedom and impartiality, as the most virtuous man in the world.

And to this consent of mankind about virtue and vice, the Scripture frequently appeals. As when it commands us *to provide things honest in the sight of all men; and by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*; intimating that there are some things so confessedly good, and owned to be such by so general a vote of mankind, that the worst of men have not the face to open their mouths against them. And it is made the character of a virtuous action, if it be *lovely, and commendable, and of good report*. Philip. 4. 8. *Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, make account of these things*; intimating to us, that mankind do generally concur in the praise and commendation of what is virtuous.

2. Men do generally glory and stand upon their innocency, when they do virtuously; but are ashamed, and out of countenance, when they do the contrary. Now glory and shame are nothing else but an appeal to the judgment of others concerning the good or evil of our actions. There are indeed some such monsters as are impudent in their impieties, but these are but few in comparison. Generally mankind is modest, the greatest part of those who do evil are apt to blush at their own faults, and to confess them in their countenance, which is an acknowledgment that they are not only guilty to themselves that they have done amiss, but that they are apprehensive that others think so. For guilt is a passion respecting our selves, but shame regards others. Now it is a sign of shame, that men love to conceal their faults from others, and commit them secretly, in the dark and without witnesses, and are afraid even of a child or a fool: Or if they be discovered in them, they are solicitous to excuse and extenuate them, and ready to lay the fault upon any body else, or to transfer their guilt, or as much of it as they can, upon others. All which are certain tokens, that men are not only naturally guilty to themselves, when they commit a fault; but that they are sensible also what opinions others have of these things.

And on the contrary, men are apt to stand upon their justification, and to glory when they have done well. The conscience of a man's own virtue and integrity, lifts up his head and gives him confidence before others, because he is satisfied they have a good opinion of his actions. What a good face does a man naturally set upon a good deed? And how does he sneak, when he hath done wickedly, being sensible that he is condemned by others, as well as by himself? No man is afraid of being upbraided for having dealt honestly or kindly with others, nor does account it any calumny or reproach, to have it reported of him, that he is a sober and chaste man. No man blusheth, when he meets a man with whom he hath kept his word, and discharged his trust: but every

man is apt to do so, when he meets one with whom he has dealt dishonestly, or who knows some notorious crime by him.

3. Vice is generally forbidden and punish'd by human laws: but against the contrary virtues there never was any law. Some vices are so manifestly evil in themselves, or so mischievous to human society, that the laws of most nations have taken care to discountenance them by severe penalties. Scarce any nation was ever so barbarous, as not to maintain and vindicate the honour of their Gods and religion by publick laws. Murder and adultery, rebellion and sedition, perjury and breach of trust, fraud and oppression, are vices severely prohibited by the laws of most nations. A clear indication, what opinion the generality of mankind, and the wisdom of nations have always had of these things.

But now against the contrary virtues there never was any law. No man was ever impeach'd for *living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*. A plain acknowledgment, that mankind always thought them good, and never were sensible of the inconvenience of them; for had they been so, they would have provided against them by laws. This St. Paul takes notice of as a great commendation of the christian virtues; *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, kindness, fidelity, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law*; the greatest evidence that could be given, that these things are unquestionably good in the esteem of mankind, *against such there is no law*. As if he had said, turn over the law of Moses, search those of Athens, and Sparta, and the twelve tables of the Romans, and those innumerable laws that have been added since; and you shall not in any of them find any of those virtues that I have mentioned, condemned and forbidden. A clear evidence that mankind never took any exception against them, but are generally agreed about the goodness of them.

Fourthly, God hath shewn us what is good by external revelation. In former ages of the world, God revealed his will to particular persons in an extraordinary manner, and more especially to the nation of the Jews, the rest of the world being in a great measure left to the conduct of natural light. But in these latter ages he hath made publick revelation of his will by his Son. And this as to the matter of our duty, is the same in substance with the law of nature; for our Saviour comprehends all under these two general heads, *the love of God, and of our neighbour*. The Apostle reduceth all to three, *sobriety, justice, and piety*; *The grace of God that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world*. So that if we believe the Apostle, the Gospel teacheth us the very same things which nature dictated to men before; only it hath made a more perfect discovery of them. So that whatever was doubtful and obscure before, is now certain and plain; the duties are still the same, only it offers us more powerful arguments, and a greater assistance to the performance of those duties; so that we may now much better say, than the Prophet could in his days, *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what it is that the Lord requires of thee*.

Fifthly and lastly, God shews us what is good by the motions of his spirit upon the minds of men. This the Scripture assures us of, and good men have experience more especially of it; though it be hard to give an account of it, and to say what motions are from the spirit of God, and what from our own minds; for, *as the wind blows where it listeth, and we hear the sound of it, but know not whence it comes, nor whither it goes*; so are the operations of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men, secret and imperceptible.

And thus I have done with the three things I propounded to speak to. All that now remains, is to make some inferences from what hath been said, by way of application.

First, Seeing God hath so abundantly provided that we should know our duty, we are altogether inexcusable, if we do not do it. Because *he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of thee*; therefore
 thou

thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art, who livest in a contradiction to this light. God hath acquainted us with our duty, by such ways as may most effectually both direct and engage us to the practice of it ; we are prompted to it by a kind of natural instinct, and strong impressions upon our minds of the difference of good and evil ; we are led to the knowledge, and urged to the practice of it, by our nature, and by our reason, and by our interest, and by that which is commonly very prevalent among men, the general voice and consent of mankind ; and by the most powerful and governing passions in human nature, by hope, and by fear, and by shame ; by the prospect of advantage, by the apprehension of danger, and by the sense of honour ; and to take away all possible excuse of ignorance from us, by an express revelation from God, the clearest and most perfect that ever was made to the world. So that whenever we do contrary to our duty, in any of these great instances, we offend against all these, and do in the highest degree fall under the heavy sentence of our Saviour, *this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.*

Secondly, You see hence what are the great duties of religion, which God mainly requires of us, and how reasonable they are ; *piety* towards God, and *justice* and *charity* towards men ; the knowledge whereof is planted in our nature, and grows up with our reason. And these are things which are unquestionably good, and against which we can have no exception ; things that were never reprov'd, nor found fault with by mankind, neither our nature nor our reason riseth up against them, or dictates any thing to the contrary. We have all the obligation, and we have all the encouragement to them, and are secure on all hands in the practice of them. In the doing of these things, there is no danger to us from the laws of men, no fear of displeasure from God, no offence or sting from our own minds.

And these things which are so agreeable to our nature, and our reason, and our interest, are the great things which our religion requires of us, more valuable in themselves, and more acceptable to God than *whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*, more than *thousands of Rams, and ten thousands of rivers of Oyl* ; more than if we offered to him *all the Beasts of the forest, and the Cattle upon a thousand hills*. We are not to neglect any institution of God ; but above all, we are to secure the observance of those great duties to which we are directed by our very nature, and tyed by the surest and most sacred of all other laws, those which God hath riveted in our Souls, and written upon our hearts : and that mankind might have no pretence left to excuse them from these, the Christian religion hath set us free from those many positive and outward observances, that the *Jewish* religion was incumber'd withal ; that we might be wholly intent upon these great duties, and mind nothing in comparison of the real and substantial virtues of a good life.

Thirdly, You see, in the last place, what is the best way to appease the displeasure of God towards a sinful nation. God seems to have as great a controversy with us, as he had with the people of *Israel*, and his wrath is of late years most visibly gone out against us ; and proportionably to the full measure of our sins, it hath been poured out upon us in full vials. How have the judgments of God follow'd us ? And how close have they follow'd one another ? What fearful calamities have our eyes seen ? enough to make the ears of every one that hears them to tingle. What terrible and hazardous wars have we been engaged in ? What a raging pestilence did God send among us, that swept away thousands, and ten thousands in our Streets ? What a dreadful and fatal fire, that was not to be checked and resisted in its course, till it had laid in ashes one of the greatest and richest cities in the world ? What unseasonable weather have we had of late ? as if for the wickedness of men upon the earth, the very *ordinances of heaven* were changed, and *summer, and winter, seed-time, and harvest*, had forgotten their *appointed seasons*. And, which is more and sadder than all this, what dangerous attempts have been made upon our religion, by the restless adversaries of it ?

And now surely, *after all this is come upon us for our sins*, it is time for us to look up to him that smites us, and to think of taking up this quarrel. 'Tis time to inquire as they do in the text, *wherewithal shall we come before the Lord, and bow our selves before the high God?* And we are apt to take the same course they did, to endeavour to appease God by some external devotion. We have now betaken our selves to prayer and fasting, and 'twas very fit, nay necessary we should do so; but let us not think this is all God expects from us. These are but a *means* to a further *end*, to oblige us for the future to the practice of a good life. The outward profession of religion is not lost amongst us, there appears still in men a great and commendable zeal for the reform'd religion, and there hath been too much occasion for it; but that which God chiefly expects from us, is reform'd lives. Piety and virtue are in a great measure gone from among us, the manners of men are strangely corrupted, *the great and weighty things of the law* are neglected, *justice and mercy, temperance and chastity, truth and fidelity*, so that we may take up *David's* complaint, *Help Lord! for the righteous man ceaseth, for the faithful fail from among the children of men.*

And till the nation be brought back to a sober sense of religion, from an airy and phantastical piety, to real and unaffected devotion, and from a factious contention about things indifferent, to the serious practice of what is necessary; from our violent heats and animosities, to a more peaceable temper, and by a mutual condescension on all sides, to a nearer and stronger union among our selves, 'till we recover in some measure our ancient virtue and integrity of manners, we have reason to fear, that God will still have a controversy with us, notwithstanding all our noise and zeal about religion.

This is the true, this is the only course to appease the indignation of God, and to draw down his favour and blessing upon a poor distracted and gasping nation. *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?*


I have but one word more, and that is to put you presently upon the practice of one of these duties that I have been persuading you to, and that is *mercy*, and *alms to the poor*. If what I have already said, have had its effect upon you, I need not use any other arguments; if it have not, I have hardly the heart to use any. I shall only put you in mind again, that God values this above all our external devotion, *he will have mercy rather than sacrifice*; that this is the way to find mercy with God, and to have our prayers speed in heaven; and without this, all our fasting and humiliation signifies nothing. And to this purpose I will only read to you those plain and persuasive words of the Prophet, which do so fully declare unto us the whole duty of this day, and particularly urge us to this of charity, *Isa. 58. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his Soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day unto the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy self from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy salvation shall spring forth speedily, and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then thou shalt call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, here I am.*

S E R M O N XLIX.

Instituted Religion not intended to undermine Natural.

MATTHEW ix. 13.

But go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice.

NE of the most successful attempts that have been made upon religion, by the Devil and his instruments, hath been by setting the laws of God at variance with themselves, and by dashing the several parts of religion, and the two tables of the law against one another, to break all in pieces; and under a pretence of advancing that part of religion which is *instituted* and *revealed*, to undermine and destroy that which is *natural*, and of primary obligation.

To manifest and lay open the mischievous consequences of this design, I shall at this time (by God's assistance) endeavour to make out these *two* things.

First, That *natural* religion is the foundation of all *instituted* and *revealed* religion.

Secondly, That no *revealed* or *instituted* religion was ever design'd to take away the obligation of *natural* duties, but to confirm and establish them.

And to this purpose, I have chosen these words of our Saviour for the foundation of my following discourse; *but go ye and learn, what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.* The occasion of which words was briefly this; the *Pharisees* found fault with him for keeping company, and eating with *publicans* and *sinners*. He owns the thing which they objected to him, and endeavours to vindicate himself from any crime or fault in so doing; and that, these two ways.

1. By telling them, that it was allow'd to a physician, and proper for his office and profession, to converse with the sick, in order to their cure and recovery. He may abstain, if he pleaseth, from the conversation of others; but the sick have need of him, and are his proper care, and his business and employment lies among them; *he said unto them, they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*; they who were already good, needed not to be call'd upon to amend and reform their lives; and they that were so conceited of their own righteousness, as the *Pharisees* were, and so confident that they were sound and whole, would not admit of a physician, and thereby render'd themselves incapable of cure; and therefore he did not apply himself to them; but to the publicans and sinners, who were acknowledg'd on all hands, both by themselves and others, to be bad men; so that it could not be deny'd to be the proper work of a spiritual physician to converse with such persons.

2. By endeavouring to convince them of their ignorance of the true nature of religion, and of the rank and order of the several duties thereby required; *but go ye and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*; which saying is quoted by him, out of the Prophet *Hosea*, chap. 6. 6. *I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings*; which text our Saviour cites and applies upon two several occasions; the considering and comparing of which, will give full light to the true meaning of it.

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The first is here in the text, upon occasion of the *Pharisees* finding fault with him, for conversing with *Publicans* and *sinners*; the other is, *Matth. 12. 7.* where the *Pharisees* blaming the disciples of our Saviour for plucking the ears of corn on the Sabbath day, our Saviour tells them, *if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless*; that is, if they had understood the true nature of religion, and what duties of it are chiefly and in the first place to be regarded, they would not have been so forward to censure this action of his disciples.

So that the plain meaning of this saying is this, that in comparing the parts of religion and the obligation of duties together, those duties which are of *moral* and *natural* obligation are most valu'd by God, and ought to take place of those which are *positive* and *ritual*. *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*, that is, *rather than sacrifice*, according to the true meaning of this *Hebrew* phrase, which is to be understood in a comparative sense, as is evident from the text it self, in *Hosea*, *I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings*; if they cannot be observed together, let *sacrifice* be neglected, and the work of *mercy* be done.

And the reason of this seems very plain; because *shewing mercy*, or *doing good* in any kind is a prime instance of those *moral* duties, which do *naturally* and *perpetually* oblige; but *sacrifice* is an instance of *positive* and *ritual* observances, and one of the chief of the kind: so that when *moral* duties, and *ritual* observances come in competition, and do clash with one another, the observation of a *rite*, or *positive institution*, is to give way to a *moral* duty; and it is no sin in that case to neglect the observation of such a *rite*, yea though it were commanded and appointed by God himself. And though this may seem to be a breach of the *letter* of the law; yet it is according to the true *mind* and *meaning* of the law; it being a tacit condition implied in all laws of a *ritual* and *positive* nature, *provided the observance of them be not to the hindrance and prejudice of any duty, which is of a higher and better nature*; in that case the obligation of it does for that time give way and is suspended.

And this will appear to be the true meaning of this rule, by comparing more particularly the instances to which our Saviour applies it. His disciples passing through the corn on the sabbath day, and being hungry, pluckt the ears and did eat; this our Saviour does justifie to be no breach of the law of the Sabbath; because in that case, and in such circumstances, it did not oblige: for the disciples being call'd to attend upon our Saviour, to be instructed by him in the things which concern'd the kingdom of God, that is, in the doctrine of the Gospel, which they were to publish to the world, this attendance hindred them from making necessary provisions against the Sabbath, they, in obedience to their master, being intent upon a better work; but that they might not starve, the necessities of nature must be provided for; and therefore it was fit, that the law of the Sabbath, which was but *positive* and *ritual*, should give way to an act of *mercy*, and *self-preservation*; *if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless*.

And the reason is the same as to any *instrumental* part of religion, by which I mean any thing which may be a *means* to promote piety and goodness; as prayer, hearing the word of God, keeping good company, and avoiding bad; the duties of this kind, our Saviour here in the text (where he likewise applies this rule,) compares with *moral* duties. To avoid the company of vicious and wicked persons, is a good means to preserve men from the contagion of their vices, and was always esteemed a duty among prudent men, both Jews and Heathens, and is in no wise disallow'd by our Saviour: but yet not so a duty, as to hinder a greater duty, nor so strictly and perversely to be insisted upon, as if one ought not to converse with bad men in any case, or upon any account, no not for so great and good an end as to reclaim them from their vices. In this case we ought to consider, that our first and highest obligation is to *moral* duties, comprehended under *the love of God and our neighbour*; among which one of the chief is to do good to men, and to shew mercy and pity to those that are in misery;

misery; and the greatest good that one man can do to another, is to be instrumental to reclaim him from the evil and error of his way; because this is *to save his soul from death*; and we cannot imagine that God ever intended, by any rule of *prudence*, or *positive* constitution of the Jewish law, so to forbid their accompanying with bad and scandalous men, that it should be unlawful to converse with them in order to their recovery and amendment; *go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*

And St. Paul was of the same mind in the precepts he gives concerning avoiding the company of scandalous christians, 2 *Thess.* 3. 14, 15. *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* St. Paul qualifies his precept, lest christians should mistake it, and fall into the Jewish extream, not to converse with those whom they esteem'd scandalous and wicked, upon any account whatsoever, no not in order to their amendment and reformation. The bond of intimacy and friendship with bad men ought to be broken; and yet the bond of common humanity may be as strong as ever. It is one thing to discountenance bad men, to bring them to shame, and a sense of their fault; and quite another thing to abandon them to ruin; and even in case of notorious heresie, or wickedness of life, it is one thing to cut them off from the society and communion of Christians; and quite another, to cut them off from human society, to cut their throats, and to extirpate them out of the world.

And yet the matter was carried thus far by the furious zeal of the Jews, when christianity first appear'd in the world; they thought that no mercy in such cases was the best service that could be done, and the best sacrifice that could be offered to Almighty God; and this pattern hath been since, not only closely follow'd, but out-done by the doctrines and practices of the church of Rome; as we have too much reason to remember upon *this day*.

* Preached
on Nov. 5.
1688.

But to proceed in the farther explication of the text, the meaning whereof in short is this; that the *ritual* and *instrumental* parts of religion, and all laws and duties concerning them, are of less value and esteem with God, than those which are of a *moral* nature, especially the great duties and offices of *piety* and *humanity*, of *the love of God*, and *of our neighbour*. And if we consider the matter well, we shall see the reason of it to be very plain; because *natural* and *moral* duties are approv'd of God, for themselves and for their own sake, upon account of their own *natural* and *intrinsic* goodness; but the *ritual* and *instrumental* parts of religion, are only pleasing to God in order to these, and so far as they tend to beget and promote them in us; they are not *naturally* good in themselves, but are *instituted* and *appointed* by God for the sake of the other; and therefore great reason there is that they should be subordinate, and give way to them, when they come in competition with one another.

For this is a known rule, which takes place in all laws, *that laws of less importance should give way to those that are of greater; quoties leges ex circumstantiâ colliduntur, ita ut utraque servari non potest, servanda est lex potior*: "When ever two laws happen to be in such circumstances as to clash with one another, so that both of them cannot be observ'd, that law which is better and of greater consequence is to be kept." And *Tully* gives much the same rule in this matter. "In comparing of laws (says he) we are to consider which law is most useful, and just, and reasonable to be observ'd." From whence it will follow, that when two laws, or more, or how many soever they be, cannot be observ'd, because they clash with one another; *ea maxime conservanda putetur, quæ ad maximas res pertinere videatur*: "It is reasonable that that law should be observ'd, which is of greatest moment and concernment."

By what hath been said, we may learn what is the meaning of this saying, which our Saviour more than once cites out of the Prophet, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice.*

From the words thus explained, I shall take occasion to prosecute the two propositions which I mentioned before; namely,

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First,

First, That *natural* religion is the foundation of *instituted* and *reveal'd* religion.

Secondly, That no *instituted* religion was ever design'd to take away the obligation of *natural* duties; but is intended to establish and confirm them. And both these are sufficiently grounded in the reason of our Saviour's discourse from this rule, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*.

I. That *natural* religion is the foundation of *instituted* and *reveal'd* religion; and all *reveal'd* religion does suppose, and take for granted, the clear and undoubted principles and precepts of *natural* religion, and builds upon them. By *natural* religion, I mean obedience to the *natural law*, and the performance of such duties as *natural light*, without any *express* and *supernatural revelation*, doth dictate to men. These lie at the bottom of all religion, and are the great and fundamental duties which God requires of all mankind; as, that we should love God, and behave our selves reverently towards him; that we should believe his revelations; and testify our dependence upon him, by imploring his aid and direction in all our necessities and distresses; and acknowledge our obligations to him for all the blessings and benefits which we receive; that we should moderate our appetites, in reference to the pleasures and enjoyments of this world, and use them temperately and chastly; that we should be just and upright in all our dealings with one another; true to our word, and faithful to our trust; and in all our words and actions observe that equity towards others, which we desire they should use towards us; that we should be kind, and charitable, merciful, and compassionate one towards another; ready to do good to all, and apt not only to pity, but to relieve them in their misery and necessity. These, and such like, are those which we call *moral* duties; and they are of *eternal* and *perpetual* obligation, because they do *naturally* oblige, without any *particular* and *express revelation* from God. And these are the foundation of *reveal'd* and *instituted* religion, and all *reveal'd* religion does suppose them, and build upon them; for all *revelation* from God, supposeth us to be *men*, and alters nothing of those duties to which we were *naturally obliged* before. And this will clearly appear if we consider these *three* things;

First, That the Scripture every where speaks of these, as the main and fundamental duties of the *Jewish* religion.

Secondly, That no *instituted* service of God, no *positive* part of religion, was ever acceptable to him, when these were neglected.

Thirdly, That the great design of the *christian* religion, was to restore and reinforce the practice of the *natural law*.

I. That the Scripture every where speaks of these as the main and fundamental duties of the *Jewish* religion. When our Saviour was ask'd *which was the first and great commandment of the law*; he answer'd, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*. One would have expected he would have given quite another answer, and have pitched upon some of those things which were so much magnified among the *Jews*, and which they laid so much weight upon; that he should have instanced in *sacrifice*, or *circumcision*, or the law of the *sabbath*: but he overlooks all these as inconsiderable in comparison, and instances only in those two great heads of moral duty, *the love of God, and our neighbour*; which are of *natural* and *perpetual* obligation, and comprehend under them all other *moral* duties.

And these are those which our Saviour calls *the law and the Prophets*, and which he says *he came not to destroy but to fulfill*, Mat. 5. 17, 18, 19, 20. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the Prophets. I am not come to destroy; but to fulfill: for verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be call'd the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

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That our Saviour doth not here speak of the *judicial* or *ceremonial* law of the *Jews*, but of the duties of the *moral* law, will, I think, be very plain, from these following considerations.

First, That the *judicial* or *ceremonial* laws of the *Jews* were to *pass away*, and did so, not long after; but this law, which our Saviour speaks of, was to be *perpetual* and *immutable*; for he tells us, *that heaven and earth should pass away, but one jot or one tittle of this law should not pass*.

Secondly, The observation of the law our Saviour speaks of, consisted in such things as the Scribes and Pharisees neglected; for he tells his disciples, upon this occasion, *that except their righteousness did exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*. But now the Scribes and Pharisees were the most accurate and punctual people in the world, in observing the precepts of the *judicial* and *ceremonial* law; they were so far from taking away any thing from these observances, that they had added to them, and enlarg'd them, by innumerable traditions of their own; so exact were they, that they would *pay tithe of mint, and annise, and cummin*, as our Saviour observes; but then they were extremely defective in *moral* duties; they were unnatural to their parents, and would pretend that their estates were consecrated to God, that under this pretence of *positive* religion, they might excuse themselves from a *natural* duty, and let their parents starve for God's sake; they were covetous, and unjust, and *devoured widows houses*; in a word, our Saviour tells us, they neglected *the weightier matters of the law, mercy, judgment, and the love of God, and keeping faith with men*; so that it is in these things, that our Saviour means, that *our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, viz. in the practice of moral duties*, which were neglected by them; and consequently 'tis the *moral* law which our Saviour came to confirm and establish.

Thirdly, If we consider the instances which our Saviour gives in his following discourse, by which we may best judge what he means. He instances in *murder*, and *adultery*, and *perjury*, which are undoubtedly forbidden by the *natural* law; and then he instances in several permissions which were indulged to them for the hardness of their hearts, but yet did intrench upon the dictates of right reason, and the first and original constitution of things; as the permission of *divorce* upon every slight occasion, and of *revenge*, and *retaliation of injuries*.

Fourthly, If we consider that by *the law and the Prophets*, our Saviour means that which was principally design'd and ultimately intended by them; which was the observation of *moral* duties; which as they were written in the two tables by the immediate finger of God himself, so are chiefly inculcated by the Prophets. And so we find this phrase of *the law and the Prophets* elsewhere used by our Saviour, when he mentions that great rule of equity, that *we should do to others as we would have them do to us*, Matth. 7. 12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the Prophets*. But how was *this the law and the Prophets*, when this rule was never so much as mentioned in either? our Saviour means, that this is the foundation of all those duties of *justice* and *mercy*, which are so much inculcated in *the law and the Prophets*.

So that our Saviour makes the observation of *moral* duties to be the principal design of the *Jewish* law, and as it were the foundation of it, and therefore he calls *moral* duties, τὰ βαρύτερα τῆ νόμου, *the weightier matters of the law*, Matth. 23. 23. *But ye* (says he to the Scribes and Pharisees) *have neglected the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy, and fidelity*. The Scribes and Pharisees busied themselves chiefly about *ritual* observances; but our Saviour tells them, that *those other* were the most considerable and important duties of the law, and lay at the bottom of the *Jewish* religion. And much the same enumeration the Prophet makes, where he compares *sacrifices* and these *moral* duties together, Mic. 6. 6, 7, 8. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow my self before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands*

of rivers of oyl? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? he hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? he had requir'd sacrifices, but had no regard to them in comparison with these.

II. No instituted service of God, no positive part of religion whatsoever, was ever acceptable to God, when moral duties were neglected; nay, so far from being acceptable to him, that he rejects them with disdain and abhorrence. To this purpose there are almost innumerable passages in the Prophets, *Isa. i. 11, &c.* To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? when ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts? bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting; and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: when ye make many prayers, I will not hear. What is the reason of all this? because they were defective in the moral duties of religion; so it follows; your hands are full of blood; wash ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow; come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord; implying that till they had respect to moral duties, all their external worship and sacrifices signified nothing. And so likewise, *Isa. 66. 3.* he tells them that nothing could be more abominable than their sacrifices, so long as they allow'd themselves in wicked practices; he that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; and he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol; yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations. And to mention but one text more out of the old Testament, *Jer. 7. 4, 5.* Trust ye not in lying words, saying, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. Thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood. If they did not practise these duties, and forbear those sins, all the reverence for the temple and the worship of God signifies nothing. You see in the Jewish religion what it was that was acceptable to God for its self and its own sake, viz. the practice of moral duties; and that all instituted religion, that did not promote and further these, or was destitute of them, was abominable to God. And under the gospel our Saviour prefers a moral duty before any gift we can offer to God, and will have it to take place, *Mat. 5. 23, 24.* If thou bring thy gift unto the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

But it should seem by this, and what hath been said before, that God prefers goodness and righteousness to men, before his own worship: and obedience to the precepts of the second table, before obedience to those of the first.

But this does but seem so; all that can be collected from this passage of our Saviour, or any thing that hath been already said, are only these two things.

1. That God prefers the practice of the moral duties of the second table, before any instituted worship, such as sacrifice was; and before obedience to the laws of religion, which are merely positive, tho' they do immediately concern the worship of God.

2. That if we neglect the duties of the second table, of goodness and righteousness towards men, God will not accept of our obedience to the precepts of the first, nor of any act of religious worship that we can perform. This our Saviour means when he says, leave there thy gift before the altar, first be reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift; intimating, that so long as we bear a revengeful mind towards our brethren, God will not accept of any gift or sacrifice that we can offer to him; or indeed of any act of religious worship that we can perform.

Thirdly, The great design of the christian religion is to restore and reinforce the practice of the natural law, or, which is all one, of moral duties; and there-

therefore our Saviour begins his first sermon, by promising *bleſſedneſs* to the practice of *theſe* duties; of *purity*, and *meekneſs*, and *righteouſneſs*, and *peaceableneſs*, and *mercifulneſs*, and *patience*, and *ſubmiſſion* to the will of God under perſecutions and ſufferings for righteouſneſs ſake; and tells us (as I ſhew'd before) that he came not to releaſe men from the practice of *theſe* duties, but to oblige them thereto more effectually; and that as theſe were *the law and the prophets*, that is, the main duties and the foundation of the *Jewiſh* religion, ſo were they much more to be ſo of the *Chriſtian*. This the ſcriptures of the new teſtament do every where declare to be the great deſign of the goſpel, and the chriſtian religion, to inſtruct us in theſe duties, and to engage us effectually to the practice of them. In that known and excellent text, *Tit. 2. 11, 12. The grace of God* (which is in and by the doctrine of the goſpel) *hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.* And herein St. James tells us, the true nature, and the force and virtue of the chriſtian religion doth conſiſt, *James 1. 27. Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the father is this, to viſit the fatherleſs and the widows in their affliction, and to keep our ſelves unſpotted from the world.* And chap. 3. 17. *The wiſdom which is from above* (that is, that heavenly and divine knowledge reveal'd to us by the goſpel) hath theſe properties, and is apt to produce theſe effects; *it is firſt pure, and then peaceable, gentle, and eaſie to be intreated, full of mercy, and of good fruits.*

And the planting of theſe diſpoſitions in us is that which the ſcripture calls *the new creature*, and *the image of God*, *Eph. 4. 20, &c.* The Apoſtle ſpeaking there of the vices and luſts wherein the Gentiles liv'd, tells Chriſtians that *they* were otherwiſe inſtructed by the goſpel; *but you have not ſo learned Chriſt, if ſo be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jeſus, that ye put off concerning the former converſation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful luſts, and be renewed in the ſpirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs, and true holineſs, or (as the words perhaps may be better render'd) in the holineſs of truth;* for it immediately follows, *wherefore putting away lying, ſpeak every man truth with his neighbour.*

And this is that which the Apoſtle elſewhere makes to be *all in all* in the chriſtian religion. *In Chriſt Jeſus, neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion, but a new creature*, *Gal. 6. 15.* Which the Apoſtle in the chapter before expreſſeth thus; *in Chriſt Jeſus neither circumciſion availeth any thing, nor uncircumciſion, but faith which worketh* (or is inſpired) *by charity.* And yet more expreſſly, *1 Cor. 7. 19. Circumciſion is nothing, and uncircumciſion is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God.* By the comparing of which texts, it appears, that the main thing in chriſtianity, is the practice of *moral* duties, and this is *the new creature*, and this the proper effect of the chriſtian faith to produce theſe virtues in us. And indeed the great deſign of the chriſtian religion and every thing in it, of the love of God in giving his ſon to die for us, of the pardon of our ſins, and juſtification in his blood, of all the promiſes and threatenings of the goſpel, and of the aſſiſtance therein promiſed, is to engage, and encourage and enable to the practice of *moral* duties.

And thus I have done with the *Fiſt* thing I propos'd to ſpeak to, namely, that *natural* religion is the foundation of *inſtituted* and *revealed* religion; and all *revealed* religion does ſuppoſe it, and builds upon it. I proceed to the

Second, namely, That no *revealed* and *inſtituted* religion was ever deſign'd to take away the obligation of *natural* duties, but was intended to confirm and eſta- bliſh them. And this alſo will be evident, if we conſider theſe *three* things.

1. That all *revealed* religion calls men to the practice of *natural* duties. This the *Jewiſh* religion did. The firſt laws which God gave them, and which he diſtinguiſh'd from the reſt, by writing them in tables of ſtone with his own finger, were the precepts of the *moral* law. And the great buſineſs of the Prophets whom God rais'd up among them from time to time, was to reprove not ſo much their defects in their *ſacrifices*, and in the duties of *inſtituted* worſhip, as the breach of the *natural* law by their vices and immoralities; and to threaten them

them with the judgments of God, if they did not reform and amend these faults.

And now under the gospel, the preceptive part of it is almost wholly made up of *moral* duties, namely, those which are comprehended under those *two* great commandments, of *the love of God, and our neighbour*. In the christian religion there is very little that is merely *positive* and *instituted*, besides the *two sacraments*, and *praying to God in the name and mediation of Jesus Christ*.

2. The most perfect revelation that ever God made to mankind (I mean that of the christian religion) doth furnish us with the best helps and advantages for the performance of *moral* duties; it discovers our duty more clearly to us; it offers us the greatest assistance to enable us to the performance of it; it presents us with the most powerful motives and arguments to engage us thereto; so that this revelation of the Gospel is so far from weakening the obligation of *natural* duties, that it confirms and strengthens it, and urgeth us more forcibly to the practice of them.

3. The *positive* rites and institutions of *revealed* religion are so far from encroaching upon the laws of *nature*, that they were always design'd to be subordinate and subservient to them; and when ever they come in competition, it is the declar'd will of God, that *positive institutions* should give way to *natural duties*; and this I have shewn to be plainly the meaning of this saying in the text, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*. If circumstances be such, that one part of religion must give place, God will have the *ritual* and *instituted* part to give way to that which is *natural* and *moral*.

It is very frequent in Scripture, when the duties of *natural* religion, and rites of divine *institution* come in competition, to slight and disparage *these* in comparison of *moral* duties, and to speak of them as things which God hath no pleasure in, and which in comparison of the other he will hardly own that he hath commanded. *When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands? Isa. 1. 12. Thou desirest not sacrifice, thou delightest not in burnt-offerings, Psal. 51. 16. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oyl? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy?*

But God no where makes any comparison to the disadvantage of *natural* duties; he never derogated from *them* in any case; he never said *he would have such a thing, and not mercy*, or *that he had rather such a rite of religion should be performed, than that men should do the greatest good, and shew the greatest charity to one another*. It is no where made a question, *will the Lord be pleased that we deal justly every man with his neighbour, and speak the truth one to another? that we be kind and tender-hearted, and ready to forgive? that we be willing to distribute and give alms to those that are in need?* there is no such question as this put in Scripture; nay it is positive in these matters, that *with such sacrifices God is well pleased*. I instance in this virtue more especially of *kindness* and *compassion*, because it is one of the prime instances of *moral* duties; as *sacrifice* is put for all the *ritual* and *instituted* part of religion, and this disposition of mind our Saviour makes the root of all *moral* duties; *love is the fulfilling of the law*; and the Apostle speaks of it as the great end and scope of the *gospel*: *the end of the commandment is charity*. And this temper and disposition of mind he advanceth above *knowledge*, and *faith*, and *hope*; *the greatest of these is charity*; and without *this*, he will not allow a man to be any thing in christianity; *this* he makes our highest perfection and attainment, and that which abides and remains in the future state; *charity never fails*.

This our Saviour most effectually recommends to us, both in his doctrine, and by his example; this he presseth as the peculiar law of his religion, and the proper mark and character of a Disciple. *This* he requires us to exercise towards those who practise the contrary towards us; *to love our enemies, and to do good to them that hate us*. And of *this*, he hath given us the greatest example that ever was; *when we were enemies to him, he lov'd us so as hardly ever any man did his friend, so as to lay down his life for us*; and he instituted the Sacrament
for

for a memorial of his love to mankind, and to put us in mind how we ought to love one another.

And now the application of what hath been said upon this argument, to the occasion of *this* day, is very obvious, and there are *two* very natural inferences from it.

First, From what hath been said upon this argument, it plainly appears what place *natural* and *moral* duties ought to have in the christian religion; and of all *natural* duties, *mercy*, and *goodness*. *This* is so primary a duty of human nature, so great and considerable a part of religion, that all *positive institutions* must give way to it; and nothing of that kind can cancel the obligation of it, nor justify the violation of this great and *natural* law. Our blessed Saviour in his religion hath declared nothing to the prejudice of it; but on the contrary, hath heighten'd our obligation to it, as much as is possible, by telling us that *the Son of man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them*.

So that *they know not what manner of spirit they are of*, who will *kill men to do God service*; and to advance his cause and religion in the world, will break through all obligations of *nature*, and *civil society*, and disturb the peace and happiness of mankind.

Nor did our Saviour by any thing in his religion design to release men from the obligation of *natural* and *civil* duties. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the *Pope*; but yet he depos'd none of the princes of this world, nor did absolve their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion; he assum'd no such power to himself (no not *in ordine ad spiritualia*) nor, that ever we read of, did he give it to any other. Whence then comes his *pretended vicar* to have this authority? And yet the horrid attempt of *this* day was first design'd, and afterwards carry'd on, in prosecution of the *Pope's Bull* of excommunication, and was not so much the effect of the despair and discontent of that party here in *England*, as the natural consequence of their doctrines of *extirpating hereticks* and *deposing Kings*, and *absolving subjects from their allegiance to them*.

No zeal for any *positive* institution in religion can justify the violation of the *natural* law, the precepts whereof are of *primary* and *indispensable* obligation. The *Pope's supremacy* is not so clear, as the duty of *obedience to civil government*; nor is *transubstantiation* so plainly reveal'd in scripture, as it is both in nature and scripture that we should *do no murder*. And yet how many thousands have been put to death, because they could not understand *this hard word*, and believe *this impossible thing*! And yet if *the supremacy of the Pope* were clearly of divine right, and the doctrine of *transubstantiation* as plain as the institution of the sacrament; yet these being but *positive* matters in religion, there would be no reason to *kill men* for not understanding and believing these things; nay it would be contrary to religion to do it; because the law of *mercy* and *humanity*, which is the law of *nature*, ought not to be violated for the promoting of any *positive institution*; and God hath plainly said, that *he will have mercy rather than sacrifice*; yea rather than *the sacrifice of the mass*, if it were what they pretend it is, *the offering of the natural body and blood of Christ*; because it would be needless: for propitiation of sin being once made by *Christ's offering himself once for all* upon the cross; *there needs no more sacrifice for sin*. Nay, I will go further yet; I had rather never administer the sacrament, nor ever receive it, than take away any man's life about it; because the sacrament is but a *positive* rite and institution of the christian religion, and God prefers *mercy*, which is a duty of *natural* religion, before any *rite* or *institution* whatsoever. Besides, that all acts of malice and cruelty are directly contrary to the particular nature and design of this blessed sacrament, which is to commemorate the sufferings of the Son of God for our sakes, and to give us an example of the greatest love that ever was, and thereby to excite us to the imitation of it.

2. What hath been said gives us a right notion and character of that church and religion, which prefers the *positive* rites and *institutions* of religion, and the observance of them, to those duties which are of *natural* and *eternal* obligation, *mercy* and *goodness*, *fidelity* and *justice*; and which for the sake of a *pretended* article of religion, or *rite of worship*, (which if it were certain that they were *revealed*, and *instituted* by God, are yet *meerly positive*) will *break the greatest of God's commandments*, and *teach men so*.

It is too plain to be deny'd, that the principles and precepts of *natural* religion were never so effectually undermin'd, and the *morality* of the christian religion never so intolerably corrupted and debauched, by any thing that ever yet had the face of religion in the world, as by the allowed doctrines and practices of the church of *Rome*, and this out of a blind and furious zeal for some imaginary doctrines and rites of the christian religion, which at the best are of *meer positive institution*, and of the same rank among *Christians*, that *sacrifices* were in the *Jewish* religion. For which we need go no further for an instance, than in the occasion of *this* day's solemnity; upon which day, (about fourscore years ago) there was design'd a *mighty sacrifice* indeed, *the greatest and richest burnt-offering* that ever was pretended to be offer'd up to Almighty God, by those of any religion whatsoever; not *the blood of bulls and goats*, but of *King, and princes, and nobles*, more in value than *thousands of rams*, and *ten thousands of rivers of oyl*; than *all the beasts of the forest*, and *the cattle upon a thousand hills*.

Here was a *prodigious sacrifice* indeed; but where was *mercy*? the thing God chiefly desires, and which above all other things is acceptable to him; no *mercy* not even to those of their own religion, whom these *nice and tender Casuists*, after a solemn debate of the case, had resolv'd to involve in the same common destruction with the rest; rather *no mercy*, than that *this sacrifice* which their *mad zeal* had prompted them to, should be omitted.

To conclude, They that can do such *inhuman* things, and think them to be *religion*, do not understand the nature of it, but had need to be taught *the first rudiments of natural religion*; that *natural duties* are not to be violated upon pretence, no, not for the sake of *positive institutions*; because *natural* religion is the *foundation* of that which is *instituted*; and therefore to violate any *natural* duty for the sake of that which is *instituted*, is for religion to undermine and blow up it self. Let those who *do such things, and teach men so*, go and learn *what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice*.

S E R M O N L.

The First
Sermon on
this text.

Christianity doth not destroy, but perfect the Law
of MOSES.

MATTH. V. 17.

*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I
am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.*



HERE is no saying in the whole Gospel, which the *Jews* did so frequently object to the christians as this of our blessed Saviour, as if his words and actions were plainly repugnant, and contrary to one another: for when it is evident, say they, that he took away so many ceremonies, purifications, distinctions of meats, sacrifices, judicial laws, and many other things; yet he says, *he came not to destroy the Law or the Prophets*; so that it is plain, that he did throw down the law of *Moses*, and in so doing contradicted his own saying, that he did not intend *to destroy the law*. To clear our Saviour's words of this objection, it will be requisite to consider the scope and design of his discourse in this chapter; by which we shall fully understand the sense and meaning of these words in the text.

Our Saviour in this Sermon, (which contains the sum and substance of his religion) doth earnestly recommend to his Disciples and followers, and strictly enjoins the perfect practice of all goodness and virtue, declaring to them, that he came to bring in and establish that righteousness, which the Jewish religion indeed aimed at, but through the weakness and imperfection of that dispensation, was not able to effect and accomplish. And to take away all suspicion of a design, to contradict the former revelations of God, made to the Jews by *Moses* and the *Prophets*, or to destroy their divine Authority, by carrying on a design contrary to them, I say, to prevent any imagination of this kind, he does here in the text expressly declare the contrary; *Think not, &c.* intimating that some either did, or at least might be apt to suspect, that his design was to destroy the obligation of the law, and to undermine the authority of *Moses* and the *Prophets*; to free them from this jealousy, he declares plainly, that he had no such thought and intention, it was far from him.

I am not come to destroy, καταλῶσαι, to abrogate, or dissolve the law, to encourage men to the breach and violation of it; for the word is of the same sense with λῶσαι, at the 19th v. *Whoever shall break one of these least Commandments*; and with καταργῆσαι, Rom. 3. 31. νόμον ἐν καταργῆσει, *do we then make void the law by faith?* Which is the same question with that of the same Apostle, Gal. 3. 21. *Is the law then against the promises of God?* that is, *are the law and the Gospel contrary? do they contradict one another?* So that the meaning of our Saviour's declaration is this, that he was not come to *dissolve*, and *abrogate*, and *make void* the law, or to encourage men to the breach of it; that the precepts of his religion were in no wise contrary to those of the law and the *Prophets*, did not thwart and oppose them, or any ways contradict the main design and intention of *the law and the Prophets*; that is, of *the Jewish religion*; for so *the law and the Prophets* do frequently signify. Matt. 7. 12. *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the Prophets*; that is, this is the main scope and intention of what *your religion*, contained in *the law and the Prophets*, teacheth, concerning your duty to one another. So likewise, Matt. 22. 40. *On these two Commandments hang all the law and the Prophets*; that is, this is the sum of all the duties of religion; to these two laws, all that

the Jewish religion teacheth, may be refer'd. *I am not come to destroy but to fulfil*; to carry on the same design which was intended by the Jewish religion, and to perfect and accomplish it; to supply all the defects and weaknesses and imperfections of that dispensation; this is the plain meaning of this caution and declaration of our Saviour's; *Think not, &c.*

For the clearing of this matter, *viz.* That the design of our Saviour's doctrine and religion, is not contrary to those former revelations, which God made to the *Jews* by *Moses* and the *Prophets*; this will evidently appear, whether we consider the prophecies and predictions of the Old Testament, or the laws and precepts therein contained.

First, The prophecies and predictions of the Old Testament; our Saviour came not to *contradict* and *overthrow* these; but to *fulfil* them. The chief predictions of the law and the Prophets were concerning the *Messias*, and his spiritual kingdom. In the law it was foretold, *that God would raise to them a Prophet like unto Moses; whom they ought to hear and obey; and to him all the Prophets of the Old Testament gave witness*, foretelling the time of his coming, his extraction, the manner and circumstances of his birth, the purity and efficacy of his doctrine, the actions and miracles of his life, his passion, death and burial, with the particular circumstances of them, his resurrection from the dead, and his ascension into heaven, and exaltation at the right hand of God; so that this part of *the law and Prophets* he did *accomplish* and *fulfil* in a most eminent and remarkable manner; all things that the Prophets had foretold concerning the *Messias*, were punctually made good in the person, and actions, and sufferings of our Saviour.

Secondly, As to the laws and precepts of the Jewish religion, the doctrine and the laws of christianity did not clash with them; nor properly *abrogate* them, and *make them void*, especially as to the *moral* precepts, which were the very life and spirit, the ultimate scope and design of that religion; nay, so far was it from doing so, that the main and proper intention of christianity, was to *clear*, and *establish* that, which was the main design of *the law and Prophets*, to *perfect the law* in this part, and to *raise and advance morality* to its highest pitch, to supply all the defects and imperfections of the Jewish religion, and to make men much better than that weak and imperfect institution was able to do. This was the great design of christianity; and it is very probable that our Saviour had a principal, if not a sole respect to the precepts of *the moral law*, when he here says, *that he came not to destroy the law and the Prophets, but to perfect and fulfil them*; as I shall have occasion by and by to shew more at large.

But that we may give a full answer to the objection of the *Jews* against this saying of our Saviour's, I shall shew that he did not come to *thwart* and *contradict*, and properly to *abrogate* and *make void the Jewish law*, in any part of it, neither the *civil* and *judicial*, nor the *ritual* and *ceremonial*, much less the *moral* and *natural* precepts of it. This is more than I think to be absolutely necessary, to reconcile this saying of our Saviour with the rest of his doctrine and actions; for tho' he had properly *abrogated the ceremonial law*, and in no sense *fulfill'd it*; yet, notwithstanding this, it may be true, that *he came not to destroy the law and the Prophets*; that is, to *destroy the obligation of moral duties*, which he speaks of in this chapter; and elsewhere declares to be the ultimate scope, the sum and substance of *the law and the Prophets*; for if the *ceremonial law* was not design'd by God to be *perpetual*, but to give way to a *more perfect dispensation*; then our Saviour did no way *thwart* and *contradict the law and the Prophets*; by *abrogating the ceremonial law*, at that time, when God design'd that a period should be put to it. But yet for the fuller satisfaction to this objection, I shall shew that our Saviour did not properly *abrogate* any part of the *Jewish law*, no, not the *ritual* and *ceremonial* part of it; but did *fulfil it*.

First, Not their *civil* and *judicial* laws. These in the original intention of them, were not laws design'd for mankind, but suited and fitted to the disposition and temper, the condition and circumstances of a particular people and nation; to these our Saviour taught obedience, and paid it himself, and never did any thing contrary to them, nor in the least weaken the obligation of them; but they continu'd in full force; 'till that nation and commonwealth was dissolved. So that these laws were no way impeached or *abrogated* by the christian religion; but

but they fell, for want of a subject to exercise their power upon, and because the People that were to be governed by them were destroyed or dissipated; and tho' they neither are, nor ever were obligatory to other nations, as given by *Moses*, and as they were the peculiar Laws of a particular Nation; yet the Natural Reason and Equity of them, so far as it concern'd Mankind, is duly considered and regarded by us, and many of these Laws are adopted into the Laws of most Christian Nations. It is plain then, that this part of the Jewish Law receiv'd no prejudice by Christianity, but continu'd in full force, so long as that Nation and Common-wealth lasted, which was to be govern'd by it.

Secondly, As to the *Ritual and Ceremonial* part of the Jewish Law, which consisted in Circumcision, and Purifications, and Sacrifices, in distinction of Meats, and Times, and innumerable other Rites and Observances; this was not properly *abrogated* and *made void* by the coming of Christ, but *fulfill'd* and *made good* by him. The Rites and Ceremonies of the Law, were the Types and Shadows of those *future good things* which were promis'd under the Gospel, a kind of rude draught of a better and more perfect Institution, which was design'd, and at last *finisht* and *perfected* by the Christian Religion. This account the Apostle gives of the *legal Rites and Observances*, Col. 2. 16, 17. *Let no Man judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of a holy-day, or of the New Moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ*; that is, he is the *substance* and *reality* of all those things, which were *shadowed* and *figured* by those *legal observances*. And so the Apostle to the *Hebrews* calls the Priests and Sacrifices of the Law, the *Examples and Shadows of Heavenly things*, Chap. 8. 5. and so Chap. 10. 1. *the Law having a Shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things*, that is, being but an *obscure Type*, and not a *perfect Representation* of the Blessings and Benefits of the Gospel, which we now have in *truth and reality*. Now reason will tell us, that the Laws concerning these *Types and Shadows*, were only to continue till the *Substance* of the things signified by them should come, and that they would be of no longer use, when *that more perfect Institution*, which was figur'd by them, should take place, and then they would expire, and become void of themselves, because the reason and use of them ceasing, they must necessarily fall.

But they did not expire immediately upon the coming of Christ, and therefore he himself submitted to these Laws, so long as they continued in force; he was Circumcised, and presented in the Temple, and perform'd all other Rites required by the Law, *that first Covenant* to which these Laws and Ordinances belong'd continuing in force till the ratification of *the second Covenant* by the death of Christ, and then these Laws expir'd, or rather were *fulfill'd*, and had their accomplishment in the Sacrifice of Christ, which made all the Sacrifices and other Rites of the Jewish Religion needless, and of no use for the future; Christ having by this *one Sacrifice of himself*, *perfected for ever them that are sanctified*, as the same Apostle speaks, Heb. 10. 14. So that Christ did not properly *abrogate* and *repeal* those *Ritual and Ceremonial* Laws; but they having continu'd as long as they were design'd to do, and there was any use of them, they *abated* and *ceased* of themselves.

And that the Death of Christ was the time of their expiration, because then the *new Covenant* took place, St. Paul expressly tells us, Eph. 2. 15. *having abolished or voided in his flesh the Law of Commandments contained in Ordinances*; and this, v. 16. he is said to have done *by his Cross*; and more plainly, Col. 2. 14. *blotting out the hand-writing of Ordinances, which was against us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his Cross*.

So that ye see that even the *Ceremonial Law* was not so properly *abrogated* by the Sacrifice and Death of Christ, but rather had its *accomplishment*, and attain'd its *end* in the Sacrifice of Christ, which by the Eternal Efficacy of it to the expiation of Sin, and the purifying of our Consciences, hath made all the Sacrifices and Washings, and other Rites of the *Ceremonial Law*, for ever needless and superfluous.

Thirdly, But especially as to the *Moral Law*, and those Precepts which are of *Natural and Perpetual obligation*, our Saviour did not come either to *dissolve*, or to *lessen* and *slacken* the obligation of them.

And of this I told you our Saviour doth principally, if not solely speak here in the Text, as will appear to any one that shall attentively consider the scope of his

Discourse. In the beginning of his Sermon he promiseth Blessing to those, and those only, who were endow'd with those Virtues which are required by the Precepts of the *Moral Law*, or comprehended in them; and then he tells them, that Christians must be very eminent and conspicuous for the practice of them, *v. 16. Let your light so shine before Men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven*; and then he cautions them not to entertain any such imaginations, as if he intended to dissolve the obligation of the Law, and to free Men from the practice of *Moral Duties*, which probably some might have suggested against him; *think not that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets*; as if he had said, you cannot entertain any such conceit, if you consider that the precepts which I inculcate upon you, and those Virtues, the practice whereof I recommend to you, are the same which are contain'd in the *Law and the Prophets*. So that I am so far from crossing the main design of the *Law and the Prophets*, and taking away the obligation of *Moral Duties* enjoyn'd by the Jewish Religion, that I come purposely to carry on the same design to *further perfection*, to give a *more perfect and clear Law*, and to give a *greater enforcement and encouragement* to the practice of *Moral Duties*; these were always the sum and substance of Religion, the ultimate design of the *Law and the Prophets*, and therefore I am so far from discharging Men from the obligation of the *Moral Precepts* of the *Law*, that I come to bind them more strongly upon you. And verily I say unto you, that is, I solemnly declare, *that whosoever shall break one of these least Commandments, and shall teach Men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, he shall in no wise enter therein. You think the Scribes and Pharisees very pious and excellent Men, and to have attained to a high pitch of Righteousness; *but I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. And then he instanceth in several Precepts of the *Moral Law*, which in the letter of them, especially as they were interpreted by the Teachers of the Law among the Jews, were very much short of that Righteousness and Perfection which he now requires of his Disciples and Followers. So that his whole Discourse is about Precepts and Obligations of the *Moral Law*, and not a word concerning the *Ritual and Ceremonial Law*; which makes me very prone to think, that our Saviour's meaning in the Text is this, that his Religion was so far from thwarting and opposing that which was the main design of the *Law and the Prophets*, that is, of the *Jewish Religion*, that the principal intention of Christianity was to advance the practice of goodness and virtue, by strengthening the obligation of *Moral Duties*, and giving us a more perfect Law and Rule of Life, and offering better Arguments and greater Encouragements to the obedience of this Law. Therefore for the fuller explication and illustration of this matter, I shall endeavour to clear these three Points.

First, That the main and ultimate design of the *Law and the Prophets*, was to engage Men to the practice of *Moral Duties*, that is, of real and substantial Goodness.

Secondly, That the Law of *Moses*, or the dispensation of the Jewish Religion, was comparatively very weak, and insufficient to this purpose.

Thirdly, That the Christian Religion hath supplied all the defects, and weaknesses and imperfections of that dispensation. These three Particulars will fully clear our Saviour's meaning in this Text.

First, That the main and ultimate design of the *Law and the Prophets*, was to engage men to the practice of *Moral Duties*; that is, of real and substantial Goodness, consisting in those Virtues which our Saviour mentions at the beginning of this Sermon; *Humility*, and *Meekness*, and *Mercy*, and *Righteousness*, and *Purity*, and *Peaceableness*. This our Saviour more than once tells us was the sum and substance, the main scope and design of the whole doctrine of the *Law and the Prophets*, *Mat. 7. 12. Therefore all things what soever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets*. And *Mat. 22. 40. That the love of God and our neighbour, those two great commands, to which all Moral Duties are reduced, are the two great hinges of the Jewish Religion; on these two hang all the law and the prophets*. St. Paul calls love, the fulfilling of the whole law, *Rom. 13. 10*. St. James, the perfect and the royal law, as that which hath a sovereign Influence upon all parts of Religion. And therefore the Apostle, *Rom. 3. 21*. tells us that this more perfect *Righteousness* which was brought in by the Gospel, or the Christian

stian Religion, is *witnessed by the law and the prophets*. And indeed the Prophets every where do slight and undervalue the *Ritual and Ceremonial* part of Religion, in comparison of the practice of *Moral Duties*, *Isa. i. 11. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? bring no more vain oblations; your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth*. But what then are the things that are acceptable to God? He tells us at the 16th ver. *wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow*. And by the Prophet *Jeremiah* God tells that people, that the business of *Sacrifices* was not the thing primarily design'd by God, but obedience to the *Moral law*; the *Ritual law* came in upon occasion, for the prevention of Idolatry, and by way of condescension to the temper of that people; and thus *Maimonides* and the learned *Jews* understand these words, *Jer. 7. 22, 23. I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices; but this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice, and walk in all the ways that I have commanded, and I will be your God and ye shall be my people*. So likewise in the Prophet *Hosea*, God plainly prefers the *Moral* before the *Ritual* part of Religion, as that which was principally designed and intended by him, *Hos. 6. 6. I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings*; but most plainly and expressly, *Mich. 6. 6. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams, and ten thousands of rivers of Oyl? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* These it seems were the great things which God stood upon and required of men even under that imperfect dispensation; and these are the very things which the Christian Religion doth so strictly enjoin and command; so that *this righteousness* which the Gospel requires, *was witnessed to by the law and the prophets*. I proceed to the

Second point, That the law of *Moses*, or the dispensation of the *Jewish* religion, was comparatively very weak, and insufficient to make men truly good, and for the promoting of real and inward righteousness; it gave laws indeed to this purpose, but those not so clear and perfect, or at least not so clearly understood as they are now under the Gospel; and it made no express promises of inward Grace, and assistance, to quicken and strengthen us in the doing of our duty; it made no explicit promises of any blessing and reward to the doing of our duty beyond this life; so that the best and most powerful Arguments and Encouragements, to Obedience, were either wholly wanting, or very obscurely revealed under this dispensation.

And this insufficiency of the *Jewish* dispensation, both to our justification and sanctification, to the reconciling of us to God, and the making of us really good, the Apostle frequently inculcates in the New Testament; *St. Paul, Acts 13. 38, 39. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified, from all those things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses*; and *Rom. 8. 3. What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh*; that is, by reason of the carnality of that dispensation, consisting in the purification of the body. *Gal. 3. 21. he calls it a law unfit to give life; If there had been a law which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law*. And the Apostle to the Hebrews, Ch. 8. 6, 7, 8, &c. finds fault with the dispensation of the law, for the lowness and meanness of its Promises, being only of Temporal good things; and for want of conferring an inward and a powerful principle to enable men to obedience; *but now hath he obtained* (speaking of Christ) *a more excellent Ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises; for if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for a second*; and this second and better covenant, he tells us, was foretold by the prophets of the old Testament; *for finding fault with them, he saith, behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and the house of Judah; not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers. For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will*

will put my Laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts. And Chap. 10. 1. 4. he shews the inefficacy of their Sacrifices for the real expiation of Sin, *the Law having but a shadow of good things to come, and not the lively representation of the things themselves, can never with those Sacrifices which they offer'd year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect; for it is not possible that the blood of Bulls and Goats should take away sins.*

I should now have proceeded to the *Third Particular*; namely, that the Christian Religion hath supplied all the defects and weakness and imperfection of the Jewish dispensation; but that I shall not now enter upon, but make one plain inference from the substance of what I have already discoursed upon this Argument.

If our Saviour *came not to dissolve and loosen the obligation of Moral Duties, but to confirm and establish it, and to enforce and bind the practice of these Duties more strongly upon us, then they do widely and wilfully mistake the design of Christianity, who teach that it dischargeth men from the obligation of the Moral Law, which is the fundamental and avow'd Principle of the Antinomian Doctrine, but directly contrary to this Declaration of our Saviour in the Text, that he came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to perfect and fulfil them; (for to take away the obligation of a Law, is plainly to destroy and make it void;)* and contrary to the Apostle's solemn resolution of this matter, *Rom. 3. 31. Do we then make void the Law through Faith?* that is, does the Gospel destroy and take away the obligation of the Law? *God forbid, yea we establish the Law;* the Christian Religion is so far from designing or doing any such thing, that it gives new strength and force to it.

But surely they that teach this Doctrine, did never duly consider that terrible threatening of our Saviour after the Text, which seems to be so directly levell'd at them; *whosoever shall break one of these least Commandments, and shall teach Men so, he shall be call'd the least in the Kingdom of Heaven;* for how can Men more effectually teach the violation, not only of the least, but of the greatest of God's Commandments, than by declaring that *the Gospel hath set Men free from the obligation of the Moral Law?* which is in effect to say, that Christians may act contrary to all the Duties of *Morality*, that is, do the most impious things in the world, without any offense against God, and notwithstanding this, continue to be his Children, and highly in the favour of God.

And all the security they have against this impious Consequence, is that weak and slender pretense, "that gratitude and love to God will preserve them from making this ill use of the grace of the Gospel, and oblige them to abstain from Sin, and to endeavour to please God as much as any Law could do." But then they do not consider the nonsense of this; for there can be no such thing as Sin, if the obligation of the Law be taken away, for *where there is no Law there can be no Transgression*, as the Apostle and common Reason likewise tells us; so that the Law being remov'd and taken away, all Actions become indifferent, and one thing is not more a sin, or offense against God than another. And what then is it they mean that Gratitude will oblige Men to, or preserve them from? when there can be no such thing as sin or duty, as pleasing or offending God, if there be no Law to oblige us to the one, or restrain us from the other.

And what is, if *this* be not, to turn the grace of God into wantonness, and to make Christian Liberty a Cloak for all sorts of Sins? A Man cannot do a greater despite to the Christian Religion, nor take a more effectual course to bring it into contempt, and to make it to be hiss'd out of the World, than to represent it as a lewd and licentious Doctrine, which gives Men a perfect discharge from all the Duties of *Morality*, and obligeth them only to believe confidently, that Christ hath purchased for them a liberty to do what they will, and that upon these terms, and no other, they are secure of the favour of God in this World, and Eternal salvation in the other. This is the summ and the plain result of the Antinomian Doctrine, the most pernicious Heresy, and most directly destructive of the great End and Design of Christianity, that ever yet was broach'd in the World. But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, that ye put off concerning your former conversation, the old Man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful Lusts, and that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new Man, which after God is created in Righteousness, and true Holiness.

S E R M O N L I.

The Second
Sermon on
this text.

Christianity doth not destroy, but perfect the Law
of MOSES.

MATTH. V. 17.

*Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I am not
come to destroy, but to fulfil.*



Have consider'd this saying of our Saviour's with respect to *the moral law*, and those precepts which are of *natural* and *perpetual* force, and that our Saviour did not come either to *dissolve* or *loosen* the obligation of them; for the illustration of which, I propounded to clear these *three* points.

First, That the main and ultimate design of *the law and the Prophets*, was to engage men to the practice of *moral* duties, that is, of real and substantial goodness.

Secondly, That *the law of Moses*, or the dispensation of the Jewish religion, was comparatively very weak, and insufficient to make men truly good, and ineffectual to promote inward and real righteousness. These *two* points I have spoken to. I shall now proceed to the

Third, namely, That the Christian religion doth supply all the defects and weaknesses and imperfections of the Jewish dispensation.

The Jewish religion had very considerable advantages above the meer *light of nature*, which was all that the Heathen world had to conduct them towards eternal happiness; the *Jews* had the knowledge of the one true God, and very signal and particular testimonies of the divine providence, which did naturally tend to beget in them good hopes of a future life, and the rewards of another world; they had the natural law reveal'd, and the main precepts of it written with God's own hand, and by *Moses* deliver'd to them; by which means they had a more certain and distinct knowledge of their duty; they had Prophets frequently sent to them, to admonish them of their duty, and to exhort them to repentance, and to warn them of approaching judgments. They had good encouragement given to hope for the pardon of sin, by God's appointment of several ways of expiation; which how unlikely soever they were to be available to the effectual expiation of sin, yet they did signify that the divine nature was placable, and did seem to figure some more effectual way, design'd by God for that purpose, that should be exhibited in due time. And finally they had most express promises and threatenings of temporal blessings and judgments, to encourage them in their obedience, and to deter them from the transgression of God's laws. These advantages the *Jews* plainly had above the rest of the world, *God did not deal so with other nations, neither had the heathen such a knowledge of God's laws.*

But notwithstanding this, the Jew^l religion was very short and defective, very weak and ineffectual to the great end of righteousness and true holiness, and to raise men to that perfection of god^lness, of which human nature, through the grace of God, is capable; and therefore there wanted a more perfect institution, to supply the defects and weaknesses and imperfection even of that divine revelation which God had made to the *Jews*, and really to effect and accomplish that which the Jewish religion attempted and aimed at, and was but, as I may say, rudely begun under that imperfect institution. And this the Gos-

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pel, or the Christian religion revealed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ hath fully effected, as will evidently appear by a particular survey and consideration of the main defects of the Jewish religion, which I shall shew to be all perfectly made up by the revelation of the Gospel, and the doctrine of Christianity, in these following particulars.

First, It was a great defect of the Jewish religion, that a considerable part of it was merely *external*, concerning the purification of *the body and the flesh*, and only figurative of that *inward* purity and *real* righteousness, which renders men truly good, and like to God; for which reason the Jewish institution is by the Apostle to the *Hebrews* call'd *the law of a carnal commandment*, Heb. 7. 16. and Ch. 9. 10. is said to consist only (that is chiefly) *in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation*; that is, till the Messias should come, and give such laws as should really tend to reform the hearts and lives of men; and therefore these laws and ordinances are call'd *poor pitiful Elements, and the rudiments of the world*, fitted rather for *children* in understanding and goodness, than to bring *men* to any maturity and perfection in goodness. All their rites of purification did only *sanctify to the purifying of the flesh*; but did not purge the conscience from dead works, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* speaks, Ch. 9. 13, 14. *they could not make those that performed and observed them perfect, as pertaining to the conscience*, v. 9. that is, these laws had no effect upon the minds of men, to make them really better, to cure them of their *moral* defects and impurities, their sins and vices.

But the Christian institution doth perfectly supply this defect, by taking us off from those *carnal* and *external* observances, and principally requiring that we *worship God in spirit and in truth*; by giving us such laws as wholly tend to advance *real* and *substantial* goodness, purity and holiness of heart and life, such as mainly tend to reform the minds and manners of men, and to make us like to that holy and perfect Being whom we worship: and besides an external humble and reverent demeanour of our selves in the worship of God, (to which natural religion doth likewise direct;) Christianity hath only instituted *two* solemn *external* rites, *viz. Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*; whereby we solemnly oblige our selves to the practice of all virtue and goodness, I say *only these two*, that by the multitude of *external* observances, Christians might not be taken off from the minding of the *real* and *substantial* duties of religion.

And therefore the Church of *Rome* have extreamly abated and weaken'd the force of Christianity upon the hearts and lives of men, by amusing them with *external* rites, which they have multiplied to that excessive degree, as to make the *Yoke* of Christ really *heavier* than that of *Moses*, and the Christian religion a more *external* and *carnal commandment* than that of the law, and by this means have diverted and taken off the minds of men from the main design of Christianity, inasmuch that they are so employ'd and taken up with matters of *external ceremony*, that they have no leisure to think of being *good men*, and to mind the *great* and *substantial* duties and virtues of the Christian life; so that they have spoil'd the Christian religion of one of its chief excellencies and perfections, I mean the *simplicity of its worship*, which they have now incumber'd with so many foolish and frivolous *rites and observances*, as do not only render it more burthen-some, but less apt to make men *inwardly* and *substantially* good, than even *Judaism* it self. This is so true and so visible, that the wiser and better sort of them have complain'd of it for several ages, and still do, as much as they dare for fear of the *inquisition*, or some other censure.

Secondly, Another defect of the law of *Moses* was, that it did not give encouragement enough to repentance, by declaring and assuring to us any certain way and method for the expiation and forgiveness of sin. This the rites of all religions aimed at, and pretended to; but were very ineffectual to that end. The heathen sacrifices, and all the cruel and barbarous rites belonging to them, did all pretend to be so many ways of appeasing the offended Deity, and of making atonement and expiation for sin; and the sacrifices of the Jews

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were instituted by God himself, to make an *external* and *legal* expiation, and to be types and shadows of a *better* and *more perfect* sacrifice, which should really expiate sin; but even this was very darkly and imperfectly discovered to them; besides, that the expiations of the law did only extend to the least sorts of sins, those of *ignorance* and *inadvertency*, but not at all to *presumptuous* sins, and such as were committed with a *high hand*, nor to *wilfull* and *deliberate* sins, except in some very few and rare cases particularly mentioned in the law; so that tho' a great part of the religious rites both of the Pagan and Jewish religion, aimed at the expiation of sin, yet were they really ineffectual to that end; and upon the whole matter, mankind, tho' they conceived good hope of God's mercy and forgiveness in case of repentance, (*Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his anger?*) yet they were unacquainted with any certain and effectual means to that purpose.

It remains then, that this great blessing of the forgiveness of sins, was never sufficiently declared and assured to mankind, but through Jesus Christ in the Gospel. So St. Paul expressly asserts, *Acts* 13. 38, 39. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.* The Gospel hath provided an expiation for all sins in general, and that by a sacrifice of inestimable value, *the blood of the son of God.* And this is a mighty encouragement to repentance, and one most effectual means to reclaim men from their sins, to be assured that they are indemnified for what is past. And this the Apostle means, when he says, *Gal.* 3. 13. that *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us*; that is, whereas the law left sinners, as to those sins which stood most in need of pardon, under a curse, having provided no expiation for them, Christ hath redeemed them from *that curse*, by making a general expiation for sin; and in this sense it is that the Author to the *Hebrews* says, *chap.* 9. 15. that Christ died *for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant*; that is, for those sins for which the covenant of the law had provided no way of forgiveness; and therefore St. John says emphatically, *1 John* 1. 7. that *the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.*

Thirdly, The law did not afford sufficiently plain and certain rules and directions for a good life. As the corruption and degeneracy of mankind grew worse, so the light of nature waxed dimmer and dimmer, and the rule of good and evil was more doubtful and uncertain, and that in very considerable instances of our duty. The law of *Moses* was peculiar to the *Jews*: and even to them, who only had the benefit and advantage of it, it did not give clear and perfect light and direction as to *moral* duties, and those things which are of an *eternal* and *immutable* reason and goodness. And therefore our Saviour in this Sermon explains it to a greater perfection than it was understood to have among the *Jews*, or the letter of it seemed to intend, and hath not only forbidden several things permitted by that law, as *divorce* and *retaliation of injuries*; but hath heightened our duty in several instances of it, requiring us *to love our enemies*, and *to forgive the greatest injuries and provocations, tho' never so often repeated*, and not only *not to revenge them*, but *to requite them with good turns*; which were not understood by mankind to be laws before, but yet when duly consider'd, are very agreeable to right reason, and the sense of the wisest and best men. So that the christian religion hath not only fixt and determined our duty, and brought it to a *greater certainty*, but hath raised it to a *greater perfection*, and rendered it every way fit to bring the minds of men to a more divine temper, and a more reasonable and perfect way of serving God, than ever the world was instructed in before.

Fourthly, The promises and threatenings of the law were only of *temporal* good and evil things, which are, in comparison of the *endless* rewards and punishments of *another world*, but very languid and faint motives to obedience. Not but that the *Jews* under the law had such apprehensions of their own immortality, and of a future state of happiness and misery after this life, as natural light suggested to them; which was in most but a wavering and uncertain persuasion,

suasion, and consequently of small efficacy to engage men to their duty; but the law of *Moses* added little or nothing to the clearness of those natural notions concerning a future state, and the strengthening of this persuasion in the minds of men; it did rather suppose it, than give any new force and life to it. And for this reason more particularly the Apostle tells us that *the law was but weak* to make men good; because it did not work strongly enough upon the hopes and fears of men by the weight of its promises, and the terrour of its threatenings; and that for this *weakness* and *imperfection* of it, it was removed, and a more *powerful* and *awakening* dispensation brought in the place of it; *Heb. 7. 18, 19. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment that was before* (that is, of the Jewish law) *for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof; for the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; that is, the covenant of the Gospel, which promiseth eternal life. And ch. 8. 6. for this reason more especially the Apostle says, that Christ had obtained a more excellent ministry, being the Mediator of a better covenant, which was establish'd upon better promises. And Rom. 1. 16, 18. St. Paul tells us, that for this reason the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, because therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. The clear revelation of a future Judgment, was that which made the Gospel so proper and so powerful an instrument for the salvation of men. The great impiety of mankind, and their impenitency in it, was not so much to be wonder'd at before, while the world was in a great measure ignorant of the infinite danger of a wicked life; and therefore God is said in some sort to overlook it; but now he commands all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. Acts 17. 30, 31. The clear discovery and perfect assurance of a future Judgment, calls loudly upon all men to leave their sins, and turn to God.*

Fifthly, The covenant of the law had no spiritual promises contained in it, of the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit, for the mortifying of sin, and enabling men to their duty, and supporting them under sufferings: but the Gospel is full of clear and express promises to this purpose. Our Saviour hath assured us, *that God will give his holy Spirit to them that ask him, Luke 11. 13.* and this the Apostle tells us is actually confer'd upon all true christians, those who do sincerely embrace and believe the Gospel, *Rom. 8. 9. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.* Hence the Gospel is call'd by the same Apostle *the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, v. 2d. of that chap. The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death; and in the next words he tells us, that herein manifestly appeared the weakness of the law, that it left men destitute of this mighty help and advantage (at least to any special promise of it) What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and by making him a sacrifice for sin condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfill'd in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit; that is, that that righteousness which the law aimed at and signified, but was too weak to effect, might be really accomplish'd in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; that is, who are acted and assisted by a higher and better principle than men either have in nature, or the carnal dispensation of the law did endow men withal. And because of this great defect, the law is said to be a state of bondage and servitude; and on the contrary, the Gospel, by reason of this mighty advantage, is call'd a state of adoption and liberty, ver. 15. for ye have not received the Spirit of bondage, but the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba Father; and 2 Cor. 3. 17. where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And to this very thing St. Paul appeals, as that whereby men might judge whether the law or the Gospel were the more excellent and powerful dispensation, Gal. 3. 2. This only would I learn of you, received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? As if he had said, let this one thing determine that whole matter; were ye made partakers of this great privilege and blessing*

of the Spirit, while ye were of the Jewish religion, or since ye became christians? And *ver. 14.* he calls it *the blessing of Abraham*; that is, the blessing promised to all nations by *Abraham's seed*, namely, *the Messias*; *that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

And then for the supporting us under afflictions, the Gospel promiseth an extraordinary assistance of God's holy Spirit to us, *1 Pet. 4. 14.* *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.*

But were there no good men under the dispensation of the law? Yes certainly there were, and they were so by the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit; but then this was an effect of the divine goodness; but not of any *special promise*, contained in that covenant, of divine grace and assistance to be conferred on all those that were admitted into it. But thus it is in the new covenant of the Gospel; and therefore the law is call'd *a dead letter, the oldness of the letter*, and *the ministration of the letter*, in opposition to the Gospel, which is call'd *the ministration of the Spirit*. And this the Apostle lays special weight upon, as a main difference between these *two covenants*, that the *first* gave an *external law*, but *the new covenant* offers *inward grace and assistance* to enable men to obedience, and hath an *inward and powerful efficacy* upon the minds of men, accompanying the ministration of it, *Heb. 8. 7, 8, 9, 10.* *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, &c. For this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.*

And of this *inward grace and assistance* we are further secured, by the powerful and prevalent and perpetual intercession of our High Priest for sinners, at the right hand of God; not like the intercession of the Priests under the law, who being sinners themselves, were less fit to intercede for others; but *we have an high priest that is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, who by the eternal Spirit offer'd himself without spot to God*, to purchase for us those blessings which he intercedes for. The Priests under the law were intercessors upon earth; but *Christ is enter'd into heaven it self, now to appear in the presence of God for us*, *Heb. 9. 24.* The Priests under the law were removed from this office by death; but *Christ, because he continues for ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood*, and is an everlasting advocate and intercessor for us, in the virtue of his most meritorious sacrifice continually presented to his father, where he is *always at the right hand of God*, to present our prayers to him, and to obtain pardon of our sins, and *grace to help in time of need*, and by his intercession in heaven, to procure all those blessings to be actually conferr'd upon us, which he purchased for us by his blood upon earth; *wherefore he is able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them*, as the same Apostle speaks, *Heb. 7. 25.*

And thus I have, as briefly as well I could, shewed how the christian religion doth supply all the weaknesses and imperfections of the Jewish religion, and consequently, does in no wise *contradict or interfere* with the great design of *the law and the Prophets*, but hath *perfected and made up* whatever was weak or wanting in that institution to make men truly good, or, as the expression is in the Prophet *Daniel*, *to bring in everlasting righteousness*; that is, to *clear and confirm* those laws of holiness and righteousness, which are of *indispensable and eternal obligation*.

And if this be the great design of our Saviour's coming, and the christian doctrine be every way fitted to advance righteousness and true holiness, and to make us as excellently good as this imperfect state of mortality will admit, since it hath many advantages incomparably beyond any religion or institution that ever was in the world, both in respect of the perfection of its laws, and

the force of its motives and arguments to repentance, and a holy life, and in respect of the encouragements which it gives, and the examples which it sets before us, and the powerful assistance which it offers to us, to enable us *to cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God*; What a shame is this to us, who are under the power of this excellent institution, if the temper of our minds, and the tenor of our conversation be not in some measure answerable to the Gospel of Christ! The greater helps and advantages we have of being good, the greater things may justly be expected from us; for *to whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.*

Christianity is *the fulfilling of the righteousness of the law, by walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, by mortifying the deeds of the flesh, and by bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance. The righteousness of Faith* doth not consist in a barren and ineffectual belief of the Gospel, in a meer embracing of the promises of it, and relying upon Christ for salvation; in *a faith without works, which is dead*; but in *a faith which worketh by love, in becoming new creatures, and in keeping the commandments of God. The righteousness of faith speaking on this wise. This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment, 1 John 3. 23. and this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also, 1 John 4. 21. That we approve the things that are excellent, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and the praise of God, Phil. 1. 10, 11. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, mind these things, Chap. 4. 8.*

And then considering what abundant provision the Gospel hath made for our attainment of everlasting salvation, we are altogether without excuse, if we perish. Since God *hath raised up so mighty a salvation for us; how shall we escape?* If we *die in our sins*, it is not because God would not forgive them, but because we would not repent and be saved; the fault is all our own, and we owe it wholly to our selves, if we be lost and undone for ever. If when *life and death, heaven and hell, are so plainly set before us, eternal misery and perdition fall to our lot and portion, it is not because we were not warned of our danger, or because happiness and the things of our peace were hid from our eyes, but because we have made death and destruction our obstinate and final choice.*


But, Beloved, I hope better things of you, and things which accompany salvation, tho' I thus speak. Only let your conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ; and if we be careful to perform the conditions which the Gospel requires on our part, we shall not fail to be made partakers of that eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised to us, for his mercy's sake in Jesus Christ.

S E R M O N LII.

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Necessity,
in order to Justification and Salvation.

GALAT. VI. 15.

For in Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision; but a new Creature.

 HERE are two Epistles of St. Paul, namely, that to the Romans, and this to the Galatians, which are principally and particularly design'd to confute a false persuasion, which had prevailed amongst many Christians, especially those who were converted from Judaism; *that it was not enough for men to embrace and confess the Christian religion, unless they kept the law of Moses, or at least submitted to that great precept, of circumcision; the neglect whereof among all the affirmative precepts of the law, was only threaten'd with excision, or being cut off from among the people.* And of the prevalency of this error, and the great disturbance which it made in the Christian Church, we have a particular account, *Acts 15.* where a general council of the Apostles is call'd, and a letter written in their names to all the Christian Churches, to rectify their apprehensions in this matter, *ver. 24.* of that chap. *For as much as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words subverting your souls, saying ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment, &c.*

And upon this occasion likewise it was, that St. Paul wrote this epistle to the Galatians, as likewise that to the Romans; in the former of which, after he had at large confuted this error, (which he calls *the preaching of another Gospel, than what the Apostles had preached, and the Christians first received*) in the beginning of the 5th Chapter he exhorts them to assert the liberty, which Christ had purchas'd for them, from the obligation of the law of Moses, *ver. 1, 2.* *Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing; not that hereby he condemneth circumcision, as a thing evil in it self; for God never instituted or commanded any thing that was so; but he opposeth the opinion of the necessity of it to our justification and salvation, when the Gospel had so plainly taken away the obligation and use of it; and consequently to affirm still the necessity of it, was really to renounce Christianity. For if Judaism was still the way to salvation, Christianity was to no purpose; and if Christianity be now the way, then the obligation to the Jewish religion was ceased. To avoid the force of this reasoning, it was not enough for the false Apostles to say (as it seems they did) that Christians were not obliged universally to the whole law of Moses, but principally to the law of circumcision; because circumcision being the sign and badge of that covenant, whoever took that upon him, did thereby own his obligation to the whole law, ver. 3, 4. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law; Christ is become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace; that is, whoever of you expect and profess to be justified by the law of Moses, ye take away the necessity and use of the Christian religion; and are fallen from grace; that is, do in effect renounce*

renounce the Gospel; for *we, through the spirit, wait for the hope of righteousness by faith*, ver. 5. *we by the Spirit*, in opposition to *circumcision*, which was *in the flesh*, do expect to be justified by the belief of the Gospel. *For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision*, ver 6. that is, now under the dispensation of the Gospel by Christ Jesus, it signifies nothing to a man's justification or salvation, whether he be circumcised, or not circumcised, whether he be a Jew or a Gentile. All that the Gospel requires as necessary to these purposes, is, that we perform the conditions of the Gospel, that so we may be capable of being made partakers of the blessings of it.

Now as the great blessing and benefit of the Gospel is variously express'd, as by *the forgiveness of our sins*, by *our acceptance with God*, or (which comprehends both) by *our justification*, sometimes by *adoption*, and *our being made the sons and children of God*, sometimes by *redemption*, and (which is the consummation of all) by *salvation and eternal life*; I say, as the blessing and benefit of the Gospel is in Scripture express'd to us by these several terms, which do in effect all signify the same thing; so our duty, and the condition the Gospel requires on our part, is likewise as variously express'd; sometimes, and that very frequently, by the word *faith*, as being the great source and principle of all religious acts and performances; but then this *faith* must not be a bare assent and persuasion of the truth of the Gospel, but such an effectual belief, as expresseth it self in suitable acts of obedience and holiness, such as the Apostle here calls *πίστις δι' ἀγαπῆς ἐνεργουμένη*, *a faith which worketh by love*, a faith that is inspir'd and acted, or rather *consummate and made perfect by charity*, (for so the word doth often signify,) and then this phrase will be just of the same importance with that of St. James, Chap. 2. 22. *by works is faith made perfect*. Sometimes, and that also very frequently, the condition of the Gospel is express'd by words which import and signify the change of our state, as by *repentance*, *conversion*, *regeneration*, *renovation*, *sanctification*, *the new creature*, and *the new man*, which expressions are all so well known, that I need not refer to particular texts; sometimes the condition of the Gospel is express'd by the visible and sensible effects of this inward change in our outward life and actions; as namely by *obedience and keeping the commandments of God*. So Heb. 5. 9. Christ is said to be *the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*; where *obedience* is plainly put for the whole condition of the Gospel, the performance whereof entitles us to eternal life and happiness.

Now that by these various expressions, one and the same thing is certainly intended and meant, *viz.* the condition of the Gospel; that which is requir'd on our part, in order to our full and perfect justification and acceptance with God, is evident beyond all denial; by comparing the three different ways whereby St. Paul doth express the same proposition for sense and substance; in which he tells us, what it is that will avail to our justification under the Gospel, that is, according to the terms of the Christian religion; that it is neither here nor there, that it signifies nothing whether a man be circumcised or not, but that we be so qualified as the Gospel requires, that the conditions upon which the blessings of the Gospel are promised be found in us. And there are three texts wherein the same thing is plainly intended in three very different expressions. Gal. 5. 6. *In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but faith, which is consummate, or made perfect by charity*. Gal. 6. 15. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but a new creature*. 1 Cor. 7. 19. *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing: but the keeping of the commandments of God*. It is evident, that in these three texts the Apostle designs to say the same thing, and consequently that *faith which is made perfect by charity*, and *the new creature*, and *keeping of the commandments of God*, are the same in sense and substance, *viz.* the condition of our justification and acceptance with God under the covenant of the Gospel, or in the Christian religion.

I shall at present, by God's assistance, handle the second of these texts. *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but a new crea-*

creature. And here the condition of the Gospel is exprest to us, by the change of our state, which in Scripture is call'd our *regeneration*, or becoming *new creatures*, and *new men*. Circumcision was but an outward sign and mark upon the body, and the flesh, though it did indeed prefigure and typify the inward circumcision of the heart, the giving of men *new hearts*, and *new spirits*, under the more perfect dispensation of the Gospel: but now in *Christ Jesus*, that is, in the Christian religion, the presence or the want of this outward mark will avail nothing to our justification; but that which was signified by it, the renovation of our hearts and spirits, our becoming *new creatures*, is now the condition of our justification and acceptance with God.

The false Apostles indeed did lay great stress upon the business of circumcision, not so much out of zeal to the law of *Moses*, as to avoid persecution, *ver. 12. They constrain you to be circumcised, only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.* For at that time, though the Christians were persecuted, yet the *Jews* by the *Roman Edicts* had the free exercise of their religion, and therefore they gloried in this external mark of circumcision, because it exempted them from suffering; but *St. Paul* gloried in his sufferings for Christ, and the marks of that upon his body, *ver. 14. God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; and ver. 17. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.* He tells them, what necessities soever they might pretend of circumcision, either for their justification, or salvation, the true ground of all was to save themselves from temporal sufferings; and that in the Christian religion it signified nothing to recommend them to the favour of God, whether they were circumcised or not; nothing would be available to this purpose, but the renovation and change of their hearts and lives. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature, καὶνὴ κτίσις a new creation*, to intimate the greatness of the change, which Christianity, thoroughly entertained, made in men.

Having thus cleared the occasion and meaning of these words, I come now to consider the particulars contained in them, namely, these *two* things.

First, That the Gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law of *Moses*. *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision.*

Secondly, That according to the terms of the Christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; *neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision: but a new creature.*

1. That the Gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law of *Moses*. *In Christ Jesus*, that is, now under the dispensation of the Gospel, *neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision.* There was never any general obligation upon mankind to this rite of circumcision, but only upon the seed of *Abraham*; but yet upon the preaching of the Gospel, many of the Jewish Christians would have brought the Gentiles under this yoke; pretending that Christianity was but a superstructure upon the law of *Moses*, which together with the Gospel, was to be the religion of the whole world; and there was some colour for this, because our Saviour himself submitted to this rite, and was circumcised; which the Apostle takes notice of in the 4th Chap. of this Epist. *ver. 4. When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son made of a woman, made under the law*, that is, *circumcised*. And 'tis true indeed, that our blessed Saviour was circumcised, but not to signify to us the perpetuity of circumcision, and the continuance of it under the Christian religion, but for a quite different end; as a testimony of his obedience to that law, which tho' afterwards it was to expire, yet was to be obeyed whilst it was in force, by all that were born under it; he was *made under the law*, and it became him, who came to teach mankind obedience to the laws of God, to *fulfill all righteousness* himself. And therefore the Apostle in this epistle, where he takes notice of this, that Christ was *made under the law*, gives this reason of it, that he might be the fitter to free those who were under it, from the servitude of it; he was *made under the law*, that he might redeem them that were under the law; and that those who were in

in the condition of servants before, might be set at liberty, and receive the adoption of sons.

But how did his being *made under the law*, qualify him to redeem those who were under the law? Thus: by submitting to it himself, he shewed that he owned the authority of it, and that he had no malice or enmity against it; or as he himself expresses it, that *he came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it*. And being *fulfill'd*, and having serv'd the time and end for which God intended it, it expir'd of it self; like a law which is not made for perpetuity, but limited to a certain period. And our blessed Saviour, who came with greater authority than *Moses*, and gave greater testimony of his divine authority, had sufficient power to declare the expiration of it; and by commissioning his disciples before and after his death to preach the Gospel to the whole world, he put an end to that *particular law and dispensation*, which only concern'd the Jewish nation, by giving a *general law to all mankind*.

So that from the death of our Saviour, and his ascension into heaven, upon which followed the general publication of the Gospel, the law of *Moses* ceased, and according to our Saviour's express appointment, Profelytes were to be admitted into the Christian Church only by *baptism*, and not by *circumcision*. And if circumcision, which was the sign of that covenant, was laid aside, then the whole obligation of that law and covenant which God had made with the Jews, was also ceased. It was once indeed the mark of God's chosen and peculiar people; but now that God hath revealed himself to the whole world by his Son, and offers Salvation to all mankind, Gentiles as well as Jews, the *wall of separation is broken down*, and circumcision, which was the mark of distinction between Jews and Gentiles, is taken away; and therefore he is said *to have made peace by his cross, and to have blotted out and taken away the hand-writing of ordinances, nailing it to his cross*; that is, from the time of his death to have taken away the obligation of the law of *Moses*, tho' it was a good while after, before the Jews were wholly weaned from the veneration and use of it.

Nay, it was some time before the Apostles were clearly convinc'd, that the Gospel was to be preach'd to the Gentiles; this being one of those truths, which our Saviour promised after his departure his Spirit should lead them into the perfect knowledge of; and then they were fully instructed, that the law of *Moses* was expir'd, and that it was no longer necessary to the salvation of men, that they should be circumcised, and keep that law. And tho' it was once enjoin'd by God himself to the Jews, and their obedience to it was necessary to their acceptance with God; yet now by Christ Jesus, God had offered salvation to men upon other terms; and whether they were circumcised, or not, was of no moment to their justification or salvation one way or other; but provided they perform'd the condition of this new covenant of the Gospel, they were all alike capable of the divine favour and acceptance.

But I proceed to that, which I mainly intend to prosecute from these words; and that is the

Second particular in the text, namely, that according to the terms of the Gospel, and the Christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives; *neither circumcision, nor uncircumcision; but a new creature*. For the full explication of this, I shall do these *three* things.

First, Shew, what is imply'd in this phrase of a *new creature*.

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that it is the same in substance with *faith perfected by charity*, and with *keeping the commandments of God*.

Thirdly, That it is very reasonable it should be so.

1. What is imply'd in this phrase of a *new creature*. It is plain at first sight, that it is a metaphorical expression of that great and thorough change which is made in men by the Gospel, or the Christian religion. The Scripture sets forth to us this change by great variety of expressions, by *conversion*, and *turning from our iniquities unto God*; by *repentance*, (which signifies a *change of our mind and reso-*

reso-

resolution, and is in Scripture call'd *repentance from dead works*, and *repentance unto life*; by *regeneration*, or *being born again*; by *resurrection from the dead*, and *rising to newness of life*; by *sanctification*, and being wash'd and cleans'd from all filthiness and impurity, (which three last metaphors are imply'd in *baptism*, which is call'd *regeneration*, Tit. 3. 5. *According to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy Ghost*; and our being born again of water and the holy Ghost, John 3. 3. *Except a man be born again, &c.* and ver. 5. *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*; and the purifying of our consciences, Heb. 10. 22. *Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water*; and the answer of a good conscience towards God, 1 Pet. 3. 21. *Baptism doth now save us; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God*; and finally our being baptiz'd into the death and resurrection of Christ, Rom. 6. 3, 4. *Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death; therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*) And lastly this change is set forth to us by *renovation*, and our being made *new creatures* and *new men*, 2 Cor. 5. 17. *Therefore if any man be in Christ, that is, professeth himself a Christian, he is a new creature; old things are past away, behold all things are become new.* And so likewise, Ephes. 4. 22, 23, 24. this great change is express'd by *putting off concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the lusts of deceit, and being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* The expression is very emphatical, *renewed in the spirit of our minds*, that is, *in our very minds and spirits*, to signify to us that it is a most inward and thorough change, reaching to the very center of our souls and spirits. And, Colos. 3. 9, 10, 11. it is represented much after the same manner, *Seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all.* Which is the same with what the Apostle says here in the text, that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision: but a new creature; that is, these external marks and differences signify nothing: but this inward change, *the new creature, Christ formed in us*, this in the christian religion is *all in all*.

But that we may the more clearly understand the just importance of this metaphor of a new creature, or a new creation, I shall,

First, Consider what it doth certainly signify, by comparing this metaphorical phrase with other plain texts of Scripture.

And *Secondly*, That it doth not import what some would extend it to, so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this, and the like metaphors in Scripture, without any manner of countenance from plain texts.

First, I shall consider what this metaphor doth certainly import, so as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of Scripture, namely these two things.

1. The greatness of this change.

2. That it is effected and wrought by a divine power.

1. The greatness of this change; it is called *καὶνὴ κτίσις*, a new creation; as if the christian doctrine, firmly entertained and believed, did as it were mould and fashion men over again, transforming them into a quite other sort of persons than what they were before, and made such a change in them, as the creating power of God did, in bringing this beautiful and orderly frame of things out of their dark and rude Chaos. Thus the Apostle represents it, 2 Cor. 4. 6. *God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness*, (alluding to the first creation) *hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* We are translated from one extrem to another. Acts 26. 18.

when our Lord sends *Paul* to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, he tells him what a change it would make in them, by *opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*. And *St. Peter* expresses the change which christianity makes in men, by their being *call'd out of darkness into a marvellous light*, 1 *Pet.* 2. 9. And so *St. Paul*, *Eph.* 5. 8. *Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord*.

And indeed, where-ever the doctrine of Christ hath its full effect, and perfect work, it makes a mighty change both in their inward principles, and outward practice; it darts a new light into their minds, so that they see things otherwise than they did before, and form a different judgment of things from what they did before; it endues them with a new principle, and new resolutions, gives them another spirit, and another temper, a quite different sense and gust of things from what they formerly had. And this inward change of their minds necessarily produceth a proportionable change in their lives and conversations, so that the man steers quite another course, acts after another rate, and drives on quite other designs from what he did before.

And this is remarkably seen in those who are reclaimed from impiety and profaneness to religion, and from a vitious to a virtuous course of life. The change is great and real in all; but not so sensible and visible in some, as others; in those who are made good by the insensible steps of a pious and virtuous education; as in those who are translated out of a quite contrary state, and *turn'd from the power of Satan unto God, and translated out of the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of Christ*; which was the case of the heathen world, in their first conversion to christianity.

Secondly, This change is effected and wrought by a divine power, of the same kind with that, which created the world, and raised up Christ Jesus from the dead; two great and glorious instances of the divine power; and to these the Scripture frequently alludes, when it speaks of this *new creation*. *God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts. Like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also are raised to newness of life*, saith *St. Paul*, *Rom.* 6. 4. And to the same purpose the same Apostle speaks, *Ephes.* 1. 19, 20. *And that ye may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the operation of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead*. So that our renovation, and being made *new creatures*, is an instance of the same glorious power, which exerted it self in the first creation of things, and in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead; but not altogether after the same manner, as I shall shew under the next head.

I should now in the *second* place proceed to shew, that this metaphor of a new creation doth not import what some men would extend it to, so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this and other like metaphors of Scripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts. But this I reserve to another discourse.

S E R M O N L I I I .

*The Second
Sermon on
this Text.*

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Necessity,
in order to Justification and Salvation.

G A L A T. VI. 15.

For in Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision; but a new Creature.



IN these words are contained these *two* things.

First, That the gospel hath taken away the obligation of the law, having taken away the sign of that covenant, which was *circumcision*.

Secondly, That according to the terms of the gospel, and the christian religion, nothing will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives. For the full explication of this, I propounded to do these *three* things.

I. To shew what is imply'd in this phrase of *a new creature*.

II. That this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that it is the same in sense and substance with those other expressions, in the two parallel texts, of *faith perfected by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God*.

III. That it is very reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification, and acceptance to the favour of God.

I began with the *first* of these, *viz.* To shew what is imply'd in this phrase of *a new creature*; as to which I shew'd,

First, What this metaphor doth certainly import, so as to be undeniably evident from other more clear and full texts of scripture; namely, the greatness of this change; and that it is effected by a divine power. I now proceed,

Secondly, To shew that it doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the meer and single strength of this and other like metaphors of scripture, without any manner of countenance and confirmation from plain texts: such doctrines as these *three*.

1. That as the creation was by an *irresistible* act of the divine power, so is this *new creation*, or conversion of a sinner.

2. That as creatures were *meerly passive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we to our conversion and regeneration.

3. That as the creation of the several ranks and kinds of creatures was *in an instant*, and effected by the powerful word of God, only saying, *let such and such things be*, and immediately they were; so this *new creation*, or the work of regeneration, is *in an instant*, and admits of no degrees.

Concerning these *three* doctrines, of great moment and consequence in divinity, I shall shew, with all the clearness and brevity I can, that they are built solely upon metaphors of scripture, tortur'd and strain'd too far, without any real ground or foundation from scripture or reason; nay, contrary to the tenor of the one and the dictates of the other; nay, indeed contrary to the general experience of the operation of God's grace upon the minds of men in their conversion.

First, It is pretended, that as the creation was by an *irresistible* act of the divine power, so is *the new creation*, or the conversion of a sinner; and this is

solely argued from the metaphorical expressions of Scripture concerning conversion; such as being *called out of darkness into light*, alluding to that powerful word of God, which in the first creation commanded the light to shine out of darkness; being *quicken'd, and rais'd to a new life*; and from this metaphor here in the text, of *a new creation*.

But surely it is a dangerous thing in divinity, to build doctrines upon metaphors, especially if we strain them to all the similitudes which a quick and lively imagination can find out; whereas some one obvious thing is commonly intended in the metaphor, and the meaning is absolv'd and acquitted in that, and it is folly to pursue it into all those similitudes, which a good fancy may suggest. When our Saviour says, *that he will come as a thief in the night*, it is plain what he means; that the day of judgment will surprize the careless world, when they least look for it, that *he will come at an hour when they are not aware*; and tho' he resemble his coming to that of *a thief in the night*, yet here is nothing of robbery in the case. So here, when the change which christianity makes in men is called *a new creation*, this only imports the greatness of the change, which by the power of God's grace is made upon the hearts and lives of men; and the metaphor is sufficiently absolv'd in this plain sense and meaning of it, agreeable to the literal expressions of Scripture concerning this thing, and there is no need that this change should in all other respects answer the work of creation; and consequently there is no necessity that it should be effected in an *irresistible* manner, or that we should be *altogether passive* in this change, and that we should no ways concur to it by any act of our own, or that this work should be done *in an instant*, and admit of no steps and degrees.

It is not necessary that this change should be effected in an *irresistible* manner. God may do so, when he pleaseth, without any injury to his creatures; for it is certainly no wrong to any man to be made good and happy against his will; and I do not deny, but that God sometimes does so. The call of the disciples to follow Christ seems to have been a very sudden and forcible impression upon their minds, without any appearing reason for it; for it is not reasonable for any man to leave his calling, and follow every one that bids him do so. The conversion of *Saul* from a persecutor of christianity, to a zealous preacher of it, was certainly effected, if not in an *irresistible*, yet in a very *forcible* and *violent* manner. The conversion of three thousand at one sermon, when the holy Ghost descended in a visible manner upon the Apostles, was certainly the effect of a mighty and *over-powering* degree of God's grace. And the like may be said of the sudden conversion of so many persons from heathenism, and great wickedness and impiety of life, to the sincere profession of christianity, by the preaching of the Apostles afterwards.

But that this is not of absolute necessity, nor the ordinary method of God's grace, to work upon the minds of men in so *over-powering*, much less in an *irresistible* manner, is as plain as any thing of that nature can be, both from experience, and the reason of the thing, and the constant tenour of the Scripture. We find that many (perhaps the greatest part) of those that are good are made so by the insensible steps and degrees of a religious education, and having been never vicious, can give no great account of any sensible change, only that when they came to years of understanding, they consider'd things more, and the principles that were instill'd into them in their younger years did put forth themselves more vigorously at that time, as seeds sprout out of the ground, after they have a good while been buried and lain hid in the earth.

And it is contrary to reason, to make an *irresistible* act of divine power necessary to our repentance, and conversion; because this necessarily involves in it *two* things which seem very unreasonable.

First, That no man repents upon consideration and choice, but upon meer force and violent necessity, which quite takes away the virtue of repentance, whatever virtue there may be in the consequent acts of a regenerate state.

Secondly,

Secondly, It implies that the conversion and repentance of those upon whom God doth not work *irresistibly* is impossible, which is the utmost can be said to excuse the impenitency of men, by taking it off from their own choice, and laying it upon the impossibility of the thing, and an utter disability in them to choose and do otherwise.

And it is likewise contrary to the constant tenour of the Bible, which supposeth that men do very frequently resist the grace and holy Spirit of God. It is said of the Pharisees by our Saviour, *Luke 7. 30.* that *they rejected the counsel of God against themselves*; that is, the merciful design of God for their salvation. And of the Jews, *Acts 7. 51.* that *they always resisted the holy Ghost*. So that some operations of God's grace and holy Spirit are *resistible*, and such, as if men did not resist them, would be effectual to bring them to faith and repentance, else why are the Pharisees said to *reject the counsel of God against themselves*, that is, *to their own ruin*; implying, that if they had not rejected it, they might have been saved; and if they had, it had been without *irresistible* grace; for that which was offered to them, was actually *resisted* by them. Other texts plainly shew, that the reason of mens impenitency and unbelief is not any thing wanting on God's part, but on theirs; as those known texts, wherein our Saviour laments the case of *Jerusalem*, because they obstinately brought destruction upon themselves, *Luke 19. 42.* *If thou hadst known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace*: intimating that they might have known them, so as to have prevented that desolation which was coming upon them, and was a forerunner of their eternal ruin; *but now they are hid from thine eyes*; intimating that then God gave them up to their own blindness and obstinacy; but the time was, when they might have *known the things of their peace*; which cannot be upon the supposition of the necessity of an *irresistible* act of God's grace to their conversion, and repentance; because then without that they could not have repented, and if that had been afforded to them, they had infallibly repented. So likewise in that other text, *Matth. 23. 37.* *Oh! Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee, even as an hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and you would not.* And in *John 5. 40.* *Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life.* He *would have gathered them*, and they *would not*; he would have given them *life*, but they *would not come to him*. Are these serious and compassionate expostulations and declarations of our Saviour's gracious intention towards them, any ways consistent with an impossibility of their repentance? which yet must be said, if *irresistible* grace be necessary thereto; for then repentance is impossible without it, and that it was not afforded to them is plain, because they did not repent. The same may be said of that solemn declaration of God, *Ezek. 33. 11.* *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* Can it be said that God hath *no pleasure in the death of sinners*, and yet be true, that he denies to the greatest part of them, that grace which is necessary to their repentance? Upon this supposition, how can it be true, that *if the mighty works that were done in Chorazin and Bethsaida, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented*, *Matth. 11. 21.* since *irresistible* grace did not accompany those miracles? for if it had, *Chorazin and Bethsaida had repented*, and without it *Tyre and Sidon could not repent*.

The same difficulty is in those texts, wherein God is represented as expecting the repentance and conversion of sinners; and our Saviour *wondering at their unbelief and hardness of heart*, and *upbraiding them with it*, *Isa. 5. 4.* *What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* *Mark 6. 6.* 'tis said our Saviour *marvell'd at the unbelief of the Jews*. And *chap. 16. 14.* that he *upbraided his Disciples with their unbelief and hardness of heart*. But why should the repentance of sinners be expected, or their unbelief *marvell'd at*, or indeed be upbraided to them, by him who knew it impossible to them, without an *irresistible* power and grace, which he knew likewise was not afforded to them? neither God nor man have reason to wonder that any man does not do that, which at the same time they certainly know he cannot do.

The bottom of all that is said to avoid this pressing difficulty, is this, “that this impotence and disability of sinners is their sin, and therefore cannot be pleaded in their excuse, for their impenitency; but God may still justly require that of them, which they had once a natural power to do, but wilfully forfeited and lost it; they had this power in *Adam*, and forfeited it by his disobedience. To shew how slight this evasion is, I need not run into that argument, how far we are guilty of the sin of our first parents. That by that first transgression and disobedience all mankind suffers, and our natures are extremely corrupted and depraved, cannot be denied; but the corruption of our natures is a thing very different from personal guilt, strictly and properly so call’d. I will take the business much shorter, and granting that mankind had in *Adam* a natural power to have continued obedient to the laws of God, yet since *by one man sin enter’d into the world, and all are now sinners*, here is an obligation to *repentance*, as well as to *obedience*, and men shall be condemned for their *impenitency*. I ask now, whether in *Adam* we had a power to *repent*? ’Tis certain *Adam* had not this power, and therefore I cannot see how we could lose it, and forfeit it in him. *Adam* indeed had a natural power *not to have sinned*, and so *not to have needed repentance*; but no power to *repent* in the state of innocency, because in that state repentance was impossible, because there could be no occasion for it. He had it not after his fall, because by that he forfeited all his power to that which is spiritually good. ’Tis said indeed he had it in innocency, but forfeited it by his fall; so that he had it, when there was no occasion or possibility of the exercise of it, and lost it when there was occasion for it: or if he did not lose it by his fall, we have it still, and then there is no need of any supernatural, much less *irresistible* grace to *repentance*; so that our impotency, as to the particular duty of *repentance*, cannot be charg’d upon us, as our fault, not so much as upon the account of original sin.

But the want of this power is the consequent and just punishment of our first transgression. Be it so; but if this impotency still remain in all those to whom God doth not afford his *irresistible* grace, how comes the grace offer’d in the gospel to aggravate the impenitency of men, and increase their condemnation? For if it be no remedy against this impotency, how comes it to inflame the guilt of impenitency? Or how is it grace to offer mercy to those upon their repentance, who are out of a possibility of repenting; and yet to punish them more severely for their impenitency after this offer made to them, which they cannot accept without that grace which God is resolved not to afford them? If this be the case, the greatest favour had been to have had no such offer made to them, and it had been happier for mankind, that *the grace of God had not appear’d to all men*, but only to those who shall *irresistibly* be made partakers of the benefit of it.

Secondly, Another doctrine grounded upon this metaphor of *a new creation*, is, that we are *meerly passive* in the work of conversion and regeneration, and contribute nothing to it; that God does all, and we do nothing at all; and this follows from the former, especially if we allow that metaphor as far as it will carry us. For as the first creation of things was by an *irresistible* act of divine power, so the things that were made were only *passive* in their creation; and as they could make no resistance, so neither could they contribute any thing to their being what they are. And this doctrine is not only argued from the metaphor of *a new creation*, but from several other metaphors used in Scripture to describe our natural state; as namely, *darkness*, *blindness*, and our being *dead in trespasses and sins*; from whence it is inferr’d, that we contribute no more to our renovation, than darkness doth to the introduction of light, than a blind man can do to the recovery of his sight, or a dead man to his own resurrection; but are *wholly passive* in this work. And to countenance this notion, they make great advantage of the character which is given in Scripture of the most degenerate heathen, taking it for granted, that their condition is the true standard of a natural and unregenerate state; and to this purpose they insist particularly upon

upon that description of the gentile Idolaters, *Eph. 4. 18, 19. Having the understanding darken'd, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lasciviousness; to work all uncleanness with greediness.* Which is indeed a description of men in their natural state, but not of *all*, but of such as by the worst sort of vitious practices of the grossest idolatry, and most abominable lewdness, were degenerated to the utmost, so that their condition seemed desperate, without a miraculous and extraordinary grace of God, which was probably afforded to many of these. In like manner they argue the common condition of mankind, from the description which is given of the wickedness of men, before God brought the flood upon them, *Gen. 6. 5. God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* This they make the character of *all men* in their *natural* state, whereas this is a description of an *extraordinary* degeneracy of men, signifying that the world was then extremely bad, and depraved to the highest degree; for God gives this as a reason why he was resolved to drown the world, and *to destroy man from the face of the earth, because their wickedness was grown to so great an height.* But if this were a description of the natural state of mankind, this could be no particular reason for bringing a flood upon the world at that time, there being the same reason for it, for fifteen hundred years before, and ever will be the same reason to the end of the world, that is, that men are naturally corrupted and depraved. Surely they consider the Scripture very superficially, that interpret it at this rate.

'Tis too true, that the nature of man is sadly corrupted and depraved; but not so bad as by vitious practices and habits it may be made; all men are not equally at the same distance from the grace of God; some are *nearer to the kingdom of God* than others, and less force and violence will serve to rescue them from the power of Satan, and to transplant them into the kingdom of Christ. The prevalence and dominion of sin makes an *unregenerate* state, as the prevalence of grace puts a man into a *regenerate* state. An unregenerate man is not necessarily as bad as is possible, no more than it is necessary to a regenerate state, that a man be perfectly good; so that it is a great mistake to argue the common condition of all mankind, from the descriptions that are given in the Scripture of the worst of men; and therefore if it were granted that *irresistible* grace were necessary for the conversion of *such*, it will not follow that the same is necessary to *all*.

All unregenerate men are not equally devoid of a sense of God, and spiritual things; they have many convictions of what they ought to be and do, and under those convictions are very capable of persuasion, which dead men are not. The grace of God is necessary to the conversion of a sinner, but it is not necessary that he should be *only passive* in this work. Experience tells us the contrary, that we can do something, that we can co-operate with the grace of God; and the Scripture tells us the same, and makes it an argument and encouragement to us *to work out our own salvation, because God works in us both to will and to do of his own goodness*, Phil. 2. 12, 13. Besides, that it is the greatest and justest discouragement in the world to all endeavours of repentance and reformation, to tell men that they can do nothing in it. He that is sure of this, that he can do nothing in this work, is a fool if he make any attempt to become better, because he struggles with an impossibility; and if the work will be done at all, it will be done without him, and he neither can, nor ought to have any hand in it. But will any metaphor bear men out against so palpable an absurdity as this?

And yet after all, there is no force in these metaphors, to prove what they aim at by them. For if to be *dead in sin* signifies an utter impotency to goodness, then to be *dead to sin* must on the contrary signify an impossibility of sinning; for just as the *unregenerate* man is *dead in sin*, so he that is *regenerate* is said in Scripture to be *dead to sin*: But yet the best of regenerate men, notwithstanding they are *dead to sin*, and *alive to God*, do offend in many things, and too frequently fall

fall into sin. Why then should the metaphor be so strong on the one side, that a man who is said *to be dead in sin*, should not be able so much as to *co-operate* with the grace of God in the work of repentance and conversion?

In short, if this be true, that men in an unregenerate and unconverted state are perfectly *dead*, and have no more sense of spiritual things than a dead man hath of natural objects, then all precepts and exhortations to repentance, and all promises and threatenings to argue and persuade men thereto are vain, and to no purpose; and it would be every whit as proper and reasonable for us to preach in the *church-yard*, over the graves of dead men, as in the *church* to the unregenerate; because they can no more act and move towards their own recovery out of a state of sin and death, than the dead bodies can rise out of their graves.

But it is said, that the end of exhortations and promises is not to declare to men their *power*, but their *duty*. But if they be *insensible*, it is to as little purpose to declare to them their *duty*, as their *power*. Besides, it will be an hard thing to convince men that any thing is their *duty*, which at the same time we declare to them to be *out of their power*.

But this is *Pelagianism*, to say that of our selves we can repent and turn to God. And who says we can *of our selves* do this, besides the *Pelagians*? we affirm the necessity of God's grace hereto, and withall the necessity of our *co-operating* with the grace of God. We say that without the powerfull excitation and aid of God's grace, no man can repent and turn to God; but we say likewise, that God cannot be properly said to *aid* and *assist* those, who do nothing themselves.

But men *can do more than they do*, and therefore are justly condemned. Not in the work of conversion sure; if they can do *nothing at all*. But they can do more by way of *preparation* towards it. Suppose they do all they can towards it, will this save them, or will God upon this *irresistibly* work their conversion? no, they say, notwithstanding any preparatory work that we can do, conversion may not follow; how then does this mend the matter?

But still they say the fault is in men's want of *will*, and not of *power*; *you will not come unto me, that ye might have life*. But can they *will* to come? no, that they cannot neither. Why then it is still want of *power* that hinders them. The offer of life is a very gracious offer to them that are guilty, and liable to death, as we all are; but not if the condition be utterly impossible to us, tho' the impossibility springs from our own fault, as I will plainly shew by a fair instance. A Prince offers a pardon to a traytor fast lockt in chains, if he will come to him and submit himself; but if he be still detained in chains, and the Prince do not some way or other help him to his liberty, 'tis so far from being a *favour* to offer him a pardon upon these terms, that it is a *cruel derision* of his misery, to say to him *you will not come to me that you may be pardon'd*; and this notwithstanding that his being cast into chains was the effect of his own crime and fault; the application is obvious. I should now proceed to answer an objection or two, and then to give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to Scripture, and the attributes and perfections of God; but this I shall reserve for another discourse.

S E R M O N L I V.

*The Third
Sermon on
this Text.*Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Necessity, in
order to Justification and Salvation.

GALAT. VI. 15.

For in Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision; but a new Creature.

THE point which I am upon from these words is, that *according to the terms of the Gospel, nothing will avail to our justification, but the real renovation of our hearts and lives.*

For the full explication of this, I propounded to shew,

First, What is implied in this expression of the *new creature*.

Secondly, That this is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God.

Thirdly, That it is highly reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification.

In speaking to the first of these, I have shewed, *1st*, What this metaphor doth certainly import; and *2dly*, That it doth not import what some would extend it to, whereon to found such doctrines as these.

First, That as the Creation was an *irresistible* act of the the divine Power, so is this *new creation*, or the conversion of a sinner.

Secondly, As creatures were *meerly passive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all to it, no more do we in our conversion and regeneration.

Thirdly, That as the creation of the several kinds and ranks of creatures was effected *in an instant*, by the powerful word of God, saying, *let such and such things be*, and immediately they were; so this *new creation* is *in an instant*, and admits of no degrees.

The *first* of these I have consider'd, and enter'd upon the *second*; namely, that as the creatures were *meerly passive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we in our conversion and regeneration.

This I told you does plainly make void all the precepts and exhortations, and all the promises and threatenings of Scripture, to argue and persuade men to repentance.

That which remains to be done upon this argument, is,

First, To answer an objection or two, which are commonly urged by the assertors of this doctrine, that we are *meerly passive* in the work of conversion.

Secondly, To give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to Scripture, and the attributes and perfections of God. For the

First, The objections are these *three*.

1. That if we be not *meerly passive* in the work of regeneration and conversion, we ascribe the whole glory of this work to our selves, and not to God.

Or, *2dly*, We do however extenuate or lessen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours of our own towards this change.

3dly, They ask St. Paul's question, *who maketh thee to differ?* and think it impossible to be answer'd, if the efficacy of God's grace do depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. These are all the material objections I know; to every one of which I hope to give a very clear and sufficient answer.

1. *Objection.* If we be not *meerly passive* in the work of regeneration and conversion, we ascribe the whole glory of this work to our selves, and not to God. But that I certainly know this objection is commonly made, and have seen it in very considerable Authors, I could not believe that men of so good sense could make it. For this is to say, that if we do any thing in this work, tho' we acknowledge that what we do in it, we do by the assistance God's grace, we ascribe it wholly to our selves, and rob God altogether of the glory of his grace; or in plainer terms, it is to say, that tho' we say God does never so much, and we but very little in this work, yet if we do not say that God does *all*, and we *nothing at all*, we take the whole work to our selves, and say God does *nothing at all*; which let any one that considers what we say judge, whether we say so or no.

The Scripture, which never robs God of the glory of his grace, does I'm sure ascribe our conversion and repentance, our regeneration and sanctification to several causes; to the holy Spirit of God, to his Ministers, to his Word, and to our selves. To the holy Spirit of God, as the principal author, and efficient. Hence we are said *to be born of the Spirit, to be sanctified by the renewing of the Holy Ghost*. To the Ministers of God, as the instruments of our conversion. Hence they are said *to turn men to righteousness to convert a sinner from the evil of his ways, to save souls from death, to save themselves, and them that hear them; to be our spiritual fathers, and to beget us in Christ*. To the word of God, as the subordinate means and instruments of our conversion. Hence we are said *to be begotten by the word of truth, to be sanctified by the truth*. And lastly, to our selves, as concurring some way or other to this work. Hence we are said *to believe and repent, to turn from our evil ways and to turn to the Lord, to cleanse and purifie our selves*. Hence likewise are those frequent commands in Scripture, *to amend our ways and doings, to wash our hearts from wickedness, to repent and turn our selves, and to make our selves new hearts, and new spirits*. So that all these causes, the Spirit of God, his Ministers, his Word, and we our selves, do all some way or other concur and contribute to this effect. God indeed is the principal, and hath so great an hand in this work from beginning to end, that all the rest are nothing in comparison, and we do well to ascribe to him the whole glory of it, *that no flesh may glory in his sight*: But nevertheless in strictness of speech, sufficiently warranted by Scripture, the Ministers of God, and the word of God, and we our selves do all *co-operate* some way or other to our conversion, and regeneration; and by ascribing to any of these such parts as they truly have in this work, God is not robbed of *any part* of the glory of his grace, much less of the *whole*. Much less is it the ascribing it *all* to our selves, whom we affirm to have *the least part* in it, not worthy to be mention'd, in comparison of *the riches of God's grace* towards us. And yet unless we do *something*, what can be the meaning of *making our selves new hearts, and new spirits*: Is it only that we should be *passive* to the *irresistible* operations of God's grace? that is, that we should not hinder, what we can neither hinder nor promote; that we should so demean our selves, as of necessity we must whether we will or no. So then *to make our selves new hearts and new spirits*, is to do nothing at all towards the hindrance or furtherance of this work; and if this be the meaning of it, it is a precept and exhortation just as fit for *stones*, as for *men*; that is, very improper for either.

2. *Objection.* But however, we do extenuate and lessen the grace of God, if there be any active concurrence and endeavours on our part towards this change. For answer to this, *three* things deserve to be consider'd.

First, It is very well worthy our consideration, that they who make this objection, have the confidence to pretend that *they* do not diminish the grace of God, by confining it to a very small part of mankind in comparison; nay, they will needs face us down, that by this very thing they do very much exalt and magnifie it, and that the grace of God is so much the greater, by how much the fewer they are that are partakers of it. But I hope they only mean that the grace is greater to themselves; (in which conceit there is commonly as much of envy as gratitude)

tude) but surely they cannot mean that the grace which is limited to a few, is greater in it self, and upon the whole matter, than that which is extended to a great many; it being a downright contradiction, to say that the grace of God is magnified by being confined. For at this rate of reasoning, the lesser it is, the greater it must be, and by undeniable consequence would be greatest of all, if it were none at all. So that it seems the grace of God may be extenuated in favour of our selves, but when we do so we must *say* we magnifie it.

Secondly, But to come close to the objection; tho' it be true, that if God's grace in our conversion do not do all, it does not do so much as if it did all; yet this is really no injury or dishonour to the grace of God; and tho' in some sense it doth extenuate it, it doth not in truth and reality take off from the glory of it. In my opinion, the grace and favour of a Prince is not the less in offering a pardon to a traytor, who puts forth his hand and gladly receives it, than if he forc'd it upon him whether he would or no. I am sure, it is in the first case much fitter to give it, and he on whom it is confer'd much better qualified to receive it. 'Tis no disparagement to a Prince's favour, that it is bestow'd on one who is in some measure qualified to receive it. But be it more or less in one case than the other, this is certain, that in both cases the man owes his life to the great grace and goodness of his Prince; and I cannot see how it lessens the grace, that the miserable object of it, the guilty and condemned person, was either by his humble submission, or thankful acceptance of it, in some degree better qualified to receive such a favour, than an obstinate refuser of it.

Thirdly, which is the principal consideration of all, We must take great heed, that while we endeavour to make God to do *all* in the conversion of sinners, we do not by this means charge upon him the ruin and destruction of impenitent sinners, which I doubt we should do, if we make the reason of their impenitency and ruin their utter impotency and disability to repent; and we certainly make this the reason of their impenitency and ruin, if there be no other difference but this between penitent and impenitent sinners, namely, that in the one God works repentance by an *irresistible* act of his power, so that he cannot but repent, and denies this grace to the other, without which he cannot possibly repent. But the Scripture chargeth the destruction of men upon themselves, and lays their impenitency at their own door. *O Israel! thou hast destroyed thy self; but in me is thy help*, Hosea 13. 9. But *where* is the *help*, when the grace absolutely necessary to repentance is denied? And how is *their destruction of themselves*, if it is unavoidable, let them do what they can? *Isa. 5. 3, 4.* God appeals to his people *Israel*, that nothing was wanting on his part, that was fit and necessary to be done, that they might bring forth the fruits of repentance, and better obedience: *And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge I pray you between me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* Is it true that God hath done all that was necessary to have brought them to repentance? Then if *irresistible* grace be necessary, he afforded them *that*; but *that* was not afforded them, because then they must unavoidably have repented, and there had been no cause for this complaint: If he did not afford it, but only the *outward means* of repentance without the *inward grace* (as some say;) then it is easy to judge why *they did not* repent; because *they could not*; and there seems to be no cause either of wonder, or complaint. Besides that it will be hard to justify that saying, *What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?* when it is acknowledged by the assertors of this doctrine, that the main thing was not done, and that without which all the rest signify'd nothing, leaving them under the same impossibility of repentance, as if nothing at all had been done to them.

But now upon *our* supposition, that *sufficient grace* was afforded to them, which they wilfully neglected to make use of, the reason and equity of this complaint is evident, and God is acquitted, as having done what was needful on his part, and the sinner justly condemned, for not concurring with the grace of God as

he might have done; which shews that we are not *meerly passive* in this work, but something is expected from us, after God hath done his part, which if we neglect to do, *our destruction is of our selves*. Whereas the contrary supposition, upon pretence of glorifying God's *grace*, by making him to do *all* in the conversion of sinners, indangers the honour of his *justice*, by laying the impenitency of sinners, and their ruin consequent upon it, at his door; which is to advance one attribute of God upon the ruin of another; whereas it is a fundamental principle of religion, to take care to reconcile the attributes and perfections of God to one another; for that is not a divine perfection, which contradicts any other perfection.

The 3d *Objection* is grounded upon that question of St. Paul, 1 Cor. 4. 7. *Who maketh thee to differ?* which they think impossible to be answer'd, if the efficacy of God's grace depend upon our concurrence and compliance with it. For, say they, when God offers his grace to two persons for their repentance, if the true reason why the one repents, and the other remains impenitent, be this, that the one complieth with this grace of God, and yieldeth to it, the other resists and stands out against it; then it is not the grace of God which makes the difference, for *that* is equal to both, but something in themselves, and so it is not God that makes them to differ, but they themselves.

But this question is impertinent to this case. The Apostle speaks it concerning spiritual gifts, upon account of which, they factiously admir'd some of the Apostles above others, and concerning *them* the question is very proper, *who maketh thee to differ?* Miraculous gifts were so order'd by God, that men were *meerly passive* in the receiving of them, and contributed nothing to the obtaining of them; and therefore if one had greater gifts than another, it was *meerly* the pleasure of God that made the difference. But the case is not the same in the graces of God's Spirit, towards the obtaining and improving whereof we our selves may contribute something; our Saviour having assured us, that *to him that bath, shall be given*. And here the question is not proper, nor is it true *that the grace of God makes all the difference*. It is indeed the foundation of all the good that is in us: but our different improvement makes different attainments in grace and goodness. Among those to whom the talents were intrusted, what *made the difference* between the man *who wrapt his talent in the napkin, and buried it*, and those *who gained double by theirs*, but that *the one* improv'd the grace confer'd on him, *the other* neglected it, and this without any manner of reflection upon, or diminution of the grace of God, or any danger from St. Paul's question, *who maketh thee to differ?* Put the case a pardon is offer'd to two Malefactors, the one accepts, the other refuses it; *their own choice makes the difference between them*; but he that is saved is nevertheless beholden to the King's pardon for his life, and it were a senseless ingratitude in him, because he accepts the pardon, when the other refuseth it, to say that he did not owe his life to the grace and favour of his Prince, but might thank himself for it; whereas he that was in a capacity to accept a pardon, was wholly due to the clemency of his Prince, who offered it to him when he no wise deserved it. In this case the thing plainly appears as it is, by which every man may see, that it is against common sense to pretend that the grace of God is destroyed, if there be any compliance on our part with it; that it is no grace, if it be not forc'd upon us, and we be not *meerly passive* in the reception of it. I proceed in the

Second place, to give a clear state of this matter, so as is most agreeable to the doctrine of the holy Scriptures, and the essential attributes and perfections of God. In order to which, I will give you a short view of the several opinions concerning this matter. And there are two *extream*, and two *middle* opinions, concerning the operation of God's grace in the conversion of a sinner.

The *first* of the *extream* opinions is that which all this while I have been arguing against, namely, that all that are converted and regenerated, are wrought upon in an *irresistible* manner, and are *meerly passive* in it; and that those who are not thus wrought upon, their repentance and conversion is *impossible*. What the inconveniencies of this opinion are, I have shewed at large.

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The other *extream* opinion is, that none are thus wrought upon, because it would be a violence and injury to man's natural liberty; but that *sufficient grace* is offered to all, one time or other, who live under the Gospel, which they may comply with or resist, and consequently if they be not brought to repentance, their impenitency and ruin is the effect of their own choice, and God is *free from the blood of all men*. But this opinion, tho' infinitely more reasonable than the other, seems not to have any necessary foundation either in Scripture or reason. There are some instances in Scripture of the conversion of men after a very *violent*, if not an *irresistible* manner, which seems to be attributed to a particular *predestination* of God; as *that* of St. Paul, who says of himself, *Gal. i. 15.* that *he was separated from his mother's womb to that work to which he was called*; and the manner of his conversion was answerable to such a *predestination*; and there is nothing in reason against this, since it is no injury to any man to be made good and happy against his will.

The two *middle* opinions are these.

First, That *irresistible grace* is afforded to *all the elect*, and *sufficient grace* to all others who live under the Gospel (for of those only we speak, the case of others being peculiar, and belonging to the extraordinary mercy of God) but then they say, that none of those to whom this *sufficient grace* is afforded shall effectually comply with it and be saved. This opinion seems more moderate, and hath this advantage in it, that it acquits the justice of God in the condemnation of those, who having *sufficient grace* afforded to them, did yet notwithstanding continue impenitent; but yet it hath two great inconveniencies in it.

First, That this supposition is to no purpose, as to any real effect for the salvation of men, because not one person more is saved, notwithstanding this *universal sufficient grace*, which they say is afforded to all; for they take it for granted it is never *effectual*; and then it seems very unreasonable to suppose, that a means *sufficient* to its end should *universally* prove *ineffectual*; nay, on the contrary, it is next to a demonstration against the *sufficiency* of a means, if *perpetually* and *in all instances* it fails of its end. This would tempt any man to think that surely there is some defect in it, or something that hinders the efficacy of it; if being *perpetually* and *generally* afforded, it doth *perpetually* and *universally* miscarry, without so much as *one instance* among so many millions to the contrary. So that this opinion seems rather to be contriv'd for a colour and shelter against some absurdity, which men know not how to avoid otherwise, than to serve any good purpose, or to be embraced for the truth and probability of it.

The other *middle* opinion is, that some are converted in an *irresistible* manner, when God pleaseth, and whom he designs to be extraordinary examples, and instruments for the good of others, and that *sufficient grace* is afforded to others, which is *effectual* to the salvation of *many*, and *rejected* by a *great many*. And this avoids all the inconveniency of the other opinion, and is evidently most agreeable both to the tenor of Scripture and to the best notions which men have concerning the attributes and perfections of God, and gives greatest encouragement to the endeavours of men. It agrees very well with the solemn declarations of Scripture, that God is not wanting on his part, to afford men sufficient means to bring them to repentance; that he *desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live*; that he *would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth*; that he *would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*; that *mens destruction is of themselves*. And this makes all the exhortations and motives of Scripture to repentance to be of some force and significance, and gives encouragement to the resolutions and endeavours of men to become better. This clearly acquits the justice of God in the condemnation of impenitent sinners, and fixeth the reason of their ruin upon their own choice. This perfectly reconciles the operation and assistance of God's grace in our conversion and regeneration, in our sanctification and perseverance in a good course, with the concurrence of our own endeavours, and makes those plain texts of Scripture have some sense and significance in them; *Work out your*
own

own salvation; Repent and turn your selves from all your evil ways; Make ye new hearts and new spirits. These are more than a thousand metaphors to convince a man, that we may and ought to do something towards our repentance and conversion. And if any man be sure that we neither do nor can do anything in this work, then I am sure that these texts signifie nothing. Finally, those texts which speak most clearly of the necessity of the divine grace and assistance, to our doing of any thing that is spiritually good, do suppose something to be done on our part. That of our Saviour, *without me you can do nothing*, implies that *with his grace and assistance we can*. That of St. Paul, *I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me*, implies, that what we do *by the strength of Christ* is truly *our own act*; *I am able to do all things*. And this does not in the least prejudice nor obscure the glory of God's grace. St. Paul it seems knew very well how to reconcile these two, and to give the grace of God its due, without rejecting all concurrence of our own industry and endeavour, *1 Cor. 15. 10. But by the grace of God I am what I am; and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain*; not because it was irresistible, and he *meerly passive* in the reception of it; but because he did *concur* and *co-operate* with it. So he tells us, *his grace that was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*. So that our concurrence and endeavour in the doing of any thing that is good, does not derogate from the grace of God, provided that we ascribe the good which we do to the assistance of divine grace, to which it is incomparably more due than to our own activity and endeavour. And so St. Paul does, *I labour'd abundantly; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*.


So that the glory of God's grace may be advanced to its due pitch, without asserting that we are *meerly passive* to the operations of it. God's grace may be *abundantly bestowed* upon us, and yet we may *labour abundantly*; *God may work in us to will and to do*, and yet *we may work out our own salvation*. I have done with the *second doctrine* grounded upon this metaphor of *a new creature*.

S E R M O N LV.

The Fourth
Sermon on
this Text.Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Necessity,
in order to Justification and Salvation.

GALAT. VI. 15.

For in Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision; but a new Creature.

N discoursing on these words, that which I was last upon was to shew, that this metaphor of a *new creature* doth not import what some would extend it to, and that so as to found doctrines of great consequence upon the single strength of this, and otherlike metaphors, *viz.* such doctrines as these *three*.

First, That as the creation was by an *irresistible* act of the divine power, so is this *new creation*, or the conversion of a sinner.

Secondly, That as creatures were *meerly passive* in their being made, and contributed nothing at all thereto, no more do we to our conversion and regeneration.

Thirdly, That as the creation was *in an instant*, only by the powerful word of God, so this new creation is *in an instant*, and admits of *no degrees*. The *two* first of these I have spoken to, and shewed, that as they had no necessary foundation in this and the like metaphors of Scripture, so they are contrary to reason and experience, and the plain and constant tenor of Scripture, which is the rule and measure of Christ's doctrine. I proceed now to consider the

Third doctrine which is grounded upon this metaphor, namely, that as the creation of the several ranks and orders of creatures was *in an instant*, and effected by the powerful word of God, saying *let such and such things be*, and immediately they were; so this *new creation* is *in an instant*, and admits of *no steps and degrees*. And this doctrine is nothing else but a farther pursuit of the metaphor; and admitting the *two* former doctrines to be true, and well grounded upon this metaphor, this *third doctrine* follows well enough from them, for it is agreeable enough, that that which is effected by an *irresistible* act of omnipotence, without any concurrence or operation on our part, should be done *in an instant* and *all at once*. Not that this is necessary, but that it is reasonable; for why should omnipotence use delays, and take time and proceed *by degrees* in the doing of that, which with the same ease it can do *at once*, and *in an instant*; especially considering how well this suits with the other metaphors of Scripture, as well as with this of *a new creation*, *viz.* the metaphor of *regeneration* and *resurrection*. A child is born *at once*, and the dead shall be raised *in a moment*, *in the twinkling of an eye*.

But notwithstanding all this plausible appearance and conspiracy of metaphors, I shall shew that this doctrine of the conversion and regeneration of a sinner being effected *in an instant*, and *all at once*, is not well grounded either upon Scripture, or experience. Not but that God can do so if he pleaseth, and work this change in some much sooner and quicker than in others; but there is nothing either in Scripture or experience to persuade us that this is the

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usual, much less the *constant* and *unalterable* method of God's grace in the conversion of a sinner, to bring it about *in an instant*, without any sensible *steps* and *degrees*.

But for the full clearing of this matter, I shall proceed by these steps.

First, I shall shew upon what mistaken grounds and principles this doctrine relies; besides the metaphors already mention'd, which I have shewn to be of no force to prove the thing.

Secondly, I shall plainly shew what *regeneration* is; by which it will appear, that it is not *necessarily* effected *in an instant*, and *at once*, but admits of *degrees*.

Thirdly, That it is evidently so in experience of the *ordinary* method of God's grace, both in those who are regenerated by a pious and religious education, and in those who are reclaimed from a vicious course of life.

Fourthly, That all this is very consonant and agreeable to what the Scripture plainly and constantly declares concerning it.

First, I shall discover several mistakes upon which this doctrine is grounded, besides the metaphors already mention'd, and which I have shewn to be of no force to prove the thing, *viz.* That regeneration is *in an instant*, and admits of *no degrees*. As,

1. That *regeneration* and *sanctification* are not only different expressions, but do signify *two* things really different. But this is a gross mistake; for *regeneration* and *sanctification* are but different expressions of the self-same thing; for *regeneration* is a metaphor which the Scripture useth to express our *translation* and *change from one state to another*, from a state of sin and wickedness, to a state of grace and holiness, as if we were *born over again*, and were the *children of another father*, and from being *the children of the devil*, did become *the children of God*; and *sanctification* is our being *made holy*, our being *purified* and *cleansed* from sin and impurity. And hence it is that *regeneration* and *sanctification* are attributed to the same causes, principal, and instrumental, to *the spirit of God*, and to *the word of God*; we are said *to be born of the Spirit*, and *to be sanctified by the holy Ghost*; *to be begotten of the word of truth*, and *to be sanctified by the truth*, which is *the word of God*. So that the Scripture speaks of them as the same thing; and they must needs be so; for if *sanctification* be the making of us holy, and *regeneration* maketh us *holy*; then *regeneration* is *sanctification*.

2. It is said, that *regeneration* only signifies our *first entrance* into this state, and *sanctification* our *progress* and *continuance* in it. But this likewise is a great mistake. For tho' it be true, that *regeneration* doth signify our *first entrance* into this state, yet it is not true, that it *only* signifies that; for it is used likewise in Scripture to signify our *continuance* in that state; for Christians are said to be the *children of God*, and consequently in a *regenerate* state, not only in the *instant* of this change, but during their *continuance* in it. Besides that our *first change* is as well call'd our *sanctification*, as our *progress* and *continuance* in a state of holiness. So that neither in this is there any difference between *regeneration* and *sanctification*. They do both of them signify both our *first entrance* into an holy state, and our *continuance* and *progress* in it; tho' *regeneration* do more frequently denote the *making* of this change, and our *first entrance* into it.

3. It is said that one of the main differences between *regeneration* and *sanctification* is this, that *regeneration* is incapable of *degrees*, and all that are regenerate are *equally* so, and one regenerate person is not *more or less* regenerate than another; whereas *sanctification* is a *gradual progress* from one degree of holiness to another, and of them that are truly sanctified and holy, one may be *more sanctified* and *more holy* than another. But this likewise is a meer fancy and imagination, without any real ground. For as an *unregenerate* state does plainly admit of *degrees*, so likewise doth the *regenerate*, and for the same reason. That an *unregenerate* state admits of *degrees*, is evident, in that some unregenerate persons are *more wicked* than others, and thereby *more the children of wrath*, and

and *the Devil*, than others, which are the Scripture expressions concerning the degrees of mens wickedness and impiety. In like manner, they that are *more holy*, and *more like God*, are *more the children of God*; and to be *more a child of God*, is surely to be more *regenerate*, that is, *more renewed after the image of God*, which consists in *righteousness and true holiness*. So that it is a meer precarious assertion, and evidently false to affirm, that *regeneration* doth not admit of degrees, and that one is not *more regenerate* than another.

4thly, and lastly, They ground this conceit upon the doctrine of the schools, which teach, that in *regeneration* and *conversion* all the habits of grace are infused, *simul & semel, together and at once*. I confess I have no regard, much less a veneration for the doctrine of *the schools*, where it differs from that of *the holy Scriptures*, which say not one word of *infused habits*, which yet are much talk'd of in divinity; and to speak the truth, these words serve only to obscure the thing. For to say that in *conversion* the *habits* of all graces and virtues are *infused together and at once*, is to say, that in an instant men that were vicious before in several kinds, are by an Omnipotent act of God's grace, and by a new principle infused into them, endued with the habits of the contrary graces and virtues, and are as chaste, and temperate, and just, and meek, and humble, as if by the frequent practice of these virtues they had become so. That this *may be*, and *sometimes* is, I am so far from denying, that I believe it to be so. Some men, by an extraordinary power of God's grace upon their hearts, are *suddenly changed*, and strangely reclaimed from a very wicked and vicious, to a very religious and virtuous course of life, and that which others attain to by slower degrees, and great conflicts with themselves, before they can gain the upper hand of their lusts, these arrive at *all on a sudden*, by a mighty resolution wrought in them by the power of God's grace, and as it were a new bias and inclination put upon their souls, equal to an habit gain'd by long use and custom. This God *sometimes* does, and when he does this, it may in some sense be call'd *the infusion of the habits of grace and virtue together, and at once*; because the man is hereby endowed with a principle of equal force and power with habits that are acquir'd by long use and practice. A strong and vigorous faith is the principle and root of all graces and virtues, and may have such a powerful influence upon the resolutions of our minds, and the government of our actions, that from this principle all graces and virtues may spring and grow up by degrees into habits; but then this principle is not *formally* but *virtually*, in the power and efficacy of it, *the infusion of the habits of every grace and virtue*; and even in those persons in whom this change is so *suddenly*, and as it were *at once*, I doubt not but that the habits of several graces and virtues are afterwards attained by the frequent practice of them, in the virtue of this powerful principle of the faith of the Gospel, as I shall shew in the progress of this discourse. And this I doubt not was very frequent and visible in many of the first converts to christianity; especially of those, who from the abominable idolatry and impiety of heathenism were gained to the christian religion. The Spirit of God did then work very miraculously, as well in the cures of spiritual as of bodily diseases. But then to make this the rule and standard of God's ordinary proceedings in the conversion and regeneration of men, is equally unreasonable, as still to expect miracles for the cure of diseases; and 'tis certain in experience, that this is not God's *ordinary* method in the conversion of sinners, as I shall fully shew by and by.

Secondly, I shall shew what *regeneration* is, by which it will plainly appear, that there is no necessity that it should be effected in an instant, and at once, but that it will admit of degrees. I do not deny that it may be in an instant, and at once. The power of God is able to do this, and *sometimes* does it *very thoroughly*, and *very suddenly*. But the question is, whether there be a necessity it should be so, and *always* be so: Now *regeneration* is the change of a man's state, from a state of sin, to a state of holiness; which because it is an entrance upon a new kind or

course of life, it is fitly resembled to *regeneration*, or a *new birth*; to a *new creation*, the man being as it were *quite chang'd* or *made over again*, so as not to be, as to the main purpose and design of his life, *the same man* he was before. This is a plain sensible account of the thing, which every one may easily understand. Now there is nothing in reason, why a man may not *gradually* be changed and arrive at this state *by degrees*; as well as after this change is made, and he arrived at this state of a regenerate man, he may *by degrees* grow and improve in it. But *the latter* no man doubts of, but that a man that is in a state of grace, may grow and improve in grace; and there is as little reason to question why a man may not come to this state *by degrees*, as well as *leap into it at once*.

All the difficulty I know of in this matter, is a meer nicety, that there is *an instant*, in which every thing begins, and therefore *regeneration* is in *an instant*; so that the instant before the man arrived at this state, it could not be said *that he was regenerate*; and the instant after he is in this state, it cannot be denied that he is so. But this is idle subtilty, just as if a man should prove that an House was built *in an instant*, because it could not be said *to be built*, 'till the instant it was *finish'd*; tho' for all this, nothing is more certain than that it was built *by degrees*. Or, suppose the time of arriving at man's estate be at *one and twenty*, does it from hence follow, that a man does not grow to be a man *by degrees*, but is made a man *in an instant*; because just before *one and twenty* he was not at man's estate, and just then he was? Not but that God, if he please, can make a man *in an instant*, as he did *Adam*; but it is not necessary from this example, that all men should be made so, much less does it follow from this vain subtilty. This is just the case. All the while the man is tending towards a regenerate state, and is struggling with his lusts, 'till by the power of God's grace, and his own resolution he get the victory; all the while he is under the sense and conviction of his sinful and miserable state, and sorrowing for the folly of his past life, and coming to an effectual purpose and resolution of changing his course; and it may be several times thrown back by the temptations of the devil, and the power of evil habits, and the weakness and instability of his own purpose; 'till at last, by the grace of God following and assisting him, he comes to a firm resolution of a better life, which resolution governs him for the future; I say all this while, which in some persons is longer, in others shorter, according to the power of evil habits, and the different degrees of God's grace afforded to men; all this time the work of *regeneration* is going on; and tho' a man cannot be said *to be in a regenerate state*, 'till that very instant that the principle of Grace and his good resolution have got the upper hand of his lusts, yet it is certain for all this, that the work of *regeneration* was not effected *in an instant*. This is plainly and truly the case, as I shall shew in the

Third particular I propounded, namely, that it is evident from experience of the *ordinary* methods of God's grace, both in those who are regenerate by a pious and religious education, and those who are reclaimed from a vitious course of life.

The first sort, namely those who are brought to goodness by a religious and virtuous education; these (at least, so far as my observation reacheth) make up a very considerable part of the number of the *regenerate*, that is, of *good men*. And tho' it be certain, considering the universal corruption and degeneracy of humane nature, that there is a real change made in them, by the operation of God's grace upon their minds, yet it is as certain in experience, that this change is made in very many, by very *silent* and *insensible degrees*, 'till at length the seeds of religion, which were planted in them by a good education, do visibly prevail over all the evil inclinations of corrupt nature, so as to sway and govern the actions of their lives; and when the principles of grace and goodness do *apparently prevail*, we may conclude them *to be in a regenerate state*, tho' perhaps very few of these can give any account of the particular time

time and occasion of this change. For things may be seen in their *effect*, which were never very sensible in their *cause*. And it is very reasonable, that such persons who never lived in any evil course, should escape those pangs and terrours which unavoidably happen unto others, from a course of actual sin, and the guilt of a wicked life; and if there be any such persons as I have described, who are in this *gradual* and *insensible* manner regenerated, and made good, this is a demonstration, that there is *no necessity* that this change should be *in an instant*, it being so frequently found to be otherwise in experience.

And as for others, who are visibly reclaimed from a notorious wicked course, in these we likewise frequently see this change *gradually* made, by strong impressions made upon their minds, most frequently by the word of God; sometimes by his providence, whereby they are convinc'd of the evil and danger of their course, and awakened to consideration, and melted into sorrow and repentance, and perhaps exercis'd with great terrours of conscience, till at length by the grace of God, they come to a fixt purpose and resolution of forsaking their sins, and turning to God; and after many strugglings and conflicts with their lusts, and the strong byas of evil habits, this resolution assisted by the grace of God doth effectually prevail, and make a real change both in the temper of their minds, and the course of their lives; and when this is done, and not before, they are said to be *regenerate*. But all the while this was a doing, the *new man* was forming, and the work of regeneration was going on; and it was perhaps a very considerable time from the first beginning of it, till it came to a fixt and settled state. And this I doubt not in experience of most persons who are reclaimed from a vitious course of life, is found to be the usual and ordinary method of God's grace in their conversion. And if so, it is in vain to pretend that a thing is done *in an instant*, which by so manifold experience is found to take up a great deal of time, and to be effected *by degrees*.

And whereas some men are pleased to call all this the *preparatory* work to regeneration, but not the regeneration it self, this is an idle contention about words. For if these preparations be a degree of goodness, and a gradual tendency towards it, then the work is begun by them, and during the continuance of them, is all the while a doing; and tho' it be hard to fix the point or instant when a man just arrives at this state, and not before, yet it is very sensible when a man is in it, and this change when it is really made, will soon discover it self by plain and sensible effects.

Fourthly, and lastly, All this is very agreeable to the plain and constant tenour of Scripture. *Isa. 1. 16.* where the Prophet exhorts to this change, he speaks of it as a *gradual* thing, *Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well;* that is, break off evil and vitious habits, and gain the contrary habits of virtue and goodness by the exercise of it. The Scripture speaks of some, as farther from a state of grace than others, *Jer. 13. 23. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil;* plainly declaring the great difficulty, equal almost to a natural impossibility, of reclaiming those to goodness, who have been long habituated to an evil course. And the Scripture speaks of some as nearer to a state of grace than others. Our Saviour tells the young man in the Gospel, who said *he had kept the commands of God from his youth;* that *he was not far from the kingdom of God.* But now, if by an *irresistible* act of God's power, this change be made *in an instant*, and cannot otherwise be made, how is one man nearer to a state of grace, or farther from it than another? If all that are made good, must be made so *in an instant* or not at all, then no man is nearer being made good than another; for if he were nearer to it, he might sooner be made so; but that cannot be, if all must be made good *in an instant*; for sooner than *that* no man can be made so. If the similitude of our *being dead in sins and trespasses* be strictly taken, no man is

nearer a resurrection to *a new life* than another; as he that died but a week ago, is as far from being raised to life again, as he that died a thousand years ago; the resurrection of both requires an *Omnipotent* act, and to *that* both are equally easy.

The two Parables of our Saviour, *Matth. 13: 31, 33.* are by many Interpreters understood of the *gradual* operation of grace upon the hearts of men. *That wherein the kingdom of heaven is liken'd to a grain of mustard-seed, which being sown was the least of all seeds, but by degrees grew up to be the greatest of herbs; and to leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened:* intimating the progress of God's grace, which *by degrees* diffuseth it self over the whole temper of a man's mind, into all the actions of his life. To be sure the parable of *the seed which fell upon good ground*, does represent the efficacy of the word of God, accompanied by his grace, upon the minds of men, and *that* is said to *spring up, and increase, and to bring forth fruit with patience*; which surely does express to us the *gradual* operation of God's word and grace in the renovation and change of a man's heart and life.

The new Testament indeed speaks of the sudden change of many upon the first preaching of the Gospel, which I have told you before is not a standard of the ordinary method of God's grace; the not considering of which, hath been a great cause of all the mistakes in this matter. 'Tis true, those which were thus converted to the belief of the Gospel, their faith was a *virtual principle* of all grace and virtue, tho' not *formally the habit* of every particular grace. St. Paul himself who was a prime instance of this kind, speaks as if he acquir'd the grace of contentment by great consideration, and diligent care of himself in several conditions; not as if the habit of this grace had been infused into him at once, *Phil. 5. 11, 12. I have learn'd in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound; every where and in all things I am instructed, both to be full, and to be hungry; both to abound and to suffer need.* And thus I have done with the *first* thing I propounded to consider, namely, the true and just importance of this metaphor of *the new creation*. The two particulars which remain, I shall, by God's assistance, finish in my next discourse.

S E R M O N LVI.

*The Fifth
Sermon on
this text.*

Of the Nature of Regeneration, and its Necessity,
in order to Justification and Salvation.

GALAT. vi. 15.

For in Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision availeth any thing, nor Uncircumcision; but a new Creature.



THE *observation* I am still upon from these words is this, *viz.* That in the Christian religion nothing will avail to our justification, but the renovation of our hearts and lives, exprest here by a *new creature*. In treating of which, I propos'd the doing of *three* things.

First, To shew the true import of this metaphor of *a new creature*.

Secondly, To shew that this is the great condition of our justification; And, *Thirdly*, That it is highly reasonable that it should be so.

In treating of the *first* of these particulars, I have consider'd some doctrines as founded upon this metaphor, which I have shewn at large not only to have no foundation in Scripture, or reason, or experience; but also to be very unreasonable in themselves, and contrary to the plain and constant tenour of Scripture, and to the ordinary method of God's grace in the regeneration of men, whether by a religious and virtuous education, or in those who are reclaim'd from a notorious wicked course of life. And that I have so long insisted upon this argument, and handled it in a more contentious way than is usual with me, did not proceed from any love to controversy, which I am less fond of every day than other; but from a great desire to put an end to these controversies, and quarrellings in the dark, by bringing them to a clear state and plain issue, and likewise to undeceive good men concerning some current notions and doctrines, which I do really believe to be dishonourable to God, and contrary to the plain declarations of Scripture, and a cause of great perplexity and discomfort to the minds of men, and a real discouragement to the resolutions and endeavours of becoming better. Upon which considerations I was strongly urgent to search these doctrines to the bottom, and to contribute what in me lay, to the rescuing of good men from the disquiet and entanglement of them.

I will conclude this matter with a few cautions, not unworthy to be remember'd by us; That we would be careful so to ascribe all *good* to God, that we be sure we ascribe nothing to him that is *evil*, or any ways unworthy of him; That we do not make him the sole author of our Salvation, in such a way, as will unavoidably charge upon him the final impenitency and ruin of a great part of mankind; That we do not so magnify the grace of God, as to make his precepts and exhortations signifie nothing; such as these, *Make ye new hearts, and new spirits, Strive to enter in at the strait gate*; where, if by the *strait gate* be meant the difficulty of our *first entrance* upon a religious course, that is of our conversion and regeneration, I cannot imagine how it is possible to reconcile our being *meerly passive* in this work, and doing *nothing at all* in it, with our Saviour's precept of *striving to enter in at the strait gate*; unless to be *very active*, and to be *meerly passive* about the same thing be all one, and an *earnest contention and endeavour* be the same thing with *doing nothing*. Again, That we do not make
the

the utmost degeneracy and depravation which men ever arrived at by the greatest abuse of themselves, and the most vile and wicked practices, the standard of an unregenerate state, and of the common condition of all men by nature. And lastly, That we do not make some particular instances in Scripture, of the strange and sudden conversion of some persons (as namely, of St. *Paul* and the Jaylor, in the *Acts*) the common rule and measure of every man's conversion; so that unless a man be as it were struck down by a light and power from heaven, and taken with a fit of trembling, and frightened almost out of his wits, or find in himself something equal to this, he can have no assurance of his conversion; whereas a much surer judgment may be made of the sincerity of a man's conversion, by the real effects of this change, than by the manner of it. This our Saviour hath taught us, by that apt resemblance of *the operation of God's Spirit to the blowing of the wind*, of the original cause whereof, and of the reason of its ceasing or continuance, and why it blows stronger or gentler, this way or that way, we are altogether ignorant; but *that it is*, we are sensible from the sound of it, *John 3. 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound of it, but canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* The effects of God's holy Spirit in the regeneration of men are sensible, tho' the manner and degrees of his operation upon the souls of men are so various, that we can give no account of them; by which, one wou'd think our Saviour had sufficiently caution'd us, not to reduce the operations of God's grace and holy Spirit in the regeneration of men, to any certain rule or standard, but chiefly to regard the sensible effects of this secret work upon the hearts and lives of men.

And after all, it is in vain to contend by any arguments against clear and certain experience. If we plainly see that many are *insensibly* changed, and made good by pious education, *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*, and that some who have long lived in a prophane neglect and contempt of religion, are by the secret power of God's word and holy Spirit, upon calm consideration, without any great terrours and amazement, visibly changed and brought to a better mind and course; it is in vain in these cases to pretend that this change is not real, because the manner of it is not answerable to some instances which are recorded in Scripture, or which we have observ'd in our experience, and because these persons cannot give such an account of the time and manner of their conversion, as is agreeable to these instances; which is just as if I should meet a man beyond Sea, whom I had known in *England*, and would not believe that he had cross'd the Seas, because he said he had a smooth and easy passage; and was wafted over by a gentle wind, and could tell no stories of storms and tempests.

And thus I have fully and faithfully endeavour'd to open to you the just importance of this phrase or expression in the text, of *the new creature*, or *the new creation*. I proceed to the

Second particular I propounded, namely, that the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is according to the terms of the Gospel, and the Christian religion, the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that this is the same in sense and substance with those phrases in the parallel texts to this, of *faith perfected by charity*, and of *keeping the commandments of God*.

That according to the terms of the Gospel, the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, is the real renovation of our hearts and lives, is plain, not only from this text, which affirms, that in the Christian religion nothing will avail us but *the new creature*; but likewise from many other clear texts of Scripture; and this, whether by justification be meant our first justification upon our faith and repentance, or our continuance in this state, or our final justification by our solemn acquittal and absolution at the great day, which in Scripture is called *salvation*, and *eternal life*.

That this is the condition of our first justification, that is, of the forgiveness of our sins, and our being received into the grace and favour of God, is plain from

from all those texts, where this change is express'd by our *repentance* and *conversion*, by our *regeneration* and *renovation*, by our *purification* and *sanctification*, or by any other terms of the like importance. For under every one of these notions, this change is made the condition of the forgiveness of our sins, and acceptance to the favour of God.

Under the notion of *repentance and conversion*, Acts 2. 38. *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.* Acts 3. 19. *Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.* Upon the same account, the penitent acknowledgment of our sins, which is an essential part of repentance, is made a condition of the forgiveness of them, 1 John 1. 9. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Under the notion of *regeneration and renovation*, 2 Cor. 5. 17. *If any man be in Christ, that is, become a true Christian, which is all one with being in a justified state, he is a new creature; old things are past away, behold all things are become new.* Tit. 3. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. where the Apostle declares at large, what change is requir'd to put us into a justified state, and to entitle us to the inheritance of eternal life; *for we our selves were also sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, that is, not for any precedent righteousness of ours, for we were great sinners, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* So that the change of our former temper, and conversion and regeneration, and the renewing of the holy Ghost, is antecedently necessary to our justification, that is, to the pardon of our sins, and our restitution to the favour of God, and the hope of eternal life. So likewise under the notion of *purification and sanctification*, 1 Cor. 6. 9, 10, 11. where the Apostle enumerates several sins and vices, which will certainly exclude men from the favour and kingdom of God, from which we must be cleansed, before we can be justified or saved; *know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.* 2 Cor. 6. 17, 18. where the Apostle likewise makes our *purification* a condition of our being received into the favour of God, and reckon'd into the number of his children; *touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.* And that by *not touching the unclean thing*, is here certainly meant our sanctification and purification from sin, is evident from what immediately follows in the beginning of the next chapter; *having therefore these promises, dearly beloved! let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; that is, having this encouragement, that upon this condition we shall be received to the favour of God, let us purify our selves, that we may be capable of this great blessing.*

And our continuance in this state of grace and favour with God, depends upon our perseverance in holiness; for *if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.*

And lastly, this is also the condition of our final justification, and absolution by the sentence of the great day, Mat. 5. 8. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* John 3. 3. *Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.* Heb. 12. 14. *Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.* 1 John 3. 3. the Apostle there speaking of the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, tells us what we must do, if ever we hope to be partakers of it; *every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*

And this condition here mention'd in the text, of our being *new creatures*, is the same in sense and substance with those expressions which we find in the two parallel texts to this, where *faith which is perfected by charity*, and *keeping the commandments of God*, are made the condition of our justification and acceptance with God. Gal. 5. 6. *In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith, which is consummate, or made perfect by charity*; and 1 Cor. 7. 19. *Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of the commandments of God*. It is evident that the design and meaning of these three texts is the same, and therefore these three expressions of *the new creature*, and of *faith perfected by charity*, and of *keeping the commandments of God*, do certainly signify the same thing. That *the new creature* signifies the change of our state, from a state of disobedience and sin, to a state of obedience and holiness of life, I have shewn at large; and the Apostle explaining this *new creation*, most expressly tells us, Ephes. 2. 10. *We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them*; and Colos. 3. 10, 12, 13, 14. where the Apostle tells them, that they ought to give testimony of their renovation, and having put on *the new man*, by all the fruits of obedience and goodness; *ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him. Put on therefore as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; and above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection*. And the Apostle St. Peter tells us, that our regeneration, which he calls *sanctification of the spirit*, is *unto obedience*, 1 Pet. 1. 2. So that our renovation consisteth in the principle and practice of obedience, and a good life; and what is this but *faith perfected by charity*? And *charity* the Apostle tells us is *the fulfilling of the law*; and what is *the fulfilling of the law*, but *keeping the commandments of God*? And *keeping the commandments of God*, or at least a sincere resolution of obedience, when there is not time and opportunity for the tryal of it, is in Scripture as expressly made a condition both of our present and final justification and acceptance with God, as *faith* is, and in truth is the same with a *living and operative faith*, and a *faith that is consummate, and made perfect by charity*. Acts 10. 34, 35. *Of a truth, I perceive (saith St. Peter) that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him*; which speech does as plainly, as words can do any thing, declare to us upon what terms all mankind, of what condition or nation soever, may find acceptance with God. Rom. 2. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. *Who will render to every man according to his deeds, to them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, eternal life: but to them who are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile: but glory, honour, and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile*. As to our acceptance with God, and the rewards of another world, it matters not whether *Jew or Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised*; that which maketh the difference, is *obeying the truth, or obeying unrighteousness; working good, or doing evil*; these are the things which will avail to our justification, or condemnation at the great day. To the same purpose is that saying of the Apostle to the *Hebrews*, chap. 5. 9. that *Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*.

I will conclude this matter with two remarkable sayings, the one towards the beginning, the other towards the end of the Bible, to satisfy us that this is the tenour of the holy Scriptures, and the constant doctrine of it from the beginning to the end. Gen. 4. 7. It is God's speech to Cain, *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?* And Rev. 22. 14. *Blessed are they, who do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the City*.

And thus I have done with the *second* thing I propounded, which was to shew, that according to the terms of the Gospel, and the Christian religion, the real reno-

renovation of our hearts and lives is the great condition of our justification and acceptance with God, and that this in sense and substance is the same with *faith made perfect by charity, and keeping the commandments of God.*

The *third* and last particular remains to be spoken to, namely, That it is highly reasonable that this should be the condition of our justification, and acceptance to the favour of God; and that upon these *two* accounts.

First, For the honour of God's holiness.

Secondly, In order to the qualifying of us for the favour of God, and the enjoyment of him, for the pardon of our sins, and the reward of eternal life.

First, For the honour of God's holiness. For should God have received men to his favour, and rewarded them with eternal glory and happiness, for the meer belief of the Gospel, or a confident persuasion that Christ would save them without any change of their hearts and lives, without *repentance from dead works, and fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life*; he had not given sufficient testimony to the world of his love to holiness and righteousness, and of his hatred of sin and iniquity. The Apostle tells us, that God in the justification of a sinner *declares his righteousness*; but should he justify men upon other terms, this would not *declare his righteousness* and love of holiness, but rather an indifferency, whether men were good and righteous or not. For a bare assent to the truth of the Gospel, without the fruits of holiness and obedience, is not *a living*, but *a dead faith*, and so far from being acceptable to God, that it is an affront to him; and a confident reliance upon Christ for salvation, while we continue in our sins, is not a justifying faith, but a bold and impudent presumption upon the mercy of God, and the merits of our Saviour; who indeed *justifies the ungodly*, that is, those that *have been* so, but not those that *continue so*. And if God should pardon sinners, and reward them with eternal life, upon any other terms than upon our becoming *new creatures*, than upon such a *faith* as is *made perfect by charity*, that is, by *keeping the commands of God*; this would be so far from *declaring his righteousness*, and being a testimony of his hatred and displeasure against sin, that it would give the greatest countenance and encouragement to it imaginable.

Secondly, It is likewise very reasonable, that such a faith, that makes us *new creatures*, and is *perfected by charity, and keeping the commandments of God*, should be the condition of justification, in order to the qualifying of us for the pardon of our sins, and the reward of eternal life; that is, for the favour of God, and for the enjoyment of him. To forgive men upon other terms, were to give countenance and encouragement to perpetual rebellion and disobedience. That man is not fit to be forgiven, who is so far from being sorry for his fault, that he goes on to offend; he is utterly incapable of mercy, who is not sensible that he hath done amiss, and resolved to amend. No Prince ever thought a rebellious subject capable of pardon upon lower terms than these. It is in the nature of the thing unfit that an obstinate offender should have any mercy or favour shewn to him.

And as without repentance and resolution of better obedience, we are unfit for forgiveness, so much more for a reward; as we cannot expect God's favour, so we are incapable of the enjoyment of him without holiness. Holiness is the image of God, and makes us like to him; and till we be *like him*, we cannot *see him*, we can have no enjoyment of him. All delightful communion and agreeable society is founded in a similitude of disposition and manners, and therefore so long as we are unlike to God in the temper and disposition of our minds, and in the actions and course of our lives, neither can God take pleasure in us, nor we in him, but there will be a perpetual jarring and discord between him and us; and tho' we were in heaven, and seated in the place of the blessed, yet we should not, nay we could not be happy; because we should want the necessary materials and ingredients of happiness. For it is with the soul in this respect, as it is with the body; tho' all things be easy without us, and no cruelty be exercis'd upon us, to give torment and

vexation to us, yet if we be inwardly diseased, we may have pain and anguish enough, we may be as it were upon the rack, and feel as great torment from the inward disorder of our humours, as if we were tortur'd from without. So it is with the soul; sin and vice are internal diseases, which do naturally create trouble and discontent, and nothing but diversion, and the variety of objects and pleasures which entertain men in this world, hinders a wicked man from being out of his wits, whenever he reflects upon himself; for all the irregular appetites and passions, lust, and malice, and revenge, are so many *furies* within us, and tho' there were no Devil to torment us, yet the disorder of our own minds, and the horrors of a guilty conscience would be a hell to us, and make us extremely miserable in the very regions of happiness. So that it is necessary that our *faith* should be *made perfect by charity*, and that we should become *new creatures*; not only from the arbitrary constitution and appointment of God, but from the nature and reason of the thing; because nothing but this can dispose us for that blessedness, which God hath promis'd to us, and prepared for us. Faith consider'd abstractedly from the fruits of holiness and obedience, of goodness and charity, will bring no man into the favour of God. All the excellency of faith is, that it is the principle of a good life, and furnisheth us with the best motives and arguments thereto, the promises and threatenings of the Gospel; and therefore in heaven, when we come to *sight* and *enjoyment*, *faith* and *hope* shall cease, but *charity never faileth*; for if it should, heaven would cease to be heaven to us, because it is the very frame and temper of happiness; and if this disposition be not wrought in us in this world, we shall be altogether incapable of the felicity of the other.

You see then what it is that must recommend us to the favour of God; the real renovation of our hearts and lives, after the image of him that created us. This must be repaired in us, before ever we can hope to be restored to the grace and favour of God, or to be capable of the reward of eternal life. And what could God have done more reasonable, than to make these very things the terms of our salvation, which are the necessary causes and means of it? How could he have dealt more mercifully and kindly with us, than to appoint *that* to be the condition of our happiness, which is the only qualification that can make us capable of it.

I will conclude all with that excellent passage in the wisdom of *Solomon*, Chap. 6. 17, 18. *The very true beginning of wisdom is the desire of discipline, and the care of discipline is love, and love is the keeping of her laws, and taking heed to her laws is the assurance of incorruption.* The summ of what I have said upon this argument amounts to this, that upon the terms of the Gospel we can have no hope of the forgiveness of our Sins, and eternal salvation, unless our nature be renewed, and the image of God, which is defaced by sin, be repaired in us, and we be *created in Christ unto good works*; That no faith will avail to our justification and acceptance with God, but that which is *made perfect by charity*, that is, by *fulfilling of the law*, and *keeping the commandments of God*; by sincere obedience and holiness of life, which notwithstanding the unavoidable imperfection of it in this state, will nevertheless be accepted with God, through the merits of our blessed Saviour, *who hath loved us, and wash'd us from our sins in his own blood.* *To whom be glory for ever.* Amen.

S E R M O N LVII.

The First
Sermon on
this Text.

The Danger of all known Sin, both from the Light of Nature and Revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them.



IN the beginning of this Chapter, the Apostle declares that he was particularly designed and appointed by God to preach the Gospel to the world, and that he was not ashamed of his ministry, notwithstanding all the reproach and persecution it was attended withal, and notwithstanding the slight and undervaluing opinion which the world had of the doctrine which he preached, it being *to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness*; for tho' this might reflect some disparagement upon it in the esteem of sensual and carnal men, yet to those who weighed things impartially, and consider'd the excellent end and design of the christian doctrine, and the force and efficacy of it to that end, it will appear to be an instrument admirably fitted by the wisdom of God, for the reformation and salvation of mankind.

And therefore he tells us, *verse 16.* that how much soever it was despised by that ignorant and inconsiderate age, *he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; because it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*; that is, the doctrine of the Gospel sincerely believed and embraced, is a most proper and powerful means, designed by God for the salvation of mankind; not only of the Jews, but also of the Gentiles.

The revelations which God had formerly made, were chiefly restrained to the Jewish nation; but this great and last revelation of the Gospel, was equally calculated for the benefit and advantage of all mankind. The Gospel indeed was first preached to the Jews, and from thence publish'd to the whole world; and as this doctrine was design'd for the general benefit of mankind, so it was very likely to be effectual to that end, being an instrument equally fitted for the salvation of the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews; *it is the power of God to salvation to every one that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.*

And to shew the efficacy of it, he instanceth in *two* things, which render it so powerful and effectual a means for the salvation of mankind.

First, Because therein the grace and mercy of God, in the justification of a sinner, and declaring him righteous, is so clearly revealed, *ver. 17.* *For therein is the righteousness of God revealed, from faith to faith, as it is written, the just shall live by faith.* This is very obscurely exprest, but the meaning of this text will be very much cleared, by comparing it with another in the *3d Chapter* of this epistle, *ver. 20, 21, 22, &c.* where the Apostle speaks more fully and expressly of the way of our justification by the faith of Jesus Christ, that is, by the belief of the Gospel. He asserts at the *20th* verse, that *by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God.* To this way of justification *by the deeds of the law*, he opposeth *the righteousness of God by the faith of*

Jesus Christ, to all, and upon all them that believe, which is the Gospel way of justification, ver. 21, 22. *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, which is by the faith of Jesus Christ, unto all, and upon all them that believe. The righteousness of God without the law is manifested*: that is, the way which God hath taken to justify sinners, and declare them righteous *without the deeds of the law*, that is, without observing the law of Moses, *is manifested*, that is, is clearly revealed in the Gospel, (which is the same with what the Apostle had said before, that *the righteousness of God is revealed in the Gospel*) *being witnessed by the law and the Prophets*, that is, the righteousness of God, or the justification of sinners by Jesus Christ, is clearly revealed in the Gospel, being also in a more obscure manner attested or foretold in the old Testament, which he calls *the law and the Prophets*; and this fully explains that difficult phrase of *the righteousness of God being revealed by the Gospel from faith to faith*; that is, by a gradual revelation, being more obscurely foretold in the old Testament, and clearly discovered in the new; so that these two passages are equivalent; *In the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith*; and *the righteousness of God without the works of the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the Prophets*. There is the first and more imperfect revelation of it, but the clear revelation of it is *in the Gospel*; this the Apostle calls *a revelation from faith to faith*, that is, from a more imperfect and obscure, to a more express and clear discovery and belief of it. And then the citation which follows is very pertinent, *as it is written, The just shall live by faith*; for this citation out of the old Testament plainly shews, that the way of justification by faith was there mentioned; or as our Apostle expresseth it, *was witnessed by the law and the Prophets*; and consequently that this was a gradual discovery, which he calls *a revelation from faith to faith*. *The just shall live by faith*, that is, good men shall be saved by their faith, shall be justified and esteemed righteous in the sight of God, and finally saved by their faith. And so the Apostle in the 5th Chapt. of this Epistle, ver. 18. calls our justification by the faith of the Gospel, *the justification of life*, in opposition to *condemnation and death*, which very well explains that saying of the Prophet, *the just shall live by faith*. I have been the longer upon this, that I might give some light to a very difficult and obscure text.

Secondly, The other instance whereby the Apostle proves the Gospel to be so powerful a means for the recovery and salvation of men is, that therein also the severity of God against impenitent sinners, as well as his grace and mercy in the justification of the penitent, is clearly revealed, ver. 18. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifested in them, for God hath shewn it unto them*. The first, viz. the grace of God in our justification and the remission of sins past, is a most proper and powerful argument to encourage us to obedience for the future; nothing being more likely to reclaim men to their duty, than the assurance of indemnity for past crimes; and the other is one of the most effectual considerations in the world to deter men from sin, that *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, &c.*

From which words I shall observe these *six* things.

First, The infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth plainly expose men to. *The wrath of God* is here said to be *revealed against the impiety and unrighteousness of men*.

Secondly, The clear and undoubted revelation which the Gospel hath made of this danger. *The wrath of God* against the sins of men, is said to be *revealed from heaven*.

Thirdly, That every wicked and vitious practice doth expose men to this great danger. *The wrath of God* is said to be *revealed against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men*.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, That it is a very great aggravation of sin, for men to offend against the light of their own minds. The Apostle here aggravates the impiety and wickedness of the heathen world, that they did not live up to the knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, which he calls *holding the truth in unrighteousness*.

Fifthly, The natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live wickedly, is a clear evidence of their *holding the truth in unrighteousness*. The Apostle therefore chargeth them with *holding the truth in unrighteousness*, because *that which may be known of God, is manifested in them, God having shewed it to them*.

Sixthly, and lastly, That the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the Gospel, against the impiety and wickedness of men, renders it a very powerful and likely means for the recovery and salvation of men. For the Apostle proves the Gospel of Christ to be the power of God to salvation, because *therein the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness*; that is, against all impenitent sinners.

I shall at the present, by God's assistance, speak to the *three* first of these particulars.

First, The infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth plainly expose men to. If there be a God that made the world, and governs it, and takes care of mankind, and hath given them laws and rules to live by, he cannot but be greatly displeased at the violation and transgression of them; and certainly the displeasure of God is the most dreadful thing in the world, and the effects of it the most insupportable. The greatest fear is from the greatest danger, and the greatest danger is from the greatest power offended and enraged; and this is a consideration exceeding full of terror, that by a sinful course we expose ourselves to the utmost displeasure of the great and terrible God; for *who knows the power of his wrath? and who may stand before him when once he is angry? According to thy fear, so is thy wrath* (saith the Psalmist.) There is no passion in the mind of man that is more boundless and infinite than our *fear*, it is apt to make wild and frightful representations of evils, and to imagine them many times greater than really they are; but in this case our imagination must fall short of the truth and terror of the thing; for the wrath of God doth far exceed the utmost jealousy and suspicion of the most fearful and guilty conscience; and the greatest sinner under his greatest anguish and despair, cannot apprehend or fear it more than there is reason for; *according to thy fear, so is thy wrath*.

If it were only the wrath and displeasure of *men* that the sinner were exposed to, there might be reason enough for fear, because *they* have many times power enough to crush an offender, and cruelty enough to fret every vein of his body, and to torment him in every part: but the wrath and vengeance of *men* bears no comparison with the wrath of God. Their passions are many times strong and blustering; but their arm is but short, and their power small, *they have not an arm like God, nor can they thunder with a voice like him*. They may design considerable harm and mischief to us; but it is not always in the power of their hand to wreak their malice upon us, and to execute all the mischief which their enraged minds may prompt them to; the very utmost they can design, is to torment our bodies, and to take away our lives, and when they have designed this, they may *die* first, and *return to their dust, and then their thoughts perish with them*, and all their malicious designs are at an end; they are always under the power and government of a superiour being, and can go no farther than he gives them leave. However if they do their worst, and shoot all their arrows at us, we cannot stand at the mark long, their wrath will soon make an end of us, and set us free from all their cruelty and oppression; *they can but kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do*; their most refined malice cannot reach our *spirits*, no weapon that can be formed by the utmost art of man can pierce and wound our *souls*; they can drive us out of *this* world, but they cannot pursue us into the *other*; so that at the worst the grave will be a sanctuary to us, and death a safe retreat from all their rage and fury.

But

But the wrath of God is not confined by any of these limits. *Once hath God spoken* (saith David by an elegant Hebrew phrase to express the certainty of the thing) *once hath God spoken, and twice I have heard this, that power belongs to God*, Psal. 62. 11. *He hath a mighty arm*, and when he pleaseth to stretch it out, none may stay it, nor say unto him, *what dost thou*; he hath power enough to make good all his threatenings, whatever he says he is able to effect, and whatever he purposeth he can bring to pass; for *his council shall stand, and he will accomplish all his pleasure*; he need but speak the word, and it is done; for we can neither resist his power, nor fly from it; if we fly to the utmost parts of the earth, his hand can reach us, for *in his hand are all the corners of the earth*; if we take refuge in the grave (and we cannot do that without his leave) thither his wrath can follow us; and there it will overtake us; for his power is not confined to *this world*, nor limited to our *bodies*; *after he hath kill'd, he can destroy both body and soul in hell*.

And this is that *wrath of God* which is revealed from heaven, and which the Apostle chiefly intends, viz. the misery and punishment of another world, this God hath threaten'd sinners withal; to express which to us, as fully as words can do, he heaps up in the next chapter so many weighty and terrible words, *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil*; in opposition to that great and glorious reward of *immortality and eternal life*, which is promised to a *patient continuance in well doing*.

So that *the wrath of God* which is here denounced against the *impiety and unrighteousness of men*, comprehends all the evils and miseries of this and the other world, which every sinner is in danger of whilst he continues impenitent; for as according to the tenour of the Gospel, *godliness hath the promises of this life, and of that which is to come*, so impenitency in sin exposeth men to the evils of both worlds, to the judgments of *the life that now is*, and to the endless and intolerable torments of *that which is to come*. And what can be more dreadful than the displeasure of an Almighty and Eternal Being? who can punish to the utmost, and *who lives for ever*, to execute his wrath and vengeance upon sinners; so that well might the Apostle say, *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*.

Consider this all ye that forget God, that neglect him, and live in continual disobedience to his holy and righteous laws; much more those who despise and affront him, and live in a perpetual defiance of him. *Will ye provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye stronger than he?* Think of it seriously, and forget him if you can, despise him if you dare; consider this, lest he take you into consideration, and rouse like a Lion out of sleep, and *tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver*. This is the first observation, the infinite danger that a wicked and sinful course doth expose men to, *the wrath of God*, which doth not only signify more than all the evils that we know, but than all those which the wildest fears and suspicions of our minds can imagine.

Secondly, The next thing observable, is the clear and undoubted revelation which the Gospel hath made of this danger, *the wrath of God is revealed, &c.* By which the Apostle intimates to us, that this was but obscurely known to the world before, at least in comparison of that clear discovery which the Gospel hath now made of it; so that I may allude to that expression in Job, which he applies to death and the grave, that *hell is naked before us, and destruction hath no covering*.

Not but that mankind had always apprehensions and jealousies of the danger of a wicked life, and sinners were always afraid of the vengeance of God pursuing their evil deeds, not only in this life, but after it too; and tho' they had turn'd the punishments of another world into ridiculous fables, yet the wiser sort of mankind could not get it out of their minds, that there was something real under them; and that *Ixion's wheel*, which by a perpetual motion carried him about; and *Sisyphus* his stone, which he was perpetually rolling up the hill, and when he had got it near the top tumbled down, and still created him a new

a new labour ; and *Tantalus* his continual hunger and thirst, aggravated by a perpetual nearness of enjoyment, and a perpetual disappointment ; and *Prometheus* his being chained to a rock, with an eagle or vulture perpetually preying upon his Liver, which grew as fast as it was gnawed ; I say even the wiser among the heathens lookt upon these as fantastical representations of something that was real, *viz.* the grievous and endless punishment of sinners, the not to be endured, and yet perpetually renewed torments of another world ; for in the midst of all the ignorance and degeneracy of the heathen world, mens consciences did accuse them when they did amiss, and they had secret fears and misgivings of some mighty danger hanging over them from the displeasure of a superior Being, and the apprehension of some great mischiefs likely to follow their wicked actions, which some time or other would overtake them ; which because they did not always in this world, they dreaded them in the next. And this was the foundation of all those superstitions, whereby the ancient Pagans endeavoured so carefully to appease their offended deities, and to avert the calamities which they feared they would send down upon them. But all this while they had no certain assurance by any clear and express revelation from God to that purpose, but only the jealousies and suspicions of their own minds, naturally consequent upon those notions which men generally had of God, but so obscured and depraved by the lusts and vices of men, and by the gross and false conceptions which they had of God, that they only serv'd to make them superstitious, but were not clear and strong enough to make them wisely and seriously religious. And to speak the truth, the more knowing and inquisitive part of the heathen world had brought all these things into great doubt and uncertainty, by the nicety and subtilty of disputes about them ; so that it was no great wonder, that these principles had no greater effect upon the lives of men, when their apprehensions of them were so dark and doubtful.

But the Gospel hath made a most clear and certain revelation of these things to mankind. It was written before upon mens hearts as the great sanction of the law of nature, but the impressions of this were in a great measure blurred and worn out, so that it had no great power and efficacy upon the minds and manners of men ; but now it is clearly discovered to us, *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven*, which expression may well imply in it these three things.

First, The clearness of the discovery ; *the wrath of God* is said to be *revealed*.

Secondly, The extraordinary manner of it ; it is said to be *revealed from heaven*.

Thirdly, The certainty of it ; not being the result of subtle and doubtful reasonings, but having a divine testimony and confirmation given to it, which is the proper meaning of *being revealed from heaven*.

First, It imports the clearness of the discovery. The punishment of sinners in another world is not so obscure a matter as it was before ; it is now expressly declared in the Gospel, together with the particular circumstances of it, namely, that there is another life after this, wherein men shall receive the just recompense of reward for all the actions done by them in this life ; that there is a particular time appointed, wherein God will call all the world to a solemn account, and those who are in their graves shall by a powerful voice be raised to life, and those who shall then be found alive shall be suddenly changed ; *when our Lord Jesus Christ*, the eternal and only begotten Son of God, who once came in great humility to save us, shall come again *in power, and great glory*, attended with *his mighty Angels*, and *all Nations shall be gathered before him*, and all mankind shall be separated into two companies, *the righteous* and *the wicked*, who after a full hearing, and fair tryal, shall be sentenced according to their actions, the one to *eternal life and happiness*, the other to *everlasting misery and torment*.

So that the Gospel hath not only declared the thing to us, that there shall be a future judgment; but for our farther assurance and satisfaction in this matter, and that these things might make a deep impresson, and strike a great awe upon our minds, God hath been pleased to reveal it to us with a great many particular circumstances, such as are very worthy of God, and apt to fill the minds of men with dread and astonishment, as often as they think of them.

For the circumstances of this judgment revealed to us in the Gospel, are very solemn and awful, not such as the wild fancies and imaginations of men would have been apt to have drest it up withal, such as are the fictions of the heathen Poets, and the extravagancies of *Mahomet*; which tho' they be terrible enough, yet they are withal ridiculous; but such as are every way becoming the Majesty of the great God, and the solemnity of the great day, and such as do not in the least favour of the vanity and lightness of humane imagination.

For what more fair and equal, than that men should be tried by a *man* like themselves, one of the same rank and condition, that had experience of the infirmities and temptations of humane nature? So our Lord tells us, that *the father hath committed all judgment to the son, because he is the son of man*, and therefore cannot be excepted against, as not being a fit and equal judge. And this *St. Paul* offers as a clear proof of the equitable proceedings of that day; *God* (says he) *hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained.*

And then what more congruous than that the Son of God, who had taken so much pains for the salvation of men, and came into the world for that purpose, and had used all imaginable means for the reformation of mankind; I say what more congruous, than that this very person should be honoured by God to sit in judgment upon the world, and to condemn those, who after all the means that had been tried for their recovery, would not repent and be saved. And what more proper, than that men, who are to be judged for *things done in the body*, should be judged *in the body*, and consequently that the resurrection of the dead should precede the general judgment?

And what more magnificent and suitable to this glorious solemnity, than the awful circumstances which the Scripture mentions of the appearance of this great judge; that he shall *descend from heaven* in great majesty and glory, attended with *his mighty Angels*, and that *every eye shall see him*; that upon his appearance, the frame of nature shall be in an agony, and the whole world in *flame and confusion*; that those great and glorious bodies of light shall be obscured, and by degrees extinguish'd; *the sun shall be darken'd, and the moon turned into blood, and all the powers of heaven shaken*; yea, *the heavens themselves shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements dissolve with fervent heat; the earth also, and all the works that are therein shall be burnt up.* I appeal to any man, whether this be not a representation of things very proper and suitable to *that great day*, wherein he who made the world shall come to judge it? and whether the wit of man ever devised any thing so awful, and so agreeable to the majesty of God, and the solemn judgment of the whole world? The description which *Virgil* makes of the judgment of another world, of *the Elisian Fields*, and *the infernal regions*, how infinitely do they fall short of the majesty of the holy Scripture, and the description there made of *heaven and hell*, and of *the great and terrible day of the Lord!* so that in comparison they are childish and trifling; and yet perhaps he had the most regular and most govern'd imagination of any man that ever lived, and observed the greatest decorum in his characters and descriptions. But who can declare *the great things of God*, but *he to whom God shall reveal them!*

Secondly, This expression of *the wrath of God* being revealed from heaven, doth not only imply the clear discovery of the thing, but likewise something extraordinary in the manner of the discovery. It is not only a natural impresson upon the minds of men, that God will severely punish sinners; but he

hath

hath taken care that mankind should be instructed in this matter in a very particular and extraordinary manner. He hath not left it to the reason of men to collect it from the consideration of his attributes and perfections, his holiness and justice, and from the consideration of the promiscuous administration of his providence towards good and bad men in this world; but he hath been pleased to send an extraordinary person from heaven, on purpose to declare this thing plainly to the world: *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven*; that is, God sent *his own Son from heaven*, on purpose to declare *his wrath* against all obstinate and impenitent sinners, that he might effectually awaken the drowsy world to repentance; he hath sent an extraordinary Ambassador into the world, to give warning to all those who continue in their sins, of the judgment of the great day, and to summon them before his dreadful tribunal. So the Apostle tells the *Athenians*, Acts 17. 30, 31. *Now he commandeth all men every where to repent; because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

Thirdly, This expression implies likewise the certainty of this discovery. If the wrath of God had only been declared in the discourses of wise men, tho' grounded upon very probable reason, yet it might have been brought into doubt by the contrary reasonings of subtle and disputing men: But to put the matter out of all question, we have a divine testimony for it, and God hath confirmed it from heaven, by signs and wonders and miracles, especially by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; for *by this he hath given assurance unto all men, that it is he who is ordained of God to judge the quick and dead.*

Thus you see in what respect *the wrath of God* is said to be *revealed from heaven*, in that the Gospel hath made a more clear, and particular, and certain discovery of the judgment of the great day, than ever was made to the world before. I proceed to the

Third observation, which I shall speak but briefly to; namely, that every wicked and vitious practice doth expose men to this dreadful danger. The Apostle instanceth in the two chief heads to which the sins of men may be reduced, *impiety* towards God, and *unrighteousness* towards men; and therefore he is to be understood to denounce *the wrath of God* against every particular kind of sin, comprehended under these general heads; so that no man that allows himself in any impiety and wickedness of life can hope to escape the wrath of God. Therefore it concerns us to be entirely religious, and *to have respect to all God's Commandments*; and to take heed that we do not allow our selves in the practice of any kind of sin whatsoever, because the living in any one known sin is enough to expose us to the dreadful wrath of God. Tho' a man be just and righteous in his dealings with men, yet if he neglect the worship and service of God, this will certainly bring him under condemnation: and on the other hand, tho' a man may serve God never so diligently and devoutly, yet if he be defective in righteousness toward men, if he deal falsely and fraudulently with his neighbour, he shall not escape the wrath of God; tho' a man pretend to never so much piety and devotion, yet if he be *unrighteous*, *he shall not inherit the kingdom of God*; if any man *over-reach and defraud his brother in any matter*, *the Lord is the avenger of such*, saith St. Paul, 1 Thes. 4. 6.

So that here is a very powerful argument to take men off from all sin, and to engage them to a constant and careful discharge of their whole duty toward God and men, and to reform whatever is amiss either in the frame and temper of their minds, or in the actions and course of their lives; because any kind of wickedness, any one sort of vitious course, lays men open to the vengeance of God, and the punishments of another world; *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men*; there is no exception in the case, we must forsake all sin, subdue every lust, *be holy in all manner of conversation*, otherwise we can have no reasonable hopes of escaping *the wrath of God*, and the damnation of Hell. But to proceed to the

Fourth observation; namely, that it is a very great aggravation of sin, for men to offend against the light of their own minds. The Apostle here aggravates the wickedness of the heathen world, that they did not live up to that knowledge which they had of God, but contradicted it in their lives, *holding the truth of God in unrighteousness*. And that he speaks here of the heathen, is plain from his following discourse, and the character he gives of those persons of whom he was speaking, *who hold the truth of God in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewn it unto them*; and this he proves, because those who were destitute of divine revelation, were not without all knowledge of God, being led by the sight of this visible world, to the knowledge of an invisible Being and power that was the author of it, ver. 20, 21. *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his Eternal Power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse; because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God. (Hæc est summa delicti, nolle agnoscere, quem ignorare non possis, saith Tertullian to the heathen; "This is the height of thy fault, not to acknowledge him, whom thou canst not but know, not to own him, of whom thou canst not be ignorant if thou wouldst;) neither were thankful; they did not pay those acknowledgments to him which of right were due to the Author of their Being, and of all good things; but became vain in their imaginations; ἑμαυτάδυσαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν, they were fool'd with their own reasonings. This he speaks of the Philosophers who in those great arguments of the Being and providence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the rewards of another world, had lost the truth by too much subtilty about it, and had disputed themselves into doubt and uncertainty about those things which were naturally known; for nimium altercando veritas amittitur; "Truth is many times lost by too much contention and dispute about it; and by too eager a pursuit of it, men many times outrun it; and leave it behind; ver. 22. and professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. Men never play the fools more, than by endeavouring to be over-subtle and wise; ver. 23. and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things; here he speaks of the sottishness of their idolatry, whereby they provoked God to give them up to all manner of lewdness and impurity, ver. 24. wherefore God also gave them up unto uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts; and again, ver. 26. for this cause God gave them up to vile affections; and then he enumerates the abominable lusts and vices they were guilty of, notwithstanding their natural acknowledgment of the Divine Justice, ver. 32. who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.* By all which it appears that he speaks of the Heathen, who offended against the natural light of their own minds, and therefore were without excuse. *Quam sibi veniam sperare possunt impietatis suæ, qui non agnoscunt cultum ejus, quem prorsus ignorari ab hominibus fas non est? saith Lactantius, "How can they hope for pardon of their impiety, who deny to worship that God, of whom it is not possible mankind should be wholly ignorant?*

So that this is *To hold the truth in unrighteousness*, injuriously to suppress it, and to hinder the power and efficacy of it upon our minds and actions; for so the word κατέχευ sometimes signifies, as well as *to hold fast*; and this every man does, who acts contrary to what he believes and knows; he offers violence to the light of his own mind, and does injury to the truth, and keeps that a prisoner, which would set him free; *ye shall know the truth (says our Lord) and the truth shall make you free.*

And this is one of the highest aggravations of the sins of men, to offend against knowledge, and that light which God hath set up in every man's mind. If men wander and stumble in the dark, it is not to be wonder'd at; many times it is unavoidable, and no care can prevent it: but in the light

it is expected men should look before them, and discern their way. That natural light which the Heathen had, tho' it was but comparatively dim and imperfect, yet the Apostle takes notice of it as a great aggravation of their idolatrous and abominable practices. Those natural notions which all men have of God, if they had in any measure attended to them, and govern'd themselves by them, might have been sufficient to have preserved them from dishonouring the Deity, by *worshipping creatures instead of God*; the common light of nature was enough to have discovered to them the evil of those lewd and unnatural practices, which many of them were guilty of, but they *detained and suppress the truth most injuriously*, and would not suffer it to have its natural and proper influence upon them; and this is that which left them *without excuse*, that from the light of nature they had knowledge enough to have done better, and to have preserved them from those great crimes which were so common among them.

And if this was so great an aggravation of the impiety and wickedness of the heathen, and left them *without excuse*, what apology can be made for the impiety and unrighteousness of christians, who have so strong and clear a light to discover to them their duty, and the danger of neglecting it, to whom *the wrath of God is plainly revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*? The truths of the Gospel are so very clear and powerful, and such an improvement of natural light, that men must use great force and violence to suppress them, and to hinder the efficacy of them upon their lives. And this is a certain rule, by how much the greater our knowledge, by so much the less is our excuse, and so much the greater punishment is due to our faults. So our Lord hath told us, *Luke 12. 47. That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.* And *John 9. 41. If ye were blind* (says our Saviour to the Jews) *ye should have no sin.* So much ignorance as there is of our duty, so much abatement of the wilfulness of our faults: but *if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation*, says the Apostle to the Hebrews, Chap. 10. 26, 27. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth*; implying that men cannot pretend ignorance for their faults, after so clear a revelation of the will of God, as is made to mankind by the Gospel.

And upon this consideration it is, that our Saviour doth so aggravate the impenitency and unbelief of the *Jews*, because it was in opposition to all the advantages of knowledge, which can be imagined to be afforded to mankind, *John 15. 22, 23, 24. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin*; that is, in comparison their sin had been much more excusable; *but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me, hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen, and hated both me and my Father.* How is that? Our Saviour means, that they had now sinned against all the advantages of knowing the will of God, that mankind could possibly have: at once opposing natural light, which was the dispensation of the *Father*; and the clearest revelation of God's will, in the dispensation of the Gospel by *his Son*; *Now have they both seen and hated both Me and my Father.*

The two remaining observations I shall reserve to another opportunity.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N LVIII.

The Danger of all known Sin, both from the Light of Nature and Revelation.

ROM. i. 18, 19.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them.



Have handled *four* of the observations which I rais'd from these words; and shall now proceed to the other *two* that remain.

The *Fifth* observation was, That the natural knowledge which men have of God, if they live contrary to it, is a sufficient evidence of *their holding the truth of God in unrighteousness*. For the reason why the Apostle chargeth them with this, is *Because that which may be known of God is manifest, in that God hath shewed it unto them*.

There is a natural knowledge of God, and of the duty we owe to him, which the Apostle calls τὸ γνωστὸν τῷ Θεῷ, *that of God which is obvious to be known* by the light of nature, and is as much as is absolutely necessary for us to know. There is something of God that is incomprehensible, and beyond the reach of our understandings; but his *Being and essential perfections* may be known, which he calls his *eternal power and Godhead*; these he tells us are *clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made*; that is, the creation of the world is a plain demonstration to men, of the *Being and power* of God; and if so, then *God is naturally known to men*; the contrary whereof Socinus positively maintains, tho' therein he be forsaken by most of his followers; an opinion, in my judgment, very unworthy of one, who, not without reason, was esteemed so great a master of reason; and (tho' I believe he did not see it) undermining the strongest and surest foundation of all religion, which, when the natural notions of God are once taken away, will certainly want its best support. Besides that by denying any natural knowledge of God, and his essential perfections, he freely gives away one of the most plausible grounds of opposing the doctrine of the Trinity. But because this is a matter of great consequence, and he was a great man, and is not to be confuted by contempt, but by better reason, if it can be found; I will consider his reasons for this opinion, and return a particular answer to them.

First, He says that if the knowledge of God were natural, it would not be of *faith*; but the Apostle says, that *we must believe that he is*. The force of which argument, if it have any, lies in this, that the object of faith is divine revelation, and therefore we cannot be said to *believe* what we *naturally know*. The schoolmen indeed say so; but the Scripture useth the word *faith* more largely, for a *real persuasion* of any thing, whether grounded upon sense, or reason, or divine revelation. And our Saviour's speech to *Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed*, does sufficiently intimate, that a man may *believe* what he *sees*; and if so, what should hinder, but that a man may be said to *believe* what he *naturally knows*; that is, be really persuaded that there is a God from *natural light*?

Secondly,

Secondly, His next argument is, because the same Apostle concludes *Enoch* to have believed God, because he pleased God, *and without faith it is impossible to please him*: From whence he says it is certain that men may be without this belief, which if it be *natural* they cannot. Indeed if the Apostle had said, that whoever believes a God, must of necessity obey and please him, then the inference had been good, that all men do not naturally believe a God, because it is certain they do not please him: but it is not good the other way, no more than if a man should argue thus, that because whoever acts reasonably, must be endowed with reason, therefore men are not naturally endowed with reason. For as men may naturally be endowed with reason, and yet not always make use of it; so men may naturally know and believe a God, and yet not be careful to please him.

His *third* argument is, that the Scripture says that there are some that do not believe a God, for which he cites that of *David*, *the fool hath said in his heart there is no God*; which certainly proves, that bad men live so, as if they believed there were no God; nay, it may farther import, that they endeavour as much as they can, to stifle and extinguish the belief of a God in their minds, and would gladly persuade themselves there is no God, because it is convenient for them there should be none; and whether *David* meant so or not, it is very probable that some may arrive to that height of impiety, as for a time at least, and in some moods, to disbelieve a God, and to be very confident of the arguments on that side. But what then? Is the knowledge and belief of a God therefore not natural to mankind? Nature it self, as constant and uniform as it is, admits of some irregularities and exceptions, in effects that are meerly natural, much more in those which have something in them that is voluntary, and depends upon the good or bad use of our reason and understanding; and there is no arguing from what is *monstrous*, against what is *natural*. It is natural for men to have five fingers upon a hand, and yet some are born otherwise; but in voluntary agents, that which is natural may be perverted, and in a great measure extinguish'd in some particular instances; so that there is no force at all in this objection.

His *fourth* and last argument is, that there have not only been particular persons, but whole nations who have had no sense, nor so much as suspicion of a deity. This I confess were of great force, if it were true; and for the proof of this, he produceth the instance of *Brasil* in *America*. But I utterly deny the matter of fact and history, and challenge any man to bring good testimony, not only of any nation, but of any city in the world, that ever were *professed Atheists*.

I know this was affirmed of some part of *Brasil*, by some of the first discoverers, who yet at the same time owned, that these very people did most expressly believe the immortality of the Soul, and the rewards and punishments of another life; opinions which no man can well reconcile with the denial and disbelief of a deity. But to put an end to this argument, later and more perfect discoveries have found this not to be true, and do assure us upon better acquaintance with those barbarous people, that they are deeply possess'd with the belief of *one supream God, who made and governs the world*.

Having thus given a particular answer to *Socinus* his arguments against the natural knowledge of a God, I will now briefly offer some arguments for it. And to prove that the knowledge and belief of a God is natural to mankind, *my*

First argument shall be from the universal consent, in this matter, of all nations in all ages. And this is an argument of great force, there being no better way to prove any thing to be natural to any kind of being, than if it be generally found in the whole kind. *Omnium consensus naturæ vox est*, "the consent of all is the voice of nature, saith *Tully*. And indeed by what other argument can we prove that reason, and speech, and an inclination to society are natural to men; but that these belong to the whole kind?

Secondly, Unless the knowledge of God and his essential perfections be natural, I do not see what sufficient and certain foundation there can be of revealed religion. For unless we naturally know God to be a Being of all perfection, and consequently that whatever he says is true, I cannot see what divine revelation

tion can signify. For God's revealing or declaring such a thing to us, is no necessary argument that it is so, unless antecedently to this revelation we be possessed firmly with this principle, that whatever God says is true. And whatever is known antecedently to revelation, must be known by natural light, and by reasonings and deductions from natural principles. I might further add to this argument, that the only standard and measure to judge of divine revelations; and to distinguish between what are true, and what are counterfeit, are the natural notions which men have of God, and of his essential perfections.

Thirdly, If the notion of a God be not natural, I do not see how men can have any natural notion of the difference of moral good and evil, just and unjust. For if I do not naturally know there is a God, how can I naturally know that there is any law obliging to the one, and forbidding the other? All law and obligation to obedience, necessarily supposing the authority of a superiour Being. But the Apostle expressly asserts, that *the Gentiles* who were destitute of a revealed law, *were a law unto themselves*; but there cannot be a natural law obliging mankind, unless God be naturally known to them.

And this *Socinus* himself in his discourse upon this very argument is forced to acknowledge. "In all men (says he) there is naturally a difference of just, and unjust, or at least there is planted in all men an acknowledgment that just ought to be prefer'd before unjust, and that which is honest, before the contrary; and this is nothing else but the word of God within a man, which whoever obeys, in so doing obeys God, tho' otherwise he neither know nor think there is a God; and there is no doubt but he that thus obeys God, is accepted of him. So that here is an acknowledgment of a natural obligation to a law, without any natural knowledge of a superior authority; which I think cannot be; and which is worse, that a man may obey God acceptably, without knowing and believing there is a God; which directly thwarts the ground of his first argument, from those words of the Apostle, *without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God*, that is, he that will be religious and please God, *must believe that he is*: so hard is it for any man to contradict nature, without contradicting himself.

Fourthly, My last argument I ground upon the words of the Apostle in my text, *that which may be known of God, is manifested in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. Is manifest in them, ἐν αὐτοῖς among them*. God hath sufficiently manifested it to mankind. And which way hath God done this? by revelation? or by the natural light of reason? He tells us at the 20th ver. *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen*, that is, God, who in himself is invisible, ever since he hath created the world, hath given a visible demonstration of himself, that is, of *his eternal power and Godhead, being understood by the things which are made*. The plain sense of the whole is, that this wise and wonderful frame of the world, which cannot reasonably be ascribed to any other cause but God, is a sensible demonstration to all mankind, of an eternal and powerful Being that was the author and framer of it. The only question now is, whether this text speaks of the knowledge of God by particular revelation, or by natural light and reason, from the contemplation of the works of God? *Socinus* having no other way to avoid the force of this text, will needs understand it of the knowledge of God by the revelation of the Gospel. His words are these; "The Apostle therefore says in this place, that the eternal Godhead of God, that is, that which God would always have us to do (for *the Godhead* is sometimes taken in this sense) and his eternal power, that is, his promise which never fails, (in which sense he said a little before that the Gospel is the power of God) these I say, which were never seen by men, that is, were never known to them since the creation of the world, are known by his works, that is, by the wonderful operation of God, and divine men, especially of Christ and his Apostles. These are his very words, and now I refer it to any indifferent judgment, whether this be not a very forced and constrained interpretation of this text; and whether that which I have before given, be not infinitely more free and natural, and every way

way more agreeable to the obvious sense of the words, and the scope of the Apostle's argument. For he plainly speaks of the *heathen*, and proves them to be *inexcusable*, because *they held the truth in unrighteousness*, and having a natural knowledge of God, from the contemplation of his works, and the things which are made, *they did not glorify him as God*. And therefore I shall not trouble myself to give any other answer to it; for by the absurd violence of it in every part, it confutes it self more effectually than any discourse about it can do.

I have been the larger upon this, because it is a matter of so great consequence, and lies at the bottom of all religion. For the natural knowledge which men have of God, is, when all is done, the surest and fastest hold that religion hath on human nature. Besides, how should God judge that part of the world who are wholly destitute of divine revelation, if they had no natural knowledge of him, and consequently could not be under the direction and government of any law? For *where there is no law there is no transgression*; and where men are guilty of the breach of no law, they cannot be judged and condemned for it; for *the judgment of God is according to truth*.

And now this being established, that men have a natural knowledge of God; if they contradict it by their life and practice, they are guilty of *detaining the truth of God in unrighteousness*. For by this argument the Apostle proves the *heathen* to be guilty of *holding the truth in unrighteousness*, because notwithstanding the natural knowledge which they had of God *by the things which are made*, they lived in the practice of gross idolatry, and the most abominable sins and vices.

And this concerns us much more, who have the glorious light of the Gospel added to the light of nature. For if they who offended against the light of nature, were liable to the judgment of God, of how much sorer punishment shall we be thought worthy, if we neglect those infinite advantages which the revelation of the Gospel hath superadded to natural light? He hath now set our duty in the clearest and strongest light that ever was afforded to mankind, so that if we will not now believe and repent, there is no remedy for us, but we must *die in our sins*; *if we sin wilfully, after so much knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin*; but *a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume us*.

The sum of what hath been said on this argument, is briefly this; that men have a natural knowledge of God, and of those great duties which result from the knowledge of him; so that whatever men say and pretend, as to the main things of religion, *the worship of God, and justice and righteousness towards men*, setting aside divine revelation, we are all naturally convinc'd of our duty, and of what we ought to do, and those who live in a bad course, need only be put in mind of what they naturally know, better than any body else can tell them, that they are in a bad course: so that I may appeal to all wicked men, from *themselves*, rash, and heated, and intoxicated with pleasure and vanity, transported and hurried away by lust and passion; to *themselves*, serious and composed, and in a cool and considerate temper. And can any sober man forbear to follow the convictions of his own mind, and to resolve to do what he inwardly consents to as best? Let us but be true to our selves, and obey the dictates of our own minds, and give leave to our own conscience to counsel us, and tell us what we ought to do, and we shall be *a law to our selves*. I proceed to the

Sixth and last observation, namely, that the clear revelation of the wrath of God in the Gospel, against the impiety and unrighteousness of men, is one principal thing, which renders it so very powerful and likely a means for the salvation of mankind. For the Apostle instanceth in *two* things, which give the Gospel so great an advantage to this purpose, the *mercy* of God to penitent sinners, and his *severity* toward the impenitent; both which are so fully and clearly revealed in the Gospel. *The Gospel is the power of God to salvation, to every one that believeth, because therein the righteousness of God is revealed*; that is, his great

great grace and mercy in the justification and pardon of sinners by Jesus Christ, which I have already shewn to be meant by *the righteousness of God*, by comparing this with the explication which is given of *the righteousness of God*, Chap. 3. ver. 22.

The other reason which he gives of the Gospel's being *the power of God to salvation*, is the plain declaration of the severity of God toward impenitent sinners, *because therein also the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. The force of which argument will appear, if we consider these following particulars.

First, That the declarations of the Gospel in this matter are so plain and express.

Secondly, That they are very dreadful and terrible.

Thirdly, That there is no safety or hope of impunity for men that go on and continue in their sins.

Fourthly, That this argument will take hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retain its force upon the minds of men, when all other considerations fail, and are of little or no efficacy. And,

Fifthly, That no religion in the world can urge this argument with that force and advantage that Christianity does.

First, That the declarations of the Gospel in this matter are most plain and express; and that not only against sin and wickedness in general, but against particular sins and vices; so that no man that lives in any evil and vicious course, can be ignorant of his danger. Our Lord hath told us in general, what shall be the doom of the workers of iniquity, yea, tho' they may have owned him, and made profession of his name: *Mat. 7. 21. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, &c. then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity. Matt. 13. 49, 50. So shall it be at the end of the world, the Angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Matth. 25. 46. The wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. John 5. 28, 29. The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. Rom. 2. 6. St. Paul tells us that there is a day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil. 2 Thes. 1. 7, 8, 9. that the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, with his mighty Angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* Nothing can be more plain and express than these general declarations of the wrath of God against sinners; that there is a day of judgment appointed, and a judge constituted to take cognizance of the actions of men, to pass a severe sentence, and to inflict a terrible punishment upon the workers of iniquity.

More particularly our Lord and his Apostles have denounced the wrath of God against particular sins and vices. In several places of the New Testament, there are catalogues given of particular sins, the practice whereof will certainly shut men out of the kingdom of heaven, and expose them to the wrath and vengeance of God. *1 Cor. 6. 9, 10. Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. So likewise, Gal. 5. 19, 20, 21. The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings,*

revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in times past, that they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Col. 3. 5, 6. *Mortifie therefore your members upon earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry, for which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.* Rev. 21. 8. *The fearful and unbelieving, (that is, those who rejected the christian religion, notwithstanding the clear evidence that was offer'd for it, and those who out of fear should apostatize from it,) The fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, (that is, those who were guilty of unnatural lusts, not fit to be named) and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars (that is, all sorts of false and deceitful and perfidious persons) shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*

And not only these gross and notorious sins, which are such plain violations of the law and light of nature; but those wherein mankind have been apt to take more liberty, as if they were not sufficiently convinced of the evil of them; as *the resisting of civil authority*, which the Apostle tells us, they that are guilty of, *shall receive to themselves damnation*, Rom. 13. 2. *Prophane swearing in common conversation*, which St. James tells us brings men under the danger of *damnation*, Ch. 5. 12. *Above all things, my brethren, swear not, lest ye fall under condemnation.* Nay, our Saviour hath told us plainly, that not only for *wicked actions*, but for *every evil and sinful word*, men are obnoxious to the judgment of God. So our Lord assures us, Mat. 12. 36, 37. *I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.* He had spoken before of that great and unpardonable sin of *blaspheming the holy Ghost*; and because this might be thought great severity for evil words, he declares the reason more fully, because words shew the mind and temper of the man, ver. 34. *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* “The character of the man is shewn by his words, saith Menander. *Profert enim mores plerumque oratio* (saith Quintilian) *& animi secreta detegit*; “A man’s speech discovers his manners, and the secrets of his heart; *ut vivit etiam quemque dicere*, Men commonly speak as they live; and therefore our Saviour adds, *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things: but I say unto you that every idle word*, τὰν ῥημάτων αἰγρόν, by which I do not think our Saviour means, that men shall be called to a solemn account at the day of judgment, for *every trifling, and impatient, and unprofitable word*, but *every wicked and sinful word* of any kind: as if he had said, do you think this severe, to make words an unpardonable fault? I say unto you, that men shall not only be condemned for their *malicious and blasphemous* speeches against the holy Ghost; but they shall likewise give a strict account for all other *wicked and sinful speeches* in any kind, tho’ much inferior to this. And this is not only most agreeable to the scope of our Saviour, but is confirmed by some Greek copies, in which it is πάν τὰ ῥήματα πορνείων, *every wicked word which men shall speak, they shall be accountable for it at the day of judgment.* But this by the bye.

Our Saviour likewise tells us, that men shall not only be proceeded against for sins of *commission*, but for the bare *omission* and *neglect* of their duty, especially in works of mercy and charity; for *not feeding the hungry*, and the like, as we see, Mat. 25. and that for the omission of these, he will pass that terrible sentence, *depart ye cursed, &c.* So that it nearly concerns us to be careful of our whole life, of all our words and actions, since the Gospel hath so plainly and expressly declared, that *for all these things God will bring us into judgment.* And if the threatenings of the Gospel be true, *what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?*

Secondly, As the threatenings of the Gospel are very plain and express, so are they likewise very dreadful and terrible. I want words to express the least part of the terrour of them; and yet the expressions of Scripture concerning the misery and punishment of sinners in another world, are such as may justly raise

amazement and horror in those that hear them. Sometimes it is exprest by a *departing from God*, and a perpetual banishment *from his presence*, who is the fountain of all comfort, and joy, and happiness; sometimes by *the loss of our souls, or our selves*. *What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* or, (as it is in another evangelist) *to lose himself?* Not that our Being shall be destroyed; that would be a happy loss indeed, to him that is sentenced to be for ever miserable; but the man shall still remain, and his body and soul continue to be the foundation of his misery, and a scene of perpetual woe and discontent, which our Saviour calls *the destroying of body and soul in hell, or going into everlasting punishment, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched*. Could I represent to you the horror of that dismal prison, into which wicked and impure souls are to be thrust, and the misery they must there endure, without the least spark of comfort, or glimmering of hope, how they wail and groan under the intolerable wrath of God, the insolent scorn and cruelty of Devils, the severe lashes and stings, the raging anguish and horrible despair of their own minds, without intermission, without pity, and without hope of ever seeing an end of that misery, which yet is unsupportable for one moment; could I represent these things to you according to the terror of them, what effect must they have upon us? and with what patience could any man bear to think of plunging himself into this misery? and by his own wilful fault and folly to endanger his *coming into this place and state of torments?* especially if we consider in the

Third place, that the Gospel hath likewise declared, that there is no avoiding of this misery, no hopes of impunity, if men go on and continue in their sins. The terms of the gospel in this are peremptory, that *except we repent, we shall perish*; that *without holiness, no man shall see the Lord*; that *the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God*. And this is a very pressing consideration, and brings the matter to a short and plain issue. Either we must leave our sins, or die in them; either we must repent of them, or be judged for them; either we must forsake our sins, and break off that wicked course which we have lived in, or we must quit all hopes of heaven and happiness, nay, we cannot *escape the damnation of hell*. The clear revelation of a future judgment is so pressing an argument to repentance, as no man can in reason resist, that hath not a mind to be miserable. *Now* (saith St. Paul to the Athenians) *he straightly chargeth all men every where to repent, because he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness*.

Men may cheat themselves, or suffer themselves to be deluded by others, about several means and devices of reconciling a wicked life, with the hopes of heaven and eternal salvation; as by mingling some pangs of sorrow for sin, and some hot fits of devotion with a sinful life; which is only the interruption of a wicked course, without reformation and amendment of life: but *let no man deceive you with vain words*; for our blessed Saviour hath provided no other ways to save men, but upon the terms of repentance and obedience.

Fourthly, This argument takes hold of the most desperate and profligate sinners, and still retains its force upon the minds of men, when almost all other considerations fail, and have lost their efficacy upon us. Many men are gone so far in an evil course, that neither shame of their vices, nor the love of God and virtue, nor the hopes of heaven are of any force with them, to reclaim them and bring them to a better mind: but there is one handle yet left, whereby to lay hold of them, and that is their *fear*. This is a passion that lies deep in our nature, being founded in self-preservation, and sticks so closely to us, that we cannot quit our selves of it, nor shake it off. Men may put off ingenuity, and break thro' all obligations of gratitude. Men may harden their foreheads, and conquer all sense of shame; but they can never perfectly stifle and subdue their *fears*; they can hardly so extinguish *the fear of hell*, but that some sparks of that fire will ever and anon be flying about in their consciences, especially when they are made sober, and brought to themselves by affliction, and by the present apprehensions of death have a nearer sight of another world. And if it was so hard for the heathen to conquer these apprehensions, how much harder must it be to christians, who have so
much

much greater assurance of these things, and to whom *the wrath of God is so clearly revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men?*

Fifthly, No religion in the world ever urged this argument upon men, with that force and advantage which christianity does. The philosophy of the Hea-then gave men no steady assurance of the thing; the most knowing persons among them were not agreed about a future state; the greatest part of them spake but doubtfully concerning another life. And besides the natural jealousies and suspicions of mankind concerning these things, they had only some fair probabilities of reason, and the authority of their Poets, who talkt they knew not what about *the Elizian fields*, and *the infernal regions*, and *the three judges of Hell*; so that the wisest among them had hardly assurance enough in themselves of the truth of the thing, to press it upon others with any great confidence, and therefore it was not likely to have any great efficacy upon the generality of mankind.

As for the Jewish religion; tho' that supposed and took for granted the rewards of another world, as a principle of natural religion; yet in the law of *Moses* there was no particular and express revelation of the life of the world to come; and what was deduced from it, was by remote and obscure consequence. Temporal promises and threatenings it had many and clear, and their eyes were so dazzled with these, that it is probable that the generality of them did but little consider a future state, till they fell into great temporal calamities under the *Grecian* and *Roman* empires, whereby they were almost necessarily awakened to the consideration and hopes of a better life, to relieve them under their present evils and sufferings; and yet even in that time they were divided into two great factions about this matter, the one affirming, and the other as confidently denying any life after this. *But the gospel hath brought life and immortality to light*, as we are assured *from heaven* of the truth and reality of another state, and a future judgment. The Son of God was sent into the world to preach this doctrine, and rose again from the dead, and was taken up into heaven, for a visible demonstration to all mankind of another life after this, and consequently of a future judgment, which no man ever doubted of, that did firmly believe a future state.

The sum of all that I have said is this; the Gospel hath plainly declared to us, that the only way to salvation is by forsaking our sins, and living a holy and virtuous life; and the most effectual argument in the world to persuade men to this, is the consideration of the infinite danger that a sinful course exposeth men to, since *the wrath of God* continually hangs over sinners, and if they continue in their sins, will certainly fall upon them, and overwhelm them with misery, and he that is not moved by this argument, is lost to all intents and purposes.

All that now remains, is to urge this argument upon men, and from the serious consideration of it, to persuade them to repent, and reform their wicked lives. And was there ever age wherein this was more needful? when *iniquity* doth not only *abound*, but even *rage* among us; when infidelity and profaneness, and all manner of lewdness and vice appears so boldly and openly, and men commit the greatest abominations without blushing at them; when vice hath got such head that it can hardly bear to be checkt and controll'd, and when, as the *Roman* historian complains of his times, *ad ea tempora, quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus, perventum est*; "things are come to that pass, that we can neither bear our vices, nor the remedies of them. Our vices are grown to a prodigious and intolerable height, and yet men hardly have the patience to hear of them; and surely a disease is then dangerous indeed, when it cannot bear the severity that is necessary to a cure. But yet, notwithstanding this, we who are the messengers of God to men, to warn them of their sin and danger, must not keep silence, and spare to tell them both of their sins, and of the judgment of God which hangs over them; *that God will visit for these things*, and that *his soul will be avenged on such a nation as this*. At least we may have leave to warn others, who are not yet *run to the same excess of riot, to save themselves from this untoward generation*. *God's judgments are abroad in the earth*, and call aloud upon us, to *learn righteousness*.

But this is but a small consideration, in comparison of the judgment of another world, which we who call our selves christians do profess to believe, as one of the chief articles of our faith. The consideration of this should check and cool us in the heat of all our sinful pleasures; and that bitter irony of Solomon should cut us to the heart; *Rejoice O young man in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.* Think often and seriously on that time, wherein *the wrath of God*, which is now *revealed against sin*, shall be *executed upon sinners*; and if we believe this, we are strangely stupid and obstinate, if we be not moved by it. The assurance of this made St. Paul extremely importunate in exhorting men to avoid so great a danger, 2 Cor. 5. 10, 11. *We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or evil. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.* And if this ought to move us to take so great a care of others, much more of our selves. The judgment to come is a very amazing consideration, it is a fearful thing to hear of it, but it will be much more terrible to see it, especially to those whose guilt must needs make them so heartily concern'd in the dismal consequences of it; and yet as sure as I stand, and you sit here, *this great and terrible day of the Lord will come, and who may abide his coming!* what will we do, when that day shall surprize us careless and unprepared! what unspeakable horror and amazement will then take hold of us! when *lifting up our eyes to heaven, we shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of it, with power, and great glory*; when that powerful voice which shall pierce the ears of the dead shall ring through the world, *Arise ye dead, and come to judgment*; when the mighty trumpet shall sound, and wake the sleepers of a thousand years, and summon the dispersed parts of the bodies of all men that ever lived, to rally together and take their place; and the souls and bodies of men which have been so long strangers to one another, shall meet and be united again, to receive the doom due to their deeds; what fear shall then surprize sinners, and how will they tremble at the presence of the great Judge, and *for the glory of his majesty!* how will their conscience fly in their faces, and their own hearts condemn them, for their wicked and ungodly lives, and even prevent that sentence which yet shall certainly be past and executed upon them. But I will proceed no further in this argument, which hath so much of terror in it.

I will conclude my sermon, as Solomon doth his Ecclesiastes, Ch. 12. 13, 14. *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man; for God shall bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.* To which I will only add that serious and merciful admonition of a greater than Solomon, I mean the great Judge of the whole world, our blessed Lord and Saviour, Luke 21. 34, 35, 36. *Take heed to your selves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you at unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man; To whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, &c.*

S E R M O N L I X.

Knowledge and Practice Necessary in Religion.

JOHN xiii. 17.

If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

W O things make up religion, the *knowledge* and the *practice* of it; and the *first* is wholly in order to the *second*; and God hath not revealed to us the knowledge of himself and his will, meerly for the improvement of our understanding, but for the bettering of our hearts and lives; not to entertain our minds with the speculations of religion and virtue, but to form and govern our actions. *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

In which words, our blessed Saviour does from a particular instance take occasion to settle a general conclusion; namely, that religion doth mainly consist in practice, and that the knowledge of his doctrine without the real effects of it upon our lives, will bring no man to heaven. In the beginning of this chapter, our great Lord and Master, to testify his love to his Disciples, and to give them a lively instance and example of that great virtue of humility, is pleased to condescend to a very low and mean office, such as was used to be performed by servants to their masters, and not by the master to his servants; namely, to wash their feet; and when he had done this he asks them if they did understand the meaning of this strange action. *Know ye what I have done unto you? ye call me master, and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am; If I then your Lord and master have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one anothers feet; for I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you the servant is not greater than the Lord, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him; if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* As if he had said, This which I have now done, is easy to be understood, and so likewise are all those other christian graces and virtues, which I have heretofore by my doctrine and example recommended to you; but it is not enough to know these things, but ye must likewise *do* them. The end and the life of all our knowledge in religion, is to put in practice what we know. It is necessary indeed that we should know our duty, but knowledge alone will never bring us to that happiness, which religion designs to make us partakers of, if our knowledge have not its due and proper influence upon our lives. Nay, so far will our knowledge be from making us happy, if it be separated from the virtues of a good life, that it will prove one of the heaviest aggravations of our misery; and it is as if he had said, *if ye know these things, wo be unto you, if ye do them not.*

From these words then, I shall observe these *three* things, which I shall speak but briefly to.

First, That the knowledge of God's will, and our duty, is necessary to the practice of it; *if ye know these things*, which supposeth that we must *know* our duty, before we can *do* it.

Secondly, That the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may be, and too often are separated. This likewise the text supposeth, that men may

may *know* their duty, and yet not *do* it; and that this is very frequent, which is the reason why our Saviour gives this caution.

Thirdly, That the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness; *if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*. I begin with the

First of these, namely, That the knowledge of God's will and our duty is necessary in order to the practice of it. The truth of this proposition is so clear and evident at first view, that nothing can obscure it, and bring it in question, but to endeavour to prove it; and therefore instead of spending time in that, I shall take occasion from it, justly to reprove that preposterous course which is taken, and openly avowed and justified by some, as the safest and best way to make men religious, and to bring them to happiness; namely, by taking away from them the means of knowledge; as if the best way to bring men *to do the will of God*, were to keep them from *knowing it*. For what else can be the meaning of that maxim so current in the Church of *Rome*, that *ignorance is the mother of devotion*? or of that strange and injurious practice of theirs of locking up from the people that great store-house and treasury of divine knowledge, *the holy Scriptures*, in an unknown tongue?

I know very well, that in justification of this hard usage of their people it is pretended that knowledge is apt to puff men up, to make them proud and contentious, refractory and disobedient, and heretical, and what not? and particularly, that the free and familiar use of the holy Scriptures permitted to the people, hath ministered occasion to the people of falling into great and dangerous errors, and of making great disturbance and divisions among Christians. For answer to this pretence, I desire these *four or five* things may be considered.

First, That unless this be the *natural* and *necessary* effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free use of the holy Scriptures, there is no force in this reason; and if this be the *proper* and *natural* effect of this knowledge, then this reason will reach a great way farther, than those who make use of it are willing it should.

Secondly, That this is not the *natural* and *necessary* effect of knowledge in religion, but only *accidental*, and proceeding from men's abuse of it; for which the thing it self is not to be taken away.

Thirdly, That the proper and natural effects and consequences of *ignorance*, are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than those which are accidentally occasion'd by *knowledge*.

Fourthly, That if this reason be good, it is much stronger for withholding the Scriptures from the Priests and the learned, than from the people.

Fifthly, That this danger was as great, and as well known in the Apostles times, and yet they took a quite contrary course.

First, I desire it may be consider'd that unless this be the *natural* and *necessary* effect of knowledge in religion, and of the free use of the holy Scriptures, there is no force in this reason; for that which is *necessary*, or *highly useful*, ought not to be taken away, because it is liable to be perverted, and abused to ill purposes. If it ought, then not only knowledge in religion, but all other knowledge ought to be restrained and suppress'd; for all knowledge is apt to *puff up*, and liable to be abused to many ill purposes. At this rate, light, and liberty, and reason, yea and life it self ought all to be taken away, because they are all greatly abused by many men, to some ill purposes or other; so that unless these ill effects do *naturally* and *necessarily* spring from knowledge in religion, the objection from them is of no force; and if they do necessarily flow from it, then this reason will reach a great way further than those that make use of it are willing it should; for if this be true, that the knowledge of religion, as it is revealed in the holy Scriptures, is *of its own nature*, so pernicious, as to make men proud and contentious and heretical, and disobedient to authority, then the blame of all this would fall upon our blessed Saviour, for revealing so pernicious a doctrine, and upon his Apostles, for publishing this doctrine in a known tongue

tongue to all mankind, and thereby laying the foundation of perpetual schisms and heresies in the church.

Secondly, But this is not the *natural* and *necessary* effect of knowledge in religion, but only *accidental*, and proceeding from men's abuse of it, for which the thing it self ought not to be taken away. And thus much certainly they will grant, because it cannot with any face be denied; and if so, then the means of knowledge are not to be denied, but only men are to be cautioned not to pervert and abuse them. And if any man abuse the holy Scriptures to the patronizing of error or heresie, or to any other bad purpose, he does it at his peril, and must give an account to God for it, but ought not to be deprived of the means of knowledge, for fear he should make an ill use of them. We must not hinder men from being *Christians*, to preserve them from being *Hereticks*, and put out mens eyes, for fear they should some time or other take upon them to dispute their way with their guides.

I remember that St. Paul, *1 Cor. 8. 1.* takes notice of this *accidental* inconvenience of knowledge, that it *puffeth up*, and that this pride occasioned great contentions and divisions among them: but the remedy which he prescribes against this mischief of knowledge is not to with-hold from men the means of it, and to celebrate the service of God, the prayers of the church, and the reading of the Scriptures *in an unknown tongue*, but quite contrary. *Chap. 14.* of that epistle, he strictly enjoyns that the service of God in the church be so performed, as may be for the *edification* of the people; which he says cannot be, if it be celebrated *in an unknown tongue*; and the remedy he prescribes against the *accidental* mischief and inconvenience of knowledge, is not *ignorance*; but *charity*, to govern their knowledge, and to help them to make right use of it; *ver. 20.* of that chap. after he had declared that the service of God ought to be performed *in a known tongue*, he immediately adds, *Brethren be not children in understanding; howbeit in malice be ye children; but in understanding be ye men.* He commends knowledge, he encourageth it, he requires it of all christians; so far is he from checking the pursuit of it, and depriving the people of the means of it. And indeed there is nothing in the christian religion, but what is fit for every man to know, because there is nothing in it, but what is designed to promote holiness and a good life; and if men make any other use of their knowledge, it is their own fault, for it certainly tends to make men good; and being so useful and necessary to so good a purpose, men ought not to be debarr'd of it.

Thirdly, Let it be consider'd, that the *proper* and *natural* effects and consequences of *ignorance* are equally pernicious, and much more certain and unavoidable, than those which are *accidentally* occasion'd by *knowledge*; for so far as a man is ignorant of his duty, it is impossible he should do it. He that hath the knowledge of religion, may be a bad christian, but he that is destitute of it, can be none at all. Or if ignorance do beget and promote some kind of devotion in men, it is such a devotion as is not properly *religion*, but *superstition*; the ignorant man may be *zealously superstitious*, but without some measure of knowledge no man can be *truly religious*. That the soul be without knowledge it is not good, says Solomon, *Prov. 19. 2.* because good practices depend upon our knowledge, and must be directed by it; when as a man that is trained up only to the outward performance of some things in religion, as to the saying over so many prayers in an unknown tongue, this man cannot be *truly religious*, because nothing is *religious*; that is not a *reasonable service*; and no service can be *reasonable*, that is not directed by our *understanding*. Indeed, if the end of prayer were only to give God to understand what we want, it were all one what language we prayed in, and whether we understood what we asked of him or not: but so long as the end of prayer is to testify the sense of our own wants, and of our dependence upon God for the supply of them, it is impossible that any man should in any tolerable propriety of speech be said to pray, who does not understand what he asks; and the saying over so many *Pater Nuncers* by one that does not understand the meaning of them, is no more a *prayer*, than the repeating over so many verses in *Virgil*. And if this were good reasoning, that men must not be permitted

to know so much as they can in religion, for fear they should grow troublesome with their knowledge, then certainly the best way in the world to maintain peace in the christian church, would be to let the people know nothing at all in religion; and the best way to secure the ignorance of the people would be to keep the priests as ignorant as the people, and then to be sure they could teach them nothing: but then the mischief would be, that out of a fondness to maintain peace in the christian church, there would be no church, nor no christianity; which would be the same wise contrivance, as if a Prince should destroy his subjects, to keep his kingdom quiet.

Fourthly, Let us likewise consider, that if this reason be good, it is much stronger for withholding the Scriptures from the Priests, and the learned, than from the people; because the danger of starting errors and heresies, and countenancing them from Scripture, and managing them plausibly and with advantage, is much more to be feared from the learned, than from the common people; and the experience of all ages hath shewn, that the great broachers and abettors of heresy in the christian church, have been men of learning and wit; and most of the famous heresies, that are recorded in ecclesiastical history, have their names from some learned man or other; so that it is a great mistake to think that the way to prevent error and heresy in the church, is to take the Bible out of the hands of the people, so long as the free use of it is permitted to men of learning and skill, in whose hands the danger of perverting it is much greater. The ancient fathers, I am sure, do frequently prescribe to the people the constant and careful reading of the holy Scriptures, as the surest antidote against the poison of dangerous errors, and damnable heresies; and if there be so much danger of seduction into error from the oracles of truth, by what other or better means can we hope to be secured against this danger? if *the word of God* be so cross and improper a means to this end, one would think that the *teachings of men* should be much less effectual; so that men must either be left in their ignorance, or they must be permitted to learn from *the word of truth*; and whatever force this reason of the danger of heresy hath in it, to deprive the common people of the use of the Scriptures, I am sure it is much stronger to wrest them out of the hands of the Priests and the learned, because they are much more capable of perverting them to so bad a purpose.

Fifthly, and lastly, This danger was as great and visible in the age of the Apostles, as it is now; and yet they took a quite contrary course: there were heresies then, as well as now, and either the Scriptures were not thought by being in the hands of the people to be the cause of them, or they did not think the taking of them out of their hands a proper remedy. The Apostles in all their epistles do earnestly exhort the people *to grow in knowledge*, and commend them for *searching the Scriptures*, and charge them that *the word of God should dwell richly in them*. And St. Peter takes particular notice of some men resting some difficult passages in St. Paul's epistles, as likewise in the other Scriptures, to their own destruction, 2 Pet. 3. 16. where speaking of St. Paul's epistles, he says *there are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, to their own destruction*. Here the danger objected is taken notice of; but the remedy prescribed by St. Peter, is not to take from the people the use of the Scriptures, and to keep them in ignorance; but after he had cautioned against the like weakness and errors, he exhorts them to *grow in knowledge*, ver. 17, 18. *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before* (that is, seeing ye are so plainly told and warned of this danger) *beware lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, (that is, of the christian religion; (believing, it seems, that the more knowledge they had in religion, the less they would be in danger of falling into damnable errors. I proceed to the

Second observation, viz. That *the knowledge of our duty, and the practice of it, may and often are separated*. This likewise is supposed in the text, that men may, and often do know the will of God, and their duty, and yet fail in the practice of it. Our Saviour elsewhere supposeth, that many *know their master's will, who do*

do not do it; and he compares those *that bear his sayings, and do them not, to a foolish man that built his house upon the sand*. And St. James speaks of some, *who are bearers of the word only, but not doers of it*, and for that reason fall short of happiness. And this is no wonder, because the attaining to that knowledge of religion which is necessary to salvation is no difficult task. A great part of it is written in our hearts, and we cannot be ignorant of it if we would; as that there is a God, and a Providence, and another state after this life, wherein we shall be rewarded, or punished, according as we have lived here in this world; that God is to be worshipped, to be prayed to for what we want, and to be praised for what we enjoy. Thus far Nature instructs men in religion, and in the great duties of morality, as justice, and temperance, and the like. And as for revealed religion, as that Jesus Christ the Son of God came in our nature to save us, by revealing our duty more clearly and fully to us, by giving us a more perfect example of holiness and obedience in his own life and conversation, and by dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification; these are things which men may easily understand; and yet for all that, they are difficultly brought to the practice of religion.

I shall instance in three sorts of persons, in whom the *knowledge* of religion is more remarkably separated from the *practice* of it; and for distinction sake, I may call them by these three names; the *speculative*, the *formal*, and the *hypocritical* christian. The first of these makes religion only a *science*, the second takes it up for a *fashion*, the third makes some *worldly advantage* of it, and serves some *secular interest* and *design* by it. All these are upon several accounts concerned to understand something of religion; but yet will not be brought to the practice of it.

The *first* of these whom I call the *speculative* christian, is he who makes religion only a *science*, and studies it as a piece of learning, and part of that general knowledge in which he affects the reputation of being a master; he hath no design to practice it, but he is loth to be ignorant of it, because the knowledge of it is a good ornament of conversation, and will serve for discourse and entertainment among those who are disposed to be grave and serious; and because he does not intend to practice it, he passeth over those things which are plain and easy to be understood, and applies himself chiefly to the consideration of those things which are more abstruse, and will afford matter of controversy and subtle dispute, as the doctrine of the *Trinity*, *Predestination*, *Free-will*, and the like. Of this temper seem many of the school-men of old to have been, who made it their great study and business to puzzle religion, and to make every thing in it intricate; by starting infinite questions and difficulties about the plainest truths; and of the same rank usually are the heads and leaders of parties and factions in religion, who by needless controversies, and endless disputes about some thing or other, commonly of no great moment in religion, hinder themselves and others from minding the practice of the great and substantial duties of a good life.

Secondly, There is the *formal* christian, who takes up religion for a *fashion*. He is born and bred in a nation where christianity is professed, and countenanced, and therefore thinks it convenient for him to know something of it. Of this sort there are, I fear, a great many, who read the Scriptures sometimes as others do, to know the history of it; and go to church, and hear the Gospel preached, and by this means come in some measure to understand the history of our Saviour, and the christian doctrine; but do not at all bend themselves to comply with the great end and design of it; they do not heartily endeavour to form and fashion their lives according to the laws and precepts of it; they think they are very good christians, if they can give an account of the Articles of their faith, profess their belief in God and Christ, and declare that they hope to be saved by him, tho' they take no care to keep his Commandments. These are they of whom our Saviour speaks, Luke 6. 46. *who call him, Lord, Lord; but do not the things which he said*.

Thirdly, *Hypocritical* christians, who make an *interest* of religion, and serve some *worldly design* by it. These are concerned to understand religion more than ordinary, that they may counterfeit it handsomely, and may not be at a loss when they have occasion to put on the garb of it. And this is one part of

the character which the Apostle gives of those persons, who he foretels would appear in the last days, *2 Tim. 3. 2.* he says they should be *lovers of their own selves, covetous, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it.*

Now these men do not love religion, but they have occasion to make use of it, and therefore they will have no more of it than will just serve their purpose and design. And indeed he that hath any other design in religion than to please God, and save his soul, needs no more than so much knowledge of it, as will serve him *to act a part* in it upon occasion. I come to the

Third and last observation, *viz.* That *the practice* of religion, and *the doing* of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness; *if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them; not if ye know these things happy are ye; but if ye know and do them.* Now to convince men of so important a truth, I shall endeavour to make out these two things.

First, That the Gospel makes the *practice* of religion a necessary condition of our happiness.

Secondly, That the nature and reason of the thing makes it a necessary qualification for it.

First, The Gospel makes the *practice* of religion a necessary condition of our happiness. Our Saviour in his first Sermon, where he repeats the promise of blessedness so often, makes no promise of it to the *meer knowledge* of religion, but to the *habit and practice* of Christian graces and virtues, of *meekness, and humility, and mercifulness, and righteousness, and peaceableness, and purity, and patience under sufferings and persecutions for righteousness sake.* And *Matth. 7. 2.* our Saviour doth most fully declare, that the happiness which he promises, did not belong to those who made profession of his name, and were so well acquainted with his doctrine, as to be able to instruct others, if themselves in the mean time did not practise it: *Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, and done many wondrous works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye workers of iniquity.* Tho' they profess to know him, yet because their lives were not answerable to the knowledge which they had of him, and his doctrine, he declares that *he will not know them,* but bid them *depart from him.* And then he goes on to shew, that tho' a man attend to the doctrine of Christ, and gain the knowledge of it; yet if it do not descend into his life, and govern his actions, all that man's hopes of heaven are fond and groundless; and only that man's hopes of heaven are well grounded, who *knows* the doctrine of Christ, and *does* it, *ver. 24. Who-soever heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house upon a rock, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock; and every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall be likened to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.* Tho' a man had a knowledge of religion as great and perfect as that which Solomon had of natural things, *large as the sand upon the sea-shore,* yet all this knowledge separated from *practice* would be like the sand also in another respect, *a weak foundation* for any man to build his hopes of happiness upon.

To the same purpose St. Paul speaks, *Rom. 2. 13. Not the bearers of the law are just before God; but the doers of the law shall be justified.* So likewise St. James, *Chap. 1. 22. Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves; and ver. 25. Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty (that is, the law or doctrine of the Gospel,) and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful bearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed;* and therefore he adds, that the truth and reality of religion is to be measured by the effects of it, in the government of our words, and ordering of our lives, *ver. 26. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart,*

heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this; to visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. Men talk of religion, and keep a great stir about it; but nothing will pass for true religion before God, but the virtuous and charitable actions of a good life; and God will accept no man to eternal life upon any other condition. So the Apostle tells us most expressly, *Heb. 12. 14. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

Secondly, As God hath made the practice of religion a necessary condition of our happiness, so the very nature and reason of the thing makes it a necessary qualification for it. It is necessary that we become like to God, in order to the enjoyment of him; and nothing makes us like to God, but the practice of holiness and goodness. Knowledge indeed is a divine perfection; but that alone, as it doth not render a man like God, so neither doth it dispose him for the enjoyment of him. If a man had the understanding of an Angel, he might for all that be a Devil; *he that committeth sin is of the Devil*, and whatever knowledge such a man may have, he is of a devilish temper and disposition: *but every one that doth righteousness is born of God.* By this we are like God, and only by our likeness to him, do we become capable of the sight and enjoyment of him; therefore every man that hopes to be happy by the blessed sight of God in the next life, must endeavour after holiness in this life. So the same Apostle tells us, *1 John 3. 3. Every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as he is pure.* A wicked temper and disposition of mind is, in the very nature of the thing, utterly inconsistent with all reasonable hopes of heaven.

Thus I have shewn that the practice of religion, and the doing of what we know to be our duty, is the only way to happiness.

And now the proper inference from all this is, to put men upon the careful practice of religion. Let no man content himself with the knowledge of his duty, unless he do it; and to this purpose I shall briefly urge these three considerations.

First, This is the great end of all our knowledge in religion, to practice what we know. The knowledge of God and of our duty hath so essential a respect to practice, that the Scripture will hardly allow it to be properly called knowledge, unless it have an influence upon our lives, *1 John 2. 3, 4. Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

Secondly, Practice is the best way to encrease and perfect our knowledge. Knowledge directs us in our practice, but practice confirms and increaseth our knowledge, *John 7. 17. If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine.* The best way to know God, is to be like him our selves, and to have the lively image of his perfections imprinted upon our souls; and the best way to understand the christian religion, is seriously to set about the practice of it; this will give a man a better notion of christianity, than any speculation can.

Thirdly, Without the practice of religion, our knowledge will be so far from being any furtherance and advantage to our happiness, that it will be one of the unhappiest aggravations of our misery. He that is ignorant of his duty, hath some excuse to pretend for himself: but he that understands the christian religion, and does not live according to it, hath no cloak for his sin. The defects of our knowledge, unless they be gross and wilful, will find an easy pardon with God: but the faults of our lives shall be severely punished, when we knew our duty and would not do it. I will conclude with that of our Saviour, *Luke 12. 47, 48. That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.* When we come into the other world, no consideration will sting us more, and add more to the rage of our torments than this, that we did wickedly, when we understood to have done better; and chose to make our selves miserable, when we knew so well the way to have been happy.

S E R M O N LX.

Practice in Religion necessary, in proportion to our Knowledge.

LUKE xii. 47, 48.

And that Servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.



N prosecution of the argument which I handled in my last discourse, namely, that the knowledge of our duty, without the practice of it, will not bring us to happiness, I shall proceed to shew, that if our practice be not answerable to our knowledge, this will be a great aggravation both of our sin and punishment.

And to this purpose, I have pitched upon these words of our Lord, which are the application of two parables, which he had deliver'd before, to stir up men to a diligent and careful practice of their duty, that so they may be in a continual readiness and preparation for the coming of their Lord. The first parable is more general, and concerns all men, who are represented as so many servants in a great family, from which the Lord is absent, and they being uncertain of the time of his return, should always be in a condition and posture to receive him. Upon the hearing of this parable, *Peter* enquires of our Saviour, whether he intended this only for his Disciples, or for all? To which question our Saviour returns an answer in another parable which more particularly concerned them; who because they were to be the chief Rulers and Governors of his church, are represented by the stewards of a great family, *ver. 42. Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make Ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?* If he discharge his duty, *blessed is he*; but if he shall take occasion in his Lord's absence to domineer over his fellow-servants, and riotously to waste his Lord's goods, his Lord, when he comes, will punish him after a more severe and exemplary manner.

And then follows the application of the whole, in the words of the text, *And that servant which knew his Lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.* As if he had said, And well may such a servant deserve so severe a punishment, who having such a trust committed to him, and knowing his Lord's will so much better, yet does contrary to it; upon which our Saviour takes occasion to compare the fault and punishment of those who have greater advantages and opportunities of knowing their duty, with those who are ignorant of it; *That servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.* And then he adds the reason and the equity of this proceeding, *For*
unto

unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

The words in general do allude to that law of the Jews, mentioned *Deut. 25. 2.* where the Judge is required to see the malefactor punish'd according to his fault, by a certain number of stripes; in relation to which known law among the Jews, our Saviour here says, that *those who knew their Lord's will, and did it not, should be beaten with many stripes: but those who knew it not, should be beaten with few stripes.* So that there are two observations lie plainly before us in the words.

First, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing his duty, if he do it not, the greater will be his condemnation; *the servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

Secondly, That ignorance is a great excuse of mens faults, and will lessen their punishment; *but he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.*

I shall begin with the latter of these *first*, because it will make way for the other; *viz.* That ignorance is a great excuse of mens faults, and will lessen their punishment; *he that knew not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.*

For the clearing of this, it will be requisite to consider what ignorance it is which our Saviour here speaks of; and this is necessary to be enquired into, because it is certain that there is some sort of ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt; and there is another sort, which doth either not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men; so that it must be a third sort, different from both these, which our Saviour here means.

First, There is an ignorance which doth wholly excuse and clear from all manner of guilt, and that is *an absolute and invincible ignorance*, when a person is wholly ignorant of the thing, which if he knew, he should be bound to do, but neither can nor could have helpt it, that he is ignorant of it; that is, he either had not the capacity, or wanted the means and opportunity of knowing it. In this case a person is in no fault, if he did not do what he never knew, nor could know to be his duty. For God measures the faults of men by their *Wills*, and if there be no defect there, there can be no guilt; for no man is guilty, but he that is conscious to himself that he would not do what he knew he ought to do, or would do what he knew he ought not to do. Now if a man be *simply* and *invincibly* ignorant of his duty, his neglect of it is altogether *involuntary*; for the Will hath nothing to do, where the Understanding doth not first direct. And this is the case of *children* who are not yet come to the use of reason; for tho' they may do that which is *materially* a fault, yet it is none *in them*, because by reason of their incapacity, they are at present *invincibly* ignorant of what they ought to do. And this is the case likewise of *idiots*, who are under a natural incapacity of knowledge, and so far as they are so, nothing that they do is imputed to them as a fault. The same may be said of distracted persons, who are deprived either wholly, or at some times, of the use of their understandings: so far, and so long as they are thus deprived, they are free from all guilt; and to persons who have the free and perfect use of their reason, no neglect of any duty is imputed, of which they are *absolutely* and *invincibly* ignorant. For instance, it is a duty incumbent upon all mankind, to believe in the Son of God, where he is sufficiently manifested and revealed to them; but those who never heard of him, nor had any opportunity of coming to the knowledge of him, shall not be condemn'd for this infidelity, because it is impossible they should *believe on him, of whom they never heard*; they may indeed be condemned upon other accounts, for sinning against the light of nature, and for not obeying *the law which was written in their hearts*; for what the Apostle says of the revelation of the law, is as true of any other revelation of God, *as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law; and as many as have sinned under the law, shall be judged by the law, Rom. 2. 12.* In like manner, those who have sinned without the Gospel, (that is, who never had the knowledge of it) shall not be condemned for any offence against

against that revelation which was never made to them, but for their violation of *the law of nature*; only they that have *sinned under the Gospel*, shall be judged by it.

Secondly, There is likewise another sort of ignorance, which either does not at all, or very little extenuate the faults of men, when men are not only ignorant, but *chuse to be so*; that is, when they wilfully neglect those means and opportunities of knowledge which are afforded to them; such as *Job* speaks of, *Job 21. 14. Who say unto God depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.* And this sort of ignorance many among the *Jews* were guilty of, when our Saviour came and preached to them, but they would not be instructed by him; *the light came among them, but they loved darkness rather than light*, as he himself says of them; and as he says elsewhere of the Pharisees, *they rejected the council of God against themselves*, they wilfully shut their eyes against that light which offered it self to them; *they would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, nor understand with their hearts, that they might be converted, and healed.* Now an ignorance in this degree wilful, can hardly be imagined to carry any excuse at all in it. He that knew not his Lord's will, because he would not know it, because he wilfully rejected the means of coming to the knowledge of it, deserves to be beaten with as many stripes, as if he had known it; because he might have known it, and would not. He that will not take notice of the King's Proclamation, or will stop his ears when it is read, and afterwards offends against it, does equally deserve punishment with those who have read it, and heard it, and disobey it; because he was as grossly faulty in not knowing it; and there is no reason that any man's gross fault should be his excuse.

So that it is neither of these sorts of ignorance that our Saviour means, neither absolute and invincible ignorance, nor that which is grossly wilful and affected; for the first, men deserve not to be beaten at all, because they cannot help it; for the latter, they deserve not to be excused, because they might have helped their ignorance, and would not.

But our Saviour here speaks of such an ignorance as does in a good degree extenuate the fault, and yet not wholly excuse it; for he says of them, that *they knew not their Lord's will*, and yet that this ignorance did not wholly excuse them from blame, nor exempt them from punishment, *but they should be beaten with few stripes.* In the

Third place then, there is an ignorance which is in some degree faulty, and yet does in a great measure excuse the faults which proceed from it; and this is when men are not absolutely ignorant of their duty, but only in comparison of others, who have a far more clear and distinct knowledge of it; and tho' they do not grossly and wilfully neglect the means of further knowledge, yet perhaps they do not make the best use they might of the opportunities they have of knowing their duty better; and therefore in comparison of others, who have far better means and advantages of knowing their Lord's will, they may be said not to know it, tho' they are not simply ignorant of it, but only have a more obscure and uncertain knowledge of it. Now this ignorance does in a great measure excuse such persons, and extenuate their crimes, in comparison of those who had a clearer and more perfect knowledge of their Master's will; and yet it does not free them from all guilt; because they did not live up to that degree of knowledge which they had; and perhaps if they had used more care and industry, they might have known their Lord's will better. And this was the case of the Heathens, who in comparison of those who enjoyed the light of the Gospel, might be said not to have known their Lord's will, tho' as to many parts of their duty, they had some directions from natural light, and their consciences did urge them to many things by the obscure apprehensions and hopes of a future reward, and the fear of a future punishment. But this was but a very obscure and uncertain knowledge, in comparison of the clear light of the Gospel, which hath discovered to us our duty so plainly by the laws and precepts of it, and hath presented us with such powerful motives and arguments to obedience in the promises and threatenings of it. And this likewise is the case of many Christians; who either through the natural slowness of their understandings, or by the neglect

neglect of their parents and teachers, or other circumstances of their education, have had far less means and advantages of knowledge than others. God does not expect so much from those, as from others, to whom he hath given greater capacity, and advantages of knowledge; and when our Lord shall come to call his Servants to an account, they shall be beaten with fewer stripes than others; they shall not wholly escape, because they were not wholly ignorant; but by how much they had less knowledge than others, by so much their punishment shall be lighter.

And there is all the equity in the world it should be so, that men should be accountable according to what they have received, and that to whom less is given, less should be required at their hands. The Scripture hath told us, that *God will judge the world in righteousness*; now justice does require, that in taxing the punishment of offenders, every thing should be consider'd, that may be a just excuse and extenuation of their crimes, and that accordingly their punishment should be abated. Now the greatest extenuation of any fault is ignorance, which when it proceeds from no fault of ours, no fault can proceed from it; so that so far as any man is innocently ignorant of his duty, so far he is excusable for the neglect of it: for every degree of ignorance takes off so much from the perverseness of the Will; *Et nihil ardet in inferno, nisi propria voluntas*, "Nothing is punisht in hell, but what is voluntary, and proceeds from our Wills.

I do not intend this discourse for any commendation of ignorance, or encouragement to it. For knowledge hath many advantages above it, and is much more desirable, if we use it well; and if we do not, it is our own fault; if we be not wanting to our selves, we may be much happier by our knowledge, than any man can be by his ignorance; for tho' ignorance may plead an excuse, yet it can hope for no reward; and it is always better to need no excuse, than to have the best in the world ready at hand to plead for our selves. Besides, that we may do well to consider, that ignorance is no where an excuse where it is cherisht; so that it would be the vainest thing in the world for any man to foster it, in hopes thereby to excuse himself; for where it is wilful and chosen, it is a fault, and (as I said before) it is the most unreasonable thing in the world, that any man's fault should prove his excuse. So that this can be no encouragement to ignorance, to say that it extenuates the faults of men: for it does not extenuate them, whenever it is wilful and affected; and whenever it is designed and chosen, it is wilful; and then no man can reasonably design to continue ignorant, that he may have an excuse for his faults, because then the ignorance is wilful, and whenever it is so, it ceaseth to be an excuse.

I the rather speak this, because ignorance hath had the good fortune to meet with great patrons in the world, and to be extoll'd, tho' not upon this account, yet upon another, for which there is less pretence of reason; as if it were the mother of devotion. Of superstition I grant it is, and of this we see plentiful proof, among those who are so careful to preserve and cherish it: but that true piety and devotion should spring from it, is as unlikely, as that darkness should produce light. I do hope indeed, and charitably believe, that the ignorance in which some are detained by their teachers and governours, will be a real excuse, to as many of them as are otherwise honest and sincere; but I doubt not, but the errors and faults which proceed from this ignorance, will lie heavy upon those who keep them in it. I proceed to the

Second observation, That the greater advantages and opportunities any man hath of knowing the will of God, and his duty, the greater will be his condemnation if he do not do it. *The servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to it, shall be beaten with many stripes. Which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself*; the preparation of our mind to do the Will of God, whenever there is occasion and opportunity for it, is accepted with him; a Will rightly disposed to obey God, tho' it be not brought into act, for want of opportunity, does not lose its reward: but when, notwithstanding we know our Lord's Will, there are neither of these, neither the
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act, nor the preparation and resolution of doing it, what punishment may we not expect?

The just God, in punishing the sins of men, proportions the punishment to the crime, and where the crime is greater, the punishment riseth; as amongst the Jews, where the crime was small, the malefactor was sentenced to *a few stripes*; where it was great, he was *beaten with many*. Thus our Saviour represents the great judge of the world dealing with sinners; according as their sins are aggravated, he will add to their punishment. Now after all the aggravations of sin, there is none that doth more intrinsically heighten the malignity of it, than when it is committed against the clear knowledge of our duty, and that upon these *three* accounts.

First, Because the knowledge of God's Will is so great an advantage to the doing of it.

Secondly, Because it is a great obligation upon us to the doing of it.

Thirdly, Because the neglect of our duty in this case, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. I shall speak briefly to these *three*.

First, Because the knowledge of God's Will is so great an advantage to the doing of it; and every advantage of doing our duty, is a certain aggravation of our neglect of it. And this is the reason which our Saviour adds here in the text, *for to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more*. It was, no doubt, a great discouragement and disadvantage to the heathens, that they were so doubtful concerning the Will of God, and in many cases left to the uncertainty of their own reason, by what way and means they might best apply themselves to the pleasing of him, and this discouraged several of the wisest of them from all serious endeavours in religion, thinking it as good to do nothing, as to be mistaken about it. Others that were more naturally devout, and could not satisfy their consciences without some expressions of religion, fell into various superstitions, and were ready to embrace any way of worship which custom prescribed, or the fancies of men could suggest to them; and hence sprang all the stupid and barbarous idolatries of the heathen. For ignorance growing upon the world, that natural propension which was in the minds of men to religion, and the worship of a Deity, for want of certain direction, exprest it self in those foolish and abominable idolatries, which were practised among the heathens.

And is it not then a mighty advantage to us, that we have the clear and certain direction of divine revelation? We have the Will of God plainly discovered to us, and all the parts of our duty clearly defined and determined, so that no man that is in any measure free from interest and prejudice, can easily mistake in any great and material part of his duty. We have the nature of God plainly revealed to us, and such a character of him given, as is most suitable to our natural conceptions of a Deity, as render him both awful and amiable; for the Scripture represents him to us as great and good, powerful and merciful, a perfect hater of sin, and a great lover of mankind; and we have the law and manner of his worship (so far as was needful) and the rules of a good life, clearly exprest and laid down; and as a powerful motive and argument to the obedience of those laws, a plain discovery made to us of the endless rewards and punishments of another world. And is not this a mighty advantage to the doing of God's Will, to have it so plainly declared to us, and so powerfully enforced upon us? so that our duty lies plainly before us; we see what we have to do, and the danger of neglecting it; so that considering the advantage we have of doing God's Will, by our clear knowledge of it, we are altogether inexcusable if we do it not.

Secondly, The knowledge of our Lord's Will is likewise a great obligation upon us to the doing of it. For what ought in reason to oblige us more to do any thing, than to be fully assur'd that it is the Will of God, and that it is the law of the great sovereign of the world, who is able to save, or to destroy? That it is the pleasure of him that made us, and who hath declared that he designs to make us happy, by
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our obedience to his laws? So that if we know these things to be the will of God, we have the greatest obligation to do them, whether we consider the authority of God, or our own interest; and if we neglect them, we have nothing to say in our own excuse. We knew the law, and the advantage of keeping it, and the penalty of breaking it, and if after this we will transgress, there is no apology to be made for us. They have something to plead for themselves, who can say, that tho' they had some apprehension of some parts of their duty, and their minds were apt to dictate to them that they ought to do some things, yet the different apprehensions of mankind about several of these things, and the doubts and uncertainties of their own minds concerning them, made them easy to be carried off from their duty, by the vicious inclinations of their own nature, and the tyranny of custom and example, and the pleasant temptations of flesh and blood; but had they had a clear and undoubted revelation from God, and had certainly known these things to be his will, this would have conquered and born down all objections and temptations to the contrary; or if it had not, would have stopt their mouths, and taken away all excuse from them. There is some colour in this plea, that in many cases they did not know certainly what the will of God was, but for us who own a clear revelation from God, and profess to believe it, what can we say for our selves, to mitigate the severity of God towards us; why he should not pour forth all his wrath, and execute upon us the fierceness of his anger?

Thirdly, The neglect of God's will when we know it, cannot be without a great deal of wilfulness and contempt. If we know it, and do it not, the fault is solely in our wills, and the more wilful any sin is, the more hainously wicked is it. There can hardly be a greater aggravation of a crime, than if it proceed from meer obstinacy and perverseness; and if we know it to be our Lord's will, and do it not, we are guilty of the highest contempt of the greatest Authority in the world. And do we think this to be but a small aggravation, to affront the great Sovereign and Judge of the world? not only to break his laws, but to trample upon them and despise them, when we know whose laws they are? *Will we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?* We believe that it is God who said, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy Neighbour; thou shalt not hate, or oppress, or defraud thy brother in any thing; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self;* and will we notwithstanding venture to break these laws, knowing whose authority they are stamp't withal? After this contempt of him, what favour can we hope for from him? What can we say for our selves, why any one of those many stripes which are threatened should be abated to us? *Ignosci aliquatenus ignorantia potest; contemptus veniam non habet;* "Something may be pardoned to ignorance; but contempt can expect no forgiveness. He that strikes his Prince, not knowing him to be so, hath something to say for himself; that tho' he did a disloyal act, yet it did not proceed from a disloyal mind: but he that first acknowledgeth him for his Prince, and then affronts him, deserves to be prosecuted with the utmost severity, because he did it wilfully, and in meer contempt. The knowledge of our duty, and that it is the will of God which we go against, takes away all possible excuse from us; for nothing can be said, why we should offend him who hath both authority to command us, and power to destroy us.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, represented to you the true ground and reason of the aggravation of those sins, which are committed against the clear knowledge of God's will, and our duty; because this knowledge is so great an advantage to the doing of our duty; so great an obligation upon us to it; and because the neglect of our Lord's will in this case, cannot be without great wilfulness, and a downright contempt of his authority.

And shall I now need to tell you, how much it concerns every one of us, to live up to that knowledge which we have of our Lord's will, and to prepare our selves to do according to it; to be always in a readiness and disposition to do what we know to be his will, and actually to do it, when there is occasion and opportunity? And it concerns us the more, because we, in this age and

nation, have so many advantages, above a great part of the world, of coming to the knowledge of our duty. We enjoy the clearest and most perfect revelation which God ever made of his will to mankind, and have the light of Divine Truth plentifully shed amongst us, by the free use of the holy Scriptures, which is not a sealed book to us, but lies open to be read, and studied by us; this spiritual food is *rained down* like Manna *round about our tents*, and every one may gather so much as is sufficient; we are not stinted, nor have the word of God given out to us in broken pieces, or mixt and adulterated, here a lesson of Scripture, and there a legend; but whole and entire, sincere and uncorrupt.

God hath not left, us as he did the Heathens for many ages, to the imperfect and uncertain direction of natural light; nor hath he revealed his will to us, as he did to the *Jews*, in dark types and shadows: but hath made a clear discovery of his mind and will to us. The dispensation which we are under, hath no veil upon it, *the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth; we are of the day, and of the light*, and therefore it may justly be expected that we should *put off the works of darkness, and walk as children of the light*. Every degree of knowledge which we have, is an aggravation of the sins committed against it, and when our Lord comes to pass sentence upon us, will add to the number of our stripes. Nay, if God should inflict no positive torment upon sinners; yet their own minds would deal most severely with them upon this account, and nothing will gall their consciences more, than to remember against what light they did offend. For herein lies the very nature and sting of all guilt, to be conscious to our selves, *that we knew what we ought to have done, and did it not*. The vices and corruptions which reigned in the world before, will be pardonable, in comparison of ours. *The times of that ignorance God winked at; but now he commands all men every where to repent*. Mankind had some excuse for their errors before, and God was pleased in a great measure to overlook them; but *if we continue still in our sins, we have no cloak for them*. All the degrees of light which we enjoy, are so many talents committed to us by our Lord, for the improving whereof, he will call us to a strict account; *for unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom he hath committed much, of him he will ask the more*. And nothing is more reasonable, than that men should account for all the advantages and opportunities they have had of knowing the will of God; and that as their knowledge was increased, so their sorrow and punishment should proportionably rise, if they sin against it. The ignorance of a great part of the world is deservedly pitied and lamented by us, but the condemnation of none is so bad, as of those who having the knowledge of God's will, neglected to do it; *how much better had it been for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy Commandment delivered unto them!* If we had been born, and brought up in ignorance of the true God and his will, *we had had no sin*, in comparison of what now we have: *but now that we see, our sin remains*. This will aggravate our condemnation beyond measure, that we had the knowledge of salvation so clearly revealed to us. Our duty lies plainly before us, we know what we ought to do, and *what manner of persons we ought to be, in all holy conversation and godliness*. We believe the coming of our Lord to judgment, and we know not how soon he may be *revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels, not only to take vengeance on them that know not God, but on them that have known him, and yet obey not the Gospel of his Son*. And if all this will not move us to prepare our selves to do our Lord's will, we deserve to have our stripes multiplied. No condemnation can be too heavy for those who offend against the clear knowledge of God's will, and their duty.

Let us then be persuaded to set upon the practice of what we know; let the light which is in our understandings, descend upon our hearts and lives; let us not dare to continue any longer in the practice of any known sin, nor in the neglect of any thing which we are convinced is our duty, and *if our hearts condemn us not, neither for the neglect of the means of knowledge, nor for rebelling against the light of God's truth shining in our minds, and glaring upon our consciences, then have we confidence towards God: but if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things*.

S E R M O N L X I.

The First
Sermon on
this Text.

The Sins of Men not chargeable upon God; but upon themselves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.



EXT to the belief of a God, and his Providence, there is nothing more fundamentally necessary to the practice of a good life, than the belief of these two principles, *That God is not the Author of sin, and That every man's sin lies at his own door, and he hath reason to blame himself for all the evil that he does.*

First, That God is not the Author of sin, that he is no way accessary to our faults, either by tempting or forcing us to the commission of them. For if he were, they would neither properly be *sins*, nor could they be justly punished. They would not properly be *sins*, for *sin* is a contradiction to the will of God; but supposing men to be either tempted or necessitated thereto, that which we call *sin*, would either be a meer passive obedience to the will of God, or an active compliance with it, but neither way a contradiction to it. Nor could these actions be justly punished; for all punishment supposeth a fault, and a fault supposeth liberty and freedom from force and necessity; so that no man can be justly punished for that which he cannot help, and no man can help that, which he is necessitated and compell'd to. And tho' there were no force in the case, but only temptation, yet it would be unreasonable for the same person to tempt and punish. For as nothing is more contrary to the holiness of God, than to tempt men to sin; so nothing can be more against justice and goodness, than first to draw men into a fault, and then to chastise them for it. So that this is a principle which lies at the bottom of all religion, *That God is not the Author of the sins of men.* And then,

Secondly, That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he has reason enough to blame himself for all the evil that he does. And this is that which makes men properly *guilty*, that when they have done amiss, they are conscious to themselves it was their own act, and they might have done otherwise; and *guilt* is that which makes men liable to punishment; and fear of punishment is the great restraint from sin, and one of the principal arguments for virtue and obedience.

And both these principles our Apostle St. James does here fully assert in the words which I have read unto you. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

In which words these *two* things are plainly contained.

First, That God doth not tempt any man to sin. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

Secondly, That every man's fault lies at his own door, and he is his own greatest tempter. *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

I. That God doth not tempt any man to sin. *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* In which words there are *three* things to be considered.

First, The proposition which the Apostle here rejects, and that is, *That God tempts men.* *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.*

Secondly, The manner in which he rejects it. *Let no man say so.* By which manner of speaking, the Apostle insinuates these *two* things. 1. That men are apt to lay their faults upon God: For when he says, *Let no man say so*, he intimates, that men are apt to *say so*, and it is very probable that some *did say so*: and 2^{dly}, That it is not only a fault, but an impious assertion to say that God tempts men. He speaks of it as a thing to be rejected with detestation. *Let no man say*; that is, far be it from us to affirm a thing so impious and dishonourable to God.

Thirdly, The reason and argument that he brings against it, *For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.*

First, The proposition which the Apostle here rejects, and that is, *That God tempts men:* *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* Now that we may the more distinctly understand the meaning of the proposition, which the Apostle here rejects, it will be very requisite to consider what *temptation* is, and the several sorts and kinds of it. To *tempt* a man, is in general, nothing else but to make tryal of him in any kind what he will do. In Scripture, temptation is commonly confin'd to the tryal of a man's good or bad, of his virtuous or vicious inclinations. But then it is such a tryal as endangers a man's virtue, and if he be not well resolved, is likely to overcome it, and to make him fall into sin. So that temptation does always imply something of danger the worst way. And men are thus tempted, either from themselves, or by others; by others chiefly these *two* ways.

First, By direct and downright persuasions to sin.

Secondly, By being brought into such circumstances as will greatly endanger their falling into it, tho' none solicit and persuade them to it.

First, By direct and downright persuasions to sin. Thus the Devil tempted our first parents, by representing things so to them, as might on the one hand incite them to sin, and on the other hand weaken and loosen that which was the great curb and restraint from it. On the one hand he represents to them the advantages they should have by breaking God's command. *God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.* On the other hand, he represents the danger of offending not to be so great and certain as they imagined. *The Serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die.* And the Devil had so good success in this way of tempting the first *Adam*, as to encourage him to set upon the second, our blessed Saviour, in the same manner; for he would have persuaded him *to fall down and worship him*, by offering him *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them.* And thus bad men many times tempt others, and endeavour to draw them into the same wicked courses with themselves. *Solomon* represents to us the manner and the danger of it, *Prov. I. 10, 11, 13, 14.* *My Son, if sinners intice thee, consent thou not; if they say, come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause; we shall find all pretious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil. Cast in thy lot amongst us, let us all have one purse.* This is the first way of temptation.

And to be sure God tempts no man this way. He offers no arguments to man to persuade him to sin; he no where proposeth either reward or impunity to sinners; but on the contrary gives all imaginable encouragement to obedience, and threatens the transgression of his law with most dreadful punishments.

Secondly,

Secondly, Men are likewise tempted, by being brought into such circumstances, as will greatly endanger their falling into sin, tho' none persuade them to it; and this happens two ways; when men are remarkably beset with the allurements of the world, or assaulted with the evils and calamities of it; for either of these conditions are great temptations to men; and make powerful assaults upon them, especially when they fall upon those who are ill disposed before, or are but of a weak virtue and resolution.

The allurements of the world are strong temptations; riches, and honours, and pleasures, are the occasions and incentives to many lusts. Honour and greatness, power and authority over others, especially when men are suddenly lifted up; and from a low condition, are apt to transport men to pride and insolency towards others. Power is a strong liquor which does easily intoxicate weak minds, and make them apt to say and do undecent things. *Man that is in honour and understands not, is like the beasts that perish*; intimating that men who are exalted to an high condition, are very apt to forget themselves, and to play the fools and beasts. It requires great consideration, and a well poised mind, not to be lifted up with one's condition. Weak heads are apt to turn and grow dizzy, when they look down from a great height.

And so likewise ease and prosperity are a very slippery condition to most men, and without great care do endanger the falling into great sins. So Solomon observes, *Prov. 1. 32. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.* For this reason Agur maketh his prayer to God, that he would give him neither poverty nor riches, but keep him in a mean condition; because of the danger of both extreams, *Prov. 30. 8, 9. Give me not riches, lest I be full, and deny thee.* Both the eager desire and the possession and enjoyment of riches do frequently prove fatal to men. So our Saviour tells us elsewhere very emphatically, *Mat. 19. 23, 24. Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven: And again I say unto you, it is easier for a Camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* St. Paul likewise very fully declares unto us the great danger of this condition, *1 Tim. 6. 9, 10. But they that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

But the greatest bait of all to flesh and blood, is sensual pleasures; the very presence and opportunity of these, are apt to kindle the desires, and to enflame the lusts of men, especially where these temptations meet with suitable tempers, where every spark that falls catcheth.

And on the other hand, the evils and calamities of this world, especially if they threaten or fall upon men in any degree of extremity, are strong temptations to human nature. Poverty and want, pain and suffering, and the fear of any great evil, especially of death, these are great straits to human nature, and apt to tempt men to great sins, to impatience and discontent, to unjust and dishonest shifts, to the forsaking of God, and Apostasy from his truth and religion. Agur was sensible of the dangerous temptation of poverty, and therefore he prays against that, as well as against riches; *give me not poverty, lest being poor I steal, and take the name of the Lord my God in vain*; that is, lest I be tempted to theft, and perjury. The Devil, whose trade it is to tempt men to sin, knew very well the force of these sorts of temptations, when he desires God first to touch Job in his estate, and to see what effect that would have, *Job 1. 11. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face.* And when he found himself deceived in this, surely he thought, that were he but afflicted with great bodily pains, that would put him out of all patience, and flesh and blood would not be able to withstand this temptation; *Chap. 2. v. 5. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.* And this was the great temptation that the primitive Christians were assaulted withal; they were tempted to forsake Christ and his religion, by a most violent persecution, by the spoiling of their goods,

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by imprisonment, and torture and death. And this is that kind of temptation which the Apostle particularly speaks of before the text, *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the Crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*; and then it follows, *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God*. And thus I have given an account of the several sorts of temptations comprehended under this *second* head, namely, when men are tempted by being brought into such circumstances as do greatly endanger their falling into sin, by the allurements of this world, and by the evils and calamities of it.

And the question is, how far God hath an hand in these kind of temptations, that so we may know how to limit this proposition, which the Apostle here rejects, *that men are tempted of God. Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God*.

That the providence of God does order, or at least permit men to be brought into these circumstances I have spoken of, which are such dangerous temptations to sin, no man can doubt, that believes his providence to be concern'd in the affairs of the world. All the difficulty is, how far the Apostle does here intend to exempt God from an hand in these temptations. Now for the clearer understanding of this it will be requisite to consider the several ends and reasons, which those who tempt others may have in tempting them; and all temptation is for one of these *three* ends or reasons; either for the tryal and improvement of men's virtues; or by way of judgment and punishment for some former great sins and provocations; or with a direct purpose and design to seduce men to sin; these I think are the chief ends and reasons that can be imagined, of exercising men with dangerous temptations.

First, For the exercise and improvement of mens graces and virtues. And this is the end which God always aims at, in bringing good men, or permitting them to be brought into dangerous temptations. And therefore St. *James* speaks of it as a matter of joy, when good men are exercised with afflictions; not because afflictions are desirable for themselves, but because of the happy consequences of them, *ver. 2, 3. of this Chapter, My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience*. And to the same purpose St. *Paul*, Rom. 5. 3, 4, 5. *We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience; δοκιμὴν* patience trieth a man, and this tryal worketh hope, and hope maketh not ashamed. These are happy effects and consequences of affliction and suffering, when they improve the virtues of men and increase their graces, and thereby make way for the increase of their glory. Upon this account, St. *James* pronounceth those *blessed*, who are *thus tempted*. *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the Crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him*.

And this certainly is no disparagement to the providence of God, to permit men to be thus tempted, when he permits it for no other end, but to make them better men, and thereby to prepare them for a greater reward: And so the Apostle assures us, Rom. 8. 17, 18. *If so be we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him; for I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us*. And *ver. 28. For we know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God*. And this happy end and issue of temptations to good men the providence of God secures to them (if they be not wanting to themselves) one of these two ways, either by proportioning the temptation to their strength; or if it exceed *that*, by ministering new strength and support to them, by the secret and extraordinary aids of his Holy Spirit.

First, By proportioning the temptation to their strength; ordering things so by his secret and wise providence, that they shall not be assaulted by any temptation, which is beyond their strength to resist and overcome. And herein the security of good men doth ordinarily consist; and the very best of us, those who have the firmest and most resolute virtue, were in infinite danger, if the providence of God did not take this care of us. For a temptation may set upon the best
men

men with so much violence, or surprize them at such an advantage as no ordinary degree of grace and virtue is able to withstand: But where men are sincerely good, and honestly resolv'd, the providence of God doth ward off these fierce blows, and put by these violent thrusts, and by a secret disposal of things, keep them from being assaulted by these irresistible kinds of temptations.

The consideration whereof, as it is a great encouragement to men to be sincerely good, so likewise a great argument for a continual dependance upon the providence of God, and to take us off from confidence in our selves, and our own strength. And this use the Apostle makes of it, *1 Cor. 10. 12. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, (that is confident that nothing shall be able to shake him, or throw him down) take heed lest he fall; there hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to men; εἰ μὴ ἀνθρώπων, but what is human; nothing but what an human strength, assisted by an ordinary grace of God, may be able to resist and conquer. But there are greater and more violent temptations than these, which you have not yet been tried with; and when those happen, we must have recourse to God for an extraordinary assistance. And this is the*

Second way I mentioned, whereby the providence of God does secure good men in case of extraordinary temptations, which no human strength can probably resist. And this the same Apostle assures us of in the very next words, God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it. That is, in case of great and violent temptations (such as the Christians in the height of their persecutions were exposed to) God will secretly minister strength and support equal to the force and power of the temptation. And this God did in an extraordinary manner to the Christian martyrs, and that to such a degree, as made them joyfully to embrace their sufferings, and with the greatest cheerfulness in the world to endure those torments, which no human patience was able to bear. And where God doth thus secure men against temptations, or support them under them, it is no reflection at all upon the goodness or justice of his providence, to permit them to be thus tempted.

*Secondly, God permits others to be thus tempted, by way of judgment and punishment for some former great sins and provocations which they have been guilty of. And thus many times God punisheth great and notorious offenders, by permitting them to fall into great temptations, which meeting with a vicious disposition, are likely to be too hard for them, especially considering how by a long habit of wickedness, and wilful commission of great and notorious sins, they have made themselves an easy prey to every temptation, and have driven the Spirit of God from them, and deprived themselves of those aids and restraints of his grace, which he ordinarily affords, not only to good men, but likewise to those who are not very bad. And thus God is said to have *harden'd Pharaoh* by those plagues and judgments which he sent upon him and his kingdom. But if we carefully read the story, it is said that *he first harden'd himself*, and then that *God harden'd him*; that is, he being harden'd under the first judgments of God, God sent more, which meeting with his obstinacy, had this unnatural effect upon him, to harden him yet more; not that God did infuse any wickedness or obstinacy into him, but by his just judgments sent more plagues upon him, which hardened him yet more, and which were likely to have that effect upon him, considering the ill temper of the man. And it was just by way of punishment that they should. And so likewise, *Joshua 11. 19, 20.* it is said that the Cities of the *Canaanites* did not make peace with *Joshua*, because *it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battel, that he might destroy them utterly*; that is, for their former iniquities, the measure whereof was now full, the providence of God did justly bring them into, and leave them under those circumstances, which made them obstinate against all terms of peace, and this proved fatal to them.*

And in the like sense we are to understand several other expressions in Scripture, which likewise might seem very harsh. As *Isaiah 6. 10. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and con-*

vert and be healed; all which expressions signify no more, but that God, for the former provocations and impenitency of that people, did leave them to their own hardness and blindness, so that they did not desire to understand and make use of the means of their recovery. So likewise, *Rom. 1. 24.* God is said to have *given up* the idolatrous Heathen *to uncleanness, to vile and unnatural lusts*; and *ver. 28. to a reprobate and injudicious mind*; that is, as a punishment of their idolatry, he left them to the power of those temptations, which betrayed them to the vilest lusts. And to mention but one text more, *2 Thes. 2. 11.* the Apostle threatens those that rejected the truth, that *for this cause God would send them strong delusions* (the efficacy of error) *that they should believe a lye, that they all might be damned, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness*; that is, as a just punishment for their renouncing the truth, God gave them over to the power of delusion; their error had its full scope at them, to tempt them with all its colours and pretences.

But it is observable, that, in all these places which I have mention'd, God is said to give men up to the power of temptation, as a punishment of some former great crimes and provocations. And it is not unjust with God thus to deal with men, to leave them to the power of temptation, when they had first wilfully forsaken him; and in this case God doth not tempt men to sin, but leaves them to themselves, to be tempted by their own hearts lusts; and if they yield and are conquered, it is their own fault, because they have neglected God's grace, whereby they might have been able to have resisted those temptations; and have forced his Holy Spirit to withdraw himself from them, and to leave them open and naked to those assaults of temptation, against which they might otherwise have been sufficiently armed.

Thirdly, The last end of temptation which I mentioned, is to try men, with a direct purpose and intention to seduce men to sin. Thus wicked men tempt others, and thus the Devil tempts men. Thus he tempted our first parents and seduced them from their obedience and allegiance to God. Thus he tempted *Job* by bringing him into those circumstances, which were very likely to have forc'd him into impatience and discontent. And thus he tempted our blessed Saviour; but *found nothing in him* to work upon, or to give him any advantage over him. And thus he daily tempts men, by laying all sorts of baits and snares before them, *going about continually, seeking whom he may seduce and destroy*; and as far as God permits him, and his power reacheth, he suits his temptations as near as he can to the humours and appetites and inclinations of men, contriving them into such circumstances, as that he may ply his temptations upon them to the greatest advantage; propounding such objects to them, as may most probably draw forth the corruptions of men, and kindle their irregular desires, and inflame their lusts, and tempt their evil inclinations that way, which they are most strongly bent. He tempts the covetous man with gain, the ambitious man with preferment, the voluptuous man with carnal and sensual pleasures; and where none of these baits will take, he stirs up his instruments to persecute those who are stedfast and confirmed in resolutions of piety and virtue, to try if he can work upon their fear, and shake their constancy and fidelity to God and goodness that way; and all this he doth with a direct design and earnest desire to seduce men from their duty, and to betray them to sin.

But thus *God tempts no man*, and in this sense it is that the Apostle means that *no man when he is tempted, is tempted of God*. God hath no design to seduce any man to sin. He often proves the obedience of men, and suffers them to *fall into divers temptations*, for the tryal of their faith, and exercise of their obedience and other virtues; and he permits bad men to be assaulted with great temptations, and as a punishment of their former obstinacy and impiety, withdraws the aids and assistances of his grace from them, and leaves them to their own weakness and folly; but not so as to take away all restraint of his grace even from bad men, unless it be upon very high provocation, and a long and obstinate continuance in sin: But God never tempts any man, with any intention to seduce him to sin, and with a desire he should do wickedly. This is the proper work of the Devil and his

his instruments; in this sense it is far from *God to tempt any man*; and whenever in the ordinary course, and by the common permission of his providence, men *fall into temptation*, the utmost that God does, is *to leave them to themselves*; and he does not do this neither, but to those who have highly provoked him to depart from them, that is, to those who have justly deserved to be so dealt withal.

And thus I have consider'd the proposition which the Apostle here rejects, namely, *that God tempts men*, and have shewn as clearly as I can, how it is to be limited and understood. I now proceed to the *second* thing which I propounded to consider, *viz.* The manner in which the Apostle rejects this proposition, *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God.* By which manner of speaking, he insinuates *two* things.

First, That men are apt to lay their faults upon God. For when he says, *let no man say so*, he intimates that men were apt *to say* thus; and 'tis probable some *did say so*, to excuse themselves for their deserting their religion upon the temptation of persecution and suffering. 'Tis not unlikely that men might lay the fault upon God's Providence, which exposed them to these difficult tryals, and thereby tempted them to forsake their religion.

But however this be, we find it very natural to men, to transfer their faults upon others. Men are naturally sensible when they offend, and do contrary to their duty; and the guilt of sin is an heavy burthen, of which men would be glad to ease themselves as much as they can; and they think it is a mitigation and excuse of their faults if they did not proceed only from themselves, but from the violence and compulsion, the temptation and instigation of others. But especially men are very glad to lay their faults upon God, because he is a full and sufficient excuse, nothing being to be blamed that comes from him. Thus *Adam* did, upon the commission of the very first sin that mankind was guilty of. When God charged him for breaking of his law, by eating of the fruit of the forbidden tree, he endeavours to excuse himself by laying the fault obliquely upon God; *The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. The woman whom thou gavest to be with me*; he does what he can to derive the fault upon God. And tho' this be very unreasonable, yet it seems it is very natural. Men would fain have the pleasure of committing sin, but then they would be glad to remove as much of the trouble and guilt of it from themselves as they can.

Secondly, This manner of speech, which the Apostle here useth, doth insinuate further to us, that it is not only a false, but an impious assertion to say that God tempts men to sin. He speaks of it, not only as a thing unfit to be said, but fit to be rejected with the greatest indignation; *let no man say*, that is, far be it from us to affirm any thing so impious and so dishonourable to God. For nothing can be more contrary to the holy and righteous nature of God, and to those plain declarations which he hath made of himself, than to seduce men to wickedness; and therefore no man, that hath any regard to the honour of God, can entertain the least suspicion of his having any hand in the sins of men, or give heed to any principles or doctrines, from whence so odious and abominable a consequence may be drawn. I proceed to the

Third thing I propounded to consider, *viz.* The reason or argument which the Apostle brings against this impious suggestion; *That God cannot be tempted with evil*, and therefore no man can imagine that he should *tempt any man* to it; *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.* And in speaking to this, I shall

First, Consider the strength and force of this argument; And

Secondly, The nature and kind of it.

First, The strength and force of this argument, *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man*; ἀπειραστός ἐστὶ κακῶν, *he is untemptable by evil*;

evil; he cannot be drawn to any thing that is bad himself, and therefore it cannot be imagined he should have any inclination or design to seduce others. And this will appear to be a strong and forcible argument, if we consider,

First, The proposition upon which it is grounded, *that God cannot be tempted by evil.*

Secondly, The consequence that clearly follows from it; and that is, that because God cannot be tempted by evil, therefore *he cannot tempt any man to it.*

First, We will consider the proposition upon which this argument is built, and that is, *that God cannot be tempted by evil.* He is out of the reach of any temptation to evil. Whoever is tempted to any thing, is either tempted by his own inclination, or by the allurements of the object, or by some external motive and consideration: but none of all these can be imagined to have any place in God, to tempt him to evil.

For, *First*, he hath no temptation to it from his own inclination. The holy and pure nature of God is at the greatest distance from evil, and at the greatest contrariety to it. He is so far from having any inclination to evil, that it is the only thing in the world to which he hath an irreconcilable antipathy: This the Scripture frequently declares to us, and that in a very emphatical manner, *Psal. 5. 4. He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him.* The words are a diminution, and less is said, than is intended by them; the meaning is, that God is so far from taking pleasure in sin, that he hath a perfect hatred and abhorrence of it, *Hab. 2. 13. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity.* As when men hate a thing to the highest degree, they turn away their eyes, and cannot endure to look upon it. Light and darkness are not more opposite to one another, than the holy nature of God is to sin. *What fellowship hath light with darkness, or God with Belial?*

Secondly, There is no allurements in the object, to stir up any inclination in him towards it. Sin in its very nature is imperfection, and irregularity, crookedness, and deformity; so that unless there be an inclination to it before-hand, there is nothing in it to move any ones liking or desire towards it; it hath no attractives or enticements in it, but to a corrupt and ill-disposed mind.

Thirdly, Neither are there external motives and considerations, that can be imagined to tempt God to it. All arguments that have any temptation, are either founded in hope or in fear; either in the hope of gaining some benefit or advantage, or in the fear of falling into some mischief or inconvenience. Now the Divine Nature being perfectly happy, and perfectly secured in its own happiness, is out of the reach of any of these temptations. Men are many times tempted to evil very strongly by these considerations; they want many things to make them happy, and they fear many things which may make them miserable; and the hopes of the one, and the fears of the other, are apt to work very powerfully upon them, to seduce them from their duty, and to draw them to sin: but the Divine Nature is firm against all these attempts, by its own fullness and security. So that you see now the proposition, upon which the Apostle grounds his argument, is evidently true, and beyond all exception, *that God cannot be tempted with evil.* Let us then in the

Second place, consider the consequence that clearly follows from it, That because God cannot be tempted with evil, therefore *he cannot tempt any man to it.* For, why should he desire to draw men into that, which he himself abhors, and which is so contrary to his own nature and disposition? When men tempt one another to sin, they do it to make others like themselves; and when the Devil tempts men to sin, it is either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. But none of these considerations

rations can have any place in God, or be any motive to him to tempt men to sin.

Bad men tempt others to sin, to make them like themselves, and that with one of these *two* designs; either for the comfort or pleasure of company, or for the countenance of it, that there may be some kind of apology and excuse for them.

For the comfort and pleasure of company. Man does not love to be alone; and for this reason bad men endeavour to make others like themselves, that agreeing with them in the same disposition and manners, they may be fit company for them. For no man takes pleasure in the society and conversation of those, who are of contrary tempers and inclinations to them, because they are continually warring and clashing with one another. And for this reason bad men hate and persecute those that are good. *Let us lie in wait (say they) for the righteous, because he is not for our turn, and he is contrary to our doings; he is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other mens, and his ways are of another fashion;* as it is exprest in the wisdom of Solomon. So that wicked men tempt others to sin, that they may have the pleasure and contentment of their society. But now for this reason God cannot be imagined to tempt men to sin; because that would be the way to make them unlike himself, and such as his soul could take no pleasure in.

Another design that bad men have in seducing others to sin, is thereby to give countenance to their bad actions, and to be some kind of excuse and apology for them. Among men, the multitude of offenders does sometimes procure impunity, but it always gives countenance to vice; and men are apt to alledge it in their excuse, that they are not alone guilty of such a fault, that they did not do it without company and example; which is the reason of that law, *Exod. 23. 2. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil;* implying, that men are very apt to take encouragement to any thing that is bad, from company and example. But neither hath this reason any place in God, who being far from doing evil himself, can have no reason to tempt others to do so, by way of excuse and vindication of himself.

And when the Devil tempts men to sin, it is either out of direct malice to God, or out of envy to men. Out of malice to God, to spoil his workmanship, and to pervert that which came innocent and upright out of his hands; to rob God of his subjects, and to debauch them from their duty and allegiance to him; to strengthen the rebellion which he has raised against God, and to make him as many enemies as he can. But for this end God cannot tempt any man; for this would be to procure dishonour to himself, and to deface the work of his own hands.

Another reason why the Devil tempts men, is envy. When he was fallen from God, and happiness, and by his own rebellion had made himself miserable, he was discontented to see the happy condition of man, and *it grieved him at his very heart;* and this moved him to tempt man to sin, that he might involve him in the same misery into which he had plunged himself. It is a pleasure to Envy to over-turn the happiness of others, and to lay them level with themselves. But the Divine Nature is full of goodness, and delights in the happiness of all his creatures. His own incomparable felicity has placed him as much above any temptation to envying others, as above any occasion of being contemned by them. He grudges no man's happiness, and therefore cannot tempt men to sin, out of a desire to see them miserable. So that none of those considerations which move the Devil to tempt men to sin, and evil men to tempt one another to do wickedly, can be imagined to have any place in God.

And thus you see the force of the Apostle's argument, that because *God cannot be tempted to evil,* therefore *he can tempt no man.* None tempt others to be bad, but those who are first so themselves. I shall now in the

Second place, Consider the nature and kind of the argument, which the Apostle here useth, Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. It does not reject this impious proposition barely upon his own authority; but he argues against it from the nature and perfection of God; and therein appeals to the common notions of mankind concerning God. We might very well have rested in his authority, being an Apostle commissioned by our Saviour, and extraordinarily assisted and witnessed to, by the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, wherewith he was endowed. But he condescends to give a reason of what he says, and appeals to the common principles of mankind. For all men will readily agree to this, *that God hath all imaginable perfection*: but it is a plain imperfection to be liable to be tempted to evil, and therefore *God cannot be tempted to evil*. And if so, it is as impossible *that he should tempt others to it*; for none can have either an inclination or interest to seduce others to evil, but those who have been first seduced to it themselves.

Now in this method of arguing, the Apostle teacheth us one of the surest ways of reasoning in religion; namely, from the *natural notions which men have of God*. So that all doctrines plainly contrary to those natural notions which men have of God, are to be rejected, what authority soever they pretend to; whatever plainly derogates from the goodness or justice of God, or any other of his perfections, is certainly false, what authority soever it may claim from the judgment of learned and pious men; yea tho' it pretend to be countenanc'd from the texts and expressions of holy Scripture. Because nothing can be entertain'd as a Divine Revelation, which plainly contradicts the common natural notions which mankind have of God. For all reasoning about Divine Revelation, and whether that which pretends to be so, be really so or not, is to be govern'd by those natural notions. And if any thing that pretends to be a revelation from God, should teach men that there is no God, or that he is not wise, and good, just, and powerful; this is reason enough to reject it, how confident soever the pretence be, that it is a Divine Revelation.

And if any thing be, upon good grounds in reason, received for a divine revelation, (as the holy Scriptures are amongst christians) no man ought to be regarded, who from thence pretends to maintain any doctrine contrary to the natural notions, which men have of God; such as clearly contradict his holiness, or goodness, or justice, or do by plain and undeniable consequence make God the author of sin, or the like; because the very attempt to prove any such thing out of Scripture, does strike at the Divine Authority of those books. For if they be from God, it is certain they can contain no such thing. So that no man ought to suffer himself to be seduced into any such opinions, upon pretence that there are expressions in Scripture, which seem to countenance them. For if they really did so, the consequence would not be the confirming of such opinions; but the weakening of the authority of the Scripture it self. For just so many arguments as any man can draw from Scripture for any such opinion, so many weapons he puts into the hands of Atheists against the Scripture it self.

I do not speak this, as if I thought there were any ground from Scripture for any such doctrine, I am very certain there is not. And if there be any particular expressions, which to prejudic'd men may seem to import any such thing, every man ought to govern himself in the interpretation of such passages, by what is clear and plain, and agreeable to the main scope and tenour of the Bible, and to those natural notions which men have of God, and of his perfections. For when all is done, this is one of the surest ways of reasoning in religion; and whoever guides himself, and steers by this compass, can never err much; but whoever suffers himself to be led away by the appearance of some more obscure phrases in the expressions of Scripture,

Scripture, and the glosses of men upon them, without regard to this rule, may run into the greatest delusions, may wander eternally, and lose himself in one mistake after another, and shall never find his way out of this endless *Labyrinth*, but by *this Clue*.

If St. *James* had not been an Apostle, the argument which he useth would have convinced any reasonable man, *that God tempts no man to sin*, because *he cannot be tempted with evil himself*, and therefore it is unreasonable to imagine *he should tempt any man*. For he argues from such a principle, as all mankind will, at first hearing, assent to.

And thus I have done with the *first* thing asserted by the Apostle here in the text ; *That God tempts no man to sin*. *Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man*. Before I proceed to the *second* assertion, *that every man is his own greatest tempter*, I should draw some useful inferences from what hath been already delivered : but I reserve both the one and the other to the next opportunity.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N LXII.

The Sins of Men not chargeable upon God; but upon themselves.

JAMES i. 13, 14.

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.



WHEN I made entrance upon these words, I told you, that next to the Belief of a *God* and a *Providence*, nothing is more fundamentally necessary to the practice of a good life, than the Belief of these *two* principles; *that God is not the author of the sins of men; and that every man's fault lies at his own door.* And both these principles St. James does clearly and fully assert in these words.

First, God tempts no man to sin.

Secondly, Every man is his own greatest tempter.

The *first* of these I have largely spoken to in my former discourse; and from what I then said, I shall only draw a few useful inferences, before I proceed to the *second*, viz. These which follow.

First, Let us beware of all such doctrines, as do any ways tend to make God the author of sin; either by laying a necessity upon men of sinning, or by laying secret designs to tempt and seduce men to sin. Nothing can be farther from the nature of God, than to do any such thing, and nothing can be more dishonourable to him, than to imagine any such thing of him; *he is of purer eyes than to behold evil*; and can we think, that he who cannot endure to see it, should have any hand in it? We find that the holy men in Scripture are very careful to remove all thoughts and suspicion of this from God. *Elihu, Job 36. 3.* before he would argue about God's providence with *Job*, he resolves in the first place, to attribute nothing to God, that is unworthy of him. *I will (says he) ascribe righteousness to my maker.* So likewise St. Paul, *Rom. 7. 7. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Is the law sin?* that is, hath God given men a law to this end, that he might draw them into sin? far be it from him. *Gal. 2. 17. Is Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.*

You see then how tender good men have always been of ascribing any thing to God, that might seem to render him the author of sin. So that we have reason to take heed of all doctrines that are of this tendency; such as are the doctrines of an absolute and irrespective decree to damn the greatest part of mankind; and in order to that, and as a means to it, efficaciously to permit men to sin. For if these things be true, that God hath absolutely decreed to damn the greatest part of men, and to make good this decree he permits them to sin, not by a bare permission of leaving them to themselves, but by such a permission as shall be efficacious; that is, he will so permit them to sin as they cannot avoid it; then those who are under this decree of God, are under a necessity of sinning; which necessity, since it does not proceed from themselves, but from the decree of God, does by consequence make God the

the author of sin. And then that other doctrine, which is subservient to this, that God does by a physical and natural influence upon the minds and wills of men, determine them to every action that they do, to bad actions as well as good. I know they who say so, tell us that God only determines men to the action, but not to the evil of it. For instance, when *Cain* kill'd his Brother, God determin'd him (they say) to the natural action of taking away a man's life, which in many cases may be done without sin. Very true: But if in these circumstances the natural action could not be done without committing the sin, he that determin'd him to the natural action, determin'd him likewise to the sin.

I am far from any thought that those that maintain these doctrines, had any intention to make God the author of sin: but if this be the necessary consequence of these doctrines, there is reason enough to reject them, how innocent soever the intention be of those who maintain them.

Secondly, Let not us tempt any man to sin. All piety pretends to be an imitation of God, therefore let us endeavour to be like him in this. 'Tis true indeed, we may be tempted with evil, and therefore we are likely enough to tempt others: but we ought not to do so. It is contrary to holiness and goodness, to the temper and disposition of the most perfect Being in the world. God tempts no man; nay, it is the proper work and employment of the Devil, 'tis his very trade and profession; he goes about seeking whom he may betray into sin and destruction. To this end he walks up and down the earth, waiting all opportunities and advantages upon men to draw them into sin; so that we are his factors and instruments, whenever we tempt men to sin.

Let those consider this, who are so active and busy to seduce men into any kind of wickedness, and to instruct them in the arts of iniquity, who tempt men into bad company and courses, and take pleasure in debauching a virtuous person, and make it matter of great triumph to make a sober man drunk, as if it were so glorious an action to ruin a Soul, and destroy that, which is more worth than the whole world. Whenever you go about this work, remember whose instruments you are, and whose work you do, and what kind of work it is. Tempting others to sin is in Scripture called murder, for which reason the Devil is said to be *a murderer from the beginning*, because he was *a tempter*. *Whosoever committeth sin is of the Devil*: but whosoever tempts others to sin, is a sort of Devil himself.

Thirdly, Since God tempts no man, let us not tempt him. There is frequent mention in Scripture of mens tempting God, *i. e.* trying him as it were whether he will do any thing for their sakes, that is mis-becoming his goodness, and wisdom, and faithfulness, or any other of his perfections. Thus the *Israelites* are said to have *tempted God in the Wilderness forty years together*, and in that space, more remarkably *ten times*. The meaning of which expressions is, that when God had promised *Abraham* to bring his seed into the land of *Canaan*, that people, by their great and repeated provocations of God, did often provoke him to have destroyed them, and consequently to have fail'd of the promise which he made to the fathers. The Devil likewise tempted our Saviour to tempt God, by casting himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, in confidence that the Angels would take care of him: but our Saviour answers him, *it is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*. From which instance it appears, that men are said to tempt God, whenever they expect the protection of his providence in an unwarrantable way. God hath promised to take care of good men, but if they neglect themselves, or willingly cast themselves into danger, and expect his providence and protection, they do not trust God, but tempt him; they try whether God's providence will countenance their rashness, and provide for them, when they neglect themselves; and protect them from those dangers, to which they wilfully expose themselves.

So likewise if we be negligent in our callings, whereby we should provide for our families, if we lavish away that which we should lay up for them, and then depend upon the providence of God to supply them, and take care of them, we tempt God to that which is unworthy of him; which is to give approbation

to our folly, and to countenance our sloth and carelessness. We cannot seduce God, and draw him to do any thing that mis-becomes him, but we tempt him in, expecting the care and protection of his providence, when we wilfully run ourselves into danger, and neglect the means of providing for our own safety. And thus I have done with the *first* great principle contain'd in the text; *viz. That God is not the author of the sins of men.* I proceed now to the

Second, That every man is his own greatest tempter. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed. God does not tempt any man to sin: but every man is then tempted, when by his own lust, his irregular inclination and desire, he is seduced to evil, and enticed; *ὃς δὲ λείαζόμενος*, is caught as it were with a bait, for so the Greek word signifies.

In which words the Apostle gives us a true account of the prevalency and efficacy of temptation upon men. It is not because God has any design to ensnare men in sin; but their own corruption and vicious inclination seduce them to that which is evil. To instance in the particular temptations the Apostle was speaking of, persecution and suffering for the *cause of religion*, to avoid which, many did then forsake the truth, and apostatiz'd from their Christian profession. The true cause of which, was not the providence of God, which permitted them to be expos'd to those sufferings; but their inordinate love of the good things of this life, and their unreasonable fears of the evils and sufferings of it; they valued the enjoyments of this present life, more than the favour of God, and that eternal happiness which he had promised to them in another life; and they feared the persecutions of men, more than the threatenings of God, and the dreadful punishments of another world. They had an inordinate affection for the ease and pleasure of this life, and their unwillingness to part with these, was a great temptation to them to quit their religion; by this bait they were caught, when it came to the tryal.

And thus it is proportionably in all other sorts of temptations. Men are betrayed by themselves, and the temptation without hath a party within them, with which it holds a secret correspondence, and which is ready to yield and give consent to it; so that it is our own consent, and treachery to our selves that makes any temptation master of us, and without that we are not to be overcome; *every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed.* It is the lust of men complying with the temptations which are offer'd to us, which renders them effectual, and gives them the victory over us.

In the handling of this argument, I shall from these words of the Apostle observe to you these *two* things.

First, That as the Apostle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to sin, so he does not ascribe the prevalency of temptation to the Devil.

Secondly, That he ascribes the prevalency of temptation to the lust and vicious inclinations of men, which seduce them to a compliance with the temptations that are presented to them; *every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed.* These *two* observations shall be the subject of my present discourse.

First, That as the Apostle doth here acquit God from any hand in tempting men to sin, so he does not ascribe the prevalency and efficacy of temptation to the Devil. That he acquits God, I have shewn at large in my former discourse. It is evident likewise, that he does not ascribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the Devil; for the Apostle in this discourse of his concerning temptations, makes no express mention of the Devil; he supposeth indeed, that baits are laid for men, *every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed, i. e.* when he plays with the baits that are laid for him, and swallows them. And the Scripture elsewhere frequently tells us, that the Devil is very active and busy to tempt men, and is continually laying baits before them; but their own lusts are the cause why they are caught by them.

And I do the rather insist upon this, because men are apt to lay great load upon the Devil, in the business of temptation, hoping thereby either wholly, or at least in a great measure to excuse themselves; and therefore I shall here consider, how far

far the Devil by his temptations is the cause of the sins which men by compliance with those temptations are drawn into.

First, It is certain that the Devil is very active and busy to minister to them the occasions of sin, and temptations to it. For ever since he fell from God, partly out of enmity to him, and partly out of envy and malice to mankind, he hath made it his great business and employment to seduce men to sin; and to this end he walks up and down the earth, and watcheth all occasions and opportunities to tempt men to sin; and so far as his power reacheth, and God permits him, he lays baits and temptations before them in all their ways, presenting them with the occasions and opportunities to sin, and with such baits and allurements as are most suitable to their tempers, and most likely to prevail with their particular inclinations, and as often as he can, surprizing men with these at the easiest time of access, and with such circumstances, as may give his temptations the greatest force and advantage. Of this the Scripture assures us in general, when it tells us of those wiles and devices of Satan, and of the methods of his temptations; so that tho' we do not particularly discern how and when he doth this, yet we have no reason to doubt of the thing, if we believe that there is such a Spirit in the world, as the Scripture particularly tells us there is, that works in the children of disobedience, and that God from whom nothing is hidden, and who sees all the secret engines which are at work in the world, to do us good or harm, hath in mercy to mankind given us particular warning of it, that we may not be wholly ignorant of our enemies, and their malicious designs upon us, and that we may be continually upon our guard, aware of our danger, and armed against it.

Secondly, The Devil does not only present to men the temptations and occasions of sin; but when he is permitted to make nearer approaches to them, does excite and stir them up to comply with these temptations, and to yield to them. And this he does, not only by employing his instruments, to solicit for him, and to draw men to sin by bad counsel and example, which we see frequently done, and probably very often by the Devil's instigation; (those who are very wicked themselves, and consequently more enslaved to the Devil, and under his power, being as it were factors for him to seduce others;) but besides this, 'tis not improbable but the Devil himself does many times immediately excite men to sin, by working upon the humours of their bodies, or upon their imaginations; and by that means infusing and suggesting evil motions into them; or by diverting them from those thoughts and considerations, which might check and restrain them from that wickedness to which he is tempting them; or by some other ways and means more secret and unknown to us. For the power of Spirits, whether good or bad, and the manner of their operations upon our minds, are things very secret, and of which we can give little or no account, but yet for all that, we have many times reason sufficient to believe a thing to be so, when we are wholly ignorant of the manner of it.

And there is reason, from what is said in Scripture, to believe that the Devil, in some cases, hath a more immediate power and influence upon the minds of men, to excite them to sin, and, where he discovers a very bad inclination or resolution, to help it forward, and to keep men to it; as when it is said, *John 13. 27.* that *the Devil enter'd into Judas*, to push him on in that ill design which he had already engaged in, of betraying our Saviour. And *Acts 5. 3.* Satan is said to have *filled the heart of Ananias*, to lie to the holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price for which he had sold his estate; which expressions do seem to intimate to us some more immediate power and influence which the Devil had upon those persons: but then 'tis very observable, that this power is never ascribed to the Devil; but in the case of great and horrid sins, and where men are before-hand notoriously depraved, and either by the actual commission of some former great sin, or by entertaining some very wicked design, have provoked God to permit the Devil a nearer access to them. For *Judas* had first taken council how to betray Christ, before it is said *the Devil enter'd into him*, to push him on to the execution of it. And *Ananias* his covetousness had first tempted him to keep back part of his estate, before it is said *the Devil filled his heart to lie to the holy Ghost*; so that what power the Devil hath over men,

they first give it him; they consent to his outward temptations, before he can get within them. Hence it is that in Scripture great sinners are described, as being more immediately under the government and influence of the Devil. *Ephes. 2. 1, 2.* Where the Apostle speaking of those, who from heathenism were converted to christianity, *you* (says he) *hath he quicken'd, who were once dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in times past ye walked, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, or unbelief; τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ νῦν ἐνεργεῖ, the spirit that still acts and inspires the children of unbelief;* that is, those who continue in their infidelity, and would not believe and obey the gospel. When men are notoriously wicked and disobedient to the councils of God, the Devil is said to act and inspire them, which certainly signifies some more immediate power and influence which he hath over such persons.

For as it is very probable, that the Devil is sometimes permitted to come near good men so as to tempt them; so by notorious wickedness and impiety, men do give admision to him, and he is permitted by the just judgment of God to exercise greater dominion over them. By resisting his temptations, we drive him from us. So St. *James* tells us, *Chap. 4. v. 7. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you;* but as we yield to his temptations, he continually makes nearer approaches to us, and gains a greater power over us.

Thirdly, But for all this, the Devil can force no man to sin; his temptations may move and excite men to sin, but that they are prevalent and effectual, proceeds from our own will and consent; 'tis our *own lusts* closing with his temptations, that produce sin. The Devil hath more or less power over men, according as they give way to him; but never so much as to force their wills, and to compel them to consent to, and comply with his temptations; the grace of God doth hardly offer this violence to men for their good, in order to their salvation; and therefore much less will he permit the Devil to have this power over men to their ruin and destruction. God's commanding us to resist the Devil, supposeth that his temptations are not irresistible.

Fourthly, From what hath been said, it appears, that tho' the Devil be frequently accessory to the sins of men, yet we our selves are the authors of them; he tempts us many times to sin, but it is we that commit it. His temptations may sometimes be so violent as to extenuate our fault, but never so forcible as wholly to excuse us; for we are so far guilty of sin, as we give our consent to it; and how powerful soever the temptation be to any kind of evil, there is always enough of our own will in it to render us guilty.

I am far from thinking that the Devil tempts men to all the evil that they do. I rather think that the greatest part of the wickedness that is committed in the world, springs from the evil motions of mens own minds. Mens own lusts are generally to them the worst Devil of the two, and do more strongly incline them to sin, than any Devil without them can tempt them to it. It is not to be doubted, that the Devil does all the mischief he can to the souls of men, so far as God permits him; and tho' the number of evil Angels be probably very great, yet it is but finite, and every one of them hath a limited power; and tho' they be very active, yet they can be but one where at once; so that his malice at the utmost does only all the evil that it can, not all that it would; he pyles where he has the best custom, where he has the fairest opportunity, and the greatest hopes; he leaves men many times for a season as (it is said) he did our Saviour, because he despairs of success at that time; and it may be sometimes when he is gone, these persons grow secure, and through their own security and folly fall into those sins, which the Devil with all his baits and wiles, whilst they were upon their guard, could not tempt them to commit.

Others, after he has made them sure, and put them into the way of it, will go on of themselves, and are as mad of sinning, and as forward to destroy themselves, as the Devil himself could wish; so that he can hardly tempt men to any wickedness, which he does not find them inclin'd to of themselves. These he can trust with themselves, and leave them to their own inclinations and conduct,

duct, finding by experience, that they will do as ill things of their own motion, as if Satan stood continually at their right hand to prompt them, and put them on, so that he can go into a far countrey, and employ himself elsewhere, and leave them for a long time, being confident that in his absence they will not bury their talent, and hide it in a napkin, but will improve it to a great advantage. And I wish that our own age did not afford us too many instances of this kind, of such forward and expert sinners, as need no tempter either to instruct or excite them to that which is evil. Now in this case the Devil betakes himself to other persons, and removes his snares and baits where he thinks there is more need and occasion for them.

So that we may reasonably conclude, that there is a great deal of wickedness committed in the world, which the Devil hath no immediate hand in, tho' he always rejoiceth in it when it is done; and that there is a great deal more reason to attribute all good to the motions and operations of the Spirit of God, than to ascribe all sin and wickedness in the world to the Devil; because the Spirit of God is more powerful, and is always every where, and is more intent upon his design, and as forward to promote it, as the Devil can be to carry on his work; nay, I doubt not but he is more active to excite men to good, than the Devil can be to tempt them to evil. And yet for all this I think there is no great reason to doubt, but that good men do many good actions of their own inclination, without any special and immediate motion from the Spirit of God. They are indeed at first regenerate, and sanctified by the holy Ghost, and are continually afterwards under the conduct of the same Spirit: but where there is a new nature, it is of it self inclinable to that which is good, and will bring forth fruits, and do actions answerable. Much less do I think that the Devil tempts every man to all the evil that he does, or the greatest part. When the lusts of men, and the habits of vice are grown strong and confirmed, the Devil may spare his temptations in a great measure; for after wicked men are wound up to such a pitch of impiety, they will go a great while of themselves.

I have done with the *first* observation, that as the Apostle acquits God from having any hand in tempting men to sin, so neither does he ascribe the efficacy and prevalency of temptation to the Devil. I proceed to the

Second observation, That he ascribes the efficacy and success of temptation to the lusts and vitious inclinations of men, which seduce them to a consent and compliance with the temptations which are afforded to them. *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed.* We have many powerful enemies; but we are much more in danger of treachery from within, than of assaults from without. All the power of our enemies could not destroy us if we were but true to our selves; so that the Apostle had great reason to ascribe the efficacy of temptation, to the irregular desires and vitious inclinations of men, rather than to those temptations which the providence of God permits them to be assaulted with, and consequently to lay the blame of mens sins chiefly upon themselves.

And that chiefly upon these *two* accounts.

First, Because the lusts of men are in a great measure voluntary.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to resist these temptations, and overcome them. Now so far as the lusts of men are voluntary, it is their own fault that they are seduced by them, and if God hath put it in our power to resist and overcome temptations, we may blame our selves, if we be overcome and foiled by them.

First, The lusts of men are in a great measure voluntary. By the lusts of men, I mean their irregular desires, and vitious inclinations. I grant that the nature of man is very much corrupted, and degenerated from its primitive integrity and perfection: but we who are Christians, have received that grace in baptism, whereby our natures are so far healed, as if we be not wanting to our selves, and do not neglect the means which God hath appointed to us, we may mortify our lusts, and live a new life; so that if our lusts remain unmortified, we our selves are in fault, much more if they gain new strength, and proceed

ceed to habits; for this could not be, if we did not after we come to age, and are able to discern between, and to chuse good and evil, voluntarily consent to Iniquity, and by wilfull and deliberate practice of known sins, improve the evil inclinations of our nature into vitious habits: but if instead of mortifying and subduing the evil propensions of our nature (which is no very difficult work to most persons, if they begin it betimes) we will cherish and give new life and power to them, we forfeit the grace which we received in baptism, and bring our selves again under the power and dominion of sin; and no wonder then, if our lusts seduce us, and make us ready to comply with the temptations of the world and the Devil.

Nay, and after this it is still our own fault, if we do not mortify our lusts; for if we would hearken to the counsel of God, and obey his calls to repentance, and sincerely beg his grace and holy Spirit to this purpose, we might yet recover our selves, and *by the spirit mortify the lusts of the flesh*; for tho' we have left God, he hath not quite forsaken us, but is ready to afford his grace again to us, tho' we have neglected and abused it, and to give his holy Spirit to those that ask him, tho' they have forfeited it; so that tho' our lusts spring from something which is natural, yet that they live and have dominion over us, is voluntary, because we might remedy it if we would, and make use of those means which God in the Gospel offers to us.

Secondly, God hath put it in our power to resist these temptations, and overcome them; so that it is our own fault, if we yield to them, and be overcome by them.

It is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations; and the grace of God, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to our selves, puts it into our power to resist any temptation that may happen to us.

First, It is naturally in our power to resist many sorts of temptations. If we do but make use of our natural reason, and those considerations which are common and obvious to men, we may easily resist the temptations to a great many sins. Some sins are so horrid in their nature, that when we have the strongest temptations to them, we cannot but have a natural aversion from them; as deliberate murder, the danger and guilt whereof, are both so great, as make it easy for any considerate man to resist the strongest temptation to it, even that of revenge. A plain act of injustice, whether by great fraud, or by downright oppression, is so base and disgraceful, so odious and abhorred by human nature, that it is not difficult to a man that hath but a common understanding, and common inclination to be honest, to overcome the greatest temptation of gain and advantage; nay he must offer considerable violence to his nature and reason, to bring himself to it at first. Prophaneness and contempt of God and religion is so monstrous a fault, and of so dreadful an appearance, that every man that will but use his reason, can have no temptation to it, either from gratifying his humour, or pleasing his company, or shewing his wit, that can be of equal force with the arguments which every man's mind and conscience is apt to suggest to him against it.

Nay, there are many sins much inferiour to these, the temptations whereto may by the ordinary reasons and considerations of prudence and interest, be baffled and put out of countenance. To instance in common swearing, to which I think there is no temptation, either from pleasure or advantage, but only from fashion and custom. Now this temptation is easie to be conquer'd, by considering that every man that professeth to believe the Bible, must acknowledge it to be a sin; and if any man be convinc'd that it is a sin, I dare undertake to convince him that he can leave it. He that can chuse at any time whether he will speak or not (which it is certainly in every man's power to do) can chuse whether he will swear when he speaks. If he says he does it by custom and habit, and when he does not think of it; a very little care and resolution will in a short time cure any man of that custom; so that it is naturally in every man's power to break off this sin.

Secondly, The grace of God puts it into our power, if we do not neglect it, and be not wanting to our selves, to resist any temptation that may happen to us; and what

what the grace of God puts into our power, is as truly in our power, as what we can do our selves. God offers his grace to every man under the gospel, for he has promised *to give his holy Spirit to them that ask him*, and it is naturally in every man's power to ask it, otherwise the promise signifies nothing; for if no man can ask the Spirit of God, till he first have it, then to promise it to them that ask it, is to promise it to them who have it already, and then 'tis needless to ask it. And if God offers his grace to every man, then 'tis every man's fault if he have it not; and every man that hath it, may by the ordinary assistance of that grace, resist any ordinary temptation. And if at any time God suffers good men to be assaulted, he hath promised in such cases an extraordinary grace and assistance: and that either *he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able*, or *that with the temptation he will find a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it*.

And thus I have done with the *second* thing I propounded to speak to from these words, *that every man is his own greatest tempter. Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed*. And now the proper inferences from what I have been all this while discoursing to you are these *three*.

First, Not to think to excuse our selves, by laying the blame of our sins upon the temptation of the Devil. That the Devil tempts us is not our fault, because we cannot help it; but it is our voluntary compliance with his temptations, our consenting to that evil which he solicits us to, which maketh us guilty. *Every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust*; The lusts of our own hearts give the efficacy to the temptations of the Devil: men many times sin upon the motions and suggestions of the Devil: but tho' he be guilty of tempting us, we are guilty of consenting to his temptations.

Many times we are not sure that the Devil tempts us to such a sin, but we are sure that we commit it, and consequently that we are guilty of it. Nay it is certain, if there were no Devil, many would be wicked, and perhaps not much less wicked than they are. The lusts and vitious inclinations of men would yield to the temptations of the world, tho' there were none to manage them, and to set them on to the greatest advantage; so that we cannot excuse our faults upon this account, that we are tempted by the Devil. If this were a sufficient excuse for us, the Devil would take no pleasure in tempting us; the whole design of his temptation being to make us guilty, and by the guilt of sin to make us miserable.

Secondly, From hence we learn what reason we have to pray to God, that he would *not lead us into temptation, i. e.* not permit us to fall into it; for in the phrase of scripture, God is many times said to do those things, which his providence permits to be done. The best of us have some remainders of lust, some irregular desires and appetites, which will be apt to betray us to sin, when powerful temptations are presented to us; so that it is a great happiness to the best of men, to be kept by the providence of God out of the way of violent temptations; for our own strength to resist them is but small, and we are apt to be secure, and to neglect our guard; we are easy to be surprized, and in continual danger through our own weakness or carelessness. Our greatest security is, if we be sincere, and heartily desirous to do well, and firmly resolved against sin, and do depend upon God for his grace and assistance, that his providence will not suffer us to fall into the hands of dangerous and violent temptations, which probably would be too hard for us; he who knows what our strength is, *will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able*.

Thirdly, From hence we may learn the best way to disarm temptations, and to take away the power of them, and that is by mortifying our lusts, and subduing our vitious inclinations. When this is done, (which by the grace of God may be done) temptation hath lost its greatest advantage upon us. 'Tis the conspiracy of our lusts, with the temptations that set upon us, that betrays us into their power. The true reason why men fall into sin, is not because they are tempted, but because there is something within them, which inclines and disposes them to comply with the temptation, and to yield to it.

It

It is said, when the Devil came to our Saviour to tempt him, that *he found nothing in him*, and therefore his temptations had no force upon him. The more we mortifie our lusts, the less the Devil will find in us, for his temptations to work upon. Every spark is dangerous, when it falls upon combustible matter; but tho' sparks fly never so thick, there is no danger, so long as there is nothing about us to catch fire.

If we will not be drawn aside and enticed to sin, let us mortifie our lusts; for so far as we are mortified, we are out of the power of temptation.

Men are apt to complain of temptations, that they are too hard for them, and that they are not able to resist them, tho' they pray to God continually for his grace to that purpose. This indeed is one means very proper and necessary to be used; but this is not all that we are to do; we must break off habits of sin, and subdue our lusts, and keep under our inclinations, and then we shall find our selves able to resist and encounter temptations with more success. And till we do this, in vain do we pray for God's grace, and depend upon him for strength to overcome the temptations that do assault us; for God's grace was never design'd to countenance the sloth and negligence of men, but to encourage and second our resolutions and endeavours of well-doing. If we expect God's grace and assistance upon other terms, we tempt God, and provoke him to leave us to the power of temptations, to be *drawn away and enticed by our own lusts*.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N LXIII.

Proving Jesus to be the *Messias*.

MATTH. XI. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his Disciples, and said unto him, *Art thou he that should come: or do we look for another?* Jesus answered and said unto them, *Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear, and see. The Blind receive their sight, and the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleansed, and the Deaf hear, the Dead are raised up, and the Poor have the Gospel preached unto them: And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

ABOUT the time of our Saviour's appearing in the world, there was a general expectation of a great Prince, that should come out of *Judæa*, and govern all nations: this the *Gentiles* had from the prophecies of the *Sibyls*, which spake of a great King that was to appear in the world about that time. So *Virgil* tells us, that the time of *Augustus* was the utmost date of that prophecy; *ultima Cumæi venit jam carminis ætas*: and *Suetonius* tells us, that all over the Eastern countries, there was an ancient and constant tradition, that such a Prince should spring out of *Judæa*: and for this reason it is, that our Saviour is call'd by the Prophet, *the expectation of the nations*.

But more especially among the *Jews*, there was at that time a more lively and particular expectation, grounded upon the predictions of their Prophets, of a Prince whom they call'd the *Messias*, or *the anointed*; and those who were more devout among them, did at that time wait for his appearance; as it is said of *Simeon*, that he waited for the consolation of *Israel*. Hence it was, that when *John the Baptist* appeared in the quality of an extraordinary Prophet, they sent from *Jerusalem* to enquire whether he were the *Messias*? *John* i. 19. *The Jews sent Priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not, but confessed, I am not the Christ.* The *Sanhedrim*, to whom it belonged to judge who were true Prophets, sent to know whether he was the *Messias* or not? he would not take this honour to himself; but told them the *Messias* was just at hand; and the next day, when *Jesus* came to be baptized of him, he bare record, that he was the Son of God, and that he saw the Spirit descending and abiding upon him.

So that it is plain that he knew him, and bare witness of him, which makes it the more strange that here in the text, he should send two of his Disciples to enquire, whether he were the *Messias* or not? *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* that is, art thou the *Messias*, or not? for so he is call'd in the ancient prophecies of him, *ἐρχόμενος*, he that should come. *Gen.* 49. 10. *The Scepter shall not depart from Judah, till Shiloh come.*

For the resolution of this difficulty, it is very probably said by interpreters, and I think there is no reason to doubt of it, that *John the Baptist* did not send this

this message for his own satisfaction, but to satisfy his Disciples, who were never very willing to acknowledge Jesus for the Messias, because they thought he did shadow and cloud their master. From whence we may take notice, how mens Judgments are apt to be perverted by faction and interest; and that good men are too prone to be swayed thereby; for such we suppose the Disciples of John to have been; they will not believe their own master, when they apprehend him to speak against their interest; for they knew that they must rise and fall in their reputation and esteem, as their master did. They believed that their master was a Prophet, and came from God; yet for all that, they could not digest his testimony of Christ, because that set him above their master; which they were sagacious enough to perceive, that it tended to the diminution and lessening of themselves. And that this was the thing which troubled them, appears plainly from the complaint which they make to their master, *John 3. 26. The Disciples of John came to him and said, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to him. This troubled them, to see him invade their master's office, and that he began to have more followers than John had; he baptizeth, and all men come to him.*

This prejudice John had endeavour'd to root out of their minds, by telling them, that he had always declared that he was not the Messias, *v. 28. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him.* But when he perceiv'd it still to stick with them, and that they observed all his actions, and the miracles that he wrought, as if they had a mind to pick a quarrel with him (for St. Luke, who relates the same story, tells us, that when our Saviour had healed the Centurion's servant, and raised from the dead the widow's son at Naim, the Disciples of John shew'd him all these things) I say, John Baptist perceiving that they watched him so narrowly, sent two of his Disciples to him, that they might receive full satisfaction from him. And St. Luke tells us, that upon their coming to him, he wrought many of his miracles before them, to convince them that he was the true Messias. *Luke 7. 21, 22. And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities, and plagues, and of evil spirits; and to many that were blind he gave sight; and then said to the Disciples of John, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised, and to the poor the gospel is preached; and blessed is he that is not offended in me.*

So that you see that the reason why John Baptist sent to our Saviour to know whether he was the Messias, was not to satisfy himself, for he had no doubt of it; but perceiving his Disciples to be ill-affected towards our Saviour, and hearing them speak with some envy of his miracles, he sent them to him, that by seeing what he did, and hearing what account he gave of himself, they might receive full satisfaction concerning him.

I have been the longer in the clearing of this, that men upon every appearance of contradiction in the evangelical history, may not be too forward to suspect the truth of it; but may be convinc'd, that if they would but have patience to examine things carefully, they would find that the story does sufficiently vindicate it self; and tho' it be penn'd with great simplicity, yet there is sufficient care taken to free it from being guilty of any contradiction to it self.

The occasion of the words being thus cleared, there are in them these two things considerable.

First, What it was that John the Baptist sent his Disciples to be satisfied about; and that was, *whether he was the Messias or not? Now when John had heard in prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his Disciples.* The circumstance of his being in prison, seems to be mention'd, to intimate to us the reason why he did not come himself along with them; he sent two of his Disciples to him, who said unto him, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? And then*

Secondly, The answer which our Saviour returns to this message; *Jesus answered and said unto them, go and shew John again the things which ye do see and hear;*

hear; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them; and blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

So that these words contain, *first*, the evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Messias. *Secondly*, an intimation that notwithstanding all this evidence which he gave of himself, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him; *blessed is he, whosoever is not offended in me.*

First, The evidence which our Saviour gives of his being the true Messias: and to prove this, there were but *two* things necessary.

1. To shew that he was sent by God, and had a particular commission from him.
2. That he was the very person of whom the Prophets foretold that he should be the Messias.

The *first* of these he proves by the miracles which he wrought; and the *second* by the correspondency of the things he did, with what was foretold by the Prophets concerning the Messias; the prophecies concerning the Messias were accomplish'd in him.

First, By the miracles which he wrought; *the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up.* Here is a brief enumeration of the several sorts of miracles which our Saviour wrought, and these were a testimony to him that *he came from God*, and was sent and commissioned by him to declare his will to the world. So he himself tells us, *John 5. 39. I have a greater witness than that of John, for the works which the father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the father hath sent me.* Upon the evidence of these miracles, *Nicodemus*, a ruler among the *Jews*, was convinced that he was sent by God, *John 3. 2. We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou dost, except God be with him.* Nay his greatest enemies were afraid of his miracles, knowing how proper an argument they are to convince men. *John 11. 47. when the chief Priests and Pharisees were met together in council against him, they concluded, that if he were permitted to go on and work miracles, he would draw all men after him. What do we? (say they) for this man doth many miracles; if we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* This they said, upon occasion of the great miracle of raising *Lazarus* from the dead.

And in reason, miracles are the highest attestation that can be given to the truth and divinity of any doctrine; and supposing a doctrine not to be plainly unworthy of God, and contrary to those natural notions which men have of God and religion, we can have no greater evidence of the truth of it, than miracles; they are such an argument, as in its own nature is apt to persuade and induce belief.

All truths do not need miracles; some are of easy belief, and are so clear by their own light, that they need neither miracle nor demonstration to prove them. Such are those self-evident principles which mankind do generally agree in: others which are not so evident by their own light, we are content to receive upon clear demonstration of them, or very probable arguments for them, without a miracle. And there are some truths, which however they may be sufficiently obscure and uncertain to most men, yet are they so inconsiderable, and of so small consequence, as not to deserve the attestation of miracles; so that there is no reason to expect that God should interpose by a miracle, to convince men of them.

Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus Inciderit.

But for such truths as are necessary to be known by us, but are not sufficiently evident of themselves, nor capable of cogent evidence, especially to prejudiced and interested persons, God is pleased in this case many times to work miracles for our conviction; and they are a proper argument to convince us of a thing that is either in it self obscure and hard to be believed, or which we are prejudiced against, and hardly brought to believe; for they are an argument *à majori ad minus*, they prove a thing which is obscure and hard to be believed,

lieved, by something that is more incredible, which yet they cannot deny because they see it done. Thus our Saviour proves himself to be an extraordinary person, by *doing such things as never man did*; he convinceth them, that they ought to believe what he said, because they saw him do those things, which were harder to be believed (if one had not seen them) than what he said.

Miracles are indeed the greatest external confirmation and evidence that can be given to the truth of any doctrine, and where they are wrought with all the advantages they are capable of, they are an unquestionable demonstration of the truth of it; and such were our Saviour's miracles here in the text, to prove that he was the true Messias; here are miracles of all kinds, *the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up*. For the nature of them, they are such as are most likely to be divine and to come from God, for they were healing and beneficial to mankind. Our Saviour here instanceth in those things which are of greatest benefit and advantage, and which free men from the greatest miseries and inconveniences; the restoring of sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf; soundness and health to the lame and the leprous, and life to the dead. And then for the number of them, they were many; not one instance of a kind, but several of every kind, and great multitudes of most of them; and for the manner of their operation, they were publick, in the sight and view of great multitudes of people, to free them from all suspicion of fraud and imposture, they were not wrought privately and in corners, and given out and noised abroad, but before all the people, so that every one might see them, and judge of them; not only among his own disciples and followers, as the Church of *Rome* pretends to work theirs, but among his enemies, *to convince those that did not believe*; and this not done once, and in one place, but at several times, and in all places where he came, and for a long time, for three years and a half; and after his death, he endowed his disciples and followers with the same power, which lasted for some ages. And then for the quality of them, they were miracles of the greatest magnitude; those of them, which in themselves might have been performed by natural means, as healing the lame, and the leprous, and the deaf, he did in a miraculous manner, by a word or a touch, yea and many times at a great distance. But others were not only in the manner of their operation, but in the nature of the thing unquestionably miraculous, as giving of sight to those that had been born blind, and raising up the dead to life, as *Lazarus*, after he had lain in the grave four days; and himself afterwards, the third day after he had been buried; which, if there ever was or can be any unquestionable miracles in the world, ought certainly to be reputed such. So that our blessed Saviour had all the attestation that miracles can give, that he came from God. And this is the *first* evidence of his being the Messias.

The *Jews* acknowledge that the Messias when he comes shall work great miracles; and their own *Talmud* confesseth, that *Jesus the son of Joseph and Mary did work great miracles*; and the history of the gospel does particularly relate more and greater miracles wrought by him, than by *Moses* and all the Prophets that had been since the world began; so that we may still put the same question to the *Jews*, which they did in our Saviour's time to one another; *when Christ cometh, when the Messias whom ye expect comes, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*

But, *Secondly*, this will yet more clearly appear by the correspondency of the things here mentioned, with what was foretold by the Prophets concerning the Messias.

Not to mention innumerable circumstances of his birth, and life, and death, and resurrection, and ascension into heaven, together with the success and prevalency of his doctrine in the world, all which are punctually foretold by some or other of the Prophets: I shall confine my self to the particulars here in the text.

First, It was foretold of the Messias, that he should work miraculous cures. *Isa. 35. 4, 5, 6.* speaking of the Messias, *he will come and save you; then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopp'd; then*

then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; this you see was fulfilled here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, the text mentions another miracle which is not in the prophet, that *he raised the dead*; but if God did more than he promised and foretold, this is no prejudice to the argument, if all that he foretold was accomplish'd in him. Besides, the *Jews* have a proverb, that God is not content to perform barely what he promiseth, but *he usually doth something over and above his promise*. That the Messias should *heal the blind, and the deaf, and the lame*, *Isaiah* prophesied; and God makes good this promise and prediction to the full; the Messias did not only do these, but, which is more and greater than any of these, *he raised the dead to life*.

Secondly, It was likewise foretold of the Messias, that he *should preach the Gospel to the poor*, *Isa. 61. 1. The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; εὐαγγελίζεσθαι πτωχοῖς to preach the Gospel or good tidings to the poor*; so the LXXII render the words; and they are the very words used by our Saviour here in the text. 'Tis true indeed, this was no miracle, but it was the punctual accomplishment of a prophecy concerning the Messias, and consequently an evidence that he was the Messias. But besides it had something in it which was very strange to the *Jews*, and very different from the way of their doctors and teachers; for the *Rabbies* among the *Jews* would scarce instruct any but for great reward; they would meddle with none but those that were able to requite their pains: the ordinary and poorer sort of people they had in great contempt, as appears by that slighting expression of them, *John 7. 48, 49. Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? but this people who knoweth not the law are cursed*. And *Grotius* upon this text tells us, that the Jewish masters had this foolish and insolent proverb among them, that *the Spirit of God doth not rest but upon a rich man*, to which this prediction concerning the Messias was a direct contradiction: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor*. In old time the Prophets were especially sent to the *Kings* and *Princes* of the people: but this great Prophet comes *to preach the Gospel to the poor*. None have so little reason to be proud as the sons of men, but never was any so humble as the Son of God, our Saviour's whole life and doctrine was a contradiction to the false opinions of the world; they thought the rich and great men of the world the only happy persons, but *he came to preach glad tidings to the poor*, to bring good news to them whom the great doctors of the law despised, and set at nought; and therefore to confound their pride and folly, and to confute their false opinions of things, he begins that excellent sermon of his with this saying, *Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God*.

Thirdly, It was foretold of the Messias, that the world should be offended at him, *Isa. 8. 14. He shall be for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel*. And *Isa. 53. 1, 2, 3. Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him; he is despised and rejected of men, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not*; and this likewise is intimated in the last words of the text, *and blessed is he who soever shall not be offended in me*. Intimating, that notwithstanding the great works that he did among them, which testified of him that he came from God, notwithstanding the predictions of their prophets concerning the Messias were so clearly and punctually accomplish'd in him; yet notwithstanding all this, they would take offence at him upon one account or other, and reject him and his doctrine; but even this, that they rejected him, and would not own him for their Messias, was another sign or evidence that he was the true Messias foretold by the Prophets; for among other things this was expressly predicted concerning him, that he should be despised and rejected of men.

And thus I have done with the first thing I propounded to speak to; namely, the evidence which our Saviour here gives of his being the true Messias.

First, The many and great miracles which he wrought, prove that he came from God. And,

Secondly, The correspondence of the things he did, with what was foretold by the prophets concerning the Messias, declare him to be the true Messias.

I now proceed to the next thing I propounded to speak to, namely,

Secondly, An *intimation* in the text, that notwithstanding all the evidence Christ gave of himself, yet many would be offended at him, and reject him, and his doctrine. In speaking to which, it will be very proper to consider,

First, How *the poor* came to be more disposed to receive the gospel, than others.

Secondly, What those prejudices are which the world had against our Saviour and his religion at its first appearance, as also those which men have at this day against the christian religion, and to endeavour to shew the unreasonableness of them.

Thirdly, How happy a thing it is to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men have against religion.

First, How the *poor* came to be more disposed to receive the Gospel than others; *the poor have the gospel preached unto them*. Which does not only signify that our Saviour did more especially apply himself to them, but likewise that they were in a nearer disposition to receive it, and did of all others give the most ready entertainment to his doctrine: and this our Saviour declares to us in the beginning of his sermon upon the mount, when he pronounceth the *poor* blessed upon this account, because they were nearer to the kingdom of God than others; *blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of God*. So likewise St. James, Chap. 2. v. 5. *Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?* So that it seems the *poor* were upon some account or other in a nearer disposition to receive the gospel, than the *great* and *rich* men of this world. And of this there are three accounts to be given.

First, The poor had no earthly interest to engage them to reject our Saviour and his doctrine. The high-priests, and scribes, and pharisees among the Jews, they had a plain worldly interest which did engage them to oppose our Saviour and his doctrine; for if he were received for the Messias, and his doctrine embraced, they must of necessity lose their sway and authority among the people; and all that which render'd them so considerable, their pretended skill in the law, and in the traditions and observances of their fathers, together with their external shews of piety and devotion, would signify nothing; if our Saviour and his doctrine should take place. And there are very few so honest and sincere, as to be content for truth's sake, to part with their reputation and authority, and to become less in the esteem of men than they were before. Few are so impartial as to quit those things which they have once laid great weight upon, and kept a great stir about, because this is to acknowledge that they were in an error, and mistaken in their zeal, which few have the ingenuity to own, tho' it be never so plain to others; and therefore it is no wonder that our Saviour's doctrine met with so much resistance from those, who were so much concern'd in point of honour and reputation, to make head against it. And this account our Saviour himself gives of their infidelity, John 5. 44. *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour which cometh of God only?* and Chap. 12. 43. *For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*.

And besides the point of reputation, those that were rich, were concerned in point of interest, to oppose our Saviour and his doctrine; because he call'd upon men *to deny themselves, and to part with houses and lands, yea and life itself, for his sake, and for the gospel's*, which must needs be a very hard and unpleasant doctrine to rich men, who had great estates, and had set their hearts upon them. Upon this account it is that our Saviour pronounceth it so *hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*; and compares it with those things that are most difficult, and humanly impossible; *I say unto you, it is easier for a Camel*

camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

But now the *Poor* were free from these incumbrances and temptations; they had nothing to lose, and therefore our Saviour's doctrine went down more easily with them; because it did not contradict their interest, as it did the interest of those who had great estates and possessions.

Secondly, Another reason of this is, that those that are *poor*, and enjoy little of the good things of this life, are willing to entertain good news of happiness in another. Those who are in a state of present misery and suffering, are glad to hear that it shall be well with them hereafter, and are willing to listen to the good news of a future happiness; and therefore our Saviour, when he had pronounced the *poor, blessed*, *Luke 6. 20.* adds by way of opposition, *v. 24. But wo unto you that are rich; for ye have received your consolation.* They were in so comfortable a condition at present, that they were not much concerned what should become of them hereafter; whereas all the comfort that *poor men* have, is the hopes of a better condition, *non si male nunc, & olim sic erit*, that if it be bad now, it will not be so always, and therefore no wonder if the promises and assurance of a future happiness be very welcome to them.

Thirdly, If by the *poor* we do not only understand those who are in a low and mean condition as to the things of this world, but such likewise as had a temper and disposition of mind suitable to the poverty of their outward condition, which our Saviour calls *poverty of spirit*, by which he means *meekness* and *humility*, there is no doubt but that such a frame and temper of spirit, is a great disposition to the receiving of truth. And that this is included in the notion of *poverty*, is very plain, both from the words of the prophecy I cited before, *Isa. 61. 1. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek, and to bind up the broken-hearted;* and likewise from our Saviour's description of these persons, in one of the Evangelists, *Matth. 5. 3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.* So that by the *poor* who are so nearly disposed to receive the Gospel, our Saviour intended those, who, being in a *poor* and *low* condition in respect of outward things, were likewise *meek* and *humble* in their spirits. Now meekness, and humility are great dispositions to the entertaining of truth. These graces and virtues do prepare the minds of men for learning and instruction; meekness and modesty, and humility, are the proper dispositions of a scholar. He that hath a mean opinion of himself is ready to learn of others; he who is not blinded by pride, or passion, is more apt to consider things impartially, and to pass a truer judgment upon them, than the proud and the passionate. Passion and Pride are great obstacles to the receiving of truth, and to our improvement in knowledge. Passion does not only darken the minds of men, but puts a false bias upon our judgments, which draws them off many times from truth, and sways them that way to which our passion inclines them. A man of a calm and meek temper stands always indifferent for the receiving of truth, and holds the balance of his judgment even; but passion sways and inclines it one way, and that commonly against truth and reason. So likewise pride is a great impediment to knowledge, and the very worst quality that a learner can have, it obstructs all the passages whereby knowledge should enter into us, it makes men refuse instruction, out of a conceit they need it not. Many men might have known more, had it not been for the vain opinion which they have entertained of the sufficiency of their knowledge. This is true in all kinds of learning, but more especially as to the knowledge of divine things. For God loves to communicate himself and bestow his grace and wisdom upon meek and humble minds. So the Scripture tells us, *Psal. 25. 9. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his ways.* And *1 Pet. 5. 5. Be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*

And thus I have shewn in what respects the *poor* were more disposed for the receiving the gospel, than others. I proceed now to the

Second thing, namely, What those prejudices and objections are, which the world had against our Saviour and his religion at their first appearance; as also to enquire into those which men have at this day against the christian religion, and to shew the weakness and unreasonableness of them. I begin,

First, With those prejudices which the world had against our Saviour and his religion at their first appearance.

Both *Jews* and *Gentiles* were offended at him and his doctrine; but not both upon the same account. They both took exceptions at him, especially at his low and suffering condition; but not both upon the same reason. I shall begin with the exceptions which the *Jews* took against our blessed Saviour and his religion; and I shall reduce them all, or at least the most considerable of them (as I find them dispersed in the history of the gospel, and in the *Acts* of the Apostles) to these six heads.

First, The exceptions which they took against him upon account of his extraction and original.

Secondly, at the meanness of his condition, contrary to their universal expectation.

Thirdly, As to his miracles.

Fourthly, His conversation.

Fifthly, The prejudice that lay against him from the opposition that was made by persons of greatest knowledge and authority among them. And,

Lastly, That the religion which he endeavoured to introduce, did abolish and supersede their antient religion, as of no longer use and continuance, though it was plain it was at first instituted by God.

First, The exceptions which they took at his extraction and original. In relation to this they were offended at three things.

1. That his original was known among them. This you find urged against him, *John* 7. 27. *We know this man whence he is, but when the Messias comes, no man knows whence he is.*

This to be sure was no just exception in reason against him. For what if his extraction were known, might he not be from God for all that? They owned *Moses* for the greatest Prophet that ever was, and yet it was very well known from whence he was.

But they seem to refer to some prophecy of the Old Testament, which did seem to assert so much. If they meant that his extraction should be altogether unknown; they knew very well, and believed the contrary, that *he was to be of the line of David, and to come out of Bethlehem*. If they referr'd to that prophecy, that *a virgin should conceive and bear a son*, and so understood that he should be without father; this was really true, tho' they thought that he was the Son of *Joseph*. And if he affirmed that he had no father, he did sufficiently justify it by his miracles; that being as easy to be believed possible by a divine power, as the miracles which he wrought; which yet they could not deny, because they saw them.

2. Another prejudice against his extraction, was the meanness of his parents and breeding. This you find mentioned, *Matth* 13. 54, 55. *Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren James and Joses, and Simon and Judas? and his sisters, are they not all with us? whence then hath this man these things? and they were offended in him.* And so likewise, *John* 7. 15. *How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?*

A strange prejudice and most unreasonable. They could not believe him to be an extraordinary person, because his parents and relations, his birth and breeding were so mean. He had been brought up to a trade, and not brought up to learning: whereas in reason, this ought to have been an argument just the other way; that he was an extraordinary person, and divinely assisted, who all on the sudden, without the help and assistance of education, gave such

uch evidence of his great wisdom and knowledge and did such mighty works. This could not be imputed to his breeding, for that was mean; therefore there must be something extraordinary and divine in it. Thus another man, who had been free from prejudice, would have reasoned.

3. The most unreasonable prejudice of all, in respect of his extraction, was grounded upon a spiteful and malicious proverb, concerning the country where our Saviour was brought up, and they supposed him to be born; and that was *Galilee*, John 1. 46. *Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* and John 7. 41. *Shall the Messias come out of Galilee?* and v. 52. *Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no Prophet.*

But it seems *Nathanael*, who was a good man, was easily taken off from this common prejudice, when *Philip* said to him, *come and see*. He bids him come and see the works he did, and then refers it to him, whether he would believe his own eyes, or an old proverb: However, it seems the *Jews* laid great weight upon it, as if this alone were enough to confute all his miracles, and after they had shot this bolt at him, the business were concluded clearly against him. But prudent and considerate men do not use to give much credit to ill-natur'd proverbs; the good or bad characters which are given of countreys are not understood to be universally true, and without exception. There is no place but hath brought forth some brave spirits, and excellent persons; whatever the general temper and disposition of the inhabitants may be. Among the *Grecians*, the *Bæotians* were esteemed a dull people, even to a proverb; and yet *Pindar*, one of their chief poets, was one of them. The *Scythians* were a barbarous nation, and one would have thought no good could have come from thence; and yet that countrey yielded *Anacharsis* an eminent philosopher. The *Idumeans* were aliens and strangers to the covenant; and yet *Job*, one of the best men that ever was, came from thence. God can raise up eminent persons from any place; *Abraham* from *Ur* of the *Chaldees*, and an idolatrous people. Nay, as our Saviour tells us, *he can out of stones raise up children unto Abraham*. The wise God, in the government of the world, does not tie himself to our foolish proverbs. It is not necessary to make a man a Prophet, that he should be bred in a good air. If God sends a man, it matters not from what place he comes.

Secondly, Another head of exception against our Saviour, was the meanness of his outward condition, so contrary to the universal expectation of the *Jews*. The *Jews* from the tradition of their fathers, to which they (as the church of *Rome* does at this day,) paid a greater reverence than to the written word of God, were possess'd with a strong persuasion, that the *Messias*, whom they expected, was to be a great prince and conqueror, and to subdue all nations to them; so that nothing could be a greater defeat to their expectations, than the mean and low condition in which our Saviour appeared; so that upon this account they were almost universally offended at him.

But this prejudice was very unreasonable. For neither did their Prophets foretel any such thing, as the temporal greatness of the *Messias*: but on the contrary most expressly, that *he should be despised and rejected of men*, that *he should be a man of sorrows and sufferings*, and at last *be put to death*; which was directly contrary to what they expected from their ill-grounded tradition.

Thirdly, Against his miracles they made these two exceptions.

1. That he wrought them by magical skill, and by the power of the Devil.

Which was so exorbitantly unreasonable and malicious, that our Saviour pronounceth it to be an *unpardonable* sin, and for answer to it, appeals to every man's reason, whether it was likely *that the Devil should conspire against himself, and assist any man to overthrow his own kingdom?* For it was plain, our Saviour's doctrine was directly contrary to the Devil's design; and therefore to assist him to work miracles for the confirmation of it, must have been apparently against his own interest, and to the ruin of his own kingdom.

2. They

2. They pretended that though he did many great works, yet he gave them no sign from heaven. *Matth. 16. 1.* it is said, *They desired him to shew them a sign from heaven.* It seems they expected that God should give some immediate testimony to him from heaven; as he did to *Elias*, when fire came down from heaven, and consumed his enemies; and particularly they expected, that when he was upon the cross, if he were the true *Messias*, he should have come down and saved himself. And because he did not answer their expectation in this, they concluded him an impostor.

Now what could be more unreasonable? when he had wrought so many other, and great miracles, perversly to insist upon some particular kind of miracle which they fancied? as if God were bound to gratify the curiosity of men; and as if our Saviour were not as much *declared to be the Son of God, by rising again from the dead*, as if he had *come down from the cross*.

Fourthly, As to his conversation, they had these three exceptions.

1. That he used no severity in his habit or diet, took too much freedom, as they thought; *came eating and drinking*, that is, he freely used the creatures of God, for the end for which they were given, with temperance and thanksgiving; and did not lay those rigorous restraints upon himself in these matters, which many, that were esteemed the most religious among them, used to do.

But he plainly shews them, that this exception was meerly out of their prejudice against him. For if he had come in the way of austerity, they would have rejected him as well. They were resolved to find fault with him, whatever he did. *Matth. 11. 16. Whereunto shall I liken this generation? John the baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and they say he hath a Devil.* He lived in a more austere and melancholy way, *he came in the way of righteousness*, used great strictness and severity in his habit and diet, and this they took exception at. Our Saviour was of a quite contrary temper, and that did not please them neither. *The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, behold, a wine-bibber, and a glutton.* So that let our Saviour have done what he would, he could not have carried himself so, as to have escaped the censures of men, so peevishly and perversly disposed.

2. That he kept company with publicans and sinners.

To which exception nothing can be more reasonable than our Saviour's own answer; that he was sent to be a *physician* to the world, *to call sinners to repentance*; and therefore they had no reason to be angry, or think it strange, if he conversed with his *patients* among whom his proper imployment lay.

3. They objected to him prophaneness in breaking the sabbath, and that surely was plain, that *he could not be of God, if he kept not the sabbath-day.* The truth was, he had healed one on the sabbath-day.

To this our Saviour gives a most reasonable and satisfactory answer, that surely *it was lawful to do good on the sabbath-day*; that *that* was but a *positive institution*, but works of mercy are *natural* and *moral* duties; and God himself had declared, that he would have even his own *institutions* to give way to those greater duties, that are of *natural* and *eternal* obligation. *I will have mercy and not sacrifice.* And then from the *end* of the sabbath; the sabbath was made for the rest and refreshment of man; and therefore could not be presumed to be intended to his prejudice. *The sabbath was made for man: and not man for the sabbath.*

Fifthly, Another great prejudice against him, was, that persons of the greatest knowledge and authority among them did not embrace his doctrine. *John 7. 48. Have any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him?* So that here was the *infalible rule* and *authority* of their church against him.

There is no doubt, but the example and authority of our guides ought to sway very much with us, and over-rule us in doubtful cases; but not against plain and convincing evidence; there we ought to follow *and obey God rather than men.* There is sometimes a visible and palpable corruption in those who are to lead us; they may have an interest to oppose the truth: And thus it was with the Pharisees and rulers at that time: And so it hath been among christians in the great degeneracy of the *Roman* church. The christian religion was never

never more endangered, nor ever more corrupted, than by those who have been in greatest authority in that church, who ought to have understood religion best, and have been the principal support of it. *Men may err: but God cannot:* So that when God sends a Prophet, or by his word does plainly declare his will to us, human example and authority ceaseth, and is of no force.

The *last* prejudice I shall mention, which the *Jews* had against our Saviour and his doctrine, was, that it did abolish and supersede their religion, as of no longer use and continuance, though it was plain it was instituted by God.

This had been a very specious pretence indeed, had not this been part of their religion, and had not their own Prophets foretold, that the Messias should come and perfect what was wanting and defective in their institution. It is expressly said in their law, *That God would raise unto them another Prophet, like to Moses, and that they should hear him*, when he came. So that in truth it was the accomplishment of all those revelations which were made to the *Jews*, and did not reprove the *Jewish* religion as *false*; but as *imperfect*: And did not *contradict* and *overthrow*; but *perfect* and *fulfil* the law and the Prophets.

And thus I have gone over the chief exceptions and offences which the *Jews* took at our Saviour and his doctrine; and I hope sufficiently shown the unreasonableness of them. I have not now time to proceed to what remains: But by what hath been said, you may easily see, upon what slight and unreasonable grounds men may be prejudiced against the best person and things, and yet be very confident all the while that they are in the right. For so no doubt many of the *Jews*, who opposed our Saviour and his doctrine, thought themselves to be. Therefore it concerns us to put on meekness, and humility, and modesty, that we may be able to judge impartially of things, and our minds may be preserved free and indifferent to receive the truths of God, when they are offer'd to us: Otherwise self-conceit and passion will so blind our minds, and bias our judgments, that we shall be unable to discern, and unwilling to entertain the plainest and most evident truths. We see here by the sad example of the *Jews*, that by giving way to passion, and cherishing pride and self-conceit, men may be so deeply prejudiced against the truth, as to resist the clearest light, and reject even salvation it self, when it is offered to them. So that it is not in vain, that the Scripture saith, *Let every man be swift to hear, and slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*: and exhorts us so earnestly, *to receive with meekness the word of God, which is able to save our souls*.

The First
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N LXIV.

The Prejudices against Christianity consider'd.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.



Have from these words propounded to consider *two* things.

I. Those prejudices and objections which the world had against our Saviour and his religion at their first appearance; as also to enquire into those which men at this day do more especially insist upon, against the christian religion; and to show the unreasonableness of them.

II. How happy a thing it is to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men have against religion.

I have entered upon the *first* of these, the prejudices which the world had against our Saviour and his religion. When this great teacher of mankind came from God, though he gave all imaginable testimony and evidence that he was sent from heaven; yet the greatest part of the world, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were mightily offended at him, and deeply prejudiced against him and his doctrine; but not both upon the same account.

I have already given you an account of the chief exceptions which the *Jews* made against our Saviour and his doctrine, and have shewn the unreasonableness of them.

I proceed now to consider the principal of those exceptions, which the *Gentiles* and *Heathen* Philosophers took at our Saviour and his doctrine. I shall mention these four.

First, That christianity was a great innovation, and contrary to the received institutions of the world.

Secondly, They objected against the plainness and simplicity of the doctrine.

Thirdly, That it wanted demonstration.

Fourthly, That the low and suffering condition of our Saviour was unsuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by him for a teacher and reformer of the world. These are the chief exceptions which the *Heathen*, and especially their *Philosophers*, took at our Saviour and his doctrine.

First, That the christian religion was a great innovation, and contrary to the received institutions of the world; and consequently that it did condemn the religion which had been so universally received and established in the world by so long a continuance of time. And no wonder if this made a great impression upon them, and raised a mighty prejudice in the minds of men against the christian religion; no prejudices being so strong as those that are fix'd in the minds of men by education: And of all the prejudices of education, none so violent and hard to be removed, as those about religion, yea though they be never so groundless and unreasonable. *Haith a nation changed their Gods, which yet are no Gods?* Intimating to us, that men are very hardly brought off from that religion which they have been brought up in, how absurd soever it be. When christianity was first propounded to the Heathen world, had men been free and indifferent, and not prepossess'd with other apprehensions of God and religion, it might then have been expected from them, that they should have entertain'd it with a readiness of mind proportionable to the reason-

reasonableness of it. But the case was quite otherwise, the world had for many ages been brought up to another way of worship, and inur'd to rites and superstitions of a quite different nature. And this sways very much with men; *Sequimur majores nostros, qui feliciter sequuti sunt suos*; as one of the Heathens said in those days; *We follow our ancestors, who happily follow'd theirs*. Men are hardly brought to condemn those opinions and customs in religion, which themselves and their fore-fathers have always embraced and followed. And wise men especially are loath to admit so great a change in a matter of so great a concernment as religion is. So that this must be acknowledged to have been a considerable prejudice against the christian religion at its first appearance. But yet upon a thorough examination, this will not be found sufficient in reason to with-hold men from embracing christianity, if we consider these *four* things.

1. No prudent person thinks that the example and custom of his fore-fathers obligeth him to that which is evil in it self, and pernicious to him that does it; and there is no evil, no danger equal to that of a false religion; for that tends to the ruin of mens souls, and their undoing for ever. A man might better alledge the example of his fore-fathers to justify his errors and follies in any other kind, than in this, which is so infinitely pernicious in the consequences of it.

2. In a great corruption and degeneracy, it is no sufficient reason against a reformation, that it makes a change. When things are amiss, it is always fit to amend and reform them; and this cannot be done without a change. The wisest among the Heathens did acknowledge, that their religion was mixt with very great follies and superstitions, and that the lives and manners of men were extreamly corrupt and degenerate; and they endeavour'd, as much as they could, and durst, to reform these things. And therefore there was no reason to oppose an effectual reformation, for fear of a change; a change of things for the better, tho' it be usually hard to be effected, being always a thing to be desired and wished for.

3. The change which christianity design'd, was the least liable to exception that could be, being nothing else in the main of it, but the reducing of natural religion, the bringing of men back to such apprehensions of God, and such a way of worshipping him, as was most suitable to the Divine Nature, and to the natural notions of mens minds; nothing else but a design to persuade men of the one true God, maker of the world, that he is a Spirit, and to be worshipp'd in such a manner as is suitable to his spiritual nature. And then for matters of practice, to bring men to the obedience of those precepts of temperance, and justice, and charity, which had been universally acknowledged even by the Heathens themselves to be the great duties which men owe to themselves and others. And that this is the main design of the christian religion, the Apostle hath told us in most plain expresse words, *Tit. 2. 11, 12. The Grace of God, (that is, the doctrine of the Gospel) which hath appeared to all men, and brings salvation, teacheth us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world.*

And all that the christian religion adds beyond this, is means and helps for our direction, and assistance, and encouragement in the discharge and performance of these duties. For our direction, God hath sent his Son in our nature, to declare his will to us, and to be a pattern and example of holiness and virtue. For our assistance, he hath promised the aids of his holy Spirit; and for our encouragement, he offers to us pardon of sin in the blood of his Son, and eternal life and happiness in another world. This is a short summ and abridgment of the christian religion, and there is nothing of all this that can reasonably be excepted against.

4. God, considering the prejudice of the Heathens against christianity, by reason of their education in a contrary religion, was strong and violent, was pleas'd to give such evidence of the truth of christianity, as was of proportionable strength and force to remove and conquer this prejudice. He was pleas'd to give testimony to the first founder of this religion by mighty miracles; and particularly by his resurrection from the dead: But because the report of these things was only

brought to the Heathen world, and they had not seen the things themselves; therefore he enabled those who were the witnesses of these things to the world, to work as great miracles as he had done. And when they saw those who gave testimony to our Saviour's miracles, do as great and strange things themselves, as they testify'd of him, there was no reason any longer to doubt of the truth of their testimony. So that though the prejudice of the Heathen against christianity was very great, yet the evidence which God gave to it was strong enough to remove it. The doctrine of christianity was such as might have recommended it self to impartial men, by its own reasonableness: But meeting with violent prejudices in those to whom it was offer'd, God was pleas'd to give such a confirmation to it, as was sufficient to bear down those prejudices.

Secondly, Another objection against christianity, was the plainness and simplicity of the doctrine. They expected some deep speculations in natural or moral Philosophy; they made full account, a teacher sent from heaven would have instructed them in the profoundest points, and discours'd to them about the first principles of things, and the nature of the soul, and the chief end of man, with a subtilty and eloquence infinitely beyond that of their greatest sophisters, and able to bear down all opposition and contradiction: But instead of this, they are told a plain story of the life and miracles of *Jesus Christ*, and of his dying upon the Cross, and rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven; and a few plain precepts of life; and all this deliver'd without any ornaments of art, or insinuation of eloquence, to gain the favour and applause of those to whom they related these things.

But now, this truly consider'd is so far from being any real objection against the christian doctrine, that it is one of the greatest commendations that can be given of it: For matter of fact ought to be related in the most plain and simple and unaffected manner; and the less art and eloquence is used in the telling of a story, the more likely it is to gain belief. And as for our Saviour's precepts, how plain soever they might be, I am sure they are a collection of the most excellent and reasonable rules of a good life, and the freest from all vanity and folly, that are to be met with in any book in the world. And can any thing be more worthy of God, and more likely to proceed from him, than so plain and useful a doctrine as this? The language of law is not wont to be fine and persuasive, but short, and plain, and full of authority. Thus it is among men: And surely it is much fitter for God to speak thus to men, than for men to one another.

Thirdly, It is objected, That the doctrine of our Saviour and his Apostles wanted demonstration; they seem'd to impose too much upon the understandings of men, and to deliver things too magisterially, not demonstrating things from intrinsecal arguments, but requiring belief and assent without proof.

This the Apostle *St. Paul* readily acknowledgeth, that in preaching the Gospel to the world, they did not proceed in the way of the heathen Orators and Philosophers, *1 Cor. 4. 4. My speech and my preaching was not in the enticing words of man's wisdom: but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*; that is, they did not go in the way of human eloquence and demonstration: but yet their doctrine did not want its evidence and demonstration, though of another kind. They did not go about to bewitch men by eloquence, not to entangle their minds by subtle reasonings, the force of which very few are capable of: But they offer'd to men a sensible proof and demonstration of the truth of what they delivered, in those strange and miraculous operations, to which they were enabled by the Holy Ghost. And this was a sensible evidence, even to the meanest capacity, of a Divine Assistance going along with them, and giving testimony to them. I appeal to any man, whether the resurrection of *Jesus Christ* from the dead, and his ascending into heaven, be not a clearer demonstration of another life after this, and more level to the capacities of all mankind, than the finest and subtlest arguments that can be drawn from the immaterial nature of the soul, its power of reflection upon it self, and independency upon body as to some of its operations; which yet are some of the chiefest arguments that philosophy affords, to prove the immortality of our souls.

Fourth-

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Fourthly, The *Heathens* objected, That the low and mean condition of our Saviour was unfuitable to one that pretended to be the Son of God, and to be appointed by God to be a teacher and reformer of the world. This to the *heathen philosophers* did not only appear unreasonable, but even ridiculous. So St. Paul tells us, 1 Cor. 1. 23. *We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness*: To think that a man who appeared in such mean circumstances, should be fit to reform the world; and one who himself was put to death, should be relied upon for life and immortality.

This objection I have heretofore consider'd at large, and therefore shall now speak but very briefly to it.

Besides those excellent reasons and ends which the Scripture assigns of our Saviour's humiliation; as that he might be a teacher and example to us; that he might make expiation for our sins; that by suffering himself he might learn to commiserate us; that *by death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and might deliver those who through fear of death were all their lives subject to bondage*; I say, besides these, it was of great use that he should live in so mean and afflicted a condition, to confront the pride, and vanity, and fantasy of the world; and to convince men of these two great truths, That God may love those whom he afflicts; and That men may be innocent, and virtuous, and contented in the midst of poverty, and reproach, and suffering. Had our blessed Saviour been a great temporal prince, his influence and example might possibly have made more hypocrites and servile converts; but would not have persuaded men one jot more to be inwardly good and virtuous. The great arguments which must do that, must be fetch'd, not from the pomp and prosperity of this world, but from the eternal happiness and misery of the other. Besides, had he appear'd in any great power and splendor, the christian religion could not have been so clearly acquitted from the suspicion of a worldly interest and design, which would have been a far greater objection against it, than this which I am now speaking to.

Add to all this, that the wisest of the *heathen philosophers* did teach, that worldly greatness and power are not to be admired, but despised by a truly wise man; that men may be virtuous and good, and dearly beloved of God, and yet be liable to great miseries and sufferings; and that whoever suffers unjustly, and bears it patiently, gives the greatest testimony to goodness, and does most effectually recommend virtue to the world; that a good man under the hardest circumstances of misery, and reproach, and suffering, is the fittest person of all other to be the minister, and Apostle, and preacher of God to mankind: And surely they who say such things (which the *Heathens* have done) had no reason to object to our blessed Saviour his low and suffering condition.

As to that part of the objection, that he who promis'd immortality to others could not save himself from death and suffering: considering that he who was put to death, rescu'd himself from the power of the grave; it is so far from being ridiculous, that nothing can be more reasonable than to rely upon him for our hopes of immortality, who by rising from the grave, and conquering death, gave a plain demonstration that he was able to make good what he promised.

I have done with the exceptions which were made against our Saviour and his doctrine at their first appearance in the world. I proceed in the

II. Place to consider the prejudices and objections which men at this day do more particularly insist upon, against our Saviour and his religion: And they are many.

First, Some that relate to the incarnation of our Saviour.

Secondly, To the time of his appearance.

Thirdly, That we have not now sufficient evidence of the truth of christianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which, at this distance, we have not, nor can be expected to have, sufficient assurance.

Fourthly, That the terms of it seem very hard, and to lay too great restraints upon human nature.

Fifthly, That it is apt to dispirit men, and to break the vigour and courage of their minds.

Sixthly,

Sixthly, The divisions and factions that are among Christians.

Seventhly, The wicked lives of the greatest part of the professors of Christianity. In answer to all which I do not propose to say all that may be said, but as briefly as I can to offer so much, as may, if not give full satisfaction, yet be sufficient to break the force of them, and to free the minds of men from any great perplexity about them.

As to the *first*, which relates to the incarnation of our Saviour; and the *second*, to the time of his appearance; I know that these and most of the rest I have mention'd, were urg'd by the Heathen against Christianity: But they are now more especially insisted upon both by the secret and open enemies of our religion.

John 1. 14.
Serm. III.

The objections against his incarnation I have elsewhere consider'd. And therefore shall proceed to the next, *viz.*

Secondly, As to the time of our Saviour's appearance, it is objected, if he be the only way and means of Salvation, why did he come no sooner into the world; but suffer mankind so long without any hopes or means of being saved? This was objected by *Porphyry* of old, and still sticks in the minds of men. To this I answer,

1. It is not fit for creatures to call their creator to too strict an account of his actions. Goodness is free, and may act when and how it pleaseth; and as *God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy*, so he may have mercy at what time he pleaseth, and is not bound to give us an account of his matters. This is much like the objection of the Atheist against the Being of God; That if there were such an infinite and eternal Being, he would surely have made the world sooner, and not have been without all employment for so long a duration; such another objection is this against our Saviour, that if he had been the Son of God, he would have begun this great and merciful work of the redemption of mankind sooner, and not have delay'd it so long, and suffer'd mankind to perish for four thousand years together.

But it seems in the one as well as the other, God took his own time, and he best knew what time was fittest. The Scripture tells us, that *in the fulness of time, God sent his Son*: when things were ripe for it, and all things accomplish'd that God thought requisite in order to it. In judging of the actions of our earthly governours, those who are at a distance from their Counsels, what conjectures soever they may make of the reasons of them, will nevertheless, if they have that respect for their wisdom which they ought, believe, that how strange soever some of their actions may seem, yet they were done upon good reason, and that they themselves, if they knew the secrets of their Counsels, should think so. Much more do we owe that reverence to the infinite wisdom of God, to believe that the Counsels of his will are grounded upon very good reason, tho' we do not see many times what it is.

2. It is not true that the world was wholly destitute of a way and means of Salvation before our Saviour's coming. Before the law of *Moses* was given, men were capable of being received to the mercy and favour of God, upon their obedience to the law of nature, and their sincere repentance for the violation of it, by virtue of *the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world*. Men were saved by Christ both before and under the law, without any particular and express knowledge of him. There were good men in other nations, as well as among the *Jews*, as *Job*, and his friends also, seem to have been. In all ages of the world and in every nation, *they that feared God and wrought righteousness were accepted of him*. The sacrifice of Christ, which is the meritorious cause of the Salvation of mankind, looks back as well as forward; and God was reconcileable to men, and their sins were pardon'd, by virtue of this great propitiation that was to be made. In which sense perhaps it is, that Christ is said to be *the lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, *Heb. 9. 25, 26.* the Apostle intimates to us, that if this sacrifice which was offered in the last ages of the world, had not been available in former ages, *Christ must have often suffer'd since the foundation of the world: But now hath he appeared once in the conclusion of the ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

3. He did appear at that time in which the world stood most in need of him; when the whole world, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were sunk into the greatest degene-

degeneracy both in opinion and practice, and the condition of mankind seem'd to be even desperate and past remedy. This was the needful time, when it was most seasonable for this great physician to come, and show his pity and skill in our recovery. God could have sent his Son many ages before; but he thought fit to try other ways first, and to reserve this powerful remedy to the last; *last of all he sent his Son.*

4. The time of our Saviour's appearing was of all ages of the world the fittest season for his coming; whether we consider,

1. That the world was at that time best prepared and disposed for receiving the Christian religion: Or,

2. That this was the fittest season that ever had been, for the easy diffusing and propagating of this religion. I assign these reasons as tending to give men some satisfaction, why this great blessing was delay'd so long; it being rather an argument of wisdom and goodness, than of the want of either, to defer things to that time, in which they are most likely to have their effect. Not but that perhaps other and better reasons may be given. To be sure God had very good reasons for this dispensation, whether we can hit upon them or not. In the mean time these seem not to be altogether inconsiderable.

1. That the world was at that time best prepared and disposed for receiving the Christian religion. All the while our Saviour's coming was delay'd, God's providence was disposing things for it, and training up mankind for the entertaining of this great blessing. The *Jewish* religion was always very burdensome, but much more so towards the expiration of the *Jewish* state, partly by the intolerable multitude of external observances, which were daily multiplied upon them, under pretense of traditions from their fathers; and partly by reason of their subjection to the *Romans*, which made the exercise of their religion in many respects more difficult.

And the Heathen world was in a very good measure prepared for christianity, by being civiliz'd. About the time of our Saviour's coming into the world, philosophy and learning had been so diffus'd by the *Roman* conquests, as had brought a great part of the world from barbarism to civility. Besides that their philosophy had this effect upon men, to refine their reason, and in a good degree to detect the follies of the heathen idolatry and superstition.

'Tis true indeed learning and philosophy flourish'd a great while before, in the time of the *Grecian* Empire, and perhaps before that in some other nations; and the conquests of the *Grecians* were very speedy and of vast extent: But yet they were neither so universal, nor so well settled; nor did they propagate their philosophy and civility together with their conquests, as the *Romans* did. So that there was no age of the world, wherein mankind were so generally prepared and disposed for the receiving of the Gospel, as that wherein our Saviour appeared.

2. This was likewise the fittest season for the easy diffusing and propagating of the Christian religion. The *Romans*, together with their conquests, did very much propagate their language, which made the ways of communication far more easy; and by the long and frequent correspondence of the several parts of that Empire one with another, the ways of travel and passage from one Country to another were more ready and open. So that no age can be instanc'd, in all respects so convenient for the speedy propagating of a new religion, as that wherein our Saviour appear'd, *viz.* when the *Roman* Empire was at its height. And it was very agreeable to the goodness and wisdom of the divine providence, that the bravest and most virtuous people in the world (infinitely beyond either the *Persians* or *Grecians*) should be chosen by God, as one of the chiefest means for the spreading of the best and most perfect revelation that ever God made to the world.

Thirdly, It is objected, That we have not now sufficient evidence of the truth of Christianity, the main arguments for it relying upon matters of fact, of which at this distance we have not, nor can be suppos'd to have, sufficient assurance. To this I answer,

1. That men not only may have, but have an undoubted assurance of matters of fact, ancients than these we are speaking of; and the distance of them from
our

our times creates no manner of scruple in the minds of men concerning them. That there was such a man as *Alexander* the Great, and that he conquer'd *Darius* and the *Persians*; That *Julius Cæsar* invaded our nation, and in some measure subdued it; and that he overcame *Pompey* in the battel of *Pharsalia*; and innumerable other things which I might instance in, that were done before our Saviour's time, are firmly believed without any manner of doubt and scruple by mankind, notwithstanding they were done so long ago. So that antient matters of fact are capable of clear evidence, and we may have sufficient assurance of them. And where there is equal evidence, if we do not give equal belief, the fault is not in the argument, but in the passion or prejudice of those to whom it is proposed.

2. We have every whit as great assurance, (nay greater, if it can, or needed to be) of the matters upon which the proof of Christianity relies, as of those which I have mention'd. The matters of fact, upon which the truth of Christianity relies, are, That there was such a person as *Jesus Christ*; that he wrought such miracles; that he was put to death at *Jerusalem* under *Pontius Pilate*; that he rose again from the dead, and was visibly taken up into heaven; that he bestowed miraculous gifts and powers upon the Apostles, to make them competent witnesses of his resurrection, and of the truth of that doctrine which they publish in his name; that accordingly they preach'd the Gospel to the world, and in a short space without any human advantages did propagate it, and gain entertainment for it in most parts of the then known world.

Now these matters of fact have the same testimony of histories, wrote in those times, and conveyed down to us, by as general and uncontrouled a tradition, as the conquests of *Alexander* and *Julius Cæsar*. So that if we do not afford equal belief to them, it is a sign that we have some prejudice or interest against the one, more than against the other, though the evidence for both be equal. Nay, I go further, that the evidence for these things which are the foundation of Christianity, is so much the greater, because that which depended upon it was of far greater concernment to the world, and consequently mankind was more obliged to search more narrowly into it.

For our Saviour's life, and death, and resurrection, we have the testimony of a greater number of eye-witnesses, who have wrote the history of these things. And though they were truly extraordinary persons, and gave testimony to themselves by miracles; yet at present I desire no more, but that they be looked upon, as knowing and honest relators of what they heard and saw; and that the same credit be given to them, which we give to *Livy*, and *Arrian*, and *Q. Curtius*, for plain events, and matters of fact.

But yet I must add withal, that besides the miracles which they wrought, they gave greater testimony of their integrity, than any historian in the world ever did. For they willingly suffer'd the greatest persecution and torment, yea and death it self, in confirmation of the truth of what they deliver'd. And for the propagating of the Christian religion through so great a part of the world, it is evident by the effect beyond all denial.

So that for the matters of fact, upon which the truth of Christianity does depend, here is greater and more advantageous evidence of history, than for any other matter of equal antiquity whatsoever.

3. As to the substance of these matters of fact, we have the concurring testimony of the greatest enemies of the Christian religion. That there were such persons as our Saviour and his Apostles, that they preached such a doctrine, that they wrought such miracles; for this we have the acknowledgment of the *Jews*, and the testimony of the Heathen historians, and particularly of *Celsus*, and *Porphyry*, and *Julian*, who were the particular and most learned adversaries of the Christian religion. So that as to the matters of fact, there is no objection against them, whatever use we may make of them, or whatever consequences we may draw from them. And I presume it agreed by all objectors, that if these matters of fact be true, they are a sufficient foundation of the truth of our religion, and we are very unequal to our religion, if we make a doubt of these things, which the greatest enemies of Christianity never had the face to deny.

4. And

4. And besides all this, to recompense the disadvantage which we have of those who saw the miracles of our Saviour and his Apostles, we have the *testimonium rei*, the evidence of the effects of these things to confirm our belief of them; and this is an advantage which the first ages of christianity could not have. We see our Saviour's predictions of the success of his religion in the world, in the propagating and establishing of it fully accomplished, notwithstanding the fierce opposition and resistance that was made against it by the greatest powers of the world. We see the dispersion of the *Jews* in all nations, and the misery and contempt which they every where suffer; and that now for above sixteen hundred years, they have continued a distinct people, and a spectacle of the divine justice and severity, for rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, and for a lasting and standing testimony of the truth of our Saviour's prediction, and of the christian religion.

So that though we live at this distance from the rise and beginning of christianity; yet we have the relation of those things, which give confirmation to it, conveyed down to us in as credible a manner, as any ancient matter of fact ever was; and the effects of things remaining to this day, do give testimony of the truth of it.

Fourthly, It is objected, That the terms of christianity seem very hard, and to lay too great restraints upon human nature. It commands us to mortify our lusts, and subdue our passions, and *deny ungodliness, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world: to be holy in all manner of conversation; to have respect to whatever things are honest, and true, and just, and virtuous, and of good report; and to deny our selves; and to part with the dearest enjoyments of this life, yea and with life it self, for the sake of Christ, and his gospel.* Now these seem to be very hard terms, to forego all the present pleasures and enjoyments of this life, in hopes of a future happiness which we are less assur'd of.

To this I answer,

1. That this is a greater objection against religion in general, than the christian religion. For natural religion requires of us all the main duties that christianity does, and gives us far less assurance of the reward of our obedience. Natural religion requires piety, and justice, and charity, the due government of our appetites and passions, as well as christianity does, but does not discover to us the rewards of another world, by many degrees so clearly, as our Lord and Saviour, who hath *brought life and immortality to light by the gospel*, and by his resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven, hath given us full assurance of another life after this, and of a glorious immortality. So that though we have not, nor can have the evidence of sense, for a future state, yet we have all the rationalevidence for it, that can be wisht or expected; and much more than men have for those adventures of their lives and fortunes, which they frequently make in the world, and think themselves reasonable in so doing.

2. The restraints which christianity lays upon men, are in the judgment of mankind so far from being an objection against it, that they are highly to the commendation of it. Nay, it were the greatest objection that could be against our religion, if it did set us at liberty from those restraints. What can be more to the credit of any religion, than to command men to be just, and charitable, and peaceable? and what more to the advantage of the professors of it? and on the contrary, what can reflect more upon any religion, than to indulge and allow men in any vice contrary to these? it shews men are glad to make any thing an objection against christianity, when they lay hold of that, which if it had been otherwise, they would have made ten times more clamour against it for the contrary.

3. As for most of those restraints which christianity lays upon us, they are of that nature, so much both for our private and publick advantage, that setting aside all considerations of religion, and of the rewards and punishments of another life, they are really good for us, and if God had not laid them upon us, we ought in reason, in order to our temporal benefit and advantage, to have laid them upon our selves. If there were no religion, I know men would not have such strong and forcible obligations to these duties: but yet I say, though there were no religion, it were good for men, in order to temporal ends, to their health,

and quiet, and reputation, and safety, and in a word, to the private and publick prosperity of mankind, that men should be temperate, and chaste, and just, and peaceable, and charitable, and kind, and obliging to one another, rather than the contrary. So that religion does not create those restraints arbitrarily, but requires those things of us, which our reason, and a regard to our advantage, which the necessity and conveniency of the things themselves, without any consideration of religion, would in most cases urge us to.

4. As to the case of persecution for religion; besides that it does not now happen so frequently as it did in the beginning of christianity, nay very seldom in comparison, if all things be consider'd, it cannot be thought unreasonable, both because religion offers to us, in consideration of our present sufferings, a happiness unspeakably greater than that which we forego for the sake of religion; and because when it happens, God does extraordinarily enable men to go through it with courage and comfort, as we see in the examples of the primitive christians, who in great numbers of all tempers and ages, did voluntarily chuse to give up themselves to these sufferings, when there was no necessity laid upon them, but fair terms of retreat were offer'd to them by their enemies. It is one thing when a man suffers by the law, and cannot help it; and another thing when men may avoid suffering. In the former case men submit to necessity, and bear it as well as they can; in the latter case, if men suffer, it is a sign they firmly believe the reward of it; and if they suffer chearfully, and with joy, as most of the martyrs did, it is a plain evidence that God affords them extraordinary support in their sufferings; and then the case is not very hard, when religion puts them upon nothing but what it gives them cause, and enables them, to rejoice in the doing of it.

Fifthly, It is objected, that the christian religion is apt to dispirit men, and to break the courage and vigour of their minds, by the precepts of patience, and humility, and meekness, and of forgiving injuries, and the like. This objection hath made a great noise in the world, and hath been urged by men of great reputation, and a deep insight into the tempers of men, and at affairs of the world. It is said to be particularly insisted upon by *Machiavel*, and very likely it may; though I think that elsewhere he is pleased to speak with terms of respect, not only of religion in general, but likewise of the christian religion; and (which seems very much to contradict the other) he says in the first book of his discourses upon *Livy*, (Ch. 11.) that the greatness and success of *Rome* is chiefly to be ascribed to their piety and religion; and that *Rome* was more indebted to *Numa Pompilius* for settling religion among them, than to *Romulus* the founder of their state; and the reason he gives is much to our present purpose; for, says he, without religion there can be no military discipline, religion being the foundation of good laws and good discipline. And particularly he commends the *Samnites*, who betook themselves to religion, as their last and best remedy to make men courageous, nothing being more apt raise men's spirits than religion.

But howsoever this objection be, I dare appeal both to reason and experience for the confutation of it.

1. To reason, and that as to these *two* things.

(1.) That the christian religion is apt to plant in the minds of men principles of the greatest resolution and truest courage. It teacheth men upon the best and most rational grounds to despise dangers, yea and death it self, the greatest and most formidable evil in this world; and this principle is likely to inspire men with the greatest courage; for what need he fear any thing in this world, who fears not death, after which there is nothing in this world to be feared? And this the christian religion does, by giving men the assurance of another life, and a happiness infinitely greater than any is to be enjoyed in this world. And in order to the securing of this happiness, it teacheth men to be holy, and just, and to exercise a good conscience both towards God and man, which is the only way to free a man from all inward and tormenting fears of what may happen to him after death. *This makes the righteous man* to be (as *Solomon* says) *bold as a Lion*. Nothing renders a
man

man more undaunted as to death, and the consequences of it, than the peace of his own mind ; for a man not to be conscious to himself of having wilfully displeased him, who alone can make us happy or miserable in the other world. So that a good man, being secure of the favour of God, may upon that account reasonably hope for a greater happiness after death than other men: whereas a bad man, if he be sober, and have his senses awakened to a serious consideration of things, cannot but be afraid to die; and be extremely anxious and solicitous what will become of him in another world. And surely it would make the stoutest man breathing afraid to venture upon death, when he sees hell beyond it. Possibly there may be some monsters of men, who may have so far suppress'd the sense of religion, and stupified their consciences, as in a good measure to have conquer'd the fears of death, and of the consequences of it. But this happens but to very few, as the Poet tells us in the person of an *Epicurean*.

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,
Atque metus omnes & inexorabile fatum
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.*

There are very few that attain to this temper, but at some times. So that if vice and wickedness do generally break the firmness of men's spirits; it remains, that nothing but religion can generally give men courage against death. And this the christian religion does eminently to those who live according to it; our blessed Saviour having delivered us from the fear of death, by conquering death for us, and giving us assurance of the glorious rewards of another life.

(2.) Meekness, and patience, and humility, and modesty, and such virtues of christianity, do not in reason tend to dispirit men, and break their true courage, but only to regulate it, and take away the fierceness and brutishness of it. This we see in experience, that men of the truest courage have many times least of pride and insolence, of passion and fierceness. Those who are better bred, are commonly of more gentle and civil dispositions: but yet they do not therefore want true courage, though they have not the roughness and fool-hardiness of men of ruder breeding. So in a true christian, courage and greatness of mind is very consistent with meekness, and patience, and humility. Not that all good men are very courageous; there is much of this in the natural tempers of men, which religion does not quite alter. But that which I am concerned to maintain is, that christianity is no hindrance to mens courage, and that *cæteris paribus*, supposing men of equal tempers, no man hath so much reason to be valiant, as he that hath a good conscience; I do not mean a blustering, and boisterous, and rash courage; but a sober, and calm, and fixt valour.

2. I appeal to experience for the truth of this. Did ever greater courage and contempt of death appear in all ages, and sexes, and conditions of men, than in the primitive martyrs? were any of the heathen soldiers comparable to the christian *legion*, for resolution and courage, even the *Heathens* themselves being judges? The religion of *Mahomet* seems to be contrived to inspire men with fierceness and desperateness of resolution, and yet I do not find, but that generally where there hath been any equality for number, the christians have been superior to them in valour, and have given greater instances of resolution and courage, than the *Turks* have done. So that I wonder upon what grounds this objection hath been taken up against christianity, when there is nothing either in the nature of this religion, or from the experience of the world, to give any tolerable countenance to it. And surely the best way to know what effect any religion is likely to have upon the minds of men, is to consider what effects it hath had in the constant experience of mankind. There remains the other two objections, which I mention'd, but I must reserve them to another opportunity.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N L X V .

The Prejudices against *Jesus* and his Religion consider'd.

MATTH. xi. 6.

And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.



FROM these words I propos'd to consider these *two* things.

I. The prejudices and objections which the world at first had, and many still have, against our blessed Saviour and his religion.

II. That it is a great happiness to escape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion.

I have consider'd those objections which the *Jews* and *Heathen Philosophers* made against our Saviour and his religion: and,

II. Those which at this day are insisted upon by the secret and open enemies of our religion. And I mention'd *seven*, the *two* last of which I shall now speak to.

Sixthly, It is objected, that there are many divisions and factions among christians. This I confess is a great reproach and scandal to our religion: but no sufficient argument against it. And,

1. To lessen and abate the force of this objection, it is to be consider'd, that a very great part of the divisions that are among those that are call'd christians, are about things that do not concern the essentials of christianity, and therefore they are no argument that christianity is not true, because they bring no suspicion of doubt and uncertainty upon the fundamentals of christianity, which all agree in, though they differ in other things. 'Tis true indeed they are very undecent, and contrary to the nature and precepts of the christian religion, which above any religion in the world does strictly require love and unity. They take off much from the strength and beauty of our religion: but do by no means destroy the truth of it.

2. How many and great soever they may be, yet they can with no colour of reason be imputed to the christian religion, as giving any cause and encouragement to them, however by accident it may be the occasion of them. For no man doubts but that the best things in the world may be perverted by bad men, and made an occasion of a great deal of mischief in the world, and yet be very innocent of all that mischief. No man can deny but that christianity does strictly enjoin love, and peace, and unity among all the members of that profession; and so far as christians are factious and unpeaceable, so far they are no christians. So that a man may as well except against philosophy, because of the differences that were among the Philosophers, and say there was no truth among them, because they were not all agreed in all things; as call the truth of christianity in question, for the differences that are among christians. Nay, a man might every whit as well except against laws and government; because notwithstanding them, there are frequent seditions and rebellions, infinite suits and controversies occasion'd even by the very laws: but no man was ever so unreasonable as to think this a good reason against laws and government.

3. The

3. The divisions of christians are so far from being an argument against christianity, that on the contrary, they are an argument that men should embrace christianity more heartily, and make more conscience of obeying the precepts of it. And if they did this, the greatest part of those contentions and uncharitable animosities which are among them would presently cease. If the christian religion were truly entertained, and men did seriously mind the precepts of it, and give up themselves to the obedience of its laws, differences would not be easily commenced, nor so vehemently prosecuted, nor so pertinaciously continued in, as they are. Men would not, upon every slight reason, and little doubt and scruple, rend and tear the body of Christ in pieces, and separate themselves from the communion of the church they live in, and in which they were baptized and received their christianity.

If men seriously consider'd, and truly understood what they do, when they divide the church of Christ upon little scruples and pretences, they would hardly be able to think themselves christians, whilst they continued in these unchristian and uncharitable practices.

If men would but be, or do what christianity requires, there would be no occasion for this objection; and if men will not, christian religion is not to be blamed for it, but those that act so contrary to the plain precepts and directions of it. I proceed to the

Seventh and last objection, the vitious and wicked lives of a great part of the professors of christianity. This is a heavy objection indeed, and such an one, that though we may justly be ashamed to own the truth of it, yet can we not have the face to deny it. 'Tis so sad a truth, that it is enough to confound us, and to fill all our faces with shame and blushing; but yet it is an objection not so strong against christianity, as it is shameful to christians. And notwithstanding the utmost force of it, we have no cause to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ; but the gospel of Christ may justly be ashamed of us. For whatever we be, *the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. The natural tendency of it is to reform and save men, and the wrath of God is therein revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, however they may detain the truths of God in unrighteousness*, and not suffer them to have their due and proper influence upon their hearts and lives.

But that I may give a more clear and particular answer to it, I desire you to attend to these following considerations.

1. It cannot be denied, but that christianity hath had once very great and marvellous effects upon the hearts and lives of men. And for this I appeal to the lives and manners of the primitive christians, for which we have not only the testimony of our own books and writers, but even of the adversaries of our religion. What reformation christianity at first wrought in the manners of men, we have clear and full testimony, from what the Apostles wrote concerning the several churches which they planted in several parts of the world. What hearty unity and affection there was among christians; even to that degree, as to make men bring in their private estates and possessions for the common support of their bretheren, we may read in the history of the *Acts* of the Apostles. The city of *Corinth*, by the account which *Strabo* gives of it, was a very vitious and luxurious place, as most in the world; and yet we see by *St. Paul*, what a strange reformation the christian religion made in the lives and manners of many of them: *1 Cor. 6. 9, 10, 11. Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And surely it is no small matter to reclaim men from such a profligate course of life. The Apostle instanceth in crimes and vices of the first rate, from which yet he tells us many were cleansed and purified by the name of the Lord Jesus, and the Spirit of God; that is, by the power and efficacy of the christian doctrine, together with the co-operation of God's Holy Spirit.*

After

After the Apostles, the ancient fathers, in their apologies for christianity, give us a large account of the great power and efficacy of the christian doctrine upon the lives and manners of men. *Tertullian* tells the *Roman* governors, that their prisons were full of malefactors, committed for several crimes; but they were all *Heathens*. *De vestris semper aestuat carcer, their prisons were thronged with criminals of their own religion*; but there were no christians to be found committed there for such crimes; *Nemo illic Christianus, nisi hoc tantum, &c. There were no christians in their prisons, but only upon account of their religion*. Or if there were any malefactors that had been christians, they left their religion when they fell into those enormities. And afterwards he adds, that if christians were irregular in their lives, they were no longer accounted christians, but were banish'd from their communion as unworthy of it. And they appealed to the *Heathens*, what a sudden and strange change christianity had made in several of the most lewd, and vitious, and debauched persons, and what a visible reformation there presently appeared in the lives of the worst men, after they had once entertained the christian doctrine.

And these testimonies are so much the stronger, because they are public appeals to our adversaries, which it is not likely they who were so persecuted and hated as the christians were, would have had the confidence to have made, if they had not been notoriously true, even their enemies themselves being judges.

And that they were so, we have the confession of the *Heathens* themselves. I shall produce two remarkable testimonies to this purpose, and one of them from the pen of one of the bitterest enemies that the christian religion ever had.

Pliny, in his epistle to *Trajan* the Emperor, gives him an account, "That having examined the christians, setting aside the superstition of their way, he could find no fault; and that this was the sum of their error, that they were wont to meet before day, and sing a hymn to Christ, and to bind themselves by solemn oath or sacrament, not to any wicked purpose, but not to steal, nor rob, nor commit adultery, nor break their faith, nor detain the pledge." So that it seems the sum of their error was, to oblige themselves in the strictest manner against the greatest vices and crimes. Which methinks is a great testimony from an enemy and a judge, one who would have been ready to discover their faults, and had opportunity of enquiring into them.

My other witness is *Julian* the Emperor and Apostate, who in one of his epistles tells us, "The christians did severely punish sedition and impiety. And afterwards exhorting the *Heathen* priests to all offices of humanity, and especially alms towards the poor; he tells them, they ought to be more careful in this particular, and to mend this fault; because (says he) *the Galileans taking advantage of our neglect in this kind, have very much strengthen'd their impiety* (for so he calls their religion) *by being very intent upon these offices, and exemplary in their charity to the poor, whereby they gained many over to them*."

And in his 49th Epist. to *Arfacius* the high-priest of *Galatia*, he recommends to him, among other means for the advancement of Paganism, the building of hospitals, and great liberality to the poor, not only of their own religion, but others. For, says he, *it is a shame that the impious Galileans should not only maintain their own poor, but ours also; wherefore let us not suffer them to outdo us in this virtue*. Nothing but the force of truth could have extorted so full an acknowledgment of the great humanity and charity of the christians, from so bitter an enemy of our religion as *Julian* was. If he owned it, we may be sure it was very great and exemplary.

So that you see that the christian religion had a very great power and efficacy upon the lives and manners of men when it first appeared in the world. And the true spirit and genius of any religion, the force of any institution is best seen in the primitive effects of it; before it be weaken'd and dispirited by those corruptions, which in time are apt to insinuate themselves into the best things. For all laws and institutions are commonly more vigorous, and have greater effects at first, than afterwards; and the best things are apt in time to degenerate, and to contract soil and rust. And it cannot in reason be expected otherwise.

therwise. So that though it be a thing to be bewailed, and by the greatest care and diligence to be resisted, yet it is not so extreamly to be wonder'd at, if christianity, in the space of sixteen hundred years, hath abated much of its first strength and vigour.

Especially considering, there were several circumstances, that gave christianity mighty advantages at first, especially the miraculous powers which did accompany the first publication of the gospel; which must needs be full of conviction to those who saw the wonderful effects of it: the extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the minds of men to dispose them to the receiving of it: the persecuted and suffering state that christians were generally in, which made those who embraced the profession to be generally serious and in good earnest in it, and kept up a continual heat and zeal in the minds of men for that religion which cost them so dear, and for which they suffer'd so much: and the fury of their enemies against it, did naturally inflame their love and kindness to one another; nothing being a greater endearment among men, than common sufferings in a common cause. So long as christians were not corrupted by secular interest; and by denying all for Christ, were free from covetousness and ambition, the great roots of all evil, the church of Christ, *though she was black, yet she was comely, and terrible as an army with banners*; she was all this while in an excellent posture to resist the temptations, and fight against the vices and corruptions of the world; but after the world broke in upon the church, and christianity was countenanced by the powers of the world, and water'd with secular preferments and encouragements, no wonder if the *tares* began to grow up with the *wheat*: then *iniquity began to abound, and the love of many to grow cold*. When the sun of prosperity began to shine upon the christian profession, then no wonder if the vermin bred and swarmed every where. When it grew creditable and advantageous for men to be christians, this must in all reason make a world of hypocrites, and counterfeit professors.

These things, I reckon, must in reason make a mighty difference between the first ages of christianity, and those which have follow'd since; and no wonder if the real fruits and effects of religion in these several states of christianity be very unequal. For prosperity and adversity made a wide difference in this matter. The persecution of any religion naturally makes the professors of it real; and the prosperity of it does as naturally allure and draw in hypocrites. Besides that even the best of men are more corrupted by prosperity, than affliction.

But tho' christians were best under persecution, yet God did not think fit always to continue them in that state, because he would not tempt them and tire them out with perpetual sufferings; and after he had given the world a sufficient experiment of the power and efficacy of the christian religion, in maintaining and propagating it self in despite of all the violence and opposition of the world, sufficient for ever to give reputation to it; he then thought good to leave it to be kept up by more human ways, and such as offer less violence to the nature of a man. Being once establish'd and settled in the world, and upon equal terms of advantage with other religions, God left it to be supported by more ordinary means; by pious education, and diligent instruction, and good laws and government, without miracles, and without persecution, and without those extraordinary and overpowering communications of his grace and spirit which he afforded to the first ages of christianity.

I have insisted the longer upon this, that men may see what effects christianity hath had upon the lives of men, by which we may see the proper nature and efficacy of it; and withal may not wonder so much that it hath not the same effects now. Though it be matter of great shame to us, that they are so vastly disproportionable to what they were at first.

2. Though the disproportion be very great between the effects of christianity at first, and what it hath now upon the lives of men; yet we ought not to deny, but it hath still some good effects upon mankind; and it is our great shame and fault that it hath no better. If we will speak justly of things, as to the general civility

civility of life and manners, freedom from tyranny, and barbarousness, and cruelty, and some other enormous vices; yea and as to the exemplary piety and virtue of great numbers of particular persons of several nations, there is no comparison between the general state of *Christianity*, and the *Pagan* and *Mahometan* parts of the world. Next to christianity, and the law of *Moses*, (which was confined to one nation) philosophy was the most likely instrument to reform mankind that hath been in the world; and it had very considerable effects upon some particular persons, both as to the rectifying of their opinions, and the reforming of their lives: but upon the generality of mankind it did very little in either of these respects, especially as to the rectifying of the absurd and impious opinions of the people concerning God, and their superstitious worship of the Deity. Whereas the christian religion did universally, where-ever it came, set men free from those gross impieties and superstitions, and taught men to worship the only true God in a right manner.

Though we must confess, to the eternal reproach of the christian religion, that the *Western* church hath degenerated so far, that it seems to be in a great measure relaps'd into the ignorance and superstition of Paganism; out of which degeneracy, that God hath rescued us, as we have infinite cause to adore his goodness, so we have all the reason in the world to dread and detest a return into this spiritual *Egypt*, this house of darkness and bondage, and the bringing of our necks again under *that yoke, which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear*.

So that you see that there are still very considerable effects of the christian religion in the world, yea and I doubt not but in those places where it is most corrupted and degenerated; because they still retain the essential doctrines of christianity, which have not quite lost their force, notwithstanding the many errors and corruptions that are mixt with them. And as God knows, and every man sees it, that the generality of christians are very bad, notwithstanding all the Influence of that excellent religion which they profess; yet I think it is very evident, men would be much worse without it. For though very many who have entertained the principles of christianity are very wicked in their lives; yet many are otherwise: and those that are bad have this advantage by their religion, that it is in its nature apt to reduce and recover men from a wicked course, and sometimes does: whereas the case of those persons would have been desperate, were it not for those principles of religion which were implanted in them by christian education, and though they were long suppress'd, yet did at last awaken them to a consideration of their condition, and proved the happy means of their recovery.

3. I will not deny but there are some persons as bad, nay perhaps worse, that have been bred up in the christian religion, than are commonly to be found in the darkness of Paganism; for the corruption of the best things is the worst, and those who have resisted so great a light as that of the gospel is, are like to prove the most desperately wicked of all others. There is nothing that men make worse use of, than of light and liberty, two of the best and most pleasant things in the world. Knowledge is many times abused to the worst purpose, and liberty into licentiousness and sedition; and yet no man for all that thinks ignorance desirable, or would wish a perpetual night and darkness to the world; and conclude from the inconveniences of abused liberty, that the best state of things would be that the generality of mankind should be all slaves to a few, and be perpetually chained to the oar, or condemned to the mines.

There are many times as bad consequences of good things, as of bad: but yet there is a great difference between good and bad for all that. As knowledge and liberty, so likewise the christian religion is a great happiness to the world in general, though some are so unhappy as to be the worse for it; not because religion is bad, but because they are so.

4. If religion be a matter of mens free choice, it is not to be expected that it should necessarily and constantly have its effects upon men; for it works upon us not by way of force or natural necessity, but of moral persuasion. If religion,
and

And the grace of God which goes along with it, did force men to be good and virtuous, and no man could be so unless he were thus violently forc'd, then it would be no virtue in any man to be good, nor any crime and fault to be otherwise. For then the reason why some men were good, would be because they could not help it; and others bad, because the Grace of God did not make them so whether they would or not.

But religion does not thus work upon men. It directs men to their duty by the shortest and plainest precepts of a good life; it persuades men to the obedience of these precepts, by the promises of eternal happiness, and the threatenings of eternal misery in case of obstinate disobedience; it offers us the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to help our weakness, and enable us to that, for which *we are not sufficient of our selves*: But there is nothing of violence or necessity in all this. After all, men may disobey these precepts, and not be persuaded by these arguments, may not make use of this grace which God offers, may *quench and resist the Holy Ghost*, and *reject the counsel of God against themselves*. And the case being thus, it is no wonder, if the temptations of this present world prevail upon the vicious inclinations of men against their duty, and their true interest; and consequently if the motives and arguments of the christian religion have not a constant and certain effect upon a great part of mankind. Not but that christianity is apt to bring men to goodness; but some are so obstinately bad, as not to be wrought upon by the most powerful considerations it can offer to them.

5. It cannot be denied, but that christianity is as well framed to make men good, as any religion can be imagined to be; and therefore wherever the fault be, it cannot be in the christian religion, that we are not good. So that the bad lives of christians are no sufficient objection either against the truth or goodness of the christian doctrine. Besides the confirmation that was given to it by miracles, the excellency of the doctrine, and its proper tendency to make men holy and virtuous, are a plain evidence of its divine and heavenly original. And surely the goodness of any religion consists in the sufficiency of its precepts to direct men to their duty; in the force of its arguments to persuade men to it; and the suitableness of its aids and helps to enable us to the discharge and performance of it. And all those advantages the christian religion hath above any religion or institution that ever was in the world. The reasonable and plain rules of a good life are no where so perfectly collected, as in the discourses of our blessed Saviour and his Apostles. No religion ever gave men so full assurance of the mighty rewards and punishments of another world; nor such gracious promises of divine assistance, and such evidence of it, especially in the piety, and virtue, and patience, and self-denial of the primitive christians, as the doctrine of God our Saviour hath done, *which teacheth men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, in contemplation of the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*.

6. And lastly, After all that hath or can be said, it must be acknowledged, and ought sadly to be lamented by us, that the wicked lives of christians are a marvellous scandal and reproach to our holy religion, and a great obstacle to the spreading of it in the world, and a real objection against it to prejudiced persons, with whom it doth justly bring into doubt the goodness and efficacy of the institution it self, to see how little effect it hath upon the hearts and lives of men. It is hard for a man to maintain the reputation of an excellent master in any kind, when all the world sees that most of his scholars prove dunces. Whatever commendation may be given to any art or science, men will question the truth and reality of it, when they see the greatest part of those who profess it, not able to do any thing answerable to it. The christian religion pretends to be an art of serving God more decently and devoutly, and of living better than other men; but if it

be so, why do not the professors of this excellent religion shew the force and virtue of it in their lives? And though I have sufficiently shewn, that this is not enough to overthrow the truth, and disparage the excellency of the christian doctrine; yet it will certainly go a great way with prejudiced persons, and it cannot be expected otherwise.

So that we have infinite reason to be ashamed, that there is so plain a contrariety between the laws of christianity, and the lives of the greatest part of christians; so notorious and palpable a difference between the religion that is in the Bible, and that which is to be seen and read in the conversations of men.

Who that looks upon the manners of the present age, could believe, (if he did not know it) that the holy and pure doctrine of the christian religion had ever been so much as heard, much less pretended to be entertained and believed among us? Nay among those who seem to make a more serious profession of religion, when we consider how strangely they allow themselves in malice and envy, in passion, and anger, and uncharitable censures, and evil speaking, in fierce contentions and animosities; who would believe that the great instrument of these mens religion, I mean the Holy Bible, by which they profess to regulate and govern their lives, were full of plain and strict precepts of love and kindness, of charity and peace, and did a hundred times with all imaginable severity, and under pain of forfeiting the kingdom of God, forbid malice, and envy, and revenge, and evil speaking, and rash and uncharitable censures, and tell us so plainly that the christian religion obligeth men *to put off all these*; and that *if any man seem to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain*? Do men read and hear these things every day, and profess to believe them to be the truths of God, and yet live as if they were verily persuaded they were false? What can we conclude from hence, but either that this is not christianity, or the greatest part of us are no christians?

So that if one of the Apostles or primitive christians should rise from the dead, and converse among us, how would he wonder to see the face and complexion of christianity alter'd from what it was in their days; and were it not for the name and title which we bear, would sooner guess us to be any thing than christians.

So that upon the whole matter, there is no way to quit our selves of this objection, and to wash away the reproach of it, but to mend and reform our lives. Till this be done, it is unavoidable, but the vitious manners of men will affect our religion with obloquy and reproach, and derive an ill conceit and opinion of it into the minds of men. And I cannot see how christianity can ever gain much ground in the world, till it be better adorned and recommended by the professors of it. Nay, we have just cause to fear, that if God do not raise up some great and eminent instruments to awaken the world out of this stupid lethargy, that christianity will every day decline, and the world will in a short space be over-run with atheism and infidelity. For vice, and superstition, and enthusiasm, which are the reigning diseases of *Christendom*, when they have run their course, and finish'd their circle, do all naturally end, and meet in Atheism. And then it will be time for the great Judge of the world to appear, and effectually to convince men of that, which they would not be persuaded to believe by any other means. And of this our Saviour hath given us a terrible and fearful intimation, in that question of his; *When the Son of man comes, shall he find faith upon earth*? Our Saviour hath not positively affirmed it, and God grant that we may not make it, and find it true.

And thus I have, by God's assistance, given the best satisfaction I could, to the most material exceptions I have met with against our blessed Saviour and his religion. The

II^d Thing remains briefly to be spoken to, *viz.* How happy a thing it is to escape the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion. *Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.* And this will appear if we consider these *three* or *four* things.

First, That prejudice does many times sway and bias men against the plainest and clearest truths. We see in daily experience, what a false bias prejudice puts upon mens understandings. Men that are educated in the grossest errors and superstitions, how hard it is to convince them that they are in a wrong way! and with what difficulty are they persuaded of their mistake! Nay they have hardly the patience to be told they are in an error, much less to consider what may be offer'd against it. How do the passions and lusts of men blind them and lead them aside from the truth, and incline them to that side of the question which is most favourable to their lusts and interests? How partially do men lean to that part which makes most for their advantage, though all the reason in the world lye on the other side?

Now ignorance and mistake are a great slavery of the understanding, if there were no worse consequences of our errors: and therefore our Saviour says excellently, that the truth makes men free; *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

Secondly, Prejudice does not only bias men against the plainest truths, but in matters of greatest concernment, in things that concern the honour of God, and the good of others, and our own welfare and happiness. Prejudices against religion occasion mistakes of the highest nature, and may lead men to superstition and idolatry, and to all manner of impiety, nay many times to atheism and infidelity. The prejudices against the doctrine of our Saviour are of another concernment than the prejudices which men have against the writers of natural philosophy or eloquence, or any other human art or science. If a man's prejudice make him err in these matters, the thing is of no great moment: but the business of religion is a matter of the greatest and weightiest concernment to mankind.

Thirdly, The consequences of mens prejudices in these things prove many times fatal and destructive to them. Men may upon unreasonable prejudices *reject the counsel of God against themselves*, as it is said of the *Chief Priests and Pharisees* among the *Jews*. Men may oppose the truth so obstinately and perversely, as to be *fighters against God*, and to bring certain ruin and *swift destruction upon themselves*, both in this world, and the other; as the *Jews* did, who by opposing the doctrine of the Gospel, and persecuting our Saviour and his disciples, *fill'd up the measure of their sins, till wrath came upon them to the uttermost*. It is easy to entertain prejudices against religion, and by considering only the wrong side of things, to fortify our prejudices to such a degree, and entrench our selves so strongly in our errors, that the plainest and most convincing truths shall not be able to have any access to us, or make any impression upon us: but all this while we do in truth undermine our own happiness, and are secretly working our own ruin; and while we think we are opposing an enemy, we are destroying our selves; *for who hath harden'd himself against God and his truth, and prospered?* The principles of religion are a firm and immovable rock, against which the more violently we dash our selves, the more miserably we shall be split and shatter'd. Our blessed Saviour and his religion have been to many, and are to this day, *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*; but he himself hath told us what shall be the fate of those who are offended at him; *Whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken; but upon whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder*. And therefore well might he say here in the text, *Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me*.

Fourthly, There are but few in comparison, who have the happiness to escape and overcome the common prejudices which men are apt to entertain against religion. Thus to be sure it was when christianity first appeared in the world: And though among us the great prejudice of education be removed; yet there are still many, who upon one account or other are prejudiced against religion, at least so far, as not to yield to the power of it in their lives. Few men are so impartial in considering things, as not to be swayed by the interest of their lusts and passions, as to keep the balance of their

judgments even, and to suffer nothing but truth and reason to weigh with them. We generally pretend to be *pilgrims and strangers in the world*, and to be all travelling towards heaven: but few of us have the indifferency of travellers; who are not concern'd to find out the fairest and the easiest way, but to know which is the right way, and to go in it. Thus it should be with us, our end should always be in our eye, and we should chuse our way only with respect to that; not considering our inclination so much as our design; nor chusing those principles for the government of our lives, which are most agreeable to our present desires, but those which will most certainly bring us to happiness at the last; and that I am sure the principles of the christian religion, firmly believed and practised by us, will do.


Let us then be persuaded by all that hath been said upon this argument, to a firm belief of the christian doctrine. I hope you are in some measure satisfied, that the objections against it are not such, as ought much to move a wise and considerate man. If we believe that God hath taken so much care of mankind, as to make any certain revelation of his will to them, and of the way to eternal happiness; let us next consider, whether any religion in the world can come in competition with the christian, and with half that reason pretend to be from God, that christianity is able to produce for it self, whether we consider the things to be believed or the duties to be practised, or the motives or arguments to the practice of those duties, or the divine confirmation that is given to the whole. And if we be thus persuaded concerning it, let us resolve to live up to the laws and rules of this holy religion. Our belief of it signifies nothing without the fruits and effects of a good life. And if this were once resolved upon, the difficulty of believing would cease; for the true reason why men are unwilling to believe the truths of the Gospel, is because they are loath to put them in practice. *Every one that doth evil, hateth the light.* The true ground of most mens prejudice against the christian doctrine, is because they have no mind to obey it; and when all is done, the great objection that lies at the bottom of mens minds against it, is, that it is an enemy to their lusts, and they cannot profess to believe it without condemning themselves, for not complying with it in their lives and practice.

S E R M O N LXVI.

Jesus, the Son of God, prov'd by his Resurrection.

ROM. i. 4.

And declared to be the Son of God, with Power, according to the Spirit of Holiness, by the Resurrection from the dead.

 **T.** Paul, in the beginning of this epistle (according to his custom in the rest) styles himself an Apostle, particularly call'd, and set apart by God, for the preaching of the Gospel; the main subject whereof was, *Jesus Christ our Lord*; who as he was, according to his divine nature, *the eternal Son of God*; so according to his human nature, he was not only *the Son of man*, but also *the Son of God*. According to the flesh (that is, the weakness, and frailty, and mortality of his human nature) *he was the Son of David*, that is of his posterity by his mother, who was of that house and line. Made of the seed of David, according to the flesh, v. 3. But according to the Spirit of holiness; (that is, in regard of that divine power of the holy Ghost, which was manifest in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead) *he was demonstrated to be the Son of God*; even according to his human nature; *declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*

All the difficulty in the words, is concerning the meaning of this phrase; of Christ's being *declared to be the Son of God*: The word is *δηλωτός*, which most frequently in Scripture does signify *predestinated, decreed, determined*; but it likewise signifies, that which is *defined, declared, demonstrated, put out of all doubt and controversy*. And in this sense our translation renders it. As if the Apostle had said, that our Lord Jesus Christ, though according to the frailty and weakness of his human nature, he was of the seed of David; yet in respect of that divine power of the holy Ghost, which manifested it self in him, especially in his resurrection from the dead, he was *declared to be the Son of God, with power*, that is, mightily, powerfully demonstrated to be so; so as to put the matter out of all dispute and controversy.

And therefore following our own translation, I shall handle the words in this sense, as containing this proposition in them; *that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, by the holy Ghost, is a powerful demonstration that he was the Son of God.*

And it will conduce very much to the clearing of this proposition to consider these two things.

First, Upon what account Christ, as man, is said to be *the Son of God*.

Secondly, In what sense he is said to be *declared to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead*. The consideration of these two particulars will fully clear this proposition, and the Apostle's meaning in it.

First, Upon what account Christ, as man, is said to be *the Son of God*. And for our right apprehension of this matter, it is very well worthy our observation, that Christ, as man, is no where in Scripture said to be *the Son of God*, but with relation to the divine power of the holy Ghost, some way or other eminently manifested in him; I say the divine power of the holy Ghost, as the Lord and giver of life, as he is call'd in the antient creeds of the Christian Church.

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For as men are naturally said to be the Children of those from whom they receive their life and being; so Christ, as man, is said to be *the Son of God*, because he had life communicated to him, from the Father, by an immediate power of the Spirit of God, or the holy Ghost. First at his conception, which was by the holy Ghost. The conception of our blessed Saviour was an immediate act of the power of the holy Ghost, overshadowing, as the Scripture expresseth it, the blessed mother of our Lord: And then at his resurrection, when after his death, he was, by the operation of the holy Ghost, raised to life again.

Now upon these two accounts only, Christ, as man, is said in Scripture to be *the Son of God*. He was really so upon account of his conception; but this was secret and invisible: but most eminently and remarkably so, upon account of his resurrection, which was open and visible to all.

1. Upon account of his conception by the power of the holy Ghost. That upon this account he was called *the Son of God*, St. Luke most expressly tells us, *Luke 1. 35.* where the Angel tells the Virgin Mary, that *the holy Ghost should come upon her, and the power of the highest should overshadow her, and therefore that holy thing, which should be born of her, should be call'd the Son of God.* And this our Saviour means by *the Father's sanctifying him, and sending him into the world*; for which reason he says he might justly call himself *the Son of God*, *John 10. 35, 36.* *If he call them Gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken: Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said I am the Son of God? If there had been no other reason, this had been sufficient to have given him the title of the Son of God, that he was brought into the world by the sanctification, or divine power of the holy Ghost.*

2. Christ is also said in Scripture to be *the Son of God*, and to be declared to be so, upon account of *his resurrection from the dead*, by the power of the holy Ghost. His resurrection from the dead, is here in the text ascribed to *the Spirit of holiness*, or the holy Ghost. And so in other places of Scripture, *Rom. 8. 11.* *If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you:* and *1 Pet. 3. 18.* *Being put to death in the flesh but quicken'd by the Spirit*; that is, he suffer'd in that frail mortal nature which he assumed: but was raised again by the power of the holy Ghost, of the Spirit of God which resided in him. And upon this account he is expressly said in Scripture to be *the Son of God*. *Psal. 2. 7.* *I will declare the decree; the Lord hath said unto me, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee*, to which perhaps the Apostle alludes here in the text, when he says that *Christ was decreed to be the Son of God, by his resurrection from the dead.* To be sure these words, *this day have I begotten thee*, St. Paul expressly tells us were accomplish'd in the resurrection of Christ; as if God by raising him from the dead, had begotten him, and decreed him to be *his Son*. *Acts 13. 32, 33.* *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the Fathers, God hath fulfill'd the same unto their Children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again, as it is also written in the second Psalm, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

He was *the Son of God* before, as he was conceived by the holy Ghost; but this was secret and invisible, and known only to the mother of our Lord: And therefore God thought fit to give a publick and visible demonstration of it, so as to put the matter out of all question, he declared him in a powerful manner to be his Son, by giving him a new life after death, by raising him from the dead; and by this new and eminent testimony given to him, declared him again to be his Son, and confirmed the title which was given him before upon a true, but more secret account, of his being conceived by the holy Ghost.

And as our Saviour is said to be *the Son of God* upon this twofold account, of his conception by the holy Ghost, and his resurrection to life by the Spirit of God: So the Scripture (which does solicitously pursue a resemblance and conformity between Christ and Christians) does likewise upon a twofold account (answerable to our Saviour's birth and resurrection) call true believers and Christians, *the children of God, viz.* Upon account of their regeneration
or

or new birth, by the operation of the Spirit of God; and upon account of their resurrection to eternal life, by the power of the same Spirit.

Upon account of our regeneration and becoming Christians by the power and operation of the holy Spirit of God upon our minds, we are said to be the Children of God, as being regenerated and born again by the holy Spirit of God: And this is our first adoption. And for this reason the Spirit of God conferred upon Christians at their baptism, and dwelling and residing in them afterwards, is call'd *the Spirit of adoption*; Rom. 8. 15. *Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby you cry, Abba Father*; and Gal. 4. 5, 6. Believers are said to *receive the adoption of Sons*; God having sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, crying *Abba Father*; that is, all Christians, for as much as they are regenerated by the holy Spirit of God, and having the Spirit of God dwelling in them, may with confidence call God Father, and look upon themselves as his children. So the Apostle tells us, Rom. 8. 14. *That as many as are led (or acted) by the Spirit of God, are the Sons of God.*

But though we are said to be Children of God upon account of our regeneration, and the holy Spirit of God dwelling and residing in Christians; yet we are eminently so, upon account of our resurrection to eternal life, by the mighty power of God's Spirit. This is our final adoption and the consummation of it; and therefore Rom. 8. 21. this is called *the glorious liberty of the Sons of God*, because by this we are for ever *deliver'd from the bondage of corruption*; and by way of eminency, *the adoption*, viz. *the redemption of our bodies*.

We are indeed *the Sons of God* before, upon account of the regenerating and sanctifying virtue of the holy Ghost; but finally and chiefly upon account of our resurrection by the power of the divine Spirit. So St. John tells us, that then we shall be declared to be *the Sons of God*, after another manner than we are now: 1 Jo. 3. 1. *Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the Sons of God. Now we are the Sons of God*, (that is, our adoption is begun in our regeneration and sanctification) *but it doth not yet appear what we shall be*; we shall be much more eminently so at the resurrection. *We know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him.*

But the most express and remarkable text to this purpose, is, Luke 20. 36. where good men, after the resurrection, are for this reason said to be *the children of God*, because they are *the children of the resurrection*. *But they who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more; for they are equal to the Angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.* For this reason they are said to be *the children of God*, because they are raised by him to a new life; and to be made partakers of that which is promised to them, and reserved for them. For all that are raised by the power of God, out of the dust of the earth, are not therefore *the children of God*; but only they that have part in the blessed resurrection to eternal life, and *do inherit the kingdom prepared for them*. Not those who are raised to a perpetual death, and the *resurrection of condemnation*. These are not the *children of God*; but *the children of wrath*, and *the children of perdition*.

But the resurrection of the just, is the full and final declaration, that we are *the children of God*; not only because we are restored to a new life, but because at the resurrection, we are admitted to the full possession of that blessed inheritance which is purchased for us, and promised to us.

And the Spirit of God which is conferred upon believers in their regeneration, and afterwards dwells and resides in them, is the pledge and earnest of our final adoption, by our resurrection to eternal life; and upon this account and no other, is said to be the *earnest* of our future inheritance, and the *seal* and confirmation of it. Eph. 1. 13. *In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed by the holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, untill the redemption of the purchas'd possession*; that is, the holy Spirit of God which Christians were made partakers of, upon their sincere belief of the Christian religion, is the seal and earnest of our resurrection to eternal

ternal life; as the Apostle plainly tells us, in that remarkable text, *Rom. 8. 11. If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.*

I have been the longer upon this, because it serves fully to explain to us those obscure phrases, of the *seal and earnest*, and *first fruits of the Spirit*, which many have mistaken to import some particular and spiritual revelation or impression upon the minds of good men, assuring them of their salvation. Whereas the Apostle intended no more by them, but that the Spirit of God which dwells in believers, enabling them *to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit*, is a pledge and earnest to us of a blessed resurrection to eternal life by the power of the Spirit of God which now dwells in us, and is the same Spirit which raised up Jesus from the dead. And in this chapter, the Spirit of God is said, *v. 16. to bear witness to our Spirits*, that is, to assure our minds, *that we are the children of God*; that is, that we are his children now, and consequently heirs of a glorious resurrection to eternal life: for so it follows in the next words, *and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.* And this being glorified together with Christ at the resurrection, he calls, *v. 19. the manifestation of the Sons of God.* Thus you see how in conformity to *the Son of God*, our elder brother, we are said to be *the Sons of God*, because we are now regenerated, and shall at the last day be raised up to eternal life, by the power of the Spirit of God. I proceed to the

Second thing I propounded to speak to, for the clearing of these words, namely, in what sense Christ is said to be *declared*, or *demonstrated to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.* By which the Apostle means these two things.

1. That by his resurrection from the dead he was approved by God to be the true Messiah, and vindicated to the world from all suspicion of being a deceiver and impostor. And consequently in the

2. Place, That hereby God gave testimony to the truth and divinity of his doctrine.

1. By his resurrection from the dead, he was approved by God to be the true Messiah, foretold by the Prophets, and expected at that time by the *Jews*, and sufficiently vindicated to the world to be no deceiver and impostor.

And for our fuller understanding of this, we are to consider these two things.

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the *Jews* were concerning the Messiah. And

(2.) What the many crimes were which they laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him.

(1.) What the apprehensions and expectations of the *Jews* were concerning the Messiah. And it is very plain from the Evangelical History, that they generally apprehended these two things of him: That the Messiah was to be *the Son of God*, and *the King of Israel*; and therefore that our Saviour, by affirming himself to be the Messiah, did call himself *the Son of God*, and *the King of Israel.* *John 1. 41. Andrew* tells his brother *Simon*, *we have found the Messiah.* *v. 45. Philip* tells *Nathanael*, *we have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the Prophets did write*; that is, the Messiah. *v. 49. Nathanael* upon discourse with our Saviour, being convinced that he was the Messiah, owns him in these terms; *Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.* *John 6. 69. Peter* declares his belief that he was the Christ, or the Messiah, in these words, *we believe and are sure that thou art the Son of the living God.* This appears likewise from the High-priest's question to him, *Matth. 26. 63. Art thou the Christ* (that is, the Messiah) *the Son of the living God*; or as it is in *St. Mark*, *the Son of the blessed*; compared with *Pilate's* question, *art thou the King of the Jews?* And when he was upon the Cross, some reviled him under the notion of *the Son of God*, *Matth. 27. 40. If thou be the Son of*

of God, come down from the cross: others under the notion of *the king of Israel*, v. 42. *If he be the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross.* From all which it is plain that the *Jews* expected and believed, that the true *Messias* was to be *the Son of God*, and *the king of Israel*; and whoever was not so, was a deceiver and impostor. But our Saviour affirmed himself to be the true *Messias*, and *the Son of God*. Now God by raising him from the dead, did abundantly vindicate him to the world, from all suspicion of imposture; and gave testimony to him, that he was all that he said of himself, *viz. the true Messias, and the Son of God.*

Which will further appear, if we consider (*2dly.*) What were the crimes which the *Jews* laid to our Saviour's charge, and for which they condemned him; and they were mainly these two, That by giving himself to be *the Messias*, he made himself *king of Israel*, and *the Son of God*. Of the first of these they accused him to *Pilate*, hoping by this accusation to make him guilty of sedition against the *Roman* government; for saying, that he was *the king of Israel*. Of the other they accused him to the chief priests, as being guilty of blasphemy, in that not being *the Messias*, he call'd himself *the Son of God*. And upon this they laid the main stress, as being a thing that would condemn him by their law. They charged him with this in his life-time, as appears by those words of our Saviour, *John 10. 36. Say ye of him whom the father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, thou blasphemest, because I said I am the Son of God?* And when he was arraigned before the chief priests, they accused him of this, and he owning this charge, *that he call'd himself the Son of God*, upon this they judg'd him guilty of death. *Matth. 26. 65, 66. Then the high priest rent his cloaths, and said, he hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witness? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered, he is guilty of death.* And when *Pilate* told them, that he found no fault in him, they still instance in this as his crime, *John 19. 7. We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God.*

Now this being the crime which was charged upon him, and for which he was crucified, and put to death; God, by raising him up from the dead, and taking him up into heaven, gave testimony to him, that he was no impostor, and that he did not vainly arrogate to himself to be the *Messias* and *the Son of God*. God by raising him from the dead, by the power of the holy Ghost, gave a mighty demonstration to him, that he was *the Son of God*. For which reason he is said by the Apostle, *1 Tim. 3. 16. to be justified by the Spirit.* The Spirit gave testimony to him at his baptism, and by the mighty works that appeared in him in his life-time; but he was most eminently and remarkably *justified by the holy Ghost, by his resurrection from the dead*; God hereby bearing him witness, that he was unjustly condemned, and that he assumed nothing to himself, but what of right did belong to him, when he said he was the *Messias*, and *the Son of God*. For how could a man that was condemned to dye for calling himself *the Son of God*, be more remarkably vindicated, and more clearly proved to be so, than by being raised from the dead, by the power of God?

And, *2dly*, God did consequently hereby give testimony to the truth and divinity of our Saviour's doctrine. Being proved by his resurrection to be *the Son of God*, this proved him to be a teacher sent by him, and what he declared to the world was the mind and will of God. For this none was more likely to know, and to report truly to mankind, than *the Son of God*, who came from *the bosom of his Father*. And because the resurrection of Christ is so great a testimony to the truth of his doctrine, hence it is that *St. Paul* tells us, that the belief of this one article of Christ's resurrection, is sufficient to a man's salvation, *Rom. 10. 9. If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart, that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* The reason is plain, because the resurrection of Christ confirmed the truth and divinity of his doctrine; so that the belief of our Saviour's resurrection does by necessary consequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine. That God raised him from the dead after he was condemned and

put to death for calling himself *the son of God*, is a demonstration that he really was *the son of God*, and if he was *the son of God*, the doctrine which he taught was true, and from God.

And thus I have shewn you, how the *resurrection* of Christ from the dead, is a *powerful demonstration* that he was *the son of God*.

All that remains, is briefly to draw some practical inferences from the consideration of our Saviour's resurrection.

1st, To confirm and establish our minds in the belief of the christian religion, of which the resurrection of Christ from the dead is so great a confirmation. And therefore I told you that this one article is mention'd by St. Paul as the sum and abridgment of the christian faith; *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* The belief of our Saviour's resurrection doth by necessary consequence infer the belief of his whole doctrine; for he who believes that God raised him from the dead, after he was put to death for calling himself *the son of God*, cannot but believe him to be *the son of God*; and consequently that the doctrine which he delivered was from God.

2^{dly}, The resurrection of Christ from the dead assures us of a future judgment, and of the recompences and rewards of another world. That Christ was raised from the dead, is a demonstration of another life after this; and no man that believes the immortality of our souls, and another life after this, ever doubted of a future judgment; so that by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, God hath given assurance unto all men of a future judgment, and consequently of the recompences and rewards of another world.

The consideration whereof ought to have a mighty influence upon us, more especially to these three purposes.

1st, To raise our minds above the present enjoyments of this life. Were but men convinced of this great and obvious truth, that there is an infinite difference between time and eternity, between a few days and everlasting ages; would we but sometimes represent to our selves, what thoughts and apprehensions dying men have of this world, how vain and empty a thing it appears to them; how like a pageant and shadow it looks, as it passeth away from them; methinks none of these things could be a sufficient temptation to any man to forget God and his soul; but notwithstanding all the present delights, and allurements of sense, we should be strongly intent upon the concernments of another world, and almost wholly taken up with the thoughts of the vast eternity which we are ready to enter into. For what is there in this world, this vast and howling wilderness, this rude and barbarous country which we are but to pass through, which should detain and entangle our affections, and take off our thoughts from our everlasting habitation, from that *better, and that heavenly country*, where we hope to live and to be happy for ever?

2^{dly}, The consideration of the rewards of another world should comfort and support us under the troubles and afflictions of this world. The hopes of a blessed resurrection are a very proper consideration to bear us up under the evils and pressures of this life. If we hope for so great a happiness hereafter, we may be contented to bear some afflictions in this world; because the blessedness which we expect will so abundantly recompence and outweigh our present sufferings. So the Apostle assures us, Rom. 8. 18. *We know that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.* The consideration whereof was that which made the primitive christians to triumph in their sufferings, and in the midst of all their tribulations *to rejoice in the hopes of the glory of God*; because their sufferings did really prepare and make way for their Glory. So the same Apostle tells us, 2 Cor. 4. 17, 18. *Our light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; whilst we look not at the things which are seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

3^{dly},

3dly and lastly, The assurance of our future reward is a mighty encouragement to obedience and a holy life. What greater encouragement can we have than this, That all the good which we do in this world will accompany us into the other? *That when we rest from our labours, our works will follow us?* That when we shall be stript of other things, and parted from them, these will still remain with us, and bear us company? Our riches and honours, our sensual pleasures and enjoyments will all take their leave of us, when we leave this world; nay many times they do not accompany us so far as the grave, but take occasion to forsake us, when we have the greatest need and use of them: but piety and virtue are *that better part which cannot be taken from us.* All the good actions which we do in this world will go along with us into the other, and through the merits of our redeemer procure for us, at the hands of a gracious and merciful God, a glorious and eternal reward; not according to the meanness of our services, but according to the bounty of his mind, and the vastness of his treasures and estate.

Now what an encouragement is this to holiness and obedience, to consider that it will all be our own another day; to be assured that whoever serves God faithfully, and does suffer for him patiently, does lay up so much treasure for himself in another world, and provides lasting comforts for himself, and faithful and constant companions, that will never leave him nor forsake him?

Let us then do all the good we can, while we have opportunity, and serve God with all our might, knowing that no good action that we do shall be lost and fall to the ground, that every grace and virtue that we exercise in this life, and every degree of them, *shall receive their full recompence at the resurrection of the just.*

How should this inspire us with resolution and zeal and industry in the service of God, to have such a reward continually in our eye; how should it tempt us to our duty, to have *a crown and a kingdom* offered to us, *joys unspeakable and full of glory, such things as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man?* And *such are the things which God hath laid up for them who love him heartily, and serve him faithfully in this world.*

S E R M O N LXVII.

The danger of Apostasy from Christianity.

HEB. vi. 4, 5, 6.

For it is impossible for those who were once enlighten'd, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away to renew them again unto repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.



THESE words are full of difficulties, and the misunderstanding of them hath not only been an occasion of a great deal of trouble, and even despair to particular persons, but one of the chief reasons why the church of *Rome* did for a long time reject the authority of this book; which by the way I cannot but take notice of as a demonstrative instance both of the fallible judgment of that church, and of the fallibility of oral tradition; for *St. Jerom* more than once expressly tells us, *that in his time* (which was about 400 years after Christ) *the church of Rome did not receive this epistle for canonical*: but it is plain, that since that time, whether moved by the evidence of the thing, or (which is more probable) by the consent and authority of other churches, they have received it, and do at this day acknowledge it for *Canonical*; from whence one of these two things will necessarily follow; either that they were in an error for 400 years together while they rejected it; or that they have since erred for a longer time in receiving it. One of these is unavoidable; for if the book be *canonical* now, it was so from the beginning; for *Bellarmino* himself confesseth (and if he had not confessed it, it is nevertheless true and certain) that the church cannot make a book *canonical*, which was not so before; if it was not *canonical* at first, it cannot be made so afterward; so that let them chuse which part they will, it is evident, beyond all denial, that the church of *Rome* hath actually erred in her judgment concerning the authority of this book; and one error of this kind is enough to destroy her infallibility, there being no greater evidence that a church is not infallible, than if it plainly appear that she hath been deceived.

And this also is a convincing instance of the fallibility of oral tradition. For if *that* be infallible in delivering down to us the *canonical* books of scripture, it necessarily follows, that whatever books were delivered down to us for *canonical* in one age, must have been so in all ages; and whatever was rejected in any age, must always have been rejected: but we plainly see the contrary, from the instance of this epistle, concerning which the church of *Rome* (which pretends to be the great and faithful preserver of tradition) hath in several ages deliver'd several things. This is a peremptory instance both of the fallibility of the *Roman* church, and of her oral tradition.

Having observed this by the way, which I could not well pass by upon so fair an occasion, I shall betake my self to the explication of these words; towards which it will be no small advantage to consider the particular phrases and expressions in the text. *It is impossible for those who were once enlighten'd*; that is, were solemnly admitted into the church by baptism, and embraced the profession of christianity. Nothing was more frequent among the ancients, than to call baptism, φωτισμὸν, *illumination*; and those who were baptized were called, φωτισθέντες, *enlighten'd persons*, because of that divine illumination which was convey'd to the minds of men by the knowledge of christianity, the doctrine whereof they made profession of at their baptism. And therefore *Justin Martyr* tells us, *that by cal-*
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ling upon God the Father, and the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the name of the Holy Ghost, ὁ φωτισόμενος λατρίαι, the enlighten'd Person is washed; and again more expressly, Καλεῖται δὲ τὸ τοῦ φωτισμοῦ, this Laver (speaking of baptism) is called illumination. And St. Cyprian gives us the reason; because by virtue of baptism *inexpiatum pectus ac purum de super se lumen infundit*, Light is infused from above into the purified soul. And that this expression is so to be understood herein the Text, as also chap. 10. 32. the Syriac and *Æthiopic* give us good ground to believe; for they render the Text thus, *It is impossible for those who have been once baptized, and have tasted of the heavenly gift.* And at the 10th chap. v. 32. which we translate, *But call to remembrance the former days, in which after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions*; that is, call to mind the former days, in which after by baptism ye had publicly embraced the profession of christianity, ye were upon that account exposed to many grievous sufferings and persecutions. So that I think there can be no great doubt, but, by *those that were once enlighten'd*, the Apostle means *those that were baptized*.

To proceed then, *For it is impossible for those who were once enlighten'd, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy Ghost*; these two expressions seem to denote the spiritual benefits and graces of the holy Ghost conferred upon christians by baptism; particularly regeneration, which is the proper work of the holy Ghost, and justification and remission of sins. So we find faith, whereby we are justified, called the gift of God, *Eph. 2. 8. Faith is the gift of God*; and our justification is called a gift, and a free gift, five several times in one chapter, *Rom. 5. 15, 16, 17, 18. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift*; for if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many; and what this free gift is, he tells us in the next words, *viz. justification, or remission of sins, v. 16. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift*; for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence, death reigned by one, much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation: even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. So that by the heavenly gift, I understand remission of sins; and by being made partakers of the holy Ghost, the sanctifying power and efficacy of God's Spirit.

And have tasted the good word of God; that is, entertained the gospel, which is here called *the good word of God*; by reason of the gracious promises contained in it, particularly the promises of eternal life and happiness.

And the powers of the world to come, δυνάμεις τε μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, the powers of the gospel age; that is, the miraculous powers of the holy Ghost which were bestowed upon men, in order to the propagation of the gospel. And that this is the true meaning of this phrase, will I think be very plain to any one who shall but consider, that the word δυνάμεις is generally in Scripture used for miraculous powers and operations; and particularly to express the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghost, which were bestowed upon the apostles and first christians; (I need not cite the particular Texts for the proof of this, they are so many and so well known;) And then if we consider farther, that the times of the gospel, the days of the *Messias*, are frequently called by the *Jews seculum futurum, the age to come*. And indeed this is the very phrase used by the LXXII concerning our Saviour, *Isa. 9. 6.* where he is called according to our translation, *The everlasting father*, but according to that of the LXXII πατὴρ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος, *The father of the future age*. And this very phrase is used once more in this epistle to the *Heb. ch. 2. 5. For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we now speak.* He had said before, *that the law was given by angels, v. 2. If the word spoken by angels was stedfast*; but the dispensation of the gospel, which he calls *the world to come*, of the future age, was not committed to them, this was administered by the son of God; *Unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come.* And 'tis observable, that this phrase is only used in this epistle to the *Hebrews*, because the *Jews* very well understood the meaning of it, being that whereby they

they commonly exprest the times of the gospel, according to that ancient tradition of the house of *Elias*, which distributed the duration of the world into three *αἰῶνες*, or ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the *Messias*, which they called the *seculum futurum*, or *the age to come*; and which is likewise in Scripture called, *the last days*, or *times*, and the *conclusion of the ages*. Concerning which, it was particularly prophesied, that the holy Ghost should be poured forth upon men in miraculous gifts and powers. And to this very purpose the Prophet *Joel* is cited by St. Peter, *Acts* 2. 16, 17. *This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel, And it shall come to pass in the last days (saith God) I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesie, &c.* From all which it is very evident, that by *tasting of the powers of the world to come*, is meant being partakers of the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghost, which were poured forth in the gospel age, by the *Jews* commonly called *the world to come*.

If they shall fall away; that is, if after all this they shall apostatize from this profession, out of love to this present world, or from the fear of persecutions and sufferings.

It is impossible to renew them again to repentance; that is, it is a thing very difficult, hardly to be hoped for, that such wilful and notorious apostates should be restored again by repentance. For the word ἀδύνατον, which we translate *impossible*, is not always to be taken in the strictest sense, for that which absolutely cannot be; but many times for that which is so very difficult that it seems next to an impossibility. So our Saviour, that which in one place he calls *exceeding hard*; viz. *for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven*, he afterwards calls *impossible with men*; and so here I understand the Apostle, that those who apostatize from christianity, after baptism and the benefits of it, 'tis *exceeding hard to recover them again to repentance*: This Phrase πάλιν ἀνακαλίζω εἰς μετάνοιαν, *to renew them again to repentance*, some understand of restoring them again to the peace and communion of the church, by a course of penance, such as was prescribed in the ancient church to great offenders; and then they understand by ἀδύνατον, not a *natural*, but a *moral impossibility*; that which cannot be done according to the orders and constitutions of the church; that is, the church did refuse to admit apostates, and some other great offenders, as murderers and adulterers, to a course of penance, in order to their reconciliation with the church; This *Tertullian* tells us was the strictness of the church in his time, *Neque idololatriæ, neque sanguini pax ab ecclesiâ redditur*; they admitted neither idolaters, nor murderers, to the reconciliation of the church. Though they were never so penitent, and shed never so many tears, yet he says they were *jejuna pacis lachrymæ*, their tears were in vain, to reconcile them to the peace and communion of the church. He says indeed they did not absolutely pronounce their case desperate in respect of God's pardon and forgiveness; *sed de veniâ Deo reservamus*, for that they referr'd them to God: but they were never to be admitted again into the church; so strict were many churches, and that upon the authority of this Text; though the church of *Rome* was more moderate in this matter, and for that reason call'd the authority of this book into question.

But I see no reason why these words should primarily be understood of restoring men to the communion of the church by penance: but they seem to be meant of restoring men to the favour of God by repentance; of which indeed their being restor'd to the communion of the church was a good sign. This the Apostle says was *very difficult*, for those who after baptism, and the several benefits of it, did apostatize from christianity, *to be recover'd again to repentance*:

Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. This is spoken by way of aggravation of the crime of apostasy, that they who fall off from christianity, in effect and by interpretation do *crucify the Son of God* over again, and expose him to shame and reproach, as the *Jews* did; for by denying and renouncing of him, they declare him to be an impostor, and consequently worthy of that death which he suffered, and that ignominy which he was exposed to; and therefore, in account of God, they are said to do that, which by their actions they do approve; so that it is made a crime of the highest nature, as if they

they should *crucify the son of God*, and use him in the most ignominious manner, even *tread under foot the son of God*, as the expression is to the same purpose, *ch. 10. 29.*

Thus I have endeavour'd, as briefly and clearly as I could, to explain to you the true meaning and importance of the several phrases and expressions in the Text; the sense whereof amounts to this, That if those who are baptized, and by baptism have received remission of sins, and do believe the doctrine of the gospel, and the promises of it, and are endowed with the miraculous gifts of the holy Ghost, if such persons as these shall after all this apostatize from christianity, it is very hard, and next to an impossibility, to imagine how such persons should recover again by repentance, seeing they are guilty of as great a crime, as if in their own persons they had put to death and ignominiously used *the son of God*, because by rejecting of him, they declared to the world that he suffered deservedly.

Having thus explained the words, in order to the further vindication of them from the mistakes and misapprehensions which have been about them, I shall endeavour to make out these *five* things.

1st, That the sin here mention'd is not *the sin against the holy Ghost*.

2^{dly}, That the Apostle does not declare it to be absolutely impossible, but only that those who are guilty of it are recover'd to repentance with great difficulty.

3^{dly}, That it is not a partial apostasy from the christian religion by any particular vicious practice.

4^{thly}, That it is a total apostasy from the christian religion, and more especially to the heathen idolatry, which the Apostle here speaks of.

5^{thly}, The reason of the difficulty of the recovery of those who fall into this Sin.

1st, That the Sin here mention'd is not *the sin against the holy Ghost*, which I have heretofore discoursed of, and shewn wherein the particular nature of it does consist. There are three things which do remarkably distinguish the sin here spoken of in the Text, from *the sin against the holy Ghost* described by our Saviour.

1st, The persons that are guilty of this sin here in the Text, are evidently such as had embraced christianity, and had taken upon them the profession of it: whereas those whom our Saviour chargeth with *the sin against the holy Ghost*, are such as constantly opposed his doctrine, and resisted the evidence he offer'd for it.

2^{dly}, The particular nature of *the sin against the holy Ghost* consisted in blaspheming the Spirit, whereby our Saviour wrought his miracles, and saying he did not do those things by the Spirit of God, but by the assistance of the devil, in that malicious and unreasonable imputing of the plain effects of the holy Ghost to the power of the devil, and consequently in an obstinate refusal to be convinced by the miracles that he wrought: but here is nothing of all this so much as intimated by the Apostle in this place.

3^{dly}, *The sin against the holy Ghost* is declared to be absolutely *unpardonable both in this world, and in that which is to come.* But this is not declared to be absolutely unpardonable; which brings me to the

2^d Thing, namely, That this sin here spoken of by the Apostle, is not said to be absolutely unpardonable. It is not *the sin against the holy Ghost*; and whatever else it be, it is not out of the compass of God's pardon and forgiveness. So our Saviour hath told us, *that all manner of sin whatsoever that men have committed is capable of pardon, excepting only the sin against the holy Ghost.* And though the Apostle here uses a very severe expression, *that if such persons fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance*; yet I have shewn that there is no necessity of understanding this phrase in the strictest sense of the word *impossible*; but as it is elsewhere used, for that which is *extremely difficult*. Nor indeed will our Saviour's declaration, which I mention'd before, that all sins whatsoever are pardonable, except *the sin against the holy Ghost*, suffer us to understand these words in the most rigorous sense.

3^{dly}, The sin here spoken of, is not a partial apostasy from the christian religion by any particular vicious practice. Whosoever lives in the habitual practice of any sin plainly forbidden by the christian law, may be said so far to have apostatiz'd from christianity; but this is not the *falling away* which the Apostle here speaks of. This may be bad enough, and the greater sins any man who professeth himself a christian lives

lives in, the more notoriously he contradicts his profession, and falls off from christianity, and the nearer he approaches to the sin in the Text, and the danger there threaten'd: but yet for all that, this is not that which the Apostle speaks of.

4thly, But it is a total apostasy from the christian religion, more especially to the heathen idolatry, the renouncing of the true God, and our Saviour, and the worship of false gods, which the Apostle here speaks of. And this will be evident, if we consider the occasion and main scope of this epistle. And that was to confirm the *Jews*, who had newly embraced christianity, in the profession of that religion; and to keep them from apostatizing from it, because of the persecutions and sufferings which attended that profession. It pleased God, when christianity first appeared in the world, to permit the powers of the world to raise a vehement persecution against the professors of it, by reason whereof many out of base fear did apostatize from it, and in testimony of their renouncing it, were forced to sacrifice to the heathen idols. This is that which the Apostle endeavours to caution and arm men against throughout this epistle. *ch. 2. 1. Therefore we ought to give the most earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should fall away:* And *Chap. 3. 12. it is called an evil heart of unbelief to apostatize from the living God. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief to depart from the living God;* that is, to fall from the worship of the true God to idolatry. And, *chap. 10. 23. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, not forsaking the assembling of our selves together;* that is, not declining the assemblies of christians, for fear of persecution; and *v. 26. it is call'd a sinning wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth;* and *v. 39. a drawing back to perdition.* And *ch. 12. it is call'd by way of eminency, the sin which so easily besets;* the sin which in those times of persecution, they were so liable to.

And I doubt not but this is the sin which *St. John* speaks of, and calls *the sin unto death*, and does not require christians to pray for those who fall into it, with any assurance that it shall be forgiven; *1 John 5. 16. There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not unto death. We know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not;* that is, does not fall into the sin of apostasy from christianity to that of the heathen idolatry: *But he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* And then *v. 21. he adds this caution, little children keep your selves from idols.* Which sufficiently shews what that sin was which he was speaking of before.

So that this being the sin which the Apostle design'd to caution men against throughout this epistle, it is very evident what *falling away* it is he here speaks of, namely, a total apostasy from christianity, and more especially to the heathen idolatry.

5thly, We will consider the reason of the difficulty of recovering such persons by repentance. *If they fall away, it is extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance;* and that for these three reasons.

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin.
2. Because it renounceth, and casteth off the means of recovery.
3. Because it is so high a provocation of God to withdraw his grace from such persons.

1. Because of the greatness and heinousness of the sin, both in the nature and circumstances of it. It is a downright apostasy from God, a direct renouncing of him, and rejecting of his truth, after men have owned it, and been inwardly persuaded and convinced of it; and so the Apostle expresseth it in this epistle, calling it an *apostasy from the living god, a sinning wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth.* It hath all the aggravations that a crime is capable of, being against the clearest light and knowledge, and the fullest conviction of a man's mind, concerning the truth and goodness of that religion which he renounceth; against the greatest obligations laid upon him by the grace and mercy of the gospel; after the free pardon of sins, and the grace and assistance of God's Spirit received, and a miraculous power confer'd for a witness and testimony to themselves, of the undoubted truth of that religion which they have embraced. It is the highest affront to the Son of God, who revealed this religion to the world, and sealed it with his blood; and, in effect, an expression of

of as high malice to the author of this religion, as the *Jews* were guilty of when they put him to so cruel and shameful a death.

Now a sin of this heinous nature is apt naturally either to plunge men into hardness and impenitency, or to drive them to despair; and either of these conditions are effectual bars to their recovery. And both these dangers the Apostle warns men of in this epistle. *Ch. 3. 12, 13. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to apostatize from the living God: but exhort one another daily, whilst it is call'd to day, lest any of you be harden'd through the deceitfulness of sin.* Or else the reflection upon so horrid a crime is apt to drive a man to despair; as it did *Judas*, who after he had betray'd the *Son of God*, could find no ease but by making away himself; the guilt of so great a sin fill'd him with such terrors, that he was glad to fly to death for refuge, and to lay violent hands upon himself. And this likewise was the case of *Spira*, whose apostasy though it was not total from the christian religion, but only from the purity and reformation of it, brought him to that desperation of mind which was a kind of hell upon earth. And of this danger likewise the Apostle admonisheth, *Ch. 12. 15. Looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God* (or as it is in our margin, *lest any man fall from the grace of God*) *lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you; and then he compares the case of such persons to Esau,* who when he had renounced his birthright, to which the blessing was annexed, was afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, rejected, and found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

2dly, Those who are guilty of this sin, do renounce and cast off the means of their recovery; and therefore it becomes extremely difficult *to renew them again to repentance.* They reject the gospel, which affords the best arguments and means to repentance, and renounce the only way of pardon and forgiveness. And certainly that man is in a very sad and desperate condition, the very nature of whose disease is to reject the remedy that should cure him. And this the Apostle tells us, was the condition of those who apostatized from the gospel, *Chap. 10. 26, 27. For if we sin wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin; but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversary.* The great sacrifice and propitiation for sin was the *Son of God*; and they who renounce him, what way of expiation can they hope for afterward? what can they expect but to fall into his hands as a judge, whom they have rejected as a sacrifice and a Saviour? and then,

3dly, Those who are guilty of this sin, provoke God in the highest manner to withdraw his grace and Holy Spirit from them, by the power and efficacy whereof they should be brought to repentance; so that it can hardly otherwise be expected, but that God should leave those to themselves, who have so unworthily forsaken him; and wholly withdraw his grace and Spirit from such persons as have so notoriously *offered despoight to the Spirit of grace.*

I do not say that God always does this, he is sometimes better to such persons than they have deserved from him, and saves those who have done what they can to undoe themselves, and mercifully puts forth his hand to recover them who were *drawing back to perdition*; especially if they were suddenly surprized by the violence of temptation, and yielded to it not deliberately and out of choice, but merely through weakness and infirmity, and so soon as they reflected upon themselves, did return and repent: This was the case of *St. Peter*, who being surprized with a sudden fear denied Christ; but being admonish'd of his sin by the signal which our Saviour had given him, he was recovered by a speedy and hearty repentance. And so likewise several of the primitive christians, who were at first overcome by fear to renounce their religion, did afterwards recover themselves, and dy'd resolute martyrs: but it is a very dangerous state, out of which but few recover, and with great difficulty.

And thus I have done with the *five* things I propounded to make out, for the clearing of this text from the mistakes and misapprehensions which have been about it. I shall now draw some useful inferences from hence by way of application, that we may see how far this doth concern our selves; and they shall be these.

1st, From the supposition here in text, that such persons as are there described (namely, those who have been baptized, and by baptism have received remission of sins, and did firmly believe the gospel, and the promises of it, and were endowed with miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost) that these may fall away; this should caution us all against confidence and security; when those that have gone thus far may fall, *let him that standeth take heed.*

Some are of opinion, that those whom the Apostle here describes are true and sincere christians, and that when he says, *it is impossible, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*, he means that they cannot fall away totally, so as to stand in need of being renewed again to repentance: But this is directly contrary to the Apostle's design, which was to caution christians against apostasy, because if they did fall away, their recovery would be so exceeding difficult; which argument does plainly suppose that they might fall away.

On the other hand, there are others who think the persons, here described by the Apostle, to be hypocritical christians, who for some base ends had entertained christianity, and put on the profession of it, but not being sincere and in good earnest, would forsake it when persecution came. But besides that this is contrary to the description which the Apostle makes of these persons, who are said *to have tasted of the heavenly gifts, and to have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost*; by which if we understand justification and remission of sins, and the sanctifying virtue of the Holy Ghost, which in all probability is the meaning of these phrases, these are blessings which did not belong to hypocrites, and which God does not bestow upon them; I say, besides this, there is no reason to imagine that the Apostle intended such persons, when it is likely that there were very few hypocrites in those times of persecution; for what should tempt men to dissemble christianity, when it was so dangerous a profession? or what worldly ends could men have in taking that profession upon them, which was so directly contrary to their worldly interests?

So that upon the whole matter, I doubt not but the Apostle here means those who are real in the profession of christianity, and that such *might fall away*. For we may easily imagine, that men might be convinced of the truth and goodness of the *christian doctrine*, and in good earnest embrace the profession of it, and yet not be so perfectly weaned from the world, and so firmly rooted and established in that persuasion, as when it came to the tryal, to be able to quit all for it, and to bear up against all the terrors and assaults of persecution; so that they might be real christians, and no hypocrites, though they were not so perfectly established and confirmed, and so sincerely resolved as many others. They were not like St. Paul, and those tried persons whom he speaks of, *Rom. 8. 35, 37. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors.* (They had been tried by all these, and yet had held out) upon which he breaks out into those triumphant expressions; *I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* They might not (I say) be like those: and yet for all that be real in their profession of christianity, and no hypocrites.

In short, I take them to be such as our Saviour describes him to be, *who received the seed into stony places*, namely, *he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while, for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.* This is no description of a hypocrite; but of one that was real, as far as he went (for he is said *to receive the word with joy*) but was not well rooted, and come to such a confirmed state, as resolutely to withstand the assaults of persecution.

So that tho' we have truly embraced christianity, and are in a good degree sincere in the profession of it, yet there is great reason why we should neither be *secure nor confident in our selves*. Not *secure*, because there is great danger that our resolutions may be born down one time or other by the assaults of temptation, if we be not continually vigilant, and upon our guard. Not *confident in our selves*; because *we stand by faith, and faith is the gift of God*, therefore as the

Apostle

Apostle infers, *we should not be high-minded, but fear.* Men may have gone a great way in christianity, and have been sincere in the profession of it; and yet afterwards may apostatize in the foulest manner, not only fall off to a vitious life, but even desert the profession of their religion. I would to God the experience of the world did not give us too much reason to believe the possibility of this. When we see so many revolt from the profession of the reformed religion, to the corruptions and superstitions of *Rome*; and others from a religious and sober life, to plunge themselves into all kind of lewdness and debauchery, and it is to be feared, into atheism and infidelity; can we doubt any longer whether it be possible for christians to fall away? I wish we were as certain of the possibility of their recovery, as we are of their falling, and that we had as many examples of the one as of the other.

Let us then be very vigilant over our selves, and according to the Apostle's exhortation, *2 Pet. 3. 17. Seeing we know these things before, beware, lest we also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from our own steadfastness.*

2dly, This shews us how great an aggravation it is, for men to sin against the means of knowledge which the gospel affords, and the mercies which it offers unto them. That which aggravated the sin of these persons was, that after they *were once enlighten'd*, that is, at their baptism were instructed in the christian doctrine, the clearest and most perfect revelation that ever was made of God's will to mankind, that after they were *justified freely by God's grace*, and had received remission of sins, and had many other benefits conferred upon them; that after all this, they should fall off from this *holy religion*. This was that which did so heighten and enflame their guilt, and made their case so near desperate. The two great aggravations of crimes are wilfulness and ingratitude; if a crime be wilfully committed, and committed against one that hath obliged us by the greatest favours and benefits. Now he commits a fault wilfully, who does it against the clear knowledge of his duty. Ignorance excuseth; for so far as a man is ignorant of the evil he does, so far the action is involuntary: but knowledge makes it to be a wilful fault. And this is a more peculiar aggravation of the sins of christians, because God hath afforded to them the greatest means and opportunities of knowledge; that revelation which God hath made of his will to the world by our blessed Saviour, is the clearest light that ever mankind had, and the mercies which the Gospel brings are the greatest that ever were offer'd to the sons of men; the free pardon and remission of all our sins, and the assistance of God's grace and holy Spirit, to help the weakness of our nature, and enable us to do what God requires of us. So that we who sin after baptism, after the knowledge of christianity, and those great blessings which the gospel bestows on mankind, are of all persons in the world the most inexcusable. The sins of heathens bear no proportion to ours, because they never enjoyed those means of knowledge, never had those blessings conferred upon them, which christians are partakers of; so that we may apply to our selves those severe words of the Apostle in this epistle, *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?* Hear how our Saviour aggravates the faults of men upon this account, of the wilfulness of them, and their being committed against the express knowledge of God's will: *Luke 12. 47, 48. The servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: for unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* The means and mercies of the gospel are so many talents committed to our trust, of the neglect whereof a severe account will be taken at the day of judgment. If we be wilful offenders, there is no excuse for us, and little hopes of pardon. *If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth* (says the Apostle in this epistle) *there remains no more sacrifice for sin.* I know the Apostle speaks this particularly of the sin of *Apostasy from christianity*; but it is in proportion true of all other sins, which those who have received the knowledge of the truth are guilty of. They, who after they have entertained christianity, and made some progress in it, and been in some measure reformed by it, do again relapse into any vitious course, do thereby render their condition very dangerous. So St. Peter tells

us, 2 Pet. 2. 20, 21. *If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them, not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* Therefore we may do well to consider seriously what we do, when under the means and opportunities of knowledge which the gospel affords us, and the inestimable blessings and favours which it confers upon us, we live in any wicked and vitious course. Our sins are not of a common rate, when they have so much of wilfulness and unworthiness in them. If men shall be severely punish'd for living against the light of nature; what vengeance shall be poured on those who offend against the glorious light of the Gospel? *This is the condemnation, that light is come, &c.*

3dly, The consideration of what hath been said is matter of comfort to those, who upon every failing and infirmity are afraid they have committed *the unpardonable sin*, and that it is impossible for them to be restored by repentance. There are many, who being of a dark and melancholy temper, are apt to represent things worse to themselves than there is reason for, and do many times fancy themselves guilty of great crimes, in the doing or neglecting of those things which in their nature are indifferent, and are apt to aggravate and blow up every little infirmity into an unpardonable sin. Most men are apt to extenuate their sins, and not to be sensible enough of the evil and heinousness of them; but it is the peculiar infelicity of melancholy persons to look upon their faults as blacker and greater than in truth they are; and whatsoever they hear and read in Scripture, that is spoken against the grossest and most enormous offenders, they apply to themselves; and when they hear of the *sin against the holy Ghost, and the sin unto death*, or read this text which I am now treating of, they presently conclude that they are guilty of these sins, and that this is a description of their case. Whereas *the sin against the holy Ghost* is of that nature, that probably none but those that saw our Saviour's miracles are capable of committing it; and excepting *that*, there is no sin whatsoever that is unpardonable. As for *the sin unto death*, and *that* here spoken of in the text, I have shewn that they are a total Apostasy from the *christian religion*, more especially to the heathen idolatry; which these persons I am speaking of, have no reason to imagine themselves guilty of. And though great and notorious crimes committed by christians, may come near to this, and it may be very hard for those who are guilty of them, to recover themselves again to repentance; yet to be sure, for the common frailties and infirmities of human nature, there is an open way of pardon in the gospel, and they are many times forgiven to us upon a general repentance; so that upon account of these, which is commonly the case of the persons I am speaking of, there is not the least ground of despair; and though it be hard many times for such persons to receive comfort, yet it is easy to give it, and that upon sure grounds, and as clear evidence of Scripture, as there is for any thing; so that the first thing that such persons, who are so apt to judge thus hardly of themselves, are to be convinced of (if possible) is this, that they ought rather to trust the judgment of others concerning themselves, than their own imagination, which is so distemper'd, that it cannot make a true representation of things. I know that where melancholy does mightily prevail, it is hard to persuade people of this: but till they be persuaded of it, I am sure all the reason in the world will signify nothing to them.

4thly, This should make men afraid of great and presumptuous sins, which come near Apostasy from christianity; such as deliberate murder, adultery, gross fraud and oppression, or notorious and habitual intemperance. For what great difference is there, whether men renounce christianity; or professing to believe it, *do in their works deny it*? Some of these sins which I have mention'd, particularly murder and adultery, were ranked in the same degree with Apostasy by the antient church; and so severe was the discipline of many churches, that persons guilty of these crimes were never admitted to the peace and communion of the church again, whatever testimony they gave of their repentance. I will not say but this was too rigorous; but this shews how inconsistent

sistent with christianity these crimes, and others of the like degree of heinousness, were in those days thought to be. They did not indeed, as *Tertullian* tells us, think such persons absolutely incapable of the mercy of God; but after such a fall, so notorious a contradiction to their christian profession, they thought it unfit afterwards that they should ever be reckon'd in the number of christians.

5thly, It may be useful for us upon this occasion to reflect a little upon the antient discipline of the church, which in some places (as I have told you) was so severe, as in case of some great crimes after baptism, as Apostasy to the heathen idolatry, murder, and adultery, never to admit those that were guilty of them, to the peace and communion of the church; but all churches were so strict, as not to admit those who fell after baptism into great and notorious crimes, to reconciliation with the church, but after a long and tedious course of penance, after the greatest and most public testimonies of sorrow and repentance, after long fasting and tears, and the greatest signs of humiliation that can be imagined. In case of the greatest offences they were seldom reconciled, till they came to lie upon their death-beds: and in case of other scandalous sins, not 'till after the humiliation of many years. This perhaps may be thought too great severity; but I am sure we are as much too remiss now, as they were over-rigorous then: but was the antient discipline of the church in any degree put in practice now, what case would the generality of christians be in? In what herds and shoals would men be driven out of the communion of the church? 'Tis true, the prodigious degeneracy and corruption of christians hath long since broke these bounds, and 'tis morally impossible to revive the strictness of the antient discipline in any measure, till the world grow better; but yet we ought to reflect, with shame and confusion of face, upon the purer ages of the church, and sadly to consider, how few among us would in those days have been accounted christians; and upon this consideration to be provoked to an emulation of those better times, and to a reformation of those faults and miscarriages, which in the best days of christianity were reckon'd inconsistent with the christian profession; and to remember that though the discipline of the church be not now the same it was then, yet the judgment and severity of God is; and that those who live in any vicious course of life, though they continue in the communion of the church, yet they shall be shut out of the kingdom of God. *We are sure that the judgment of God will be according to truth, against them which commit such things.*

6thly, and lastly, The consideration of what hath been said, should confirm and establish us in the profession of our holy religion. 'Tis true, we are not now in danger of apostatizing from christianity to the heathen idolatry; but we have too many sad examples of those who apostatize from the profession of the gospel, which they have taken upon them in baptism, to atheism and infidelity, to all manner of impiety and lewdness. There are many who daily fall off from the profession of the *reformed religion*, to the gross errors and superstitions of the *Roman church*, which in many things does too nearly resemble the old Pagan Idolatry. And what the Apostle here says of the Apostates of his time, is proportionably true of those of our days, that *they who thus fall away, it is extremely difficult to renew them again to repentance.* And it ought to be remember'd, that the guilt of this kind of Apostasy hath driven some to despair; as in the case of *Spira*, who, for resisting the light and convictions of his mind, was cast into those agonies, and fill'd with such terrors, as if *the very pains of hell had taken hold on him*; and in that fearful despair, and in the midst of those horrors, he breathed out his soul.

Let us then hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; and let us take heed how we contradict the profession of our faith, by any impiety and wickedness in our lives; remembering that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* I will conclude with the words of the Apostle immediately after the text, *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 briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.* And how gladly would I add the next words! *But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, tho' we thus speak.*

S E R M O N LXVIII.

Christ the Author, and Obedience the Condition of Salvation.

HEB. v. 9.

And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.



HIS is spoken of Christ, our great High-priest under the gospel; upon the excellency of whose person, and the efficacy of his sacrifice for the eternal benefit and salvation of mankind, the Apostle insists so largely in this, and the following chapters; but the sum of all is briefly comprehended in the text, that our High-priest *being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.*

In which words we have these four things considerable.

1st, The great blessing and benefit here spoken of, and that is *eternal salvation*; and this implies in it, not only our deliverance from hell, and redemption from eternal misery; but the obtaining of eternal life and happiness for us.

2^{dly}, The author of this great blessing and benefit to mankind; and that is *Jesus Christ the Son of God*, who is here represented to us under the notion of our *High-priest*, who by making atonement for us, and reconciling us to God, is said to be the *author of eternal salvation* to mankind.

3^{dly}, The way and means whereby he became the author of our salvation; *being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation.* The word is *τελειωθείς*, having consummated his work, and finish'd his course, and receiv'd the reward of it. For this word hath an allusion to those that run in a race, where he that wins receives the crown. And to this the Apostle plainly alludes, *Phil. 3. 12.* where he says, *not as though I had already attained*, *ἐχ' ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον*, not as if I had already taken hold of the prize; but I am pressing, or reaching forward towards it; *ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι*, or were already perfect; that is, not as if I had finish'd my course, or had the prize or crown in my hand; but I am pressing forward towards it. In like manner, our blessed Saviour, when he had finish'd the course of his humiliation and obedience, which was accomplish'd in his sufferings, and had receiv'd the reward of them, being risen from the dead, and exalted to the right hand of God, and crown'd with glory and honour, he is said to be *τελειωθείς* made perfect; and therefore when he was giving up the ghost upon the cross, he said, *John 19. 30. τέλειται, it is finish'd*, or perfected; that is, he had done all that was necessary to be done, by way of suffering, for our redemption. And the same word is likewise used *Luke 13. 32.* concerning our Saviour's sufferings, *I do cures to day and to morrow, καὶ τῇ τριτῇ τελειῶμαι*, and the third day I shall be perfected; this he spake concerning his own death. And therefore *ch. 2. 10.* God is said to *make the captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings*; *διὰ παθημάτων τελειῶσαι*. And thus our High-priest being *made perfect* in this sense, that is, having finish'd his course, which was accomplished in his sufferings, and having received the reward of them, in being exalted at the right hand of God, *he became the author of eternal salvation to us.*

4^{thly}, You have here the qualifications of the persons who are made partakers of this great benefit, or the condition upon which it is suspended, and that is *obedience*; *he became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.*

These are the main things contained in the text. For the fuller explication whereof, I shall take into consideration these five things.

1st, How and by what means Christ is the *author of our salvation.*

2^{dly}, What *obedience* the gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3^{dly}, We will consider the *possibility* of performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the gospel.

4^{thly},

4thly, The necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

And 5thly, I shall shew that this is no prejudice to the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God, declared in the gospel.

1st, We will consider how and by what means *Christ is the author of our salvation*; and this is contain'd in these words, *being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation*; that is (as I told you before) having finish'd his course which was accomplish'd in his last sufferings; and having received the reward of them, being exalted at the right-hand of God, he became the *author of eternal salvation* to us; so that by all he did, and suffer'd for us, in the days of his flesh, and in the state of his humiliation, and by all that he still continues to do for us, now that he is in heaven at the right-hand of God; he hath effected and brought about the great work of our salvation. His doctrine and his life, his death and sufferings, his resurrection from the dead, and his powerful intercession for us at the right-hand of God, have all a great influence upon the reforming and saving of mankind; and by all these ways and means, he is *the author and cause of our salvation*; as a rule, and as a pattern, as a price and propitiation, and as a patron and advocate that is continually pleading our cause, and interceding with God on our behalf, *for mercy, and grace to help in time of need*.

And indeed our condition requir'd an high priest who was qualified in all these respects, for the recovery of mankind out of that corrupt and degenerate state into which it was sunk; an high priest *whose lips should preserve knowledge*, and from whose mouth we may learn the law of God; whose life should be a perfect pattern of holiness to us, and his death a propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and by whose grace and assistance we should be endowed with power and strength to mortifie our lusts, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God; and therefore *such an high priest became us, who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, who might have compassion on the ignorant, and them that are out of the way, and being himself compass'd with infirmities, might have the feeling of ours, being in all points tempted as we are, only without sin*; and in a word, *might be able to save to the utmost all those that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us*.

By these qualifications our high priest is described in this epistle; and by these he is every way suited to all our defects and infirmities, all our wants and necessities; to instruct our ignorance by his doctrine, and to lead us in the path of righteousness by his most holy and most exemplary life; to expiate the guilt of our sins by his death; and to procure grace and assistance for us, by his prevalent intercession on our behalf. By all these ways, and in all these respects, he is said to be *the author of eternal salvation*.

1st, By the holiness and purity of his doctrine, whereby we are perfectly instructed in the will of God and our duty, and powerfully excited and persuaded to the practice of it. The rules and directions of a holy life were very obscure before, and the motives and encouragements to virtue but weak and ineffectual, in comparison of what they are now render'd by the revelation of the gospel. The general corruption of mankind, and the vitious practice of the world, had in a great measure blurr'd and defac'd the natural law; so that the heathen world, for many ages, had but a very dark and doubtful knowledge of their duty, especially as to several instances of it. The custom of several vices had so prevail'd among mankind, as almost quite to extinguish the natural sense of their evil and deformity. And the Jews, who enjoy'd a considerable degree of *divine revelation*, had no strict regard to the morality of their actions; and contenting themselves with some kind of outward conformity to the bare *letter* of the ten commandments, were almost wholly taken up with little ceremonies and observances, in which they placed the main of their religion, almost wholly neglecting the greater duties and weightier matters of the law.

And therefore our blessed Saviour, to free mankind from these wanderings and uncertainties about the will of God, revealed the moral law, and explained the full force and meaning of it, clearing all doubts, and supplying all the defects of it, by a more particular and explicit declaration of the several parts of our duty, and by precepts of greater perfection, than the world was sufficiently acquainted withal before; of greater humility and more universal charity; of abstaining from re-

venge and forgiving injuries, and returning to our enemies good for evil, and love for ill-will, and blessings and prayers for curses and persecutions. These virtues indeed were sometimes, and yet but very rarely, recommended before in the counsels of wise men; but either not in that degree of perfection, or not under that degree of necessity, and as having the force of laws, and laying an universal obligation of indispensable duty upon all mankind.

And as our blessed Saviour hath given a greater clearness, and certainty, and perfection, to the rule of our duty, so he hath reveal'd, and brought into a clearer light, more powerful motives and encouragements to the constant and careful practice of it; for *life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel*; the resurrection of Christ from the dead being a plain and convincing demonstration of the *immortality of our souls*, and another life after this, and an evidence to us both of his power, and of the fidelity of his promise, to raise us from the dead. Not but that mankind had some obscure apprehensions of these things before. Good men had always good hopes of another life, and future rewards in another world; and the worst of men were not without some fears of the judgment and vengeance of another world; but men had disputed themselves into great doubts and uncertainties about these things; and as men that are in doubt, are almost indifferent which way they go; so the uncertain apprehensions which men had of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments of another world, had but a very faint influence upon the minds of men, and wanted that pressing and determining force to virtue and a good life, which a firm belief and clear conviction of these things, would have infused into them.

But now *the light of the glorious gospel of Christ* hath scatter'd all these clouds, and chased away that gross darkness which hid the other world from our sight, and hath removed all doubts concerning the immortality of mens souls, and their future state; and now *the kingdom of heaven*, with all its treasures of life, and happiness, and glory, lies open to our view, and *hell is also naked before us, and destruction hath no covering*. So that the hopes and fears of men are now perfectly awaken'd, and all sorts of considerations that may serve to quicken and encourage our obedience, and to deter and affrighten men from a wicked life, are expos'd to the view of all men, and to stare every man's conscience in the face. And this is that which renders the gospel so admirable and powerful an instrument for the reforming of mankind, and, as the Apostle calls it, *the mighty power of God unto salvation*; because therein life and immortality are set before us, as the certain and glorious reward of our obedience; and *therein also the wrath of God is revealed from heaven, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. So that considering the perfection of our rule, and the powerful enforcements of it upon the consciences of men, by the clear discovery and firm assurance of the eternal recompence of another world; nothing can be imagin'd better suited to its end, than the doctrine of the gospel is to make men wise, and holy, and good unto salvation; both by instructing them perfectly in their duty, and urging them powerfully to the practice of it.

2dly, The example of our Saviour's life is likewise another excellent means to this end. The law lays an obligation upon us; but a pattern gives life and encouragement, and renders our duty more easy, and practicable, and familiar to us; for here we see obedience to the divine law practis'd in our own nature, and performed by a man like our selves, *in all things like unto us, sin only excepted*. 'Tis true indeed, this exception makes a great difference, and seems to take off very much from the encouraging force and virtue of this *example*. No wonder if he that was without sin, and was God as well as man, perform'd all righteousness; and therefore, where is the encouragement of this *example*? That our nature, pure and uncorrupted, supported and assisted by the divinity to which it was united, should be perfectly conformed to the law of God, as it is no strange thing, so neither doth it seem to have that force and encouragement in it, which an example more suited to our weakness might have had. But then this cannot be deny'd, that it hath the advantage of perfection, which a pattern ought to have, and to which, though we can never attain, yet we may always be aspiring towards it; and certainly we cannot better learn, how God would have men to live, than by seeing how God himself lived, when he was pleased to assume our nature, and to become man.

And

And then, we are to consider that the Son of God did not assume our nature in its highest glory and perfection, but compassed with infirmities, and liable in all points to be tempted like as we are; but still it was without sin; and therefore God doth not exact from us perfect obedience, and that we should *fulfil all righteousness*, as he did; he makes allowance for the corruption of our nature, and is pleased to accept of our sincere, tho' very imperfect obedience. But after all this, his *human nature* was united to the *divinity*, and he had the *Spirit without measure*; and this would indeed make a wide difference between us and our *pattern*, as to the purpose of holiness and obedience, if we were destitute of that assistance which is necessary to enable us to the discharge of our duty; but this God offers, and is ready to afford to us, for he hath promised to *give his holy Spirit to them that ask him*; and *the Spirit of him that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead dwells in all good men*, who sincerely desire to do the will of God; *in the working out our salvation, God worketh in us both to will and to do.*

So that as to that obedience which the Gospel requires of us, if we be not wanting to our selves, if we do not *receive the grace of God in vain*, and *quench and resist his blessed Spirit*, we may be as really assisted as *the Son of God* himself was; for, in this respect, all true and sincere christians are *the sons of God*; so that St. Paul tells us, *Rom. 8. 14. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

So that if all things be duly consider'd, the life of our blessed Saviour, as it is the most perfect, so in the main, it is a very proper *pattern* for our imitation, and could not have come nearer to us, without wanting that perfection which is necessary to a compleat and absolute pattern. *The Son of God* condescended to every thing that might render him the most familiar and equal example to us, excepting *that*, which as it was impossible, so had been infinitely dishonourable to him, and would have spoil'd the perfection of his example; he came as near to us as was fit or possible, *being in all things like unto us, sin only excepted*; that is, abating that one thing, which he came to destroy and abolish, and which would have destroyed the very end of his coming; for if he had not been *without sin*, he could neither have made an *expiation* for sin, nor have been a perfect *pattern* of holiness and obedience.

And as the life of our blessed Saviour had all the perfection that is requisite to an *absolute pattern* (so that by considering his temper and spirit, and the actions of his life, we may reform all the vitious inclinations of our minds, and the exorbitances of our passions, and the errors and irregularities of our lives) so it is a very *powerful example*, and of great force to oblige and provoke us to the imitation of it; for it is the example of one whom we ought to reverence, and have reason to love, above any person in the world: The example of our Prince and sovereign Lord, of our best friend and greatest benefactor, of the High-priest of our profession, and the Captain of our salvation, of the author and finisher of our faith, of one who came down from heaven for our sakes, and was contented to assume our nature together with the infirmities of it, and to live in a low and mean condition, for no other reason but that he might have the opportunity to instruct and lead mankind in the way to life, to deliver us from sin and wrath, and to bring us to God and happiness. 'Tis the example of one who laid down his life for us, and sealed his love to us in his blood, and whilst we were enemies, did and suffer'd more for us, than ever any man did for his friend.

And surely these considerations cannot but mightily recommend and endear to us this *example of our Lord and Saviour*. We are ambitious to imitate those whom we highly esteem and reverence, and are apt to have their examples in great veneration, from whom we have received great kindneses and benefits, and are always endeavouring to be like those whom we love, and are apt to conform our selves to the will and pleasure of those from whom we have received great favours, and who are continually heaping great obligations upon us.

So that whether we consider the excellency of our pattern, or the mighty endearments of it to us, by that infinite love and kindness which he hath express'd towards us, we have all the temptation, and all the provocation in the world, to endeavour to be like him; for who would not gladly tread in the steps of *the Son of God*, and of the best friend that the sons of men ever had? Who will not follow *that example* to which we stand indebted for the greatest blessings and benefits that ever were

procured for mankind? Thus you see of what force and advantage the *example* of our blessed Saviour is toward the recovery and salvation of mankind.

3dly, He is *the Author of eternal salvation*, as he hath purchased it for us, by the *merit of his obedience and sufferings*, by which he hath obtained eternal redemption for us; not only deliverance from the wrath to come, but eternal life and happiness. When by our sins we had justly incurr'd the wrath and displeasure of Almighty God, and were liable to eternal death and misery, he was contented to be substituted a sacrifice for us, *to bear our sins in his own body on the tree*, and to expiate the guilt of all our offences by his own sufferings. He died *for us*, that is, not only for our benefit and advantage, but in our place and stead: so that if he had not died we had eternally perish'd; and because he died, we are saved from that eternal ruin and punishment, which was due to us for our sins.

And this, tho' it be no where in Scripture call'd by the name or term of *satisfaction*, yet, which is the same thing in effect, it is call'd *the price of our redemption*; for as we are sinners, we are liable and indebted to the justice of God, and our blessed Saviour by his death and sufferings hath discharged this obligation; which discharge, since it was obtained for us by *the shedding of his precious blood, without which*, the Scripture expressly says, *there had been no remission of sin*, why it may not properly enough be called *payment* and *satisfaction*, I confess I cannot understand. Not that God was angry with his Son, for he was always well pleased with him; or that our Saviour suffer'd the very same which the sinner should have done in his own person, the proper pains and torments of the damned: but that his perfect obedience and grievous sufferings, undergone for our sakes, and upon our account, were of that value and esteem with God, and his voluntary sacrifice of himself in our stead, so highly acceptable and well pleasing to him, that he thereupon was pleased to enter into a covenant of grace and mercy with mankind; wherein he hath promised and engaged himself to forgive the sins of all those who sincerely repent and believe, and to make them partakers of eternal life. And hence it is, that the blood of Christ, which was shed for us upon the cross, is call'd *the blood of the covenant*; as being the sanction of that new covenant of the Gospel, into which God is enter'd with mankind; and not only the confirmation, but the very foundation of it; for which reason, the cup in the Lord's Supper (which represents to us the blood of Christ) is call'd *the New Testament in his blood, which was shed for many for the remission of sins*.

4thly, and lastly, Christ is said to be *the author of our salvation*, in respect of his powerful and perpetual *intercession* for us at the right hand of God. And this seems to be more especially intimated and intended, in that expression here in the text, that *being made perfect he became the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*. Which words of *his being perfected*, do, as I have shew'd before, more immediately refer to his sufferings, and the reward that followed them, *his exaltation at the right hand of God*, where *he lives for ever to make intercession for us*; by which perpetual and most prevalent *intercession* of his, he procures all those benefits to be bestowed upon us, which he purchased for us by his death; the forgiveness of our sins, and our acceptance with God, and perfect restitution to his favour, upon our faith and repentance, and the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit to enable us to a sincere discharge of our duty, to strengthen us against all the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil, to keep us from all evil, and to preserve us to his heavenly kingdom.

And this is that which our Apostle calls *obtaining of mercy, and finding grace to help in time of need*, ch. 4. v. 16. of this Epist. Our blessed Saviour, now that he is advanced into heaven, and *exalted on the right hand of the Majesty on high*, doth out of the tenderest affection and compassion to mankind, still prosecute that great and merciful design of our salvation which was begun by him here on earth, and in virtue of his meritorious obedience and sufferings does offer up our prayers to God, and as it were plead our cause with God, and represent to him all our wants and necessities, and obtain a favourable answer of our petitions put up to God in his name, and all necessary supplies of grace and strength, proportionable to our temptations and infirmities.

And by virtue of this powerful *intercession* of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer,
our

our sins are pardoned upon our sincere repentance, our prayers are graciously answered, our wants are abundantly supplied, and the grace and assistance of God's Spirit are plentifully afforded to us, to excite us to our duty, to strengthen us in well doing, to comfort us in afflictions, to support us under the greatest tryals and sufferings, and *to keep us through faith unto salvation.*

And for this reason, as the purchasing of our salvation is in Scripture attributed to the death and sufferings of Christ; so the perfecting and finishing of it is ascribed to the prevalency of his intercession at the right hand of God for us. So the Apostle tells us, *ch. 7. v. 25. that he is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him; seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us.* He dyed once to purchase salvation for us; and that we may not fall short of it, but receive the full benefit of this purchase, *he lives for ever to make intercession for us,* and thus *he saves to the uttermost of all those that come to God by him;* that is, he takes care of the whole business of our salvation from first to last. And now that he is in heaven, he is as intent to procure our welfare and happiness, and as tenderly concerned for us, as when he lived here among us upon earth, as when he hung upon the cross, and *poured out his soul an offering for our sins;* for he appears at the right hand of God in our nature, that which he assumed for our sakes, which was made subject to, and sensible of our infirmities, and which *was tempted in all things like as we are, only without sin;* and therefore *he knows how to pity and succour them that are tempted;* and from the remembrance of his own sufferings, is prompted to a compassionate sense of ours, and never ceaseth in virtue of his blood, which was shed for us, to plead our cause with God, and to intercede powerfully in our behalf.

So that the virtue and efficacy of Christ's *intercession* on our behalf, is founded in the redemption, which he wrought for us, by his blood and sufferings; which, being enter'd into heaven, he represents to God on our behalf. As the High-priest under the law did enter into the holy place, with the blood of the sacrifice that had been offered, and in virtue of that blood interceded for the people: *so Christ by his own blood enter'd into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us;* as the Apostle speaks, *ch. 9. v. 12.* He enter'd into *the holy place,* that is *into heaven it self,* to make *intercession* for us, as the Apostle explains himself, *v. 24. Christ is not enter'd into the holy places which are made with hands; but into heaven it self, to appear in the presence of God for us.* And *ch. 10. v. 12.* speaking of Christ's appearing for us at the right hand of God, *this man* (says he) *after he had offer'd one sacrifice for sin for ever* (that is, a sacrifice of perpetual virtue and efficacy) *sat down at the right hand of God,* that is to intercede for us in virtue of that sacrifice.

From all which it appears that the virtue of Christ's mediation and intercession for us in heaven, is founded in his sacrifice, and the price of our redemption which he paid on earth, in shedding his blood for us.

From whence the Apostle reasons, that *there is but one Mediator between God and man,* by whom we are to address our prayers to God; *1 Tim. 2. 5. There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.* His mediation is founded in his ransom, or the price which he paid for our redemption. The Apostle indeed does not say there is *but one Mediator* between God and man in express words, but surely he means so; if by saying *there is one God,* he means there is *but one God,* for they are joyned together, and the very same expression used concerning both; *There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men:* that is, there is *but one God,* and *one Mediator.* But then, they of the church of Rome endeavour to avoid this plain text, by distinguishing between a *Mediator of redemption,* and a *Mediator of intercession:* But now if Christ's *mediation,* by way of *intercession,* be founded in the virtue of his *redemption;* then if there be but *one Mediator of redemption,* then there is but *one Mediator of intercession* in heaven for us. *There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.* So that the power and prevalency of his *intercession* is founded in his *ransom,* that is, *the price of our redemption;* in virtue whereof alone he intercedes with God for us, as the Apostle to the *Hebrews* does most plainly assert. So that all other intercessors in heaven for us are excluded from offering and presenting our prayers to God, besides *our high-priest, who is at the right hand of God, and lives for ever, to make intercession for us,* and by virtue of

of his *intercession* is able to save to the uttermost all those that come to God by him, that is, who put up their prayers to God in the alone virtue of his *mediation*. So that as there is no need of any other, if his *intercession* be available to save to the uttermost: so there is great danger in applying to any other (whether Saint or Angel, or even the blessed Virgin) if the benefit of his *intercession* be limited to those who come to God by him. And thus I have shewn by what means Christ is the Author of our salvation; which was the first thing propos'd to be consider'd. I proceed to the

Second thing I propos'd to enquire into; namely, what *obedience* the Gospel requires as a condition, and is pleas'd to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation. And this I shall explain, first *negatively*, and then *positively*.

1st, *Negatively*; It is not a meer outward profession of the christian religion, and owning of Christ for our Lord and law-giver, that will be accepted in this case. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord (saith our Saviour) shall enter into the kingdom of God. By which we may very reasonably understand, all that profession of religion, which falls short of *obedience* and a *holy life*; as the profession of faith in Christ, being baptized into his name and religion, the mere belief of his doctrine, and the owning of him for our Lord and Saviour; no, nor the external worship of him, and profession of subjection to him, by prayer and hearing his word and communicating in the Holy Sacrament. No, though this be set off in the most glorious manner, by prophesying and working miracles in his name; for so it follows in the next words, *Many shall say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out Devils, and in thy name have done many wondrous works? We have eat and drunk in thy presence, and have heard thee preach in our streets.* But he tells us, that nothing of all this, without obedience to his laws, will be sufficient to gain us admission into heaven.

2^{dly}, *Positively*; That which God requires as a condition, and will accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal life, is faith in Christ, and a sincere and universal obedience to the precepts of his holy Gospel. Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of God: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. And here in the text it is expressly said, that Christ is the Author of eternal salvation to them that obey him, τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ, to them that hearken to him; that is, to them that do so hear and believe his Gospel, as to obey it; to them, and no other, he is the Author of eternal salvation.

And that we may the more clearly and distinctly understand what *obedience* it is, which the Gospel exacts as an indispensable condition of eternal salvation, and a necessary qualification in all those who hope to be made partakers of it; we may be pleas'd to consider, that there is a *virtual* and an *actual* obedience to the laws of God; a *perfect* and a *sincere* obedience to them; the explication of these terms, will give us a distinct conception of the things we are speaking of.

1st, There is a *virtual*, and there is an *actual* obedience to the laws of God. By an *actual* obedience, I mean the practice and exercise of the several graces and virtues of christianity, and the course and tenor of a holy life; when out of a good conversation men do shew forth their works, and by the outward actions of their lives do give real testimony of their piety, justice, sobriety, humility, meekness, and charity, and all other christian graces and virtues, as occasion is minister'd for the practice and exercise of them.

By a *virtual* obedience, I mean a sincere belief of the Gospel, of the holiness and equity of its precepts, of the truth of its promises, and the terror of its threatenings, and a true repentance for all our sins. This is obedience in the root and principle; for he who sincerely believes the Gospel, and does truly repent of the errors and miscarriages of his life, is firmly resolv'd to obey the Commandments of God, and to walk before him in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life; so that there is nothing that prevents or hinders this man's *actual* obedience to the laws of God, in the course of a holy and good life, but only the want of time and opportunity for it. And this was the case of those, who, upon the hearing of the Gospel when it was first preached to them, did heartily embrace it, and turn from their sins, and the worship of idols, to the true and living God, but perhaps were cut off soon after; (as there were many who being but newly gained to christianity, were presently put to death, and suffer'd martyrdom for that profession;) there is

no doubt to be made, but that in this case, a *virtual* obedience was in such persons a sufficient qualification for eternal life.

But where there is time and opportunity for the exercise of our obedience, and the practice of the virtues of a holy life, there *actual* obedience to the laws and precepts of the Gospel is necessary, to qualify us for eternal happiness; so that tho' a man do sincerely believe the Gospel, and truly repent of his sins, and resolve upon a better life; yet if he do not afterwards in the course of his life put this resolution in practice, and *bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and amendment of life*, and persevere in a holy course, his first resolution of obedience, tho' it were sincere, will not avail him to Salvation. Nay, if he should continue for some time in the resolution and practice of a holy and virtuous life, and afterwards fall off from it, and *turn from the holy commandment deliver'd unto him, his latter end would be worse than his beginning; all his righteousness that he hath done would not be remember'd; he should die in his iniquity*. For *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*. If *any man draw back, God's Soul will have no pleasure in him*. This is so very clear and plain from Scripture, that no man can entertain a contrary persuasion, without contradicting the whole tenor of the Bible.

The sum of what I have said is this, that a *virtual* obedience and *sincere* faith and repentance are sufficient, where there is no time and opportunity for *actual* obedience, and the practice of a holy life: but where there is opportunity for *actual* obedience, and the continued practice of a good life, and perseverance therein; they are indispensably necessary in order to our *eternal salvation*, and a well grounded hope and assurance of it.

2dly, There is a *perfect*, and there is a *sincere* obedience. *Perfect* obedience consists in the exact conformity of our hearts and lives to the law of God, without the least imperfection, and without failing in any point or degree of our duty. And this obedience, as it is not consistent with the frailty and infirmity of corrupt nature, and the imperfection of our present state, so neither doth God require it of us as a necessary condition of eternal life. We are indeed commanded to be *perfect, as our father which is in heaven is perfect*: but we are not to understand this strictly and rigorously; for that is not only impossible to men in this present state of imperfection, but absolutely impossible to human nature, for *men to be perfect, as God is perfect*: but the plain meaning of this precept is, that we should imitate those divine perfections of goodness, and mercy, and patience, and purity, and endeavour to be as like God in all these as we can, and be still aspiring after a nearer resemblance of him, as may be evident to any one who considers the connexion and occasion of these words.

By a *sincere* obedience, I mean such a conformity of our lives and actions to the law of God, as to the general course and tenor of them, that we do not live in the habitual practice of any known sin, or in the customary neglect of any material or considerable part of our known duty; and that we be not wilfully and deliberately guilty of the single act of heinous and notorious sins, as I have formerly explain'd this matter more at large, in another discourse. And this obedience, even in the best of men, is mixt with great frailty and imperfection; but yet because it is the utmost that we can do in this state of infirmity and imperfection, the terms of the Gospel are so merciful and gracious, as that God is pleased for the sake of the meritorious obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour, to accept this *sincere*, tho' *imperfect* obedience, and to reward it with eternal life. And this, I doubt not, after all the intricate disputes, and infinite controversies about this business, is the true and clear state of this matter.

And this *sincere* obedience which the Gospel requires of us, as a condition of our happiness, tho' it be sometimes call'd by divines, *evangelical perfection*; yet it is but very improperly so call'd; for nothing is properly perfect to which any thing is wanting; and great defects and imperfections must needs be acknowledged in the obedience of the best and holiest men upon earth; and they who pretend to *perfection* in this life, do neither understand the law of God, nor themselves, but (as St. John says of such persons) *they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them*; and besides other imperfections, these two are evident in them, *ignorance* and *pride*.

And thus much may suffice to have spoken to this *second* particular, namely, what obedience the Gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, for eternal life.

The Second
Sermon on
this Text.

S E R M O N LXIX.

The Possibility and Necessity of Gospel-Obedience, and
its consistence with free Grace.

H E B. V. 9.

*And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation un-
to all them that obey him.*



OR the explication of these words, I propos'd to consider these *five* things.

1st, How and by what means Christ is the Author of our salvation.

2^{dly}, What obedience the Gospel requires as a condition, and is pleased to accept as a qualification, in those who hope for eternal salvation.

3^{dly}, The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd, and ready to be afforded to us by the Gospel.

4^{thly}, The necessity of this obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness.

5^{thly}, The consistency of this method and means of our salvation with the law of faith, and the free grace and mercy of God declared in the Gospel.

I have handled the *two* first of these, and now proceed to the

Third thing I propos'd to consider, *viz.* The possibility of our performing this condition, by that grace and assistance which is offer'd and ready to be afforded to us by the Gospel. For if Christ be *the Author of eternal Salvation only to those who obey him*; then those who live in disobedience to the Gospel are in a state of damnation. But there cannot be the guilt of disobedience, where obedience is impossible; no man being guilty, or justly liable to punishment, for the not doing of that, which it was no ways possible for him to do. Therefore the covenant of the Gospel, into which God is enter'd with mankind, doth necessarily suppose the possibility of performing the condition of it; otherwise it leaves them in as bad a condition as they were in before, because it only offers new blessings and benefits to us, but sets us never the nearer the obtaining of them, if so be the condition upon which they are granted be altogether impossible to us; nay, it renders our state many degrees worse, if our not performing the condition of such gracious offers brings us under new and greater guilt.

If it be said, that some persons have great benefit by it, because they by an especial and effectual grace shall be enabled to perform the conditions of this covenant; is not this a mighty straitening to the grace and mercy of the Gospel, to confine it within so narrow a compass, as still to leave the greatest part of mankind in a worse condition, than if salvation had never been offer'd to them? as it certainly does, if (as this doctrine does necessarily suppose) the guilt and punishment of men shall be greatly increased and heighten'd by their contempt of, and disobedience to the Gospel; when at the same time it is acknowledged, that it was not possible for those men to obey it; for want of that special and effectual grace, which is necessary to enable them thereto. I do not love to handle these points contentiously, but this in my apprehension does as much derogate from the amplitude and riches of God's grace in the Gospel, as any thing that can easily be said.

And therefore, for the right stating and clearing of this matter, I shall endeavour to make out these *three* things.

1. That we are not sufficient of our selves, and by any power in us, to perform the condition of the Gospel.

2. That the grace of God is ready to enable and assist us to the performance of these conditions, if we be not wanting to our selves.

3. That what the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our selves, that may properly be said to be possible to us, and, in some sense, in our power.

1. That we are not sufficient of our selves, and by any power in us, to perform the condition of the Gospel. The grace of God doth clearly appear in the whole business of our salvation: *By grace ye are saved* (says the Apostle) *and that not of your selves, it is the gift of God.* Faith is the gift of God, and so is repentance. *It is God that works in us both to will and to do of his own goodness;* that is, who both inclines and excites us to that which is good, and enables us to do it. *Without me* (says Christ) *ye can do nothing;* and *through Christ strengthening me* (saith St. Paul) *I am able to do all things;* all things which God requires of us, and expects to be done by us in order to our salvation. Without the grace of Christ, *we are without strength; and are not sufficient of our selves, as of our selves, to think a good thought;* that is, we are not sufficient of our selves to design or resolve upon any thing that is good; *but our sufficiency is of God.*

The depravation of our nature hath brought a great impotency and disability upon us to that which is good; and we have made our selves much weaker by evil practice; by the power of evil habits, we are enslaved to our lusts, and *sold under sin.* So that if at any time we are convinced of our duty, and from that conviction have an inclination to that which is good, *evil is present to us.* When the law of God gives us the knowledge of our duty, and stares our consciences in the face, *there is another law in our members, warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin, which is in our members.* Sin brings us under the power of Satan, and gives him dominion over us. *For his Servants ye are whom ye obey;* so that he rules and bears sway in us, and *we are led captive by him at his pleasure.* Evil and vicious habits are a kind of second nature superinduced upon us, which takes away our power and liberty to that which is good, and renders it impossible to us to raise and rescue our selves; so that *we are prisoners and captives, till the Son of God sets us free; and dead in trespasses and sins, till he gives us life.* And therefore the Prophet represents the recovery of our selves from the bondage of sin, by such things as are naturally impossible, to shew how great our weakness and impotency is; Jer. 13. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.* And by how much stronger the chains of our sins are, and the more unable we are to break loose from them; by so much the greater and more evident is the necessity of the divine assistance, and of the power of God's grace, to knock off those fetters, and to rescue us from this bondage and slavery.

2. The grace of God is ready to assist and enable us to the performance of these conditions, that is, to faith and repentance, and all the purposes of obedience and a holy life; if we be not wanting to our selves, and do not reject or neglect to make use of that grace, which God offers us, and is ready to afford to us in a very plentiful manner. And this is that which renders all the mercies of the Gospel effectual (if it be not our own fault, and wilful neglect) to the great end and design of our salvation; and without this, all the gracious offers of the Gospel would signify nothing at all to our advantage.

And this likewise is that which renders the unbelief and impenitency and disobedience of men utterly inexcusable, because nothing of all this does proceed from want of power, but of will to do better. And therefore this is so necessary an encouragement to all the endeavours of obedience and a good life, that men should be assured of God's readiness to assist and help them in the doing of their duty, that without this the revelation of the Gospel, though never so clear, would signify nothing to us, all the precepts and directions for a good life, and the most vehement persuasions and exhortations to obedience, would have

have no force and life in them; for what signifies it to direct the dead, and speak to them that cannot hear, and to persuade men, tho' it were with all the earnestness in the world, to those things which it is impossible for them to do?

Therefore our blessed Saviour, when he had laid down, and explained the precepts of holiness and virtue in his Sermon upon the mount, to encourage them to what he had been directing and proposing to them, he assures them that God is ready to afford his grace and assistance to all those that are sincerely desirous to do his will, and do earnestly implore his grace and assistance to that purpose. *Matth. 7. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. Ask (saith he) and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* So that if any man want the grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit, it is his own fault; it is either for want of seeking, or for want of earnestness in asking; for our Saviour expressly assures us, that he denies it to none; *for every one that asketh, receiveth.*

And to give us a more lively and sensible assurance of this, he represents the care and kindness of God to men, by the affections of earthly parents to their children, who tho' they be many times evil themselves, yet are not wont to deny their children necessary good things, when they decently and dutifully beg them at their hands; *what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?* Here is a general promise and declaration, that upon our humble and earnest prayer to God, he will grant us whatever is good and necessary, by which is certainly intended in the first place, spiritual good things, because these are the best and most necessary; and to satisfy us that our Saviour did in the first place, and more especially mean these, *St. Luke 11. 13. How much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?* The holy Spirit, that is, the continual presence and influence of it to all the purposes of guidance and direction, of grace and assistance, of comfort and support in our Christian course.

And what else is the meaning of that parable of our Saviour's concerning the *Talents* entrusted with every man, according to his capacity and opportunities, *Matth. 25.* I say, what else can be the meaning of it but this? That God is beforehand with every man, by affording the advantages and opportunities of being happy, and such a measure of grace and assistance to that end, which if he faithfully improve, he shall be admitted *into the joy of his Lord.*

And upon this consideration of the gracious promises of the Gospel to this purpose, it is, that the Apostle *St. Paul* doth so earnestly exhort Christians to endeavour after the highest degree of universal holiness and purity, that we are capable of in this life; *2 Cor. 7. 1. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* And so likewise *Phil. 2. 12, 13. Wherefore, my beloved, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling* (that is, with great care and concernment, lest you should fall short of it) *for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.* The consideration of God's readiness to assist us, and of his grace which is always at hand to stir up our wills to that which is good, and to strengthen us in the doing of it, ought to be a great argument and encouragement to us, to put forth our utmost endeavours, and so co-operate with the grace of God toward our own salvation.

And the Apostle *St. Peter* useth the same argument to press men to use their utmost diligence, to make their calling and election sure, by abounding in all the virtues of a good life, *2 Pet. 1. 3, 4. According as his divine power hath given us all things which pertain to life and godliness,* (that is, hath so plentifully furnished us with all the requisites to a godly life) *through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue* (that is, by knowledge of the Gospel and the grace therein offered to us) *whereby he hath given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corrup-*

tion that is in the world through lust. And then from the consideration of this divine power, conveyed to us by the gospel, and the promises of it, he exhorts men to give all diligence, to add to their faith virtue, and knowledge, and temperance, and patience, and godliness, and brotherly love and charity.

And indeed the scripture every where ascribes our regeneration and sanctification, the beginning, and progress, and perseverance of our obedience to the powerful grace and assistance of God's holy Spirit; we are said to be *regenerated and born again of the spirit, to be renewed and sanctified by the Holy Ghost, to be led by the spirit, and by the spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh*, and in a word, *to be kept by the mighty power of God through faith unto salvation*.

3. What the grace of God is ready to enable us to do, if we be not wanting to our selves, may properly be said to be possible to us, and in some sense, in our power. That may be said to be possible to us, which tho' we *cannot do of our selves, as of our selves*, (that is by our own natural power) yet we can do by the help and assistance of another, if that assistance be ready to be afforded to us; as we are sure the grace of God's holy spirit is, because he hath promised it to them that seek it, and *he is faithful who hath promised*.

That cannot be said to be wholly out of a man's power, which he may have for asking; that which we are able to do by the strength and assistance of another, is not impossible to us. Surely, St. Paul did no ways derogate from the grace of God when he said, *I am able to do all things thro' Christ strengthening me*; he reckons himself able to do all that which by the strength Christ he was enabled to do.

And this is the true ground of all the persuasions and exhortations, which we meet with in scripture, to holiness and obedience; which would all be, not only to no purpose, but very unreasonable, if we were wholly destitute of power to do what God commands: But if he be allways ready at hand to assist us by a grace sufficient for us, if he co-operate with us in the work of our salvation, then is there abundant ground of encouragement to our endeavours; and if we fall short of eternal salvation, it is wholly our own fault; it is not because God is wanting to us in those aids and assistances of his Grace which are necessary; but because we are wanting to our selves, in not seeking God's grace more earnestly, or by neglecting to make use of it when it is afforded to us. For it is really all one, both to the encouragement of our endeavours, and to the rendering of our disobedience inexcusable, whether we be able of our selves to perform the condition of the gospel, or God be ready to assist us by his grace and holy spirit to that purpose.

Wherefore, as the Apostle exhorts, *Heb. xii. 12, 13, 14, 15. Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make strait paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but let it rather be healed. Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God*; intimating, that it is want of care and diligence on our part, if the grace of God fail of its end, and be not effectual to all the purposes of faith and repentance, and obedience. God does not withhold his grace from us; but men may receive it in vain, if they do not make use of it. And thus I have done with the *third* thing I proposed to consider from these words: I proceed to the

Fourth, viz. To consider the necessity of this obedience, in order to our obtaining of eternal life and happiness. *Christ is the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him*; that is, to such, and only to such, as live in obedience to the precepts of his holy gospel, to them who frame the general course of their lives according to his laws. Some men seem to be so afraid of the merit of obedience and good works, that they are loath to assert the necessity of them, and do it with so much caution, as if they were not thoroughly persuaded of it, or did apprehend some dangerous consequences of it: but this fear is perfectly groundless; as if merit could not be excluded, without casting off our duty, and releasing our selves from any necessary obligation to be good. For any man surely may easily discern a plain difference between a worthiness of desert, and a fitness

of receiving a rebel, being penitent and sorry for what he hath done ; though he cannot deserve a pardon, yet he may thereby be qualified and made meet to receive it ; though repentance do not make him worthy, yet it may make him capable of it, which an obstinate rebel, and one that persists in his disloyalty, is not. This is a thing so plain of it self, that it would be waste of time and words to insist longer upon the proof of it.

Now the necessity of obedience, in order to eternal life and happiness, relies upon these *three* grounds.

1st, Upon the constitution and appointment of God.

2^{dly}, The general reason of rewards.

3^{dly}, Upon the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience.

1st, The constitution and appointment of God. *Eternal life is the gift of God*; and he may do what he will with his own, he may dispense his gifts and favours upon what terms and conditions he pleaseth ; and therefore if he hath plainly declared, that *to them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, he will give eternal life* ; that *without holiness, no man shall see the Lord* ; but *if we have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life* ; who shall resist his will, or dispute his pleasure ? The right and authority of God in this matter is so unquestionable, that it admits of no contest ; and the blessings and benefits propos'd, are so infinitely great and unvaluable, that no condition of obtaining them, which is possible to be perform'd by us, can be thought hard and unequal ; so that we ought thankfully to receive so great a favour, let the terms and conditions of it be what they will ; and if there were no other reason for the imposing of these conditions upon us, of faith, and repentance, and obedience, but merely the will and pleasure of God, this were enough to silence all objections against it.

But 2^{dly}, The necessity of obedience in order to eternal life, is likewise founded in the reason of rewards in general. For though the measure and degree of our reward, so infinitely beyond the proportion of our best duty and service, as eternal life and happiness is, I say though the measure and degree of this reward be founded in the immense bounty and goodness of God, yet the reason of reward in general, is necessarily founded in our obedience to God's laws ; for according to the true nature and reason of things, nothing but obedience is capable of reward. For though authority may pardon the breach and transgressions of laws, and remit the punishment due thereto ; yet to reward the contempt of laws, and willful disobedience to them, is directly contrary to the design of government, and does plainly overthrow the very reason and end of all laws, and makes obedience and disobedience to be all one, if so be they are equally capable of reward : and therefore nothing can be more absurd and senseless, than for any man to hope to be rewarded by God, who does not live in a sincere obedience to his laws. *Every man that hath this hope in him, (that is, in Christ Jesus, to be saved by him) purifieth himself, even as he is pure* ; that is, endeavours to be like him in the purity and obedience of his life : and nothing surely can be more unreasonable than to expect to be rewarded by the great governour and judge of the world, if we be disobedient to his laws ; for where obedience to law is refused, there all reason, and equity of reward ceaseth. No wise prince can think fit to reward disloyalty and contempt of his laws ; because to reward it, would be to encourage it ; much less will God, the great and infinitely wise governour of the world.

3^{dly}, The necessity of obedience will yet more evidently appear, if we consider the particular nature of that reward, which God will confer upon us for our obedience. The happiness of heaven, which is the reward promised in the gospel, is described to us by the sight and enjoyment of God. Now to render us capable of this blessed reward, it is necessary that we be like God ; but nothing but obedience and holiness, and *being renewed after the image of him who created us in righteousness*, can make us like to God. For he that would be like God must be holy, and just, and good, and patient, and mercifull, as God is ; and this alone can make us capable of the blessed sight and enjoyment of God ; for unless *we be like him*

him, we cannot see him as he is, and if we should be admitted into heaven, we could not find any pleasure and happiness in communion with him. *Blessed are the pure in heart* (says our Saviour) *for they shall see God. Without holiness* (says the Apostle) *no man shall see the Lord.* And indeed, it is in the very nature of the thing impossible, that a wicked man (whilst he remains so) should ever be happy, because there can be no agreeable and delightfull society between those that are of a quite contrary temper and disposition to one another, between him *who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*, and a sinfull and impure creature. For *what fellowship* (saith the Apostle) *can righteousness have with unrighteousness? what communion hath light with darkness, or God with Belial?* That is, with the wicked and disobedient. Till we become like to God in the frame and temper of our minds, there can be no happy society between him and us; we could neither delight our selves in God, nor he take any pleasure in us; for *he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him. The wicked shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity.* It cannot be otherwise, but that there must be an eternal jarring and discord between the righteous and holy God, and wicked and unrighteous men. *I will behold thy face* (says David) *in righteousness.* There is no looking God in the face, upon any other terms. If we have been *workers of iniquity*, God will cast us out of his sight, and in great anger bid us to *depart from him*; and we also shall desire him to *depart from us*, being unable to bear the sight of him.

So that there is great reason why holiness and obedience should be made the conditions of eternal life and happiness, since in the very nature of the thing it is so necessary a qualification for the blessed sight and enjoyment of God, who to us, is the cause and fountain of happiness. I come in the

Fifth and last place, To shew that this method and means of our salvation is no prejudice to the law of faith, and to the free grace and mercy of God declared in the gospel. The gospel is called *the law of faith*, and *the law of grace*, in opposition to the *Jewish* dispensation, which is called *the law*, or *covenant of works*, because it consisteth so much in external rites and observances, which were but *types and shadows of good things to come*, (as the Apostle calls them in this epistle;) and which when they were come, that law did expire of it self, and was out of date, the obligation and observance of it was no longer necessary; but *a better covenant*, which was *established upon better promises*, came in the place of it, and men were *justified by faith*, that is, by sincerely embracing the christian religion, and were no longer under an obligation to that external, and servile, and imperfect dispensation, which consisted in circumcision, and in almost an endless number of external ceremonies. These are *the works of the law* so often spoken of by St. Paul, concerning which the Jews had not only an opinion of the necessity of them to a man's justification and salvation, but likewise of the merit of them; in opposition to both which opinions, St. Paul calls the covenant of the Gospel, *the Law of faith*, and *the law of grace*.

But there is no where the least intimation given, either by our Saviour or his Apostles, that obedience to the precepts of the gospel (which are in substance the moral law cleared and perfected) is not necessary to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life; but on the contrary, 'tis our Saviour's express direction to the young man, who ask'd, *what good things he should do, that he might obtain eternal life? If thou wilt* (says he) *enter into life, keep the commandments*: and that he might understand what commandments he meant, he instanceth in the precepts of the moral law. And indeed, the whole tenour of our Saviour's sermons, and the precepts and writings of the Apostles, are full and express to this purpose. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven. Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine* (that is, these precepts which I have delivered) *and doth them not, I will liken him to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.*

If ye know these things, happy are ye, if ye do them. In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him. In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith, that is acted and inspired by charity. And that the Apostle here means, that charity or love, which is the fulfilling of the law, is evident from what he says elsewhere, that neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but the keeping of the commandments of God. In which text it is plain, that the Apostle speaks of the terms of our justification, and what is available with God to that purpose. And St. James to the same purpose, tells us, that by the works of obedience our faith is made perfect; and that faith without works is dead: and surely a dead faith will neither justify nor save any man. St. John likewise very earnestly cautions us to take heed of any such doctrine, as would take away the necessity of righteousness and obedience; Little children (says he) let no man deceive you; he that doth righteousness, is righteous, as he is righteous. To all which, I shall only add the plain words of my text, that Christ became the author of eternal salvation to them that obey him.

So that no man hath reason to fear, that this doctrine of the necessity of obedience to our acceptance with God, and the obtaining of eternal life, should be any ways prejudicial to the law of faith, and the law of grace. For so long as these three things are but asserted and secured:

1st, That faith is the root and principle of obedience and a holy life, and that without it, it is impossible to please God.

2^{dly}, That we stand continually in need of the divine grace and assistance to enable us to perform that obedience which the gospel requires of us, and is pleased to accept in order to eternal life. And,

3^{dly}, That the forgiveness of our sins, and the reward of eternal life, are founded in the free grace and mercy of God, conferring these blessings upon us, not for the merit of our obedience, but only for the merit and satisfaction of the obedience and sufferings of our blessed Saviour and Redeemer; I say, so long as we assert these three things, we give all that the gospel any where ascribes to faith, and to the grace of God revealed in the gospel.

I have been carefull to express these things more fully and distinctly, that no man may imagine, that whilst we assert the necessity of obedience and a holy life, we have any design to derogate in the least from the faith and the grace of God; but only to engage and encourage men to holiness and a good life, by convincing them of the absolute and indispensable necessity of it, in order to eternal salvation. For all that I have said, is in plain *English* no more but this, that it is necessary for a man to be a good man, that he may get to heaven; and whoever finds fault with this doctrine, finds fault with the gospel it self, and the main end and design of the grace of God therein revealed to mankind, which offers salvation to men upon no other terms than these which I have mention'd; and to preach and press this doctrine, is certainly, if any thing in the world can be so, to pursue the great end and design of the christian religion, so plainly and expressly declared by St. Paul, *Tit. ii. 11, 12. The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* And if the grace of God declared in the gospel have this effect upon us, then we may with confidence wait for the blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works; and then he adds, *these things teach, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority; that is, declare and inculcate this doctrine, and rebuke severely those who teach or practise contrary to it.* And he repeats it again with a more vehement charge to *Titus*, to press upon men the necessity of obedience and good works, *Chap. iii. 8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God, be carefull to maintain good works.*

All that now remains, is to make some usefull inferences from what hath been said upon this argument, and so to conclude this discourse.

First of all, To convince us that an empty profession of the christian religion,

on, how specious and glorious soever it be, if it be destitute of the fruits of obedience and a holy life, will by no means avail to bring us to heaven. No profession of faith in Christ, no subjection to him, tho' we be baptized in his name, and list our selves in the number of his disciples and followers, tho' we have made a constant profession of all the articles of the christian faith, and have performed all the external parts and duties of religion, have gone constantly to church, and frequented the service of God, and have joined in publick prayers to God with great appearance of devotion, and have heard his word with great reverence and attention, and received the blessed sacrament with all imaginable expressions of love and gratitude to our blessed redeemer; nay, tho' we had *heard* our blessed Saviour himself *teach in our streets*, and *had eaten and drunk in his presence*; yet if all this while *we have not done the will of God*, and obey'd his laws, none of all these things will signify any thing to bring us to heaven, and make us partakers of that salvation, which he hath purchased for mankind.

But we cannot plead so much for our selves, as those did, of whom our Saviour speaks. None of us shall be able to alledge for our selves at the great day, that *we had prophesied in his name, and in his name had cast out devils, and in his name had done many wonderfull works*; and yet if we could alledge all this, it would do us no good. All that such can say for themselves is, that *they have called him Lord, Lord*; that is, they have made profession of his religion, and been call'd by his name; that they have paid an outward honour and respect to him, and declared a mighty love and affection for him; but *they have not done his will, but have hated to be reformed, and have cast his commandments behind their backs*; they have only born the leaves of an outward profession, but *have brought forth no fruit unto holiness*, and therefore can have no reasonable expectation, that *their end should be everlasting life*. So that when these men shall appear before the great and terrible judge of the world, they shall have nothing to say but those vain words, *Lord, Lord*: To which our Saviour will answer in that day, *why call ye me Lord, Lord, when ye would not do the things which I said?* Notwithstanding all your profession of faith in me, and subjection to me, *ye have been workers of iniquity, therefore depart from me, I know ye not whence ye are*.

Secondly, The consideration of what hath been said should stir us up to a thankful acknowledgement of what the author of our salvation hath done for us; and there is great reason for thankfulness, whether we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, or the way and manner in which it was purchased, or the easy and reasonable terms upon which it may be obtain'd.

1st, If we consider the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us, and that is salvation, *eternal salvation*, which comprehends in it all the blessings and benefits of the gospel, both the means and the end, our happiness, and the way to it, by *saving us from our sins*; from the guilt of them, by our justification in the blood of Christ; and from the power and dominion of them, by the sanctifying grace and virtue of the Holy Ghost.

And it comprehends the end, our deliverance from hell and the wrath to come, and the bestowing of happiness upon us, a great and lasting happiness, great as our wishes, and immortal as our souls; all this is comprehended in *eternal salvation*.

2dly, If we consider the way and manner in which this great benefit was purchased and procured for us; in a way of infinite kindness and condescension, in the lowest humiliation, and the unparallel'd sufferings of the Son of God; for *never was there any sorrow like unto his sorrow, wherewith the Lord afflicted him in the day of his fierce anger*; in his *taking upon him the form of a servant*, and the person of a sinner, and his *becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross*, which was the punishment of the vilest slaves, and the most heinous malefactors. The Son of God came down from heaven, from the highest pitch of glory and happiness, into this lower world, this *vale of tears*, and sink of sin and sorrow; and was contented himself to suffer, to save us from eternal ruin; to be the most despicable, and the most miserable man that ever was, that he might raise us to glory and honour, and advance us to a state of the greatest happiness that human nature is capable of.

3dly,

3dly, If we consider the easy and reasonable terms upon which we may be made partakers of this unspeakable benefit, and that is by a constant and sincere and universal obedience to the laws of God, which supposeth repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the root and principle of all the virtues of a good life; that is, by doing that which best becomes us, and which is most agreeable to the original frame of our nature and to the dictates of our reason, and which, setting aside the consideration of our reward, is really best for our present benefit and advantage, our comfort and happiness, even in this world; for God, in giving laws to us, hath imposed nothing upon us, but what in all reason ought to have been our choice, if he had not imposed it; nothing but what is for our good, and is in its own nature necessary to make us capable of that happiness which he hath promised to us. And what can be more gracious, than to make one benefit the condition of a greater? Than to promise to make us happy for ever, if we will but do that which upon all accounts is really best and most for our advantage in this present life?

Thirdly, Here is abundant encouragement given to our obedience; we have the divine assistance promised to us, to enable us to the performance of the most difficult parts of our duty; we have the holy spirit of God to help our infirmities, to excite us to that which is good, and to help and strengthen us in the doing of it.

For our further encouragement we are assured of the divine acceptance in case of our sincere obedience, notwithstanding the manifold failings and imperfections of it, for the sake of the perfect righteousness and obedience, and the meritorious sufferings of our blessed Saviour: And tho' *when we have done all we can do, we are unprofitable servants*, and have done nothing but what was our duty, yet God is pleased to accept what we can do, because it is sincere, and to forgive the defects and imperfections of our obedience, for his sake, who *fulfilled all righteousness*.

And besides all this, we have the encouragement of a great and everlasting reward, infinitely beyond all proportion of any service and obedience that we can perform. And if God be ready to assist and strengthen us in the doing of our duty, and be willing so graciously to accept and to reward at such a rate the sincerity of our endeavours to please him, notwithstanding all the failings and imperfections of our best service and obedience, what can we possibly desire more for our encouragement to *patient continuance in well-doing*, and to be *stedfast and unmoveable, and abundant in the work of the Lord*.

Fourthly, and *lastly*, The consideration of what hath been said upon this argument may serve severely to rebuke the groundless presumption of those who rely with so much confidence upon Christ for eternal salvation, without any conscience or care to keep his commandments; as if salvation lay upon his hands, and he knew not how to dispose of it, and were glad of any one that would come and take it off upon any terms. No, *he came to save us from our sins, to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*.

So that the salvation which he hath purchased for us, doth necessarily imply our forsaking of our sins, and returning to God and our duty, and his death and sufferings are not more an argument of his great love to mankind, than they are a demonstration of his perfect hatred of sin. So that if we continue in the love and practice of sin, we defeat the whole design of his coming into the world, and of all that he hath done and suffered for us; and the redemption which Christ hath wrought for us will not avail us in the least. *Salvation is far from the wicked*, (says David, Psal. cxix. 155.) If we have been *workers of iniquity*, the Saviour of the world when he comes to judge it, will bid us *to depart from him*.

From all that hath been said, it is evident, that it is the greatest presumption in the world for any man to hope to obtain eternal salvation by any device whatsoever, or in the communion of any church whatsoever, without obedience and a holy life. For tho' our obedience cannot merit; yet it is necessary to qualify and dispose us for it: Though it does not make us strictly worthy; yet it makes us *meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light*.

S E R M O N LXX.

The Authority of Jesus Christ, with the Commission and Promise which he gave to his Apostles.

MAT. XXVIII. 18, 19, 20.

And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth: Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: And lo, I am with you all way, even unto the end of the world.

THESE words are the last that our blessed Saviour spake to his Apostles, immediately before his ascension into heaven; and there are these *three* things contained in them.

I. A declaration of his own authority; *All power is given unto me both in heaven and in earth.*

II. A commission to his disciples, grounded upon that authority; *Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.*

III. A promise to encourage them in this work; *And lo, I am with you all ways, even unto the end of the world.*

I. Here's our Saviour's declaration of his own authority; *All power is given unto me in heaven and earth.* Here is an unlimited power and authority given him over all creatures in heaven and earth. This the scripture tells us, was conferred upon him, as a reward of his sufferings; *Phil. ii. 8, 9, 10. He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name, which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;* that is, that all creatures, angels, and men, and devils, should do homage, and acknowledge subjection to him.

II. Here is the commission he gave to his Apostles, by virtue of this authority; *Go ye therefore and teach all nations.* The commission which he here gives, is founded in the authority he had before received. Having all power committed to him, he constitutes and appoints the Apostles and their successors to manage the affairs of this spiritual kingdom upon earth; and this seems to be the same commission, which St. John mentions in other words, *John xx. 21. As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you;* that is, as my Father commissioned me before, so now having received full authority from him, I commission you.

Now in this commission, which our Saviour gave to his disciples, I shall take notice, *First*, Of the general import and design of it.

Secondly, A more particular declaration how they were to manage this design.

First, The general import and design of this commission; *Go ye and teach all nations.* The word which we translate *teach*, is μαθητεύσατε, disciple all nations, endeavour to make all the world christians. One would think here was a power plainly enough given them, to preach the gospel to the *Gentiles*, as well as to the *Jews*. Which will more fully appear, if we compare this passage in St. Matthew with the other Evangelists. St. Mark, *ch. 16. 15.* hath it; *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* From which text I suppose St. Francis thought himself bound to preach to beasts and birds, and accordingly did it very often, and with wonderfull success, as they tell us in the legend of his life. But to extend our Saviour's commission so far, is want of common sense; in which St. Francis (tho' they tell us he had other gifts and graces to an eminent degree) was plainly defective.

But to proceed, St. Luke, *ch. 24. 47.* tells us, our Saviour commanded, that *repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.* So that their commission did plainly extend to the *Gentiles*, as well as to the *Jews*; only they were to begin with the *Jews*, and to preach the gospel first

to them, and when they had gone over *Judæa* and *Samaria*, then to pass to other nations, as *St. Luke* doth most expressly declare, *Act. i. 8. Ye shall receive power; after that the holy ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.*

But see the strange power of prejudice, to blind the eyes even of good men, in the plainest matters. The disciples of our Saviour, for all they had entertained a new religion, yet they retained the old pride and prejudice of their nation against the rest of the world; as if none but themselves had any share in the favour of God, or were to have any part in the salvation of the *Messias*.

Our Saviour did so far consider this prejudice of theirs, that he never in his lifetime acquainted them with this matter, so as to make them fully to understand it, because they were not able to bear it. And it is very probable, that this is one of those things which our Saviour meant, *John xvi. 12, 13. I have yet many things to say unto you; but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.* That is, he should lead them into the knowledge of those truths, of which they were not then capable. And tho' our Saviour, after his resurrection, seems to have declar'd this sufficiently to them; yet by their practice after his ascension, it appears that they understood all this only of the *Jews*, namely that they were to preach the gospel first to the *Jews* that were at *Jerusalem*, and in *Judæa*, and then to those that were dispers'd in other nations; for 'tis clear from the history of their first preaching recorded in the *Acts*, that they preach'd to none but to the *Jews*, and the proselytes of the *Jewish* religion. So strong was their prejudice, that they had not the least suspicion that this blessing of the gospel was intended for the heathen world; nor were they convinc'd to the contrary till *St. Peter* had a special vision and revelation to this purpose, and the Holy Ghost came upon the *Gentiles* in miraculous gifts, as he had done before upon the *Jews* that were converted to christianity. And thus the spirit of God led them into this Truth, and then they understood this command of our Saviour's in a larger sense. And to this *St. Peter* plainly refers, *Acts 10. 42.* where he tells us, how that Christ after his resurrection appeared to them, and commanded them to preach unto the people. So likewise do *Paul* and *Barnabas*, *Acts xiii. 46.* where they speak thus to the *Jews*, *it was necessary that the word should first be preached to you; but seeing you put it from you, lo, we turn to the Gentiles, for so hath the Lord commanded us.* Now he no where commanded this, but in this commission, which he gave them before his ascension.

Secondly, You have here a particular declaration how they were to manage this work of making disciples to the christian religion.

1. By baptizing them into the christian faith.
2. By instructing them in the precepts and practices of a christian life.
1. By baptizing them into the christian faith, which is here call'd *baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*. Baptism is a solemn rite appointed by our Saviour for the initiating persons into the christian religion: But it was a ceremony in use before, both among the *Jews* and *Gentiles*. The heathens observed it at the initiating persons into their religious mysteries; and the *Jews*, when they admitted proselytes to their religion; at which time the males (as *Maimonides* tells us) were both circumcised and baptized, the women were only baptized. One circumstance of the baptism of grown persons was, that standing in the water up to the neck, they received several precepts of the law. And as the *Jewish* writers further tell us, this ceremony did not only belong to them that were of grown years, but to the children of proselytes, if it were desired, upon condition, that when they came to years they should continue in that religion.

Now tho' this was a religious ceremony used both by *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and without any divine institution, that we know of, our blessed Saviour (who in none of his institutions seems to have favoured unnecessary innovations) was so far from the superstition of declining it upon this account, though it had been in religious use both among *Jews* and *Gentiles*, that he seems the rather to have chosen it for that very reason. For seeing it was a common rite of all religions, and in it self very significant of that purity which is the great design of all religion, it was the more likely to find the easier acceptance, and to be most suitable to that, which he intended to be the *universal religion* of the world.

As for the form of baptism, *in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy*

Holy Ghost, it plainly refer's to that short creed, or profession of faith, which was required of those that were to be baptized, answerably to the reciting of the precepts of the law, at the baptizing of profelytes among the *Jews*: Now the articles of this creed were reduced to these three heads, *of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, and contains what was necessary to be believed concerning each of these. And this probably is that which the Apostle calls the doctrine of baptism, *Heb. vi. 2. viz.* a short summary of the christian faith, the profession whereof was to be made at baptism; of which the most antient fathers make so frequent mention, calling it *the rule of faith*. It was a great while indeed before christians tied themselves strictly to that very form of words, which we now call the Apostles creed; but the sense was the same, tho' every one exprest it in his own words; nay, the same father reciting it upon several occasions, does not confine himself to the very same expressions: A plain indication that they were not then strictly bound up to any form of words, but retaining the sense and substance of the articles, every one exprest'd them as he pleas'd. So that *to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost*, is to perform this rite or sacrament by the authority of, and with special relation to the three persons of the blessed Trinity, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, as the chief objects of the christian faith, whereof solemn profession was then made. So that upon this form in baptism appointed by our Saviour, compared with what is elsewhere said in scripture, concerning the divinity of the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is principally founded the doctrine of the blessed Trinity, I mean in that simplicity in which the scripture hath delivered it, and not as it hath been since confounded and entangled in the cobwebs and niceties of the schools. The scripture indeed nowhere calls them persons, but speaks of them as we do of several persons; and therefore that word is not unfitly used to express the difference between them, or at least we do not know a fitter word for that purpose.

By *baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, is meant, the initiating of men by this solemn rite or ceremony into the christian religion, upon their profession of the necessary doctrines of it, concerning *the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, and a solemn stipulation and engagement to live according to those doctrines: Which promise of a suitable life and practice was likewise made at the same time, as *Justin Martyr* and other of the antient Fathers do testify.

But before I leave this head, it is very fit to take particular notice what use the *Anabaptists* make of this text, so as in effect to lay the whole stress of their cause upon it, as if by virtue of this command of our Saviour's, and the manner wherein it is exprest, all infants, even those of christian parents, who are themselves already admitted into the new covenant of the gospel, were excluded from baptism; because it is here said by our Saviour, *Go ye, and disciple all nations, baptizing them*; from whence they infer, (and very clearly and strongly as they think) that none are to be baptized, but such as are first thoroughly instructed in the christian religion, and made disciples, which infants are not, but only those who are grown to some maturity of years and understanding: But the opinion and practice of the antient church in this matter, is a sufficient bar to this inference, at least to the clearness of it. And indeed it cannot reasonably be imagined, that the Apostles, who had all of them been bred up in the *Jewish* religion, which constantly, and by virtue of a divine precept and institution, admitted infants into that church, and to the benefits of that covenant, by the rite of circumcision, and likewise the infants of profelytes by baptism, (as I observed before) I say no man can reasonably imagine, that the Apostles could understand our Saviour, as intending by any consequence from this text, to exclude the children of christians out of the christian church, and to debar them of the benefits of the new covenant of the gospel: The children of christians being every whit as capable of being taken into this new covenant, and of partaking of the benefits of it, as children of the *Jews* were of being admitted into

the old : Unless we will suppose (which at first sight seems very harsh and unreasonable) that by the terms of the christian religion, children are in a much worse condition, than the children of the *Jews* were under the law. So that the parity of reason being so plain, nothing less than an express prohibition from our Saviour, and an exception of children from baptism, can be thought sufficient to deprive the children of christians of any privilege, of which the *Jewish* were capable. For the plain meaning of this commission to the Apostles is, to go and *profelyte all nations to the christian religion*, and to admit them solemnly into it by baptism ; as the *Jews* were wont to profelyte men to their religion by circumcision and baptism ; by which rites also they took in the children of the profelytes, upon promise that when they came to years they should continue in that religion. And if this was our Saviour's meaning, the Apostles had no reason from the tenor of their commission, to understand that the children of christian profelytes were any more excluded, than the children of profelytes to the *Jewish* religion, unless our Saviour had expressly excepted them ; for it is a favourable case, and in a matter of privilege, and therefore ought not to be determined to debar children of it, upon any obscure consequence from a text, which it is certain was never so understood by the christian church for 1500 years together. I have done with the *first* part of their commission, which was to disciple or profelyte all nations to the christian religion, and to admit them into the christian church, by the rite or sacrament of baptism. I proceed to consider the

Second part of their commission, which was to instruct men in the precepts and duties of a christian life, *teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*. You see how their commission bounds and limits them ; they were to teach others those precepts which Christ had taught and deliver'd to them ; they had no power by virtue of this commission to make new laws, which should be of universal and perpetual obligation, and consequently necessary to the salvation of all christians ; they were only to be the publishers, but not the authors of this new religion. And therefore St. *Paul*, when the *Corinthians* consulted him about several things relating to marriage and virginity, he only gives his advice, but would not take upon him to make a law in those cases that should be binding to all christians. And for the same reason christians do generally at this day think themselves absolved from the obligation of that canon, which was made even in a council of the Apostles, as to all those branches of it, the reason whereof is now ceased. But notwithstanding this, the authority which our Saviour conferred upon his Apostles to teach his doctrine, does in the nature of it necessarily imply a power of governing the societies of christians, under such officers, and by such rules as are most suitable to the nature of such a society, and most fit to promote the great ends of the christian religion : For without this power of governing, they cannot be suppos'd to be endowed with sufficient authority to teach ; and therefore in pursuance of this commission, we find that the Apostles did govern the societies of christians by such rules and constitutions, as were fitted to the then present circumstances of christianity. And as they did appoint temporary officers upon emergent occasions, so they constituted others that were of perpetual use in the church, for the instructing and governing of christians, and that in such a subordination to one another, as would be most effectual to the attaining of the end of government ; which subordination of governors, hath not only been used in all religions, but in all the well-regulated civil societies that ever were in the world. And this may suffice to have spoken of the second part of their commission.

The *third* and *last* thing in the text, is the promise which our Saviour here makes for the encouragement of the Apostles in this work ; *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* ; that is, tho' I be going from you in person, yet I will still be present with you by my power and spirit. And surely this must

must needs be a great encouragement to have him engaged for their assistance, who had all power in heaven and earth committed to him, as he tells them at the 18th verse.

I shall endeavour therefore, as far as the time will permit, to explain to you the true meaning and extent of this promise. That it is primarily made to the Apostles, no man can doubt, that considers, that it was spoken to them immediately by our Saviour; and in regard to them, the meaning of it is plainly this, that our Saviour would send down the Holy Ghost upon them, in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the more speedy planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them, and assist them extraordinarily in this work.

And that this is the primary meaning of it, in regard to the Apostles, will be very plain, by considering how this promise is express'd by the other Evangelists; *Mark* xvi. 17. instead of this promise, you have these words immediately after our Saviour had given them commission to go and preach the gospel, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature: He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.* And then it follows, *These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name they shall cast out devils, and shall speak with new tongues.* And *Luke* xxiv. 39. instead of *Lo, I am with you*, it is said, *Behold, I send the promise of my father upon you*; that is, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost; for it follows in the next words, *but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, untill ye be endowed with power from on high.* This *St. Luke* himself interprets of the promise of the Holy Ghost, *Acts* i. 4, 5. *He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence.* And v. 8. *Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.* So that no man that compares these texts together, can doubt, but that this was the primary meaning of this promise, as it was made to the Apostles.

But then it is as plain likewise, that this promise is to be extended farther than to the persons of the Apostles, even to all those that should afterwards succeed them in this work of preaching the gospel, and baptizing, because our Saviour adds, *that he would be with them to the end of the world*: which words, because they reach far beyond the Apostles times, (as I shall shew by and by) must be necessarily extended to such persons in after-ages, as should carry on the same work.

There are two famous controversies about the sense of these words, in which this promise is express'd.

The *first* is, concerning the circumstance of time mentioned in this promise, *allway, to the end of the world.*

The other concerning the substance of the promise it self, what is meant by our Saviour's *being with them*. In the *first* we have to deal with the Enthusiasts; in the *latter* with the Papists. I shall examine the pretences of both these, as briefly and plainly as I can.

First, Concerning the circumstance of time express'd in these words, *Allway, to the end of the world.* The Enthusiasts would persuade us, that the meaning of these phrases is not to be extended beyond that age, and that this promise is to be limited to the Apostles persons, and that the sense of it is, that Christ would be with the Apostles, *ᾠς τὰς ἡμέρας*, all their days, so long as they should live, and that would be, *ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος*, to the end of that age; thus they translate it, and with no worse design than to take away the necessity of a gospel-ministry.

But this pretense will vanish, if we can make good these *two* things:

1. That the letter of this promise extends further than the persons of the Apostles, and the continuance of that age.

2. However that be, it is certain that the reason of it extends to all that should succeed them in their ministry, to the end of the world.

1. The letter of this promise extends farther than the persons of the Apostles, and the continuance of that age. I will easily grant that the phrase *πᾶς πᾶς ἡμέρας*, signifies only *continually*; I will be with you continually; but then the other phrase, *ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος*, untill the end of the world, is several times in scripture undeniably used for the end and dissolution of all things, and cannot with any probability be shewn to be ever used otherwise. In this sense it is unquestionably used three times, *Matth. xiii. The harvest is the end of the world*, v. 39. *So shall it be at the end of the world*, v. 40. and v. 49. it is said, that *at the end of the world, the Angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from the just, and cast them into the furnace*; which must either be understood of the end of the world, and of the day of judgment, or there will be no clear text in the whole bible to that purpose; and it is very probable, that this phrase is used in the same sense, *Matth. xxiv. 3.* where the disciples ask our Saviour, *What shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?* As will appear to any one that considers our Saviour's answer to this question; the latter part whereof cannot, without too much violence, be accommodated to any thing but the final dissolution of the world. Now if this phrase be every where else in scripture used in this sense, there is no reason why it should be taken otherwise in the text, only to serve the purpose of an unreasonable opinion.

I know there are phrases very near a-kin to this, which are used in a quite different sense, namely, for the expiration of the *Jewish* state: and that we may know how to distinguish them, it is observable, that when the scripture speaks of the end of the world, it is called *συντελεία τοῦ αἰῶνος*, the end of the age, in the singular number; but when it speaks of the times before the gospel, it always expresseth them in the plural: the reason of which is, that famous tradition among the *Jews*, of the house of *Elias*, which distributed the whole duration of the world into three ages; the age before the law, the age under the law, and the age of the *Messias*; and this last age they looked on with great difference from the rest, as the famous and glorious age, which was to be as it were the beginning of a new world: And therefore the *Jews* in their writings constantly call it the *seculum futurum*, the age, or the world to come: And therefore the Apostle in this epistle to the *Hebrews*, calls the state of the gospel by that name, as best known to them, *Heb. ii. 5. But unto the Angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we now speak*; that is, the law was given by the disposition of Angels, but the dispensation of the gospel, which is call'd the world to come, was managed and administred by the Son of God. So likewise *Heb. vi. 5.* those miraculous powers which accompanied the first preaching of the gospel, are called *δυνάμεις τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος*, the powers of the world to come, that is, of the gospel-age.

So that this last age of the gospel, is that which the scripture by way of eminency calls *the age*; those that went before are constantly call'd *αἰῶνες*, the ages in the plural number. So we find, *Eph. iii. 9.* the gospel is call'd *the dispensation of the mystery that was hid in God, ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων*, from ages; and you have the same phrase, *Col. i. 26.* Upon the same account, the expiration of the *Jewish* state, is in scripture called *the last times*, and *the last days*, *Heb. i. 2. But in the last days, God hath spoken to us by his Son*, *1 Cor. x. 11. These things are written for our admonition, upon whom τὰ τέλη τῶν αἰώνων*, the ends of the ages are come. In the same sense the Apostle, *Heb. ix. 26.* speaking of Christ, says, that he appeared, *ἐπὶ συντελεία τῶν αἰώνων*, at the end of the ages, to take away sin; that is, at the conclusion of the ages which had gone before, in the last age. So that if we will be governed in the interpretation of

of this text, by the constant use of this phrase in scripture, the letter of this promise will extend to the end of the world.

2. But however this be, it is certain that the reason of this promise does extend to all those that should succeed the Apostles in their ministry, to the end of the world; I will suppose now (to give our adversaries their utmost scope) that which we have no reason to grant, that the letter of this promise reacheth only to the Apostles and their age, and that our Saviour's meaning was no more but this, that he would send down the Holy Ghost upon them in miraculous gifts, to qualify and enable them for the speedy planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, and that he would be with them till this work was done. Now supposing there were nothing more than this intended in the letter of it, this ought not much to trouble us, so long as it is certain, that the reason of it does extend to the successors of the Apostles in all ages of the world. I do not mean, that the reason of this promise does give us sufficient assurance, that God will assist the teachers and governors of his church in all ages, in the same extraordinary manner as he did the Apostles, because there is not the like reason and necessity for it; but that we have sufficient assurance from the reason of this promise, that God will not be wanting to us, in such fitting and necessary assistance, as the state of religion, and the welfare of it in every age shall require: For can we imagine that God would use such extraordinary means to plant a religion in the world, and take no care of it afterwards? That he who had begun so good a work, so great and glorious a design, would let it fall to the ground for want of any thing that was necessary to the support of it?

This is reasonable in it self; but we are not also without good ground for thus extending the general reason of particular promises beyond the letter of them. The Apostle hath gone before us in this, for *Heb. xiii. 5, 6.* he there extends two particular promises of the Old Testament to all christians, *Let your conversation* (says he) *be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have: For he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* And again, *The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.* These promises were made to particular persons; the first of them to *Joshua*, and the other to *David*; but yet the Apostle applies them to all christians, and to good men in all ages, because the general ground and reason of them extended so far. He who gave *Joshua* and *David* this encouragement to their duty, will certainly be as good to us, if we do ours.

And thus I have done with the first controversy about the sense of these words, which concerns the circumstances of time mentioned in this promise, *always, to the end of the world*, and have plainly shewn, that both the letter and the reason of this promise does extend further than the persons of the Apostles; and the continuance of that age, even to all that should succeed them in their ministry to the end of the world. I come now to consider,

Secondly, the substance of the promise it self, namely, what is meant by our Saviour's *being with them*. And here our adversaries of the church of *Rome* would fain persuade us, that this promise is made to the church of *Rome*, and that the meaning of it is, that *that* church should always be infallible, and never err in the faith. But as there is no mention of the church of *Rome* in this promise, nor any where else in scripture upon the like occasion, whereby we might be directed to understand this promise to be made to that church; so to any unprejudiced person the plain and obvious sense of this promise can be no other than this, that our Saviour having commission'd the Apostles to go and preach the christian religion in the world, he promises to assist them in this work, and those that should succeed them in it, *to the end of the world*. But how any man can construe this promise, so as to make it signify the perpetual infallibility of the *Roman* church, I cannot for my life devise; and yet this is one of the main texts upon which they build that old and tottering fabrick of their infallibility.

Here is a general promise of assistance to the pastors and governors of the church, in all ages, to the end of the world ; but that this assistance shall always be to the degree of infallibility, (as it was to the Apostles) can neither be concluded from the letter of this promise, nor from the reason of it ; much less can it be from hence concluded, that the assistance here promised, if it were to the degree of infallibility, is to be limited and confined to the supreme pastor and governor of the *Roman* church.

That the assistance here promised shall always be to the degree of infallibility, can by no means be concluded from the letter of this promise. Indeed there is no pretense or colour for it ; he must have a very peculiar sagacity, that can find out in these words, *I am with you always*, a promise of infallible assistance. Is not the promise which God made to *Joshua*, and which the Apostle to the *Hebrews* applies to all christians, and to all good men in all ages, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee*, the very same in sense with this, *I will be with you always* ? And yet surely no man did ever imagine, that by virtue of this promise, every christian, and every good man is infallible.

But neither can it be infer'd from the reason of this promise, that this assistance shall always be to the degree of infallibility. It was so indeed to the Apostles ; the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, which were bestowed upon them for the more speedy and effectual planting and propagating of the gospel in the world, were a divine testimony and confirmation to the doctrine which they delivered ; and having this divine testimony given to them, we are certain that they were secured from error in the delivery of that doctrine. So that the Apostles had no other infallibility, but what depended upon, and was evidenced by the miraculous gifts wherewith they were endowed ; and therefore without the like gifts, none can with reason pretend to the like infallibility : For infallibility signifies an extraordinary assistance of God's spirit, whereby those who are thus assisted are secured from error. This every confident man may, if he pleaseth, pretend to ; but no man is to be believed to have it, but he who can give such evidence of it, as is fit to satisfy reasonable men, that he hath it. Now the only sufficient evidence of such an extraordinary divine assistance is the power of miracles. This indeed is the great external testimony of a teacher come from God, *if he do such works as none can do, except God be with him* ; and this evidence the Prophets of old, and our Saviour, and his Apostles, always gave of their infallibility. And if the Pope and General councils can give the testimony of such miracles for their infallibility, as *Moses*, and our Saviour, and his Apostles did work, we are ready to acknowledge it. Such a testimony as this would give the world a thousand times more satisfaction concerning their infallibility, than all the subtil arguments of *Bellarmino*, and all their writers. But if they cannot, they may dispute about it to the end of the world ; and every man that hath but the same confidence, may pretend to it with as much reason as they do.

But to proceed in my argument ; here is a plain reason why this extraordinary assistance should be granted to the Apostles at first ; and another reason as plain, why it should not be continued afterwards. It was reasonable, and in some degree necessary, that the Apostles should be thus assisted at the first publication of the gospel, namely, to give satisfaction to the world, that they were faithful and true witnesses of the doctrine and miracles of Christ. But since this doctrine and these miracles are recorded to posterity by those very persons that were thus assisted, here is as plain a reason, why after the gospel was planted and establish'd in the world, this infallibility should cease. So long as we have an infallible foundation of faith, namely, the divine revelation consigned in writing, and transmitted down to us by testimony of undoubted credit, what need is there now of a fixt and standing infallibility in the church ? But having handled this argument more at large elsewhere, I shall insist no further upon it here.

I have now done with the *three* things I propounded to discourse upon, from this text. You have heard what authority our Saviour had given him ; what commission he gave to his disciples ; and what assistance he hath promised to the pastors and governours of his church to the end of the world ; namely, such an assistance as is suitable to the exigencies of the church, in the several ages and states of christianity ; which assistance was at first very extraordinary and miraculous. God was pleased to *give witness* to the first teachers and publishers of the gospel, *with signs and wonders and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost* ; and this at first was in a very great degree necessary, it not being otherwise imaginable, how christianity could have born up against all that force and violent opposition which was raised against it : But this extraordinary assistance was but a temporary and transient dispensation. God did, as it were, pass by *in the strong and mighty wind, in the earthquake, and in the fire : but he was in the still voice* ; that is, he designed to settle and continue in that dispensation, in that more calm and secret way of assistance, which offers less violence to the nature of man, but which was intended for the constant and permanent dispensation. So that we have no reason to think, that God hath now forsaken his church, though he be not with it in so sensible and extraordinary a manner.

But then if any particular church desire and expect this blessed presence and assistance of God's holy spirit, we must remember, that there is a condition to be performed on our parts. For how absolute soever this promise may be, in respect of the church universal ; it is certainly conditional to any particular church, as sad experience in many instances hath shewn. God hath long since left the church of *Jerusalem*, where the gospel was first publisht ; he hath left the church of *Antioch*, where the believers of the gospel were first call'd *christians* ; he hath left the famous churches of *Asia*, to that degree of desolation, that the ruins and places of some of them are hardly at this day certainly known. And this may also be the fate of any particular church, not excepting *Rome* herself, for all her pride and confidence to the contrary. *Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God : towards them that fell, severity ; but towards us goodness, if we continue in his goodness, otherwise we also shall be cut off.*

This, as I observed before, is spoken particularly to the *Roman* church ; the Apostle supposeth that the church of *Rome* herself may be guilty of apostacy from the faith, and cut off by unbelief, and indeed seems to foretell it ; which how it consists with their confident pretence to infallibility, let them look to it.

And let all particular churches look to themselves that they do not forfeit this promise of divine assistance. For Christ hath not so tied himself to any particular church, but that if they forsake him, he may leave them, and *remove his candlestick from them*. There have been many sad instances of this, since the first planting of christianity ; and we have no small reason to apprehend that it may come to be our own case ; for certainly we have many of those marks of ruin among us, which did foretell the destruction of the *Jewish* church and nation ; horrible profaneness and contempt of religion, division and animosities to the highest degree, and an universal dissoluteness and corruption of manners. And why should we, who do the same things, think our selves exempted from the same fate ? What can we expect, but that God should deal with us, as he did with them, *take away the kingdom of God from us, and give it to a nation that will bring forth the fruits of it ?*

The condition of this great promise here in the text, to the pastors and governours of the christian church, is the faithfull execution of their commission ; if they do sincerely endeavour to gain men to the belief and practice of christianity, Christ hath promised to be with them. The performance of this condition doth primarily concern the chief governors of the church, and next to them the ministers of the gospel in general, that they should be diligent and
faithfull

faithfull in their respective stations, *teaching men to observe all things, whatsoever Christ hath commanded.* And if we would make this our great work, to instruct our respective charges in the necessary doctrines of faith, and the indispensable duties of a good life, we should have far less trouble with them about other matters. And that we may do this work effectually, we must be serious in our instructions, and exemplary in our lives. *Serious in our instructions*; this certainly the Apostle requires in the highest degree, when he chargeth ministers, *so to speak, as the oracles of God*; to which nothing can be more contrary, than to trifle with the word of God, and to speak of the weightiest matters in the world, the great and everlasting concernments of the souls of men, in so slight and indecent a manner, as is not only beneath the gravity of the pulpit, but even of a well-regulated stage. Can any thing be more unsuitable, than to hear a minister of God from this solemn place to break jests upon sin, and to quibble upon the vices of the age? This is to shoot without a bullet, as if we had no mind to do execution, but only to make men smile at the mention of their faults; this is so nauseous a folly, and of so pernicious consequence to religion, that hardly any thing too severe can be said of it.

And then if we would have our instructions effectual, we must be *exemplary in our lives.* Aristotle tells, that the manners of the speaker have *μεγίστην δύναμιν* the most sovereign power of persuasion. And therefore Cato puts it into the definition of an orator, that he is *vir bonus, dicendi peritus, a good man, and an eloquent speaker.* This is true as to all kinds of persuasion; the good opinion which men have of the speaker, gives great weight to his words, and does strangely dispose the minds of men to entertain his counsels. But the reputation of goodness is more especially necessary and usefull to those whose proper work it is to persuade men to be good; and therefore the Apostle, when he had charged Titus to put men in mind of their duty, he immediately adds, *in all things shewing thy self a pattern of good works.* None so fit to teach others their duty, and none so likely to gain men to it, as those who practise it themselves; because hereby we convince men that we are in earnest, when they see that we persuade them to nothing, but what we chuse to do our selves. This is the way to *stop the mouths of men,* and to confute their malice, by an exemplary piety and virtue. So St. Peter tells us, 1 Pet. ii. 15. *For so is the will of God, that by well doing ye put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*

S E R M O N LXXI.

The Difficulties of a Christian Life considered.

LUKE XIII. 24.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

THERE are two great mistakes about the nature of religion, equally false, and equally pernicious to the souls of men: and the devil, whose great design it is to keep men off from religion by any means, makes use of both these mistakes, to serve his own purpose and design upon the several tempers of men. Those who are melancholy and serious, he disheartens and discourageth from attempting it, by the extream trouble and difficulty of it,

it, representing it in so horrid and frightfull a shape, incumber'd with such difficulties, and attended with such troubles and sufferings, as are insuperable, and intolerable to human nature; whereby he persua'ds men, that they had better never attempt it, since they may despair to go through with it.

On the other hand, those who are sanguine and full of hopes, he possesses with a quite contrary apprehension; that the business of religion is so short and easy a work, that it may be done at any time, and if need be, at the last moment of our lives, tho' it is not so well to put it upon the last hazard; and by this means, a great part of mankind are lull'd in security, and adjourn the business of religion from time to time; and because it is so easy, and so much in their power, they satisfy themselves with an indeterminate resolution to set about that business some time or other before they die, and so to repent, and make their peace with God once for all.

These pretences contradict one another, and therefore cannot be both true; but they may both be false, as indeed they are, and truth lies between them; religion being neither so slight and easy a work as some would have it, nor so extremely difficult and intolerable, as others would represent it. To confute the false apprehensions which some have of the easiness of it, our Saviour tells us, there must be some *striving*; and to satisfy us, that the difficulties of religion are not so great and insuperable, as some would make them, our Saviour tells us, that those who *strive* shall succeed and *enter in*; but those who only *seek*, that is, do not vigorously set about the business of religion, but only make some faint attempts to get to heaven, *shall not be able to enter in*. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, but shall not be able.*

The occasion of which words of our blessed Saviour, was a question that was put to him by one of his Disciples, concerning the number of those that should be saved, v. 23. One said unto him, *Lord, are there few that be saved?* To which curious question, our Saviour (according to his manner, when such kind of questions were put to him) does not give a direct answer, because it was neither necessary, nor usefull for his hearers to be resolved in; it did not concern them to know what number of persons should be saved, but what course they should take, that they might be of that number: and therefore, instead of satisfying their curiosities, he puts them upon their duty; admonishing them, instead of concerning themselves what should become of others, to take care of themselves. *And he said unto them, strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* He does not say, that *but few shall be saved*; (as some have presumptuously ventur'd to determine) but only *few* in comparison of those *many that shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

In these words we may consider these *two* things.

First, The duty enjoined, *Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*

Secondly, The reason or argument to enforce it, *For many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

First, The duty enjoined, *Strive to enter in at the strait gate.* Which words being metaphorical, I shall strip them of the metaphor, that so we may see the plain meaning of them. Now by this metaphor, or rather allegory, these *three* things are plainly intended.

1st, The course of a holy and christian life, in order to the obtaining of eternal happiness, is here represented to us by *a way*, which every man that would come to heaven, must walk in. For so St. *Matth.* (who expresseth this more fully) makes mention of *a way*, as well as a *gate*, by which we must enter into it; *strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth to life.* And this, tho' it be not express'd by St. *Luke*, is necessarily understood, *Strive to enter in by the strait gate*, that is, into the *way* that leads to *life*.

2dly, The first difficulties of a holy and religious course of life, are here represented to us by a *strait gate*. For the gate at which we enter, and the *way* in which we walk, can signify nothing else, but the beginning and progress of a holy and religious course.

3dly, Our diligence and constancy in this course, are represented by *striving*, a word which hath a great force and emphasis in it, ἀγωνίζεσθαι, a metaphor taken from the earnest contention which was used in the *Olympic* games, by those who strove for mastery in running or wrestling, or any of the other exercises which were there used.

Secondly, Here is a reason added to enforce the exhortation or duty ; *for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able* : that is, there are a great many that will do something in christianity, and make some faint attempts to get to heaven, who yet shall fall short of it, for want of such a firm resolution and earnestness of endeavour, as is necessary to the attaining of it.

Having thus explain'd the words, I shall take occasion from the first part of them, namely, the duty of exhortation, to handle these *three* points, very usefull for us to consider, and to be well instructed in.

1st, The difficulties of a holy and christian course.

2dly, The firm resolution, and earnest endeavour that is required on our part for the conquering of these difficulties.

3dly, That these difficulties are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just discouragement to our endeavours ; if we will *strive*, we may master them.

First, The difficulties of a holy and christian course. And these are either from our selves, or from something without us.

1. From our selves, from the original corruption and depravation of our nature, and the power of evil habits and customs, contracted by vitious practices. Our natures are vitiated and depraved, inclined to evil, and impotent to good ; besides that being habituated to sin and vice, it is a matter of infinite difficulty to break off a custom, and to turn the course of our life another way. Now because this is the difficulty of our first entrance into religion, it is represented by a *strait gate*, which is hard to get through.

2. There are likewise other difficulties from without ; as namely, the opposition and persecution of the world, which was very raging and violent in the first beginnings of christianity. And this our Saviour represents by the ruggedness and roughness of the way, as St. *Matthew* expresseth it, chap. vii. 14. *Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to life*, καὶ στενὴ ἡ ὁδὸς, *confragosa est via*, (so *Grotius* renders it) the way is craggy, full of afflictions and troubles.

So that these are the two great difficulties in a christian course, indisposition from within, and opposition from without.

1. Indisposition from within. And this makes religion so much the more difficult, because it checks us at our very first entrance upon our christian course, and makes us unwilling to set out. The corruption of our nature, and those vitious habits which by a long custom of sin we have contracted, do strongly incline us the contrary way, so that a man must offer great force and violence to himself, that will conquer this difficulty. It is one of the hardest things in the world to break off a vitious habit, and to get loose from the tyranny of custom. The Prophet *Jeremiah* speaks of it as next to a natural impossibility. Ch. xiii. 23. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Or the Leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil*. This requires great striving indeed. Nothing shows the spirit and resolution of a man more, than to contend with an inveterate habit ; for in this case a man strives against the very bent and inclination of his soul ; and 'tis easier to set a man against all the world, than to make him fight with himself : and yet this every man must do, who from any wicked course of life, betakes himself seriously to religion ; he must as it were lay violent hands upon himself, and fight with the man he was before ; and this in scripture is emphatically exprest to us, *by crucifying the old man, with the affections and lusts thereof*. A christian when he first enters upon a holy and good course of life, is represented as two persons and parties at civil wars one with another, *the old*, and *the new man* ; so that whoever will be a christian must put off himself, and become another man ; and 'tis no easy matter for a man to quit himself.

2. In our christian course, we must likewise expect to meet with great opposition from without. Blessed be God, christianity hath generally been for many ages free from this difficulty, which attended the first profession of it; it was then indeed a very steep and craggy way, very rough and thorny, not to be travelled in without sweat and blood; then the dangers and hazards of that profession were such, as were not to be encountered by a mere moral resolution, and the natural strength of flesh and blood; the persecution that attended it was so hot, and the torments which threaten'd it so terrible, that the sensual and inconsiderate part of mankind would rather venture hell at a distance, than run themselves upon so present and evident a danger.

But since these ages of persecution, this difficulty hath been in a great measure removed. Not but that the true religion hath still its enemies in the world; but they are not let loose, as they were in those times; it is still persecuted and exposed to the malice and reproach, but not to the rage and fury of unreasonable Men. In the calmest times there is hardly any man can be a strict and sincere christian, without being liable to hatred and contempt, without denying himself many of those worldly advantages, which those who make no conscience of the strict laws of christianity may make to themselves; so that at all times it requires a good degree of constancy and resolution to persevere in a holy course, and to bear up against the opposition of the world, and to withstand its temptations, to be *harmless and blameless in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation*; not to be infected with the eminent and frequent examples of vice, and carryed down with the stream of a corrupt and degenerate age. So that tho' our difficulties be not always the same, and equal to those which the primitive christians encountered, yet there is enough to exercise our best resolution and care; tho' the main body of the enemies of christianity be broken, and *the Sons of Anak be destroyed out of the land*; yet *some of the old inhabitants are still left, to be thorns in our sides, and pricks in our eyes*, that true religion may always have something to exercise its force and vigor upon. I have done with the *first* point, the difficulties of a christian course. I proceed to the

Second, The earnest endeavour that is to be used on our part, for the conquering of these difficulties. And to the business of religion, if we will set upon it in good earnest, these *three* things are required.

1st, A mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and christian course.

2^{dly}, Great diligence and industry to carry us on in it.

3^{dly}, An invincible constancy to carry us through it, and make us persevere in it to the end.

1st, A mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and good course. For want of this, most men miscarry and stumble at the very threshold, and never get through the *strait gate*, never master the difficulties of the first entrance. Many are well disposed towards religion, and have fits of good inclination that way, (especially in their young and tender years) but they want firmness of resolution to conquer the difficulties of the first entrance upon a religious and virtuous life; like the young man that came to our Saviour, well inclined to do some *good thing*, that *he might inherit eternal life*; but when it came to the point, he gave back, he was divided betwixt Christ and the world, and had not resolution enough *to part with all for him*.

Many men (I doubt not) have frequent thoughts and deliberations about a better course of life, and are in a good mind to take up, and break off that lewd and riotous course they are in; but they cannot bring themselves to a fixt purpose and resolution: and yet without this nothing is to be done, *the double minded man is unstable in all his ways*. There must be no indifferency and irresoluteness in our minds, if we will be christians; we must not stop at the *gate*; but resolve to press in. We see that men can take up peremptory resolutions in other matters, to be rich and great in the world, and they can be true and steadfast to these resolutions; and why should not men resolve to be wise and happy, and stand to these resolutions and make them good? God is more ready to assist and strengthen these kind of resolutions than any other; and I am sure no man hath

so much reason to resolve upon any thing, as to live a holy and virtuous life; no other resolution can do a man that good, and bring him that comfort and happiness, that this will.

2dly, The business of religion, as it requires a mighty resolution to engage us in a holy and good course, so likewise a great diligence to carry us on in it. When we are got through the *strait gate*, we must account to meet with many difficulties in our way; there are in the course of a christian life many duties to be performed, which require great pains and care; many temptations to be resisted, which will keep us continually upon our guard; a great part of the way is up hill, and not to be climb'd without labour; and the scripture frequently calls upon us, *to work out our salvation with fear and trembling*; that is, with great care and industry; *to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure*; to follow holiness, *down* to pursue it with great earnestness. Nothing in this world that is of value, is to be had on other terms; and we have low thoughts of heaven, if we think any pains too much to get thither.

3dly, The business of religion requires an invincible constancy to carry us through it, and to make us persevere in it to the end. Resolution may make a good entrance; but it requires great constancy and firmness of mind, to hold out in a good course. A good resolution may be taken up upon a present heat, and may cool again; but nothing but a constant and steady temper of mind will make a man persevere; and yet without this, no man shall ever reach heaven. *He that continueth to the end shall be saved; but if any man draw back, God's soul will have no pleasure in him.* God puts this case by the Prophet, and determines it, *Ezekiel xviii. 24. When the righteous man turneth away from his righteousness, shall he live? all his righteousness that he hath done, shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them he shall die*; nay, so far will his righteousness be from availing him, if he do not persevere in it, that it will render his condition much worse, to have gone so far towards heaven, and at last to turn his back upon it. So St. Peter tells us, *2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome; the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* I proceed to the

Third point, namely, That the difficulties of a holy and a christian life are not so great and insuperable, as to be a just ground of discouragement to our endeavours. All that I have said concerning the difficulties of religion, was with no design to damp, but rather to quicken our industry; for, upon the whole matter, when all things are duly considered, it will appear, that *Christ's yoke is easy, and his burthen light*; that the commandments of God are not grievous; no, not this commandment of *striving to enter in at the strait gate*; which I shall endeavour to make manifest by taking these four things into consideration.

1. The assistance which the gospel offers to us. God hath there promised *to give his holy spirit to them that ask him*; and by the assistance of God's holy spirit, we may be able to conquer all those difficulties. Indeed if we were left to our selves, to the impotency and weakness of our own nature, we should never be able to cope with these difficulties; every temptation would be too hard for us; every little opposition would discourage us: But *God is with us, and there is nothing too hard for him.* If the principles of a holy life were only the birth of our own resolution, they would easily be born down; but they are from God, of a heavenly birth and original; and whatsoever is *born of God, overcometh the world.* John i. 12, 13. *As many as received him, to them gave he power (ἐξουσίαν the privilege) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

God considers the impotency of human nature, in this depraved and degenerate state into which we are sunk, and therefore he hath not left us to our selves, but when he

he commands us to *work out our own salvation*, he tells us for our encouragement, that *he himself works in us both to will and to do*; he does not bid us to be strong in our own strength, for he knows we have no strength of our own, but to be *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*; and what may not even a weak creature do, that is so powerfully assisted? If we will but make use of this strength, nothing can be too hard for us. All that God expects from us is, that we should comply with the motions of his spirit, and be as sincere in the use of our own endeavours, as he is in the offers of his grace and assistance.

2. Let us consider, that the greatest difficulties are at first; 'tis but making one manfull onset, and sustaining the first brunt, and the difficulties will abate and grow less, and our strength will every day increase and grow more. *The gate is strait*: but when we have once got through it, *our feet will be set in an open place*. After some struggling to get through, we shall every day find our selves at more ease and liberty. It will be very hard at first, to master our vitious inclinations, to change the habit of our minds, and the course of our lives, and to act contrary to what we have been long accustomed: but this trouble lasts but for a little while; these pangs of the new-birth, tho' they be sharp, yet they are not usually of long continuance.

It does indeed require great resolution and firmness of mind, to encounter the first difficulties of religion: but if we can but stand it out for one brunt, our enemy will give way, and the pleasure of victory will tempt us on. It is troublesome to conflict with great difficulties, and men are loth to be brought to it: but when we are engaged, it is one of the greatest pleasures in the world to prevail and conquer. Many men are loth to go to war; but after a little success, they are as loth to give over; that which was a terror to them at first, turns into a pleasure.

3. Consider that custom will make any course of life tolerable, and most things easy. Religion, and the practice of a holy life is difficult at first; but after we are once habituated to it, the trouble will wear off by degrees, and that which was grievous will become easy; nay, by degrees, much more pleasant than ever the contrary practice was. We see the daily experience of this, in the most difficult and laborious employments of this world; a little pains tires a man at first, but when he is once seasoned and inured to labour, idleness becomes more tedious and troublesome to him than the hardest work. Custom will make any thing easy, tho' it be a little unnatural. Nothing is more unnatural than sin; 'tis not according to our original nature and frame, but it is the corruption and depravation of it, a second nature superinduced upon us by custom: whereas the practice of holiness and virtue is agreeable to our original and primitive state, and sin and vice are the perverting of nature contrary to our reason, and the design of our beings, and to all obligations of duty and interest: but by returning to God and our duty, we return to our primitive state; we act naturally, and according to the intention of our beings; and when the force of a contrary custom is taken off, and the bias clapt on the other side, *we shall run the ways of God's commandments with more delight and satisfaction*, than ever we found in the ways of sin.

For sin is a violence upon our natures, and that is always uneasy, yet it is made more tolerable by custom: but religion restores men to their natural state, and then we are at ease and rest. Religion is at first *a yoke and burthen*: but unless we *take this upon us*, we shall never *find rest to our souls*.

4thly and lastly, Consider the reward that religion propounds, and this must needs sweeten and mitigate all the troubles and difficulties that are occasioned by it. This *strait gate* through which we must enter, and this *craggy way* which we are to climb up, *leads to life*, and he is a lazy man indeed, that will not strive and struggle for *life*. All that a man can do, he will do for his life, for this miserable life which is so short and uncertain, and *born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards*; a life not worth the having, nor worth the keeping with any great care and trouble, if it were not in order to a better and happier life. But 'tis not this life which our Saviour means; that indeed were not worth all this striving for:

'Tis

'Tis eternal life ; a state of perfect and endless happiness ; of joys *unspeakable and full of glory*. And who would not *strive to enter in at that gate*, which leads to so much felicity ? Can a man possibly take too much pains, be at too much trouble for a few days, to be happy for ever ?

So often as I consider what incredible industry men use for the things of this life, and to get a small portion of this world, I am ready to conclude, That either men do not believe the rewards of another world, or that they do not understand them ; else they could not think much to be at the same pains for heaven, that they can cheerfully bestow for the obtaining of these corruptible things. Can we be so unconscionable, as to think God unreasonable, when he offers heaven and everlasting happiness to us upon as easy terms, as any thing in this world is ordinarily to be had ? And are not we very foolish and unwise, to put away eternal life from us, when we may have it upon terms so infinitely below the true worth and value of it ?

I have now done with the *three* things which I propounded to speak to from the first part of these words, which are so many arguments to enforce the exhortation here in the text ; *to strive to enter in at the strait gate*, and to give all diligence, by the course of a holy and virtuous life, to get to heaven ; and we may assure ourselves, that nothing less than this will bring us thither. So our Saviour tells us, in the latter part of the text ; that *many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able*. I proceed now to the

Second part of the text ; the reason or argument whereby this exhortation is enforced ; *Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able*. Every seeking to enter in will not gain our admission into heaven ; therefore there must be *striving* : For men may do many things in religion, and make several faint attempts to get to heaven, and yet at last fall short of it, for want of earnest contention and endeavour which is necessary to the attaining of it. We must make religion our business, and set about it with all our might, and persevere and hold out in it, if ever we hope to be admitted to heaven ; *for many shall seek to enter, that shall be shut out*.

Now what this *seeking* is, which is here opposed to *striving to enter in at the strait gate*, our Saviour declares after the text ; *v. 25. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us ; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know ye not whence you are ; then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets ; but he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are ; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity*. St. Matthew mentions some other pretences which they should make ; upon which they should lay claim to heaven, *Mat. vii. 21, 22, 23. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name have cast out devils ? And in thy name done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity*. After all their seeking to enter in, and notwithstanding all these pretences, they shall be shut out, and be for ever banisht from the presence of God. This shall be their doom, which will be much the heavier, because of the disappointment of their confident expectation and hope. So St. Luke tells us, ----*xiii. 28, 29. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth ; when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and ye your selves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God*. To which St. Matthew adds, *Chap. viii. v. 12. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast into utter darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. And then our Saviour concludes (*Luke 13. 30.*) *Behold, there are last that shall be first, and first which shall be last*. From all which it appears, with what confidence many men, upon these false pretences (which our Saviour calls *seeking to enter in*) shall lay claim to heaven, and how strangely they shall be disappointed of their expectation

tion and hope ; when they shall find themselves cast out of heaven, who they thought had out-done all others in religion, and were the only members of the true church, and *the children and heirs of the kingdom* ; and shall see others, whom they thought to be out of the pale of the true church, and excluded from all terms of salvation, come from all quarters, and find free admission into heaven ; and shall find themselves so grossly and widely mistaken, that those very persons whom they thought to be *last*, and of all others farthest from salvation, shall be *first* ; and they themselves, whom they took for *the children of the kingdom*, and such as should be admitted into heaven in the first place, shall be rejected and cast out.

So that by *seeking to enter*, we may understand all those things which men may do in religion upon which they shall pretend to lay claim to heaven, nay, and confidently hope to obtain it ; and yet shall be shamefully disappointed, and fall short of it. Whatever men think, and believe, and do in religion, what privileges soever men pretend, what ways and means soever men endeavour to appease the deity, and to recommend themselves to the divine favour and acceptance, all this is but *seeking to enter in*, and is not that *striving* which our Saviour requires. *If men do not do the will of God, but are workers of iniquity*, it will all signify nothing to the obtaining of eternal happiness.

Our Saviour here instanceth in mens profession of his religion, *calling him Lord, Lord* ; in their personal familiarity and conversation with him, by *eating and drinking in his presence* and company ; in their having heard him preach the doctrine of life and salvation, *Thou hast taught in our streets* ; in their having prophesied, and wrought great miracles in his name and by his power, *Have we not prophesied in thy name ? And in thy name cast out devils ? And in thy name done many wonderfull works ?* These were great and glorious things which they boasted of ; and yet nothing of all this will do, if men *do not the will of God* ; notwithstanding all this, he will say unto them, *I know ye not whence ye are, depart from me, ye workers of iniquity.*

And by a plain parity of reason, whatever else men do in religion, what attempts soever men may make to get to heaven, upon what privileges or pretences soever they may lay claim to eternal life, they will certainly fall short of it, if they *do not the will of God, but are workers of iniquity*. My business therefore at this time shall be, to discover the several false claims and pretences which men may make to heaven, and yet shall never enter into it. And to this purpose I shall instance in several particulars, by one or more of which men commonly delude themselves, and are apt to entertain vain and ill-grounded hopes of eternal salvation.

1st, Some trust to the external profession of the true religion.

2^{dly}, Others have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they rely much upon that.

3^{dly}, There are others that find themselves much affected with the word of God, and the doctrines contained in it.

4^{thly}, Others are very strict and devout in the external worship of God.

5^{thly}, Others confide much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone salvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which therein they have above others of getting to heaven.

6^{thly}, Others think their great zeal for God and his true religion, will certainly save them.

7^{thly}, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion.

8^{thly}, Others rely much upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, and become the children of God, and heirs of everlasting life ; and being once truly so, they can never fall from that state, so as finally to miscarry.

Lastly, Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at the last.

I shall briefly go over these particulars, which are the several ways whereby men *seek to enter* into heaven, and hope to get thither at last ; and shall shew the

the insufficiency of them; and that there is something beyond all this necessary to be done for the attainment of everlasting salvation.

1st, Some trust to the mere external profession of the true religion, and think it enough to call Christ, *Lord, Lord*; to be baptized in his name, and thereby to be admitted members of the christian church. What the Apostle says of the profession of the *Jewish* religion, and the outward badge of it, *circumcision*, may be applied to the profession of christianity made in baptism, *Rom. ii. 17, 25, 28, 29. Behold thou art called a Jew, and reatest in the law, and makest thy boast of God. Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision; for he is not a Jew that is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter.* The case is the same of those who make only an outward profession of christianity. *Baptism verily profiteth, if we perform the condition of that covenant which we entered into by baptism; but if we do not, our baptism is no baptism: For he is not a christian which is one outwardly, nor is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a christian which is one inwardly, and baptism is of the heart, in the spirit, and not in water only.* So St. Peter tells us, *1 Pet. iii. 21. that baptism is not only the washing of the body with water, and the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.*

The promise of eternal life and happiness is not made to the external profession of religion, without the sincere and real practice of it. *Why call ye me Lord, Lord,* (says our Saviour) *and do not the things which I say?* The scripture hath no where said, *he that is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth and is baptized, he that repenteth and is baptized, shall be saved.* This deserves to be seriously considered by a great many christians, who have nothing to shew for their christianity, but their names; whose best title to heaven is their baptism, an engagement entered into by others in their name, but never confirmed and made good by an act of their own; a thing which was done before they remember, and which hath no other effect upon their hearts and lives, than if it were quite forgotten.

2^{dly}, There are others who have attained to a good degree of knowledge in religion, and they hope *that* will save them. But if our knowledge in religion, though never so clear and great, do not descend into our hearts and lives, and govern our actions, all our hopes of heaven are built upon a false and sandy foundation. So our Saviour tells us, *Matth. vii. 26. Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.* And *John xiii. 17. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*

There is not a greater cheat in religion, nothing wherein men do more grossly impose upon themselves, than in this matter; as if the knowledge of religion, without the practice of it, would bring men to heaven. How diligent are many in reading and hearing the word of God, who yet take no care to practise it in their lives? Like those in the Prophet, *Ezek. xxxiii. 31. of whom God complains, They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear my words; but they will not do them.* None do so foolishly, and yet so deservedly miss of happiness, as those who are very careful to learn the way to heaven, and when they have done, will take no pains at all to get thither.

3^{dly}, There are others who find themselves much affected with the word of God, and the preaching of it; and this they take for a very good sign, that it hath its due effect upon them. And this happens very frequently, that the word of God makes considerable impressions upon men for the present, and they are greatly affected with it, and troubled for their sins, and afraid of the judgments of God, and the terrible vengeance of another world; and upon this they take up some resolutions of a better course, which after a little while vanish and come to nothing. This was the temper of the people of *Israel*, they delighted to hear the Prophet speak to them in the name of God, *Ezek. xxxiii. 32. And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well*
upon

upon an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not, Mark vi. 20. It is said that *Herod* had a great reverence for *John* the Baptist, that he observed him, and heard him gladly; but yet for all that, he continued the same cruel and bad man that he was before. And in the parable of the sower, *Matth.* xiii. 20. there are one sort of hearers mentioned, who, *when they heard the word, received it with joy; but having no root in themselves, they endured but for a while, and when tribulation or persecution ariseth, because of the word, presently they are offended.* There are many men who have sudden motions in religion, and are mightily affected for the present: but it must be a rooted and fixt principle, that will endure and hold out against great difficulties and opposition. *Acts* xxiv. 25. it is said that when *St. Paul* reasoned of righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to come, *Felix* trembled: and nothing is more frequent, than for men to be mightily startled at the preaching of the word, when their judgments are convinced and born down, and their consciences touched to the quick: a lively representation of the evil of sin, and the infinite danger of a sinfull course, may stir up the passions of grief and fear, and dart such stings into the consciences of men, as may make them extremely restless and unquiet, and work some good thoughts and inclinations in them towards a better course; and yet like metals, when the heat is over, that they may be harder for having been melted down.

4thly, Others shew great strictness and devotion in the worship of God, and this they hope will be accepted, and cannot fail to bring them to heaven: and yet some of the worst of men have been very eminent for this. The *Pharisees* were the most exact people in the world in matter of external ceremony and devotion; and yet for all this, our Saviour plainly tells them, that *they were farther from the kingdom of God, than those who seemed to be farthest, than publicans and harlots*; and that because they were so very bad, under so great a pretense of devotion, *therefore they should receive the greater damnation.*

Not but that external devotion is a necessary expression of religion, and highly acceptable to God, when it proceeds from a pious and devout mind, and when men are really such in their hearts and lives as their external devotion; represents them to be: But when the outward garb of religion is only made a cloak for sin and wickedness, when there is nothing within to answer all the shew that we see without, nothing is more odious and abominable to God. These are mere engines and poppets in religion; all the motions we see without proceed from an artificial contrivance, and not from any inward principle of life; and as no creature is more ridiculous than an ape because the beast makes some pretense to human shape, so nothing is more fullsom than this hypocritical devotion, because it looks like religion, but is the farthest from it of any thing in the world.

5thly, Others confide very much in their being members of the only true church, in which alone salvation is to be had, and in the manifold privileges and advantages which they have thereby above others, of getting to heaven. Thus the *Jews* confined salvation to themselves, and looked upon all the rest of the world as excluded from it. And not only so, but they believed that by one means or other every *Israelite* should be saved. So that they were the *jewish* catholic church, out of which there was no hope of salvation for any.

The same pretense is made by some christians at this day, who engross salvation to themselves, and will allow none to go to heaven out of the communion of their church; and have so ordered the matter, that hardly any that are in it can miscarry. They are members of an infallible church, which cannot possibly err in matters of faith; *they have not only eat and drunk in Christ's presence, but have eat and drunk his very corporal presence, the natural substance of his flesh and blood*; they have not only our blessed Saviour, but innumerable other intercessors in heaven; they have not only their own merits to plead for them, but in case they be defective, they may have the merits of others assigned and made over to them, out of the infinite stock and treasure of the church, upon which they may challenge eternal life, as of right and due belonging to them;

and by a due course of confession and absolution, may quit scores with God for all their sins from time to time. Or if they have neglected all this, they may, after the most flagitious course of life, upon *attrition* (that is, upon some trouble for sin, out of fear of hell and damnation) joined with *confession* and *absolution*, get to heaven at last; provided the Priest mean honestly, and do not, for want of intention, deprive them of the saving benefit and effect of this sacrament.

But is it possible men can be deluded at this rate! as to think that confidence of their own good condition, and want of charity to others, will carry them to heaven? That any church hath the privilege to save impenitent sinners? And they are really impenitent, who do not exercise such a repentance as the gospel plainly requires; and if men die in this state, whatever church they are of, the great Judge of the world hath told us, that *he will not know them*, but will bid them *to depart from him, because they have been workers of iniquity*.

6thly, Others think that their zeal for God and his true religion will certainly save them. But zeal, if it be not *according to knowledge*, if it be mistaken in its object, or be irregular and excessive in the degree, is so far from being a virtue, that it may be a great sin and fault; and tho' it be for the truth, yet if it be destitute of charity, and separated from the virtues of a good life, it will not avail us. So St. Paul tells us, that *tho' a man shall give his body to be burnt; yet if he have not charity, it is nothing*.

7thly, Others go a great way in the real practice of religion, and this sure will do the business. And it is very true, and certain in experience, that religion may have a considerable awe and influence upon men's hearts and lives, and yet they may fall short of happiness. Men may in many considerable instances perform their duty to God and man; and yet the retaining of one lust, the practice of any one known sin, may hinder them from *entering in at the strait gate*. Herod did not only *hear John gladly*, but *did many things* in obedience to his doctrine; and yet he was a very bad man. The Pharisee *thanked God* (and it may be truly) *that he was not like other men, an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer*; and yet the penitent Publican was *justified before him*. The young man who came to our Saviour to know what he should do to enter into life, and of whom our Saviour testifies, that he was *not far from the kingdom of God*, and that he *wanted but one thing*; yet for want of that he miscarried. And St. James assures us, that *if a man keep the whole law, and yet fail in one point, he is guilty of all*. If we be *workers of iniquity* in any one kind, Christ will disown us, and bid us *depart from him*.

8thly, Others rely upon the sincerity of their repentance and conversion, whereby they are put into a state of grace, from whence they can never finally fall. They did once very heartily repent of their wicked lives, and did change their course, and were really reformed, and continued a great while in that good course. And all this may be certainly true, but it is as certain that they are relapsed into their former evil course: and if so, the Prophet hath told us their doom, that *if the righteous man forsake his righteousness, his righteousness shall not be remembered; but in the sin that he hath sinned, in that shall he die*. So that a *righteous man* may *turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and die in it*. For the Prophet doth not here (as some vainly pretend) put a case, which is impossible in fact should happen, unless they will say, that the other case which he puts together with it, of *the wicked man's turning away from his wickedness, and doing that which is lawfull and right*, is likewise impossible, which God forbid. And that men may fall from a state of grace, is no matter of discouragement to good men; but a good caution against security, and an argument to greater care and watchfulness; according to that of the Apostle, *Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall*; which admonition were surely to little purpose, if it were impossible for them that *stand* to *fall*.

Lastly, Others venture all upon a death-bed repentance, and their importunity with God to receive them to mercy at last. This indeed is only *to seek*, and not *to strive to enter in*; and these perhaps are they whom our Saviour represents as *standing without, and knocking at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us*; or, as St.

St. *Matthew* expresses it, *Many shall say to me that day, Lord, Lord, which is most probably meant of the day of judgment, when their case is brought to the last extremity; and next to that is the day of death, when men are entering into a state of endless happiness or misery. And no wonder, if the sinner would then be glad, when he can no longer continue in this world, to be admitted into happiness in the next: but the door is then shut to most sinners, and it is a miracle of God's grace and mercy, if any repentance that men can then exercise, (which at the best must needs be very confused and imperfect) will then be accepted; if any importunity which men can then use, will be available. For with what face can we expect, that after all the evil actions of a long life, God should be mollified towards us by a few good words, and accept of a forc'd and constrained repentance for all our willfull and deliberate crimes, and that he should forgive us all our sins upon a little importunity, when we can sin no longer, and would repent no sooner.*

Let us then, by all that hath been said, be effectually persuaded to mind the business of religion in good earnest and, with all our might, especially the practice of it in the exercise of all the graces and virtues of a good life. Let us heartily repent of all the sins of our past life, and resolve upon a better course for the future; and let us not delay and put off this necessary work to the most unfit and improper time of old age, and sickness, and death: but let us set about it presently, and enter upon a good course, and make all the speed and progress in it we can.

And let us remember, that whatever we do in religion will not bring us to heaven, if we do not *do the will of our father which is in heaven*; if we do not give up our selves to a constant and universal obedience to his laws. This is *to strive to enter in at the strait gate*: And tho' we *strive to enter in* a thousand other ways, *we shall not be able*; and after all our confidence and conceit of our selves, and our own righteousness, and security of our salvation from the privileges of any church, it will be a strange damp and disappointment to us, to see the sincere christians, who have done the will of God, and lived in obedience to his Laws, to come from all quarters, and churches in the world, and *sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God*, when we, who thought our selves *the children of the kingdom, shall be cast out*, because we have been *workers of iniquity*. I will conclude all with those plain words of the Apostles, *Rom. ii. 7, 8, 9. To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour, and immortality; eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to the gospel.*

S E R M O N LXXII.

The Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus*.

LUKE XVI. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.

First Sermon on this Text.

I Intend, by God's assistance, to go over this parable, than which I think there is none in the whole gospel, which is more apt to affect men, or which is more artificially contrived, and in the circumstances whereof a greater *decorum* is observed.

It is a great question among interpreters, whether this narration concerning the rich man and *Lazarus* be a parable, or a history, or a mixture of both. That it is not a history, the resemblance between it and others of our Saviour's parables, will easily convince any man that is not contentious; besides that, in some ancient copies, 'tis usher'd in with this preface, *And he spake a parable to his Disciples: A certain rich man, &c.*

But yet as some of the antients have not improbably conjectur'd, it seems to be such a kind of parable, as had something of a real foundation; as namely, that there was such a poor man as *Lazarus* is here described, and of that name among the *Jews*: For in a meer parable 'tis altogether unusual to name persons, nor is this done in any other of our Saviour's parables.

But whether this be so or not, is not worth the disputing, because it alters not the case as to our Saviour's purpose, and the instructions which we may learn from it.

In the handling of this parable, I shall explain it as I go along, and draw two sorts of instructions or observations from it.

The *first* sort of observations shall be from the circumstances which serve for the *decorum* of the parable: And these I will not warrant to be all intended by our Saviour; but only to be true in themselves, and usefull, and to have a probable rise from some circumstances of the parable; and therefore I shall speak but very briefly to them.

The *second* sort of observations shall be such as are grounded upon the main scope and intent of the parable; and these I shall insist more largely upon. I begin,

First, With those observations and instructions which I shall gather up from the circumstances which serve for the *decorum* of the parable; and I shall take them in order as they lie in the parable.

Ver. 19. *There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.* Some think that our Saviour in this description reflected upon *Herod*, because he describes this rich man to be *cloathed in purple*. But this conjecture is without reason; for besides that it was not our Saviour's custom in his preaching, to give secret girds to the magistrate; 'tis certain that it was long after our Saviour's time, that purple was appropriated to kings: It was then, and a great while after, the wear of rich and powerfull men, and of the favourites and great men of the court, who are frequently in antient histories call'd the *purpurati*, those that wore purple.

That which I observe from hence, is, that the rich man is not here censured for enjoying what he had, for wearing rich apparel, and keeping a great table. This of it self, if it be according to a man's estate and quality, and without intemperance, is so far from being a fault, that it is a commendable virtue. But here was his fault, that he made all to serve his own sensuality and luxury, without any consideration of the wants and necessities of others: Whereas one of the great uses of the plentiful tables of rich men, is from the superfluity of them to feed the poor and the hungry.

Ver. 20. *And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus,* as if our Saviour had said, for instance, poor *Lazarus* whom ye all knew. And here I cannot but take notice of the *decorum* which our Saviour uses. He would not name any rich man, because that was invidious, and apt to provoke. He endeavours to make all men sensible of their duty; but he would provoke none of them by any peevish reflection; for nothing is more improper than to provoke those whom we intend to persuade. While a man's reason is calm and undisturbed, it is capable of truth fairly propounded; but if we once stir up men's passions, it is like muddying of the waters, they can discern nothing clearly afterwards. But to proceed in the parable.

There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at the rich man's gate full of sores, and was desirous to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table, moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. Here are three great aggravations of the rich man's uncharitableness.

1st, That

1st, That here was an object presented it self to him.

2^{dly}, Such an object as would move any one's pity, a man reduc'd to extream misery and necessity.

3^{dly}, A little relief would have contented him.

1st, Here was an object presented it self to him, *Lazarus* laid at a rich man's gate; so that as often as he went out of his own house and came in, he could not but take notice of him. Good men that are charitably disposed, will enquire out objects for their charity, and not allways stay 'till they thrust themselves upon them: But he is a very bad man, who, when an object of great pity and charity is presented, is so far from relenting towards him, that he stops his ear to his cry, and turns away his face from him. He is an uncharitable man, who being rich, and hearing of the miseries of others, does not take them into consideration: But what we see with our eyes is much more apt to affect us. So that this was an argument of a very cruel disposition in the rich man, that having so many occasions of seeing *Lazarus*, he should never be moved to commiserate him.

2^{dly}, Here was such an object presented to him, as would move any one's pity, a Man reduced to extream misery and necessity. Here was no common object of charity, a man, not only in extream want, but in great pain and anguish, and so helpless, that he was unable to keep off the dogs from being troublesome to him: And yet this did not move him.

3^{dly}, A very little relief would have contented this poor man, and have been a great kindness to him; that which the rich man might have spared without the least prejudice to himself. He would have been glad to have been *fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table*; and yet the parable intimates, that the rich man was so hard-hearted, as not to afford him these.

Ver. 22. *And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.* Here was a great and sudden change! He, who when he was alive was neglected by men, and contumeliously exposed like a dead carcass to the dogs, when he dies is attended on by the Angels, and by them safely conveyed into a state of unspeakable happiness. He who lay at the rich man's gate, and could find no entrance there, is admitted into heaven. *The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's bosom.*

'Tis very observable, that our Saviour in this parable represents men as passing immediately out of this life into a state of happiness or torment. And as in no other place of scripture, so neither in this, where it had been so proper, does our Saviour give the least intimation of the state of *purgatory*, which the church of *Rome* hath devised, and makes so much profit and advantage of; which because it is so visible and apparent, we may without uncharitableness suppose to be the reason why they keep such a stir about it.

And was carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom. It was an antient tradition among the *Jews*, that the Angels did attend good men at their death, and carry their souls into *paradise*, which is here call'd *Abraham's bosom*. And this was a proper place for *Lazarus*, who had been neglected by the rich man; to be convey'd into *Abraham's bosom*, who was of a quite contrary temper, and loved to entertain and relieve strangers.

And *paradise* is fitly call'd *Abraham's bosom*, because the *Jews* had so great a veneration for *Abraham*, and that deservedly for his eminent faith and obedience, that they gave him the first place among the blessed. Hence is the expression, *Matt. viii. 11. of sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.* Now this expression of *being in Abraham's bosom*, is an allusion to the custom of feasts among the *Jews*, where the most esteemed and beloved guest sat next him that was chief at the feast, and leaned on his bosom. Hence *St. John* is call'd the Disciple whom *Jesus* loved, because when he sat at meat, he leaned on his bosom, *John xiii. 23.* Hence likewise is the expression of our Saviour's being *in the bosom of his father*, to signify his dearness to him, *John i. 18.* *No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten son which is in the bosom of the father, he hath declared him.*

I proceed. *The rich man also died, and was buried.* *The rich man also died*; this is very elegant and emphatical, insinuating to us, what the Scripture so often takes notice of; that riches, for all mens confidence in them, will not deliver from Death. This rich man indeed was out of danger of being starved and famisht, as poor *Lazarus* was. But death had other ways to come at him. It is probable enough, that he might be surfeited by *faring sumptuously every day.* *The rich man also died.*

And was buried. And here again we may observe the strict *decorum* which our Saviour uses in this parable. It is not said of *Lazarus*, that *he was buried*, but only that *he died*; it is probable, that he was flung out of the way into some pit or other: But of the rich man it is said, *he was buried.* And this is all the advantage which a rich man hath by a great estate after he is dead, to have a pompous and solemn funeral; which yet signifies nothing to him after death, because he is insensible of it.

Ver. 23. *And in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* As corporal acts are attributed to God in scripture, so likewise to separated souls.

In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments; intimating to us, that this sensual and voluptuous man had stupidly past away his life, without any serious thoughts and consideration: but now at last he was awakened, when it was too late, and began to consider. *In hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments.*

O the stupidity of sinners! who run on blindly in their course, and never open their eyes 'till they are fallen into the pit; who cannot be brought to consider, 'till consideration will do them no good; 'till it serve to no other purpose, but to enrage their consciences, and to multiply the stings of them.

Thus it was with this rich man, *he lift up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.* Our Saviour represents him as seeing that which would then most probably come to his mind. Feeling his own misery, he began to consider the happy condition of the poor man whom he had so cruelly neglected. And indeed one great part of the torment of hell consists in those reflections which men shall make upon the happiness which they have willfully lost and neglected, and the sins whereby they have plunged themselves into that miserable state.

Ver. 24. *And he cried, and said, father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.* See how the scene is changed; now he is fain to beg relief of the beggar, who had sued to him in vain.

Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue. Here is another very decent circumstance; the rich man is represented as not having the face to beg any great relief from *Lazarus*, towards whom he had been so hard-hearted. *To dip the tip of his finger in water, to cool his tongue*, had been a very great favour from *Lazarus*, to whom the rich man had denied even the *crumbs which fell from his table.*

For I am tormented in this flame. The scripture loves to make use of sensible representations, to set forth to us the happiness and misery of the next life; partly by way of condescension to our understandings, and partly to work more powerfully upon our affections. For whilst we are in the body, and immers'd in sense, we are most apt to be moved by such descriptions of things, as are sensible; and therefore the torments of wicked men in hell, are usually in scripture described to us, by one of the quickest and sharpest pains that human nature is ordinarily acquainted withal, namely, by the pain of burning; fire being the most active thing in nature, and therefore capable of causing the sharpest pains.

But we cannot from these and the like expressions of scripture certainly determine that this is the true and proper pain of hell: All that we can infer from these descriptions is this, that the sufferings of wicked men in the other world, shall be very terrible, and as great, and probably greater than can possibly be described to us, by any thing that we are now acquainted withal; for who knows the

the power of God's anger, and the utmost of what omnipotent justice can do to sinners? For as the glory of heaven, and the joys of God's presence are now inconceivable; so likewise are the torments of hell, and the miseries of the damned. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have enter'd into the heart of man, those dreadful things which God prepares for them that hate him.* Who can imagine the utmost significancy of those phrases which the scripture uses to set forth this to us; of God's being a *consuming fire*, of being *tormented in flames*, of God's *wrath and jealousy smoking* against sinners, and all the curses that are written in his book, falling upon them? Who can conceive the horror of those expressions, of *the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched*; of God's *pouring out the vials of his wrath*, of being *deliver'd over to the tormentor*, of being *thrust into utter darkness*, of being *cast into the lake of fire and brimstone*? These forms of speech seem to be borrowed from those things which among men are most dreadful and affrighting; and to be calculated and accommodated to our capacities, and not so much intended to express to us the proper and real torments of hell, as to convey to us in a more sensible and affecting manner the sense of what the scripture says in general, that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Ver. 25, *But Abraham said, son, remember that thou in thy life-time received'st thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. Abraham said, son, remember.* It is very observable, how our Saviour chuses to represent to us the discourse between *Abraham* and the rich man; tho' there was the greatest difference between them imaginable, the one was in heaven, and the other in hell, yet they treated one another civilly. *Abraham* is brought in giving the common terms of civility to this wretched wicked man, and calling him *son*; *son, remember.* It was indeed a very severe thing which he said to him; he put him in mind of his former prosperity, and of his fault in his unmercifull usage of *Lazarus*; *Remember, son, that thou in thy life-time received'st thy good things, and Lazarus, &c.* But yet whilst he speaks such sharp things to him, he bates bad language. A man may say very severe things, where a just occasion requires it; but he must use no reviling; *rem ipsam dic, mitte male loqui*, say the thing, but use no bad language. And this, as one says, is the true art of chiding, the proper style wherein we must use to reprove. If we do it with malice, and anger, and contempt, it is misbecoming, even tho' we despair of doing good: but if we hope for any good effect, we are like to miss of it this way, for as the Apostle says excellently, *the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

Some think that *Abraham* gives the rich man the title of *son* ironically, and by way of jeer: but without all reason. For surely there is not so much bad nature in heaven, as to scoff at those who are in misery. Besides that, we find our Saviour observing this *Decorum* of good language in other of his parables; as particularly, in that of the king who invited guests to the marriage of his son, *Matth. xxii. 11.* When the king saw there the man that came without his wedding garment, tho' he pass'd a very severe sentence upon him, yet he gives him the common terms of civility; *Friend, how camest thou hither?*

This should teach us christians, how we ought to demean our selves towards those who are at the greatest distance from us, and how we ought to behave our selves towards one another in the greatest differences of religion. None sure can be at greater distance than *Abraham* in *paradise*, and the rich man in *hell*; and yet our Saviour would not represent them as at terms of defiance with one another. One might have expected that *Abraham* should have reviled this poor wretch, and disdain'd to have spoken to him: But this is not the temper of heaven, nor ought it to be of good men upon earth, even towards the worst of men.

How does this condemn our rudeness and impatience with one another, in our religious differences! we think no terms bad enough to use towards one another: and yet one of the most famous disputes that we find mentioned in scripture, and that between the most opposite parties that can be imagined, was managed after another fashion; I mean that recorded by *St. Jude* between *Michael* the Arch-angel,

Arch-angel, and the devil, v. 9. *Yet Michael the Archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses; durst not bring a railing accusation; he durst not allow himself this, no, not in the heat of dispute, when persons are most apt to fly out into passion, because it was indecent, and would have been displeasing to God; this I believe is the true reason why it is said, he durst not bring a railing accusation.* And yet I may add another, which is not improper for our consideration, I am sure it hath a good moral, the devil would have been too hard for him at railing, he was better skill'd at that weapon, and more expert at that kind of dispute.

Which consideration may be a good argument to us against reviling any man. If we revile the good, we are unjust, because they deserve it not; if we revile the bad, we are unwise, because we shall get nothing by it. I could almost envy the character which was given of one of the *Romans*; *Nescivit quid esset male dicere; he knew not what it was to give bad language.*

I proceed. *Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things. Thy good things,* those which thou didst value and esteem so highly, and didst place thy chief happiness in, as if there had been no other good to be sought after. *Thy good things,* and indeed so he used them, as if he had been the sole lord and proprietor of them, and they had not been committed to him, as a steward, to be dispensed for his master's use, for the cloathing of the naked, and the feeding of the hungry, and the relieving of those in distress.

Ver. 27, 28. *Then he said, I pray thee therefore father, that thou wouldst send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.* Here the rich man, tho' in hell, is represented as retaining some tenderness for his relations, as solicitous lest they should be involved in the same misery with himself. The last piece of that which commonly remains in men, is natural affection, which is not so much a virtue, as a natural principle, and is common to many brute beasts. When a man puts off this, we may give him up for lost to all manner of goodness. To be *without natural affection*, is the worst character can be given of a man. Our Saviour represents this rich man in hell as not so totally degenerate as to be quite destitute of this.

I think some attribute this motion of the rich man concerning his brethren to another cause; as if he had desired it, not out of kindness to them, but out of regard to himself, as being afraid that if his brethren, who probably were corrupted by his example, had perished by that means, it would have been an aggravation of his torments. But this conjecture is too subtle, and without any good ground; for every man carries his burden of guilt with him out of this world, and it is not encreased by any consequence of our actions here. For the crime of a bad example is the same whether men follow it or not, because he that gives bad example to others, does what in him lies to draw them into sin; and if they do not follow it, that is no mitigation of his fault.

I have but one observation more, and that is from the mention of his *brethren* as his nearest relations, which is a great aggravation of the rich man's uncharitableness, because he is represented as having no children to take care for, and yet he would not consider the poor.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, endeavour'd to explain this parable, and have made such observations from the circumstances of it, as may be useful for our instruction: But as I premised at first, I will not warrant all these observations to be certainly intended by our Saviour; I know very well that every circumstance of a parable is not to be prest too far, the moral accommodation does chiefly belong to the main scope of it, and many circumstances are only brought in to fill up the parable, and to make handsomer way for that which is most material, and principally intended: But so long as the observations are true and useful, and have a fair colour and occasion from the circumstances, it is well enough; to be sure there is no harm done. I proceed to the *second* sort of observations, namely, such as are drawn from the main scope and intent of the parable, which I promised to speak more largely to; and they are *six*, which I shall handle in order.

First,

First, I observe that uncharitableness and unmercifullness to the poor, is a great and damning sin. We find no other fault imputed to the rich man but this, that he took no care out of his superfluity and abundance to relieve this poor man that lay at his gate. He is not charged for want of justice, but of charity; not for having got a great estate by fraud or oppression, but that in the midst of this abundance he had no consideration and pity for those that were in want.

I shall endeavour to make out this observation by the parts of it.

1st, That unmercifullness and uncharitableness to the poor is a great sin.

2dly, Such a sin, as alone and without any other guilt, is sufficient to ruin a man for ever. I shall speak to these severally.

1st, That unmercifullness and uncharitableness to the poor is a very great sin. It contains in its very nature two black crimes, inhumanity and impiety.

1. Inhumanity; it is an argument of a cruel and savage disposition, not to pity those that are in want and misery. And he doth not truly pity the miseries of others, that doth not relieve them when he hath ability and opportunity in his hands. Tendernefs and compassion for the sufferings of others, is a virtue so proper to our nature, that it is therefore call'd *humanity*, as if it were essential to human nature, and as if without this, we did not deserve the name of men. To see a man like our selves, *bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh*, labour under want and necessity, and yet not to be moved to commiserate him, this is a sign that we have put off our own nature, otherwise we should pity the sufferings of it in others. For whenever we behold a man like our selves groaning under want, and prest with necessity, and do not relent towards him, and are not ready to relieve him, we are hard-hearted to our own nature, and do in some sense what the Apostle says *no man ever did* (that is, none retaining the temper and affections of a man) *hate his own flesh*.

This the scripture speaks of as a most barbarous sort of inhumanity, and calls it murder, *1 John iii. 15. Whoso hateth his brother, is a murderer*; and not to relieve our brother in want, is to hate him; for this is the instance which the Apostle gives at the *17th verse, whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother in want, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him*; whoso doth not consider the poor, is a man-slayer and a murderer, he is cruel to his own nature, nay, were he sufficiently sensible of the condition of human nature, he is cruel to himself.

Seest thou a poor man in great misery and want, there is nothing hath befallen him but what is common to man, what might have been thy lot and portion as well as his, and what may happen to thee or thine another time. Make it therefore thine own case; (for so the providence of God may make it one time or other, and thou provokest him to make it so speedily, by thy unmercifull disposition toward the poor;) I say, make it thine own case, if thou wert in the poor man's condition, and he in thine, consult thine own bowels, and tell me how thou wouldst wish him to be affected toward thee. Wouldst thou be willing that he should slight and repulse thee, and shut up his bowels of compassion from thee? If not, then do not thou deal so with him; consider that it may be thine own case, therefore do not thou give the world any bad example in this kind, do not teach men to be unmercifull, lest they learn of thee, and thou find the ill effects of it, when it comes to be thine own condition. This is the first aggravation of this sin, the inhumanity of it. But,

2. Besides the inhumanity of this sin, it is likewise a great impiety toward God. Unmercifullness to the poor hath this fourfold impiety in it; it is a contempt of God; an usurpation upon his right; a slighting of his providence; and a plain demonstration that we do not love God, and that all our pretences to religion are hypocritical and insincere.

1. It is a contempt of God, and a reproaching of him; so *Solomon* tells us, *Prov. xiv. 31. He that oppresseth the poor*, (not only he that dealeth unjustly with a poor man, but he that is uncharitable towards him, as appears by the opposition, *but he that honoureth him, hath mercy on the poor*. Here oppression of the poor

is opposed to want of charity towards him;) *He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his maker*; how is that? He despiseth God who made him after his own image and likeness: For the poor man bears the image of God as well as the rich, so that thou canst not oppress or neglect him, without some reflection upon God, whose image he bears.

2. The uncharitable man is an usurper upon God's right. *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, and he hath given it to the children of men*, not absolutely to dispose of as they please, but in trust, and with certain reservations, so as to be accountable to him for the disposal of it. In respect of other men, we are indeed true proprietors of our estates: but in respect of God, we are but stewards; and he will call us to an account how we have laid them out. So much as we need is ours; but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our family, in the rank wherein God hath placed us, all that is given to us, that we may give it to others. And if God hath been liberal to us in the blessings of this life, it is on purpose to give us an opportunity, and to engage us to be so to others that stand in need of our charity; and we are false to our trust, if we keep those things to our selves, which we receive from God for this very end that we might distribute them to others, according to the proportion of our ability and their necessity. This is to hide our Lord's talent in a napkin, and that which thou storest up in this case is unjustly detained by thee; for God intended it should have been for bread for the hungry, and for cloaths for the naked, for the relief and support of those who were ready to perish.

3. The uncharitable man is impious in flighting of God's providence. He does not consider that riches and poverty are of the Lord, that he can soon change our condition, and that it is an easy thing with him to make a rich man poor. We do not sufficiently reverence the providence which rules the world, if when God hath blest us with plenty and abundance, we have no pity and regard for those that are in need. God can soon turn the wheel, and lay thee as low as the poor man whom thou dost neglect. He can *cast down the mighty from their seat, and exalt the humble and meek; fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich empty away*.

God's providence could easily have disposed of things otherwise, to have secured every man from want: but he hath on purpose order'd this variety of conditions, high and low, rich and poor, not that some men might have an advantage to insult over and despise others, but that there might be an opportunity for the exercise of several virtues; that the poor might have an opportunity to exercise their dependance upon God, and their patience and submission to his will; and that the rich might shew their temperance, and moderation, and charity.

4. Unmercifullness to the poor is a plain demonstration that we do not love God, and that all our other pretences to religion are hypocritical, and insincere. St. James tells us, that *pure religion and undefiled before God and the father, is this, to visit the fatherless and the widow*, Ja. i. 27. That *the wisdom which is from above is full of mercy and good fruits*, Ch. iii. 17. St. John represents this uncharitable disposition as utterly inconsistent with the true love of God, 1 John iii. 17. *But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him; how dwelleth the love of God in him?* In vain does such a man pretend to love God; nay, Ch. iv. v. 20. he tells us that it is impossible such a man should love God. *If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* This deserves to be seriously consider'd by those who make a great shew of devotion, and are at great pains in prayer, and fasting, and reading, and hearing the word of God, and in all other frugal exercises of religion, which stand them in no money; lest all their labour be lost for want of this one necessary and essential part; lest with the young man in the gospel, after they have kept all other commandments, they be rejected by Christ for lack of *this one thing*. I have done with the first part of the observation, that unmercifullness is a very great sin, I proceed to the

2d, That it is such a sin, as alone, and without any other guilt, is sufficient to ruin a man for ever. The parable lays the rich man's condemnation upon this; it was the guilt of this sin that tormented him when he was in hell. The scripture is full of severe threatenings against this sin. *Prov. xxi. 13. Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.* God will have no regard or pity for the man that regardeth not the poor. That is a terrible text, *Jam. ii. 13. He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.*

Our Saviour hath two parables to represent to us the danger of this sin; this here in the text, and that in *Luke xii.* concerning the covetous man that enlarged his barns, and was still laying up, but laid nothing out upon the poor: upon which our Saviour makes this observation, which is the moral of the parable, *v. 21. So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God;* so shall he be, such an issue of his folly may every one expect, who layeth up treasure for himself, but does not lay up riches with God. How is that? The scripture tells us, by works of mercy and charity; this our Saviour calls *laying up for our selves treasures in heaven*, *Matth. vi. 20.* And *Luke xii. 33.* he calls giving of alms, *providing for our selves bags that wax not old, a treasure in heaven that faileth not.*

There is no particular grace and virtue to which the promise of eternal life is so frequently made in scripture, as to this of mercy and charity to the poor. *Matth. v. 7. Blessed are the mercifull, for they shall find mercy.* Which promise, as it does not exclude a reward in this world, so it seems principally to respect the mercy of God at the great day, *Luke xiv. 12, 13, 14. When thou makest a feast, invite not the rich, for they will recompense thee again: but invite the poor, and the maimed, and the lame, and the blind, for they cannot recompense thee; but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just,* *Luke xvi. 9. Make therefore to your selves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations,* *1 Tim. vi. 17, 18, 19. Charge them that are rich in this world, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation, as the word *σπουδαῖς* is sometimes used, a good treasure against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life.*

But the most considerable text of all other to this purpose, is in *Matth. xxv.* where our Saviour gives us a description of the judgment of the great day: And if that be a true and proper representation of the process of that day, then the grand enquiry will be, what works of charity have been done or neglected by us, and accordingly sentence shall be past upon us.

The proper result from all this discourse is to persuade men to this necessary duty. Our eternal happiness does not so much depend upon the exercise of any one single grace or virtue, as this of charity and mercy. Faith and repentance are more general and fundamental graces, and as it were the parents of all the rest: But of all single virtues the scripture lays the greatest weight upon this of charity; and if we do truly believe the precepts of the gospel, and the promises and threatenings of it, we cannot but have a principal regard to it.

I know how averse men generally are to this duty, which make them so full of excuses and objections against it.

1. They have children to provide for. This is not the case of all, and they whose case it is, may do well to consider, that it will not be amiss to leave a blessing, as well as an inheritance to their children.

2. They tell us, they intend to do something when they die. I doubt that very much; but granting their intention to be real, why should men chuse to spoil a good work, and to take away the grace and acceptableness of it, by the manner of doing? It shews a great backwardness to the work, when we defer it as long as we can. He that will not do good, till he be forced by the last necessity, *din noluit*, was long unwilling. It is one of the worst compliments we can put upon God, to give a thing to him when we can keep it no longer.

3. others say they may come to want themselves, and it is prudence to provide against that. To this I answer,

(1.) I believe that no man ever came the sooner to want for his charity. *David* hath an express observation to the contrary, *Psal. xxxvii. 25. I have been young and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.* And tho' he uses a general word, yet that by the *righteous* here he intended the *mercifull man*, is evident from the next words, *he is ever mercifull and lendeth.*

And besides *David's* observation, we have express promises of God to secure us against this fear, *Psal. xl. 1, 2. Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble, the Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth,* Prov. xxviii. 27. *He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack.*

(2.) Thou may'st come to want tho' thou give nothing ; thou may'st lose that which thou hast spared in this kind as well as the rest ; thou may'st lose all, and then thou art no better secured against want, than if thou hadst been charitable. Besides that, when thou art brought to poverty, thou wilt want the comfort of having done this duty, and may'st justly look upon the neglect of this duty as one of the causes of thy poverty.

(3.) After all our care to provide for our selves, we must trust the providence of God ; and a man can in no case so safely *commit himself to God as in well-doing.* If the providence of God (as we all believe) be peculiarly concern'd to bless one man more than another, I dare say the charitable man will not have the least portion.

(4.) There is a worse objection than all these made by some grave men, who would be glad under a pretense of piety to slip themselves out of this duty ; and that is this, that it favours of popery to press good works with so much earnestness upon men, as if we could merit heaven by them ; so that they dare not be charitable out of a pious fear, as they pretend, lest hereby they should entertain the doctrine of merit.

But if the truth were known, I doubt covetousness lies at the bottom of this objection : However it is fit it should be answered. And,

(1.) I say that no man that is not prejudiced either by his education or interest, can think that a creature can merit any thing at the hand of God, to whom all that we can possibly do, is antecedently due ; much less that we can merit so great a reward as that of eternal happiness.

(2.) Tho' we deny the merit of good works, yet we firmly believe the necessity of them to eternal life. And that they are necessary to eternal life, is as good an argument to persuade a wise man to do them, as if they were meritorious ; unless a man be so vain-glorious as to think heaven not worth the having unless he purchase it himself at a valuable consideration.

And now let me earnestly intreat you, as you love God and your own souls, not to neglect this duty ; lest you bring your selves to the same miserable state with this rich man, to whom the least charity that could be ask'd was denied. Our Saviour hath purposely left this parable on record, to be a testimony and a witness to us ; lest we being guilty of the same sin, *should come into the same place of torment.*

And if any ask me according to what proportion of his estate he ought to be charitable ? I cannot determine that. Only, let no man neglect his duty, because I cannot (and it may be no one else can) tell him the exact proportion of his charity to his estate. There are some duties that are strictly determined, as those of justice ; but God hath left our charity to be a *free-will offering.* In the proportion of this duty, every one must determine himself by prudence and the love of God : God hath left this duty undetermined, to try the largeness of our hearts towards him ; only to encourage us to be *abundant in this grace,* he hath promised, that according to the proportion of our charity, shall be the degree of our happiness, *2 Cor. ix. 6. He that soweth plentifully, shall reap plentifully.* But let us be sure to do something in this kind ; any part of our estate rather than none.

I will conclude with that excellent counsel of the son of *Syrach*, Eccl. iv. *My son defraud not the poor, and make not the needy eye to wait long; make not a hungry soul sorrowfull, neither provoke a man in his distress; add not more trouble to a heart that is vexed, defer not to give to him that is in need. Reject not the supplication of the afflicted, nor turn away thy face from a poor man; turn not away thy eye from the needy, and give him none occasion to curse thee. For if he curse thee in the bitterness of his soul, his prayers shall be heard of him that made him. Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the poor, and give him a friendly answer with meekness. Be as a father to the fatherless, and instead of a husband to their mother; so shalt thou be as the son of the most high, and he shall love thee more than thy mother doth.*

S E R M O N LXXIII.

The Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus*.

LUKE XVI. 19, 20.

There was a certain rich man, which was cloathed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores.

The Second Sermon on this Text.

I Proceed to our second observation, that a man may be poor and miserable in this world, and yet dear to God. This beggar *Lazarus*, tho' he was so much slighted, and despised in his life-time by this great rich man, yet it appeared when he came to die, that he was not neglected by God, for he gave his Angels charge concerning him, to convey him to happiness; v. 22. *The beggar died, and was carried into Abraham's bosom.*

But this truth is not only represented to us in a parable, but exemplified in the life of our blessed Saviour. Never was any man so dear to God as he was, for he was *his only begotten son, his beloved son, in whom he was well pleased*: And yet how poor and mean was his condition in this world! infomuch that the Jews were offended at him, and could not own one that appeared in so much meanness, for the true Messiah. He was born of mean parents, and persecuted as soon as he was born; he was destitute of worldly accommodations; *The foxes had holes, and the birds of the air had nests; but the son of man had not where to lay his head. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*

God could have sent his son into the world with majesty and great glory, and have made all the kings of the earth to have bowed before him, and paid homage to him: but the wisdom of God chose rather that he should appear in a poor and humble, in a suffering and afflicted condition, to confound the pride of the world, who measure the love of God by these outward things, and think that God hates all those whom he permits to be afflicted.

Now it was not possible to give a greater and clearer demonstration of this truth, that goodness and suffering may meet together in the same person, than in the son of God, *who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and to put him to grief.*

Afflictions in this world are so far from being a sign of God's hatred, that they are an argument of his love and care; *whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* Those he designs for great things hereafter he trains up by great hardships in this world, and by many tribulations prepares

prepares them for a kingdom. This course God took more especially in the first planting of christianity; the *poor* chiefly were those that *received the gospel*. Not many mighty, nor many noble; but the *base things of the world, and the things that were despised did God chuse*. Hearken, my beloved brethren, saith St. James, ch. ii. 5. *Hath not God chosen the poor in this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him?*

Now this consideration should persuade to patience under the greatest sufferings and afflictions in this world. God may be our father, and chasten us severely; nay, this very thing is rather an argument that he is so. God may love us tho' the world hate us. 'Tis but exercising a little patience, and these storms will blow over, and we shall be removed into a calmer region, where *all tears shall be wiped from our eyes; and death and sorrow shall be no more*. This was the portion of the Son of God here; but it is a faithful saying, that if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him. Therefore those who suffer in this world ought not to be moved, as though some strange thing happened unto them; but should rather rejoice, in as much as they are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, they also may be glad with exceeding joy, 1 Pet. 4. 12, 13. I proceed to a

Third observation, which is the different estate of good and bad men after this life; *Lazarus died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man died, and went to hell*. This the justice of the divine providence seems to require; so that if there had been no revelation of God to this purpose, it is a thing very credible to natural reason, whether we consider God or our selves. If we consider God, our reason tells us, that he is the holy and righteous governor of the world, and consequently, that he loves goodness, and hates sin; and therefore is concern'd to countenance the one, and discountenance the other, in such a solemn and publick manner, as may vindicate his holiness and justice to the whole world. Now the dispensations of his providence are promiscuous in this world; and therefore it seems very reasonable, that there should be a general assize, a fair and open trial; when *God will render to every man according to his works*.

And if we consider our selves, this will appear very credible; for this hath been the constant opinion, not only of the common people, but of the wisest persons, who had only the light of nature to guide them. Nay, if we do but search our own consciences, we shall find an inward and secret acknowledgment of this, in that inward peace and satisfaction we find in any good action, and in that shame, and fear, and horror, that haunts a man after the commission of any, tho' never so secret a sin.

And as reason and scripture together do assure us of a future judgment; so likewise, that men, when they pass out of this world, shall meet with the proper consequences and rewards of their actions in the other. And tho' the happiness or misery of men be not so compleat as it shall be after the public judgment; yet it is unspeakable great. *Lazarus* is represented as very happy immediately after his passing out of this world; he is said to be *carried into Abraham's bosom*: by which the *Jews* express the happiness of the future state. And the rich man is represented, as in great anguish and torment. But what the happiness of good men, and the misery of wicked men shall be in the other state, we can but now imperfectly and unskillfully describe. Each of these I have in another discourse spoken something to. I proceed to a

Fourth observation, the vast difference between men's conditions in this world, and the other. The rich man prospered here, and was afterwards tormented: *Lazarus* was poor and miserable in this world, and happy in the other; v. 25. *Remember that thou in thy life-time receivest thy good things, and Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented*. And it is very agreeable to the wisdom of God, to make such a difference between mens conditions in this world and the other; and that for these two reasons.

1st, For the trying of mens virtue.

2^{dly}, In order to the recompensing of it.

1. For

i. For the tryal of men's virtue. For this end principally God ordains the sufferings of good men; and permits the best of his servants many times to be involved in the greatest calamities, to try their faith in him, and love to him; to improve their virtue, and to prevent those sins into which the mighty temptations of a perpetual prosperity are apt to draw even the best of men; to take off their affections from the love of this vain world, and to engage and fix them there, where they shall never repent that they have placed them; to prove their sincerity towards God, and to exercise their patience and submission to his will; to prepare them for the glory of the next life, and to make the happiness of heaven more welcome to them, when they shall come to it.

2^{dly}, In order to the recompensing of men: that they who will take up with the pleasures and enjoyments of this present world, and take no care for their future state; that they who will gratify their senses, and neglect their immortal souls, may inherit the proper consequences of their wretched choice. And on the other hand, they who love God above all things, and had rather endure the greatest evils, than do the least, that they who look beyond the present scene of things, and believe the reality and eternity of the other state; and live accordingly, may not be disappointed in their hopes, and serve God and suffer for him for nothing. From this consideration of the difference between the condition of men in this world and the other, we may infer,

i. That no man should measure his felicity or unhappiness by his lot in this world. If thou receivest thy good things, art rich and honourable, and has as much of the things of this world as thine heart can wish; art splendidly attired, and *farest sumptuously every day*; art *in no trouble like other men, neither art plagued like other folk*; do not upon this bless thy self as the happy man. On the other hand, art thou poor and miserable, destitute of all the conveniences and accommodations of this life; do not repine at thy lot; and murmur at God for having dealt hardly with thee. No man can be pronounced happy or miserable for what befalls him in this life; *no man knows love or hatred by these things*; this life is but a short and inconsiderable duration, and it matters not much what entertainment we meet withal, as we are passing through this world: The state of eternity is that wherein the happiness or misery of man shall be determined. He is the happy man who is so in that life which shall never have an end; and he is miserable that shall be so for ever.

2. We should not set too great a value upon the blessings of this life. We may *receive our good things* here, and *be tormented* hereafter; nay, this very thing will be no inconsiderable part of our torment, none of the least aggravations of our misery, that we *did receive our good things*. Nothing afflicts a man more, and toucheth him more sensibly when he is in misery, than the remembrance of his former prosperity; had he never been happy, his misery would be the less.

Therefore we should be so far from applauding our selves in the prosperity of this world, that we should rather be afraid of *receiving our good things* here; lest God should put us off with these things, and this should be all our portion, and lest our misery in the next world should be the greater for our having been happy.

The felicities of this world are transient, and tho' our happiness were never so compleat, yet it is going off, and passing away; and when it is gone and past, if misery succeed it, it had better never have been. *Remember, thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things*; these things are only for our *life-time*, and how short is that! did men seriously consider this, they would not set such a price upon any of the transient enjoyments of this life, as for the sake of them to neglect the great concerns of another world. We are apt to be dazzled with the present glittering of worldly glory and prosperity: But if we would look upon these things as they will be shortly gone from us, how little would they signify! the rich man here in the parable did, no doubt, think himself a much happier man than poor *Lazarus* that lay at his door; and yet after a little while how glad would he have been to have changed conditions with this poor man! when he was *in torments*, then no doubt he wish'd that he had suffer'd all the misery

fery and want in this world, which *Lazarus* did, provided he might have been comforted as he was, and carried by Angels into *Abraham's bosom*. We should value this world, and look upon it, as this rich man did, not when he enjoyed it, but when he was taken from it; and we should esteem it, and use it while we may, as he wisht he had done when it was too late.

3. We should not be excessively troubled if we meet with hardship and affliction here in this world; because those whom God designs for the greatest happiness hereafter, may receive *evil things* here. Thus our blessed Saviour, *the captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings*: this was the method which God used towards his own Son, first *he suffered, and then enter'd into glory*. He suffered more than any of us can bear; and yet he supported himself under all his sufferings by the consideration of the glory that would follow; *for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, and despised the shame*.

The same consideration should arm us with patience and constancy under the greatest evils of this life. The evils that we lie under are passing and going off; but the happiness is to come. And if the happiness of the next world were no greater, nor of longer continuance, than the miseries of this world; or if they did equally answer one another; yet a wise man would chuse to have misery first, and his happiness last. For if his happiness were first, all the pleasure and comfort of it would be eaten out by dismal apprehensions of what was to follow: but his sufferings, if they were first, would be sweeten'd by the consideration of his future happiness; and the bitterness of his sufferings would give a quicker relish to his happiness when it should come, and make it greater.

But a good man under the sufferings of this life, hath not only this comfort, that his happiness is to come, but likewise that it shall be infinitely greater than his sufferings; that these are but short, but that shall never have an end. And this was that which fortified the first christians against all that the malice and cruelty of the world could do against them. They thought themselves well paid, if *through many tribulations they might at last enter into the kingdom of God*; because they believed that the joys of the next life would abundantly recompense all their labours and sufferings in this world. They expected a mighty reward, far beyond all their sufferings; they were firmly persuaded that they should be vast gainers at the last. So the Apostle tells us of himself, *Rom. viii. 18. I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed*. And to the same purpose, *2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. Our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for us an eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal*. If we would consider all things together, and fix our eyes as much upon the happiness and glory of the next world, as upon the pomp and splendor of this; if we would look as much at *the things which are not seen, as the things whilst are seen*, we should easily perceive, that he who suffers in this world does not renounce his happiness, only puts it out to interest, upon terms of the greatest advantage.

4. We should do all things with a regard to our future and eternal state. It matters not much what our condition is in this world, because that's to continue but for a little while: but we ought to have a great and serious regard to that state that never shall have an end. Therefore whenever we are doing any thing, we should consider what influence such an action will have upon the happiness or misery of the next life. We should measure every action, and every condition of our lives by the reference of them to eternity. To be rich and great in this world will contribute nothing to our future happiness; all these things which we so much dote upon, and pursue with so much eagerness, will not commend any man to God; they will signify nothing when we come to appear before our judge. Death will strip us of these things, and in the other world, the soul of the poorest man that ever lived shall be upon equal terms with the richest. Nothing but holiness and virtue will then avail us; and it is but a little while and we shall all certainly be of this mind, that the best thing men can do in this world, is to provide for the other. I proceed to a

Fifth obfervation, that the ftate of men in the next world is fixt and unchangeable ; which I ground upon v. 26. *Between us and you there is a great gulf fixt, fo that they that would pafs from hence to you cannot, neither can they pafs to us that would come from thence.* By which words our Saviour feems not only to intend, that they that are in heaven and hell can have no communication and intercourfe with one another ; but likewise that they are lodg'd in an immutable ftate. Thofe that are happy are like to continue fo ; and thofe that are miserable are immutably fixt in that ftate.

1. As to thofe that are in happinefs there can be no great doubt. For what can tempt men that have fo narrowly escap'd the dangers and temptations of a wicked world, and are poffefft of fo great a happinefs by the free grace and mercy of God, to do any thing whereby they may forfeit their happinefs ; or fo much as to entertain a thought of offending that God, to whom they cannot but be fenfible how infinitely they are obliged ? In this imperfect ftate few men have fo little goodnefs as to fin without temptation, but in that ftate where men are perfectly good, and can have no temptation to be otherwife, it is not imaginable that they fhould fall from that ftate.

2. As to the ftate of the damned, that *that* likewise is immutable the fcripture does feem plainly enough to affert, when it calls it *an everlafting deftruction from the prefence of the Lord*, and ufes fuch expreffions to fet forth the continuance of their mifery, as fignify the longeft and moft interminable duration, expreffions of as great an extent as thofe which are ufed to fignify the eternal happinefs of the bleffed ; and as large and unlimited, as any are to be had in thofe languages wherein the fcriptures are written.

Befides that wicked men in the other world are in fcripture represented as in the fame condition with the devils, of whom there is no ground to believe that any of them ever did or will repent. Not becaufe repentance is impoffible in its own nature to thofe that are in extream mifery ; but becaufe there is no place left for it. Being under an irreverfible doom, there is no encouragement to repentance, no hope of mercy and pardon, without which repentance is impoffible. For if a man did utterly despair of pardon, and were affured upon good ground, that God would never fhew mercy to him, in this cafe a man would grow desperate, and not care what he did. He that knows that whatever he does, he is miserable and undone, will not matter how he demeans himfelf. All motives to Repentance are gone after a man once knows it will be to no purpofe. And this the fcripture feems to represent to us, as the cafe of the devils and damned fpirits. Becaufe their ftate is finally determined, and they are concluded under an irreverfible fentence, therefore repentance is impoffible to them.

Sorry, no doubt, they are, and heartily troubled that by their own fin and folly they have brought this mifery upon themfelves, and they cannot but conceive an everlafting difpleafure againft themfelves, for having been the caufe and authors of their own ruin ; and the reflection of this will be a perpetual fpring of difcontent, and fill their minds with eternal rage and vexation ; and fo long as they feel the intolerable punifhments of fin, and groan under the fupportable torments of it, and fee no end of this miserable ftate, no hope of getting out of it, they can be no otherwife affected, than with difcontent to themfelves, and rage and fury againft God.

They are indeed penitent fo far, as to be troubled at themfelves for what they have done ; but this trouble works no change and alteration in them ; they ftill hate God who inflicts thefe punifhments upon them, and who they believe is determined to continue them in this miserable ftate. The prefent anguifh of their condition, and their despair of bettering it, makes them mad ; and their minds are fo diftracted by the wildnefs of their paffions, and their fpirits fo exasperated and fet on fire by their own giddy motions, that there can be no reft and f Silence in their fouls, not fo much as the liberty of one calm and fedate thought.

Or if at any time they reflect upon the evil of their fins, and fhould entertain any thoughts of returning to God and their duty, they are prefently checkt with this confideration, that their cafe is determined, that God is implacably

offended with them, and is inexorably and peremptorily resolved to make them miserable for ever; and during this persuasion, no man can return to the love of God and goodness, without which there can be no repentance.

This consideration, of the immutable state of men after this life, should engage us with all seriousness and diligence to endeavour to secure our future happiness. God hath *set before us good and evil, life and death*, and we may yet *chuse* which we please; but in the other world, we must stand to that choice which we have made here, and inherit the consequences of it.

By sin mankind is brought into a miserable state; but our condition is not desperate and past remedy. God hath sent his son *to be a prince and a saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins*. So that tho' our case be bad, it need not continue so, if it be not our own fault. There is a possibility now of changing our condition for the better, and of laying the foundation of a perpetual happiness for our selves. The grace of God calls upon us, and is ready to assist us; so that no man's case is so bad, but there is a possibility of bettering it, if we be not wanting to our selves, and will make use of the grace which God offers, who is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men. Under the influence and assistance of this grace, those who are *dead in trespasses and sins*, may *pass from death to life*, may be *turned from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God*. So long as we are in this world there is a possibility of being translated from one state to another, from the *dominion of satan, into the kingdom of God's dear son*. But if we neglect the opportunities of this life, and stand out against the offers of God's grace and mercy, there will no overtures be made to us in the other world. After this life is ended, God will try us no more; our final miscarriage in this world will prove fatal to us in the other, and we shall not be permitted to live over again to correct our errors. *As the tree falls so it shall lye*; such a state as we are settled in, when we go out of this world, shall be fix'd in the other, and there will be no possibility of changing it. We are yet *in the hand of our own counsel*, and by God's grace we may mould and fashion our own fortune. But if we trifle away this advantage, we shall *fall into the hands of the living God*, out of which there is no redemption. God hath yet left heaven and hell to our choice, and we had need to look about us, and chuse well, who can chuse but once for all and for ever. There is yet a space and opportunity left us of repentance; but so soon as we step out of this life, and are enter'd upon the other world, our condition will be sealed, never to be revers'd. And because after this life there will be no further hopes of mercy, there will be no possibility of repentance. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation; therefore to day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts; lest God swear in his wrath that we shall not enter into his rest*. I proceed to a

Sixth observation, that a standing revelation of God is evidence sufficient for divine things. *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them*; that is, they have the books of *Moses* and the *Prophets*, written by men divinely inspired, these do sufficiently declare to them the will of God and their duty; and it is unreasonable to demand or expect that God should do more for their conviction and satisfaction.

I know very well the text speaks only of the scriptures of the Old Testament, those of the New being not then extant when this parable was deliver'd. But what is here said concerning the scriptures of the Old Testament, is equally applicable to the New; and tho' *Abraham* do only recommend *Moses* and the *Prophets*, there is no doubt but he would have said the same concerning *Christ* and his *Apostles*, if the books of the New Testament had been then extant. So that what I shall say upon this observation, does indifferently concern the whole scripture.

And that I may make out this observation more fully, I shall take these *five* things into consideration.

1st, What we are to understand by a divine revelation.

2^{dly}, Give a brief account of the several kinds of it.

3^{dly}, Shew what advantage this standing revelation of the scriptures hath above any other way of conveying the will of God to the world.

4^{thly},

4thly, That there is sufficient evidence for the divinity of the scriptures.

5thly, That it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for our conviction, than to afford such a standing revelation of his mind and will. I shall go over these as briefly as I can. I begin with the

1st, What we are to understand by a divine revelation. By a divine revelation we are to understand a *supernatural discovery, or manifestation of any thing to us*; I say *supernatural*, because it may either be immediately by God, or by the mediation of Angels, as most, if not all the revelations of the Old Testament were. A *supernatural discovery or manifestation*, either immediately to our minds, by our understandings and inward faculties; (for I do not so well understand the distinction between understanding and imagination, as to be careful to take notice of it,) or else mediately to our understandings by the mediation of our outward senses, as by an external appearance to our bodily eyes, or by a voice and sound to the sense of hearing: A *discovery or manifestation of a thing*, whether it be such as cannot be known at all by the use of our natural reason and understanding; or such as may be discovered by natural light, but is more clearly revealed or made known, or we are awakened to a more particular and attentive consideration of it. For it is not at all unsuitable to the wisdom of God to make a *supernatural discovery* to us of such things as may be known by the light of nature, either to give us a clearer manifestation of such truths as were more obscurely known, and did as it were lie buried in our understandings; or else to quicken our minds to a more serious and lively consideration of those truths.

2dly, For the several kinds of divine revelations. That they were various, the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, *ch. i. 1. God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to the fathers by the Prophets*; where by *Prophets* we are to understand not only those who did foretell future things, but any person that was divinely inspired, and to whom God was pleased to make any supernatural discovery of himself.

Now the several kinds of revelation taken notice of by the *Jews*, are visions; dreams; prophecy; oracle; inspiration, or that which they call the Holy Ghost; voice *Bath-col*; or that which was the highest of all, which they call *gradus Mosaicus*, the degree of revelation, which was peculiar to *Moses*. The *jewish* writers, especially *Maimonides*, have many subtil observations about the differences of these several kinds of revelation, which depend upon subtil and philosophical distinctions of the faculties of perception; as that some of these revelations were by impression only upon the understanding; some only upon the imagination; some upon both; some upon the outward senses; but the simple and plain difference between them, so far as there is any ground in scripture to distinguish them, seems to be this; vision was a representation of something to a man when he was waking, in opposition to dreams, which were representations made to men in their sleep. Prophecy might be either dream or vision; and the *Jews* observe, that it was always one of these two ways, which they grounded upon *Numb. xii. 6. If there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make my self known to him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream*. But prophecy in the strict notion of it, had this peculiarly belonging to it, that it was not only monitory or instructive, but did foretell some event of concernment to others; and the *jewish* Doctors tell us, that it was a clearer revelation, and carried a greater assurance along with it, and that this was common to all the three, that there was something of extasy and transport of mind in all these.

The fourth sort of revelation, which was by oracle, which is call'd *Urim* and *Thummim*, was a rendering of answers to questions, by the High-priest looking upon the stones in the breast-plate; which how it was done, is uncertain.

The fifth sort of revelation is that which they call the Holy Ghost, which was a more calm and gentle inspiration, without any extraordinary transport of mind or extasy; such as *David* had in the writing of the *Psalms*.

The lowest of all was that which they call'd *Bath-col*, which was by a voice from heaven ; and this is the way of revelation, which the *Jews* observed did only continue among them from the days of the Prophet *Malachi* to our Saviour.

The highest of all was that which they call'd *gradus Mosaicus*, to which the *Jews* give several prerogatives above all the other ways of revelation ; as that it was done by impression merely upon the understanding, without extasy, or rapture, or transport, when he was waking, and in his ordinary temper, and his senses not bound up either by extasy or sleep ; that it was a revelation immediately from God himself, and not by the mediation of Angels, without any fear, or amazement, or fainting, which was incident to other Prophets ; and the spirit of prophecy rested upon him, and he could exert it arbitrarily, and put it forth when he would. Of which thus much is evidently true from the story of him, that the spirit of prophecy did rest more constantly upon him, and that he could exert it with greater freedom, and without any discernable amazement or transport from his ordinary temper. But that it was by impression merely upon his understanding, as that is a distinct faculty from the imagination, is not so certain : that it was always by an immediate communication from God, without the mediation of Angels, seems not to be true ; for St. *Stephen* tells us, that *the law was given by the disposition of Angels*, Acts vii. 53. And St. *Paul*, that *it was ordained by the Angels in the hand of a mediator*, that is *Moses*, Gal. iii. 19. But that the revelation which was made to him, had some singular prerogatives above those of other Prophets, is plain from scripture, Numb. xii. 5. 6, 7, 8. when *Aaron* and *Miriam* contended with *Moses* as being equal to him, God tells them that there was a vast difference between him and other Prophets ; *Hear now my words, if there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make my self known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so — With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches, &c.* Exod. xxxiii. 11. *And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend*, Deut. xxxiv. 10. *And there arose not a Prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.* All which signify at least this, that God made the clearest, and most familiar, and most perfect discoveries to *Moses* of any of the Prophets ; only our Lord *Jesus Christ*, by whom God hath discovered his will to us under the New Testament, did exceed *Moses* ; *Moses* being but a faithful servant, that is *humilis amicus*, a meaner sort of friend ; but the Lord *Jesus Christ*, the only begotten son of God, who came from the bosom of his father, and was intimately acquainted with the secrets of his will, and had not the spirit given him by measure, but the most plentiful effusion of it, being anointed above his fellows.

Now these being the several sorts and degrees of revelation, which God hath made of himself to the world, the holy scriptures are a system or collection of these, the authentic instruments or record, by which the things revealed any of these ways, are transmitted to us, and is therefore call'd *the word of God*, as containing those things which God in several ages hath spoken to the world ; that is, matters of divine revelation, which are necessary to be known by men, in order to their eternal happiness. And this being now the great and standing revelation of God, which is to continue to the end of the world, I intend to limit my discourse solely to this, as being the only revelation which we are concern'd to enquire after.

And therefore in the 3d place to shew you what advantage this standing revelation of the scriptures hath above private revelations (made to particular persons, and frequently repeated and renewed in several ages ; that so it may appear both agreeable to the wisdom of God to settle revelations in this way, as being more commodious ; and likewise to his goodness, it being a real privilege which these latter ages of the world enjoy, that they have a more fixt and certain way of being acquainted with the will of God, than those ages had, which were govern'd by such private revelations, as were now and then made to particular persons. And the advantages are these.

1. It is a most certain way of conveyance of things, and more secure and free from imposture. Suppose a revelation made to a particular person, which is of general concernment; that this may have a general and lasting effect, he must impart it to others, as many as he can, and give them the best assurance he can of it; and these must relate it to others; and so it must pass from hand to hand, to be delivered from parents to their children. Now this way of conveying a revelation by oral report must needs be liable to many uncertainties, both by involuntary mistakes, through weakness of memory or understanding, and willfull falsifications and impostures, out of malice and design. So that the effect of an unrecorded revelation can neither be large nor lasting; it can but reach a few persons, and continue a little while in its full credibility; and the further it goes, the weaker, like circles made in water, which the more they enlarge themselves, and the longer they continue, the less discernible they are, till at length they quite disappear. Whereas being once recorded by persons secured from error, by supernatural and divine assistance, they are not liable to those easy falsifications or mistakes, which traditional reports and relations are necessarily, through human malice or weakness, liable to.

2. It is a more general and universal way of conveyance; which is evident from the common experience of the world, who have pitched upon this way of writing things in books, as that which doth most easily convey the knowledge and notice of things to the generality of men.

3. It is a more uniform way of conveyance; that is, things that are once written and propagated that way, lye equally open to all, and come in a manner with equal credit to all; it being not morally possible that a common book, that passeth through all hands, and which is of vast importance and concernment, should be liable to any material corruption, without a general conspiracy and agreement; which cannot be, but that it must be generally known. So that considering the commonness, and universal concernment of this book of the scriptures, all men are in a manner equally, that is, every man is sufficiently and competently assur'd of the credit of it; that is, that we are not in any material thing impos'd upon by false copies. But in traditional revelation it is quite otherwise; tradition being a very unequal and ununiform way of conveyance. For seeing it may be of general concernment, and all cannot have it at the first hand, that is, immediately from him to whom it was made, but some at the second, others at the third, fourth, or fifth hand, or much further off; the credit of it will be necessarily weaken'd by every remove. A report that comes through many hands, being like the argument we call *induction*; and as the strength and goodness of that depends upon the truth of every one of those instances that make it up, so that if any of them fail, the whole argument is naught; so the credit of a report that passeth through twenty hands, depends upon the integrity and sufficiency of all the relators; and whatever there is either of falshood and malice, or of incapacity of understanding, or frailty of memory in any of the relators, so much weakness is derived into the report or testimony; and consequently the assurance which we can have of a private revelation, which is deliver'd traditionally through a great many persons, must needs be very unequal.

4. It is a more lasting way of conveyance. Which likewise appears by experience, we having now nothing at all of the history of ancient times, but what is conveyed down to us in writing.

5. It is a more human way of conveyance, which requires less of miracle and supernatural interposition for the preservation of it. This book of the scriptures may with ordinary human care be transmitted entire, and free from any material error, to all succeeding ages: But revelations unwritten, if they have any lasting and considerable effect, they must at least in every age be renewed and repeated; otherwise in a very short space, either through the unfaithfulness, or carelessness and frailty of men, they will either be quite lost, or so corrupted and depraved, that they will signify nothing.

From all which it appears, that we have so little cause to murmur and repine
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at the providence of God, which in these latter ages of the world does not make those more immediate discoveries and manifestations of himself to us, that he did to former ages; that we have rather great reason to admire the wisdom and goodness of God's providence, which hath privileged us with this standing revelation of his *written word*, which hath so many ways the advantage of frequent and extraordinary revelation, and in respect of the generality of mankind, is much more usefull and effectual to its end. I know there are some that have endeavour'd to persuade the world, that doctrines may much better be preserved by common rumour and report, than by writing and record; but I hope there is no man so destitute of common sense as to believe them contrary to the experience of all men.

I come now to the *4th* thing I propos'd to be consider'd; namely, that there is sufficient evidence of the divinity of the scriptures. By the divinity of the scriptures, I mean, that they were revealed by God, and that the things contained in them were not invented by men, but discovered to men by God; and that the pen-men of these books did not write their own private conceptions, but were inspired by the Holy Ghost. Now if we can be satisfy'd of this, we ought to receive the scriptures with the same reverence, as if an Angel from heaven should declare these things unto us, or as if God should immediately reveal them to our minds; for nothing can come with greater authority than this, that we believe it to be revealed by God; and provided we be assured of this, it matters not which way; the thing hath the same authority.

Now that we have sufficient evidence of the divinity of the scriptures, will best appear, by considering what is sufficient to give authority to a book, so that no prudent or reasonable man can question, but that the book was writ by him whose name it bears. For what evidence we would accept of for the authority of other books, we must not refuse in this case for the scriptures; if we do, we deal unequally, and it is a sign that we do not want evidence for the authority of the scriptures, but that we have no mind to believe them.

Now the utmost authority that any book is capable of, is, that it hath been transmitted down to us by the general and uncontroll'd testimony of all ages, and that the authority of it was never questioned in that age wherein it was written, nor invalidated ever since.

And this evidence we have for the authority of the scriptures. As for the Old Testament, I shall not now labour in the proof of that by arguments proper to it self, but shall take the divinity of them upon the authority of the New; which if it be proved, is sufficient evidence for it, tho' there were no other.

Now for the scriptures of the New Testament, I desire but these *two* things to be granted to me at first.

1. That all were written by those persons whose names they bear: and for this we have as much authority as for any books in the world, and so much as may satisfy men in other cases, and therefore not to be rejected in this.

2. That those who wrote those books were men of integrity, and did not willfully falsify in any thing; and this cannot reasonably be denied, because these very persons gave the utmost evidence that men could give of their integrity. The highest attestation that any man can give of the truth of what he relates, is to lay down his life for the testimony of it; and this the Apostles did.

Now if this be granted, that they did not falsify in their relations concerning the miracles of Christ, and his resurrection, and the miraculous gifts which were bestowed upon the Apostles after his ascension; this is as great an evidence as the world can give, and as the thing is capable of, that our Saviour was *a teacher come from God*, and that the Apostles were extraordinarily assisted by the Holy Ghost; and if this be granted, what can be desired more to prove the divinity of their writings?

But it may be said, that tho' the Apostles were granted to be men of integrity, and that they did not willfully falsify in their relations, yet they might be mistaken about those matters: But that they were not, we have as much evidence as can be for any thing of this nature, namely, that the things which are

related

related are plain sensible matters of fact, about which no man need mistake, unless he will; and they did not write things upon the report of others, who might possibly have designs to deceive, but upon the surest evidence in the world, their own knowledge, and the testimony of their senses; *the things that we have seen and heard, testify we unto you.* So that if they were mistaken in these things, no man can be sure of any thing; and by the same reason that we disbelieve the authority of the scriptures upon this account, we must believe nothing at all. This is in short the whole force of the argument for the divinity of the scriptures, which I might have enlarged infinitely upon; but I design now only briefly to represent to you, that we, who live at the distance of so many ages from the time of this revelation, are not destitute of sufficient evidence for the authority of the scriptures, and such evidence, as they who reject in other cases, are esteemed unreasonable.

I should come now to the

5th, and last thing, namely, that it is unreasonable to expect, that God should do more for our conviction, than to afford us a standing revelation of his mind and will, such as the books of the holy scriptures are. But this I shall refer to another opportunity, in a particular discourse upon the 31st verse, which contains the main design, the sum, and substance of this whole parable.

S E R M O N LXXIV.

The Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus*.

LUKE XVI. 31.

If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.

*The third
Sermon on
this Text.
Preach'd
at White-
hall, Ann.
1678.*

THESE words are the conclusion of that excellent parable of our Saviour concerning the rich man and *Lazarus*, and they are the final answer which *Abraham* gives to the rich man's last request; who being in great torment, and not able to obtain any ease for himself, is represented as concerned for his relations, whom he had left behind him upon earth, lest they also by their own carelessness and folly should plunge themselves into the same misery that he was in; and therefore he begs of *Abraham*, that he would send *Lazarus* to his father's house, where he had five brethren, that he might testify unto them, lest they also should come into that place of torment. To which request *Abraham* answers, that there was no necessity of such an extraordinary course to be used towards those who had sufficient means of conviction so near at hand, if they would but hearken to them, and make use of them. *Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.*

But the rich man presseth his request further, upon this reason, that they might not perhaps be moved by *Moses and the Prophets*, nay, it was likely they would not be moved by them; for they had allways had them, and yet they remained impenitent: But if a special messenger should be sent to them from the dead, this certainly could not fail to awaken them, and bring them to repentance, v. 30. *And he said, nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead they will repent.* To which *Abraham* makes this peremptory reply, *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead.*

In which words *Abraham* absolutely denies that there is any such probability, much less certainty that those who reject a public credible revelation of God, such as that of the holy scriptures is, should be effectually convinced by a messenger

senger from the dead. And our Saviour brings in *Abraham* delivering himself very positively in this matter, and therefore we may presume it to be our Saviour's own sense, and may rely upon it for a truth; which however at first sight it may not be so evident, yet I hope in the progress of this discourse to make it sufficiently clear.

But before I undertake that, I shall premise a caution or two to prevent all mistake in this matter.

First, That we are not to understand these words too strictly and rigorously, as if the thing were simply and in it self impossible, that a man who is not convinced by hearing or reading *Moses* and *the Prophets*, should be brought to repentance any other way. For it is very possible in the nature of the thing, yea, and likely enough, that a man who is not convinced by calm evidence and persuasion, may yet be very much wrought upon by a strange and amazing accident; and if one, whom he had known when he was alive, should appear to him from the dead, and declare the certainty of a future state, and the condition of things in another world, there is little doubt to be made, but that this would more rouse and awaken him to consider his danger, than all the threatenings of God's word; and 'tis very possible that by the concurrence of God's grace, this might prove an effectual means to convince such a man, and to bring him to repentance. And yet for all this, it is not probable upon the whole matter, and if all circumstances be duly consider'd, that this should generally have a permanent effect upon Men, so as thoroughly to reclaim such persons as do obstinately resist the light and counsels of God's word.

Second, Another caution I would give is this, that we are not to understand these words so, as to weaken the force of that argument from miracles for the proof and confirmation of a divine doctrine; as if our Saviour intended to insinuate, that miracles are not a proper and sufficient argument to convince men. For our Saviour does not here oppose *Moses* and *the Prophets* to a miraculous testimony; but he advanceth the publick evidence and testimony which *Moses* and *the Prophets* had above the evidence of a single and private miracle; for *Moses* and *the Prophets* had their confirmation from miracles; and miracles are the great evidence and attestation which God hath always given to the divinity of any person or doctrine; and therefore *Abraham* cannot be thought to speak any thing to the prejudice of miracles, when he says, *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead*. Nay, so far is he from that, that this reasoning of his is rather for the advantage of miracles. For *Moses* and *the Prophets* had the confirmation of many and great, of public and unquestionable miracles; a credible relation whereof was conveyed down to after ages. So that if rational means of conviction were the thing desired, it was not likely that those, who were not persuaded by *Moses* and *the Prophets*, which were acknowledged by themselves to have had the confirmation of so many undoubted miracles, should in reason be convinced by a private and single miracle.

These considerations being premised by way of caution, I come now to make out the truth of what is here asserted in the text. And for the full clearing of this matter, I shall speak to these *two* propositions.

First, That it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a standing revelation of his mind and will; such as that of the holy scriptures is. And if so, then,

Secondly, That upon the whole matter it is very improbable, that those who reject this publick revelation of God, should be effectually convinced, tho' one should speak to them from the dead.

First, That it is unreasonable to expect that God should do more for the conviction of men, than to afford them a standing revelation of his mind and will; such as that of the holy scriptures is. This is strongly imply'd in *Abraham's* first answer, *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them*; as if he had said, having such means of conviction so near at hand, why should they desire and expect any other? It is in this case of the scriptures, as in that of God's pro-

vidence;

vidence ; God does not commonly prove his providence to men by extraordinary instances of his power, and by changing the course of nature, to convince every man in the world that he governs it : but by standing testimonies of his wisdom and power, and goodness ; by these God does sufficiently satisfy considerate men of his government and care of the world ; and tho' he do seldom manifest himself in supernatural and extraordinary ways, yet he hath not left himself without a witness, by the constant course of nature, in the returns of day and night, in the revolutions of the seasons of the year, *in that he gives us rain from heaven, and fruitfull seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.* And these standing arguments of his providence, tho' they be not so much taken notice of, because they are so common, yet they are daily miracles, and we can hardly imagine greater, and we should be strangely amazed at them, but that they are so very frequent and familiar.

The case is the same as to divine revelation. God hath not thought fit to gratify the perverse curiosity of men, by affording to every man a particular and immediate revelation of his mind and will : but he hath given us a standing revelation, which at first had the greatest and most miraculous confirmation, and he hath still left us sufficient means of being assured of the truth of this revelation, and of the confirmation that was at the first given to it ; and we tempt God, by demanding extraordinary signs, when we may receive so abundant satisfaction in an ordinary way. This being admitted, I shall proceed in the

Second Place to shew, that it is upon the whole matter, and all circumstances consider'd, very improbable, that those who reject this public revelation from God, should be effectually convinced, tho' one should speak to them from the dead. And this is that which is expressly asserted here in the text, *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.* Not but that any man would be very much startled and amazed, if one should come from the dead to warn him of the danger of his wicked life ; but yet for all that, it is very unlikely that they who obstinately and perversely refuse to be convinced by *Moses and the Prophets*, would be effectually persuaded, (that is, so as to be brought to repentance and reformation of their lives) *tho' one should rise from the dead.* And that for these reasons :

1. Because if such miracles were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect ; and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all.

2. Men have as great or greater reason to believe the threatenings of God's word, as the discourse of one that should speak to them from the dead.

3. The very same reason which makes men to reject the councils of God in his word, would in all probability hinder them from being convinced by a particular miracle.

4. Experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince those who are obstinately addicted and wedded to their lusts.

5. An effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of God's grace, which there is no reason to expect either in an extraordinary way, or in an extraordinary degree, after men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means which God hath appointed to that end.

1. If such miracles, as a special messenger from the dead to warn and admonish men, were frequent and familiar, it is very probable they would have but very little effect upon men ; and unless we suppose them common and ordinary, we have no reason to expect them at all. For it is unreasonable at first sight, that the worst and more obstinate sort of sinners should expect this, as a peculiar favour and privilege to themselves, and that God should not do as much for others, who have deserved it more, and would probably make better use of it ; and if these things were common, it is very probable that men would not be much moved by them. It may be, while the apprehension of such a thing were fresh upon them, they would take up some good resolutions ; as sinners usually do, while they are under present convictions of conscience, and the hand of

God, by some great affliction or sickness, lies heavy upon them : but still they would be apt to defer their repentance, and put it off 'till the present amazement were a little over, and the terror of their first apprehensions were abated and worn off by degrees, and after a little while they would return to their former course. And this is too probable, from what we see men do in other cases not very much remote from this. It is a very terrible and amazing thing to see a man die, and solemnly take his last leave of the world. The very circumstances of dying men are apt to strike us with horror : to hear such a man how sensibly he will speak of the other world, as if he were just come from it, rather than going to it ; how severely he will condemn himself for the folly and wickedness of his life ; with what passion he will wish that he had lived better, and served God more sincerely ; how seriously he will resolve upon a better life, if God would be pleased to raise him up, and try him but once more ; with what zeal and earnestness he will commend to his best friends and nearest relations a religious and virtuous course of life, as the only thing that will minister comfort to them when they come to be in his condition. Such discourses as these are very apt to move and affect men for the time, and to stir up in them very good resolutions, whilst the present fit and impressiion lasts : but because these sights are very frequent, they have seldom any great and permanent effect upon men. Men consider that it is a very common case, and sinners take example and encouragement from one another ; every one is affected for the present, but few are so effectually convinced, as to betake themselves to a better course.

And if apparitions from the dead were as common as it is for men to die, we may reasonably presume that the discourses of dead and dying, of those that are going, and those who come from the dead, would have much the same effect upon the generality of men.

But if we suppose this a singular case, (which there is no reason to do) in that case the effect would probably be this ; a man that was strongly addicted to his lusts, and had no mind to leave them, would be apt, when the fright was over, to be easily persuaded that all this was merely the work of fancy and imagination ; and the rather, because such things did not happen to others as well as to himself.

2. We have as great or greater reason to believe the warnings or threatenings of God's word, as the discourses of one that should come to us from the dead. For the threatenings of God's word against such sins as natural light convinceth men of, have the natural guilt and fears of men on their side, the particular testimony of every man's conscience, and the concurrent testimony of mankind to the probability of the thing ; and to give us full assurance of the truth and reality of them, we have a credible relation of great and unquestionable miracles wrought on purpose to give testimony to those persons who denounced those threatenings, that they came from God. So that here is a very public and authentick testimony given to the threatenings of God's word, more suitable to the generality of mankind, and of greater authority than a private apparition, or a single miracle ; and if *that* will not convince men, why should we suppose that *this* will ?

3. The very same reason which make men to *reject the counsels of God* in his word, would, in all probability, hinder men from being convinced by an apparition from the dead. It is not generally for want of evidence, that men do not yield a full and effectual assent to the truth of God's word, I mean, that they do not believe it so as to obey it ; but from the interest of some lust. The true cause is not in men's understandings, and because there is not reason enough to satisfy them, that the scriptures are the word of God : but in the obstinacy of their wills, which are enslaved to their lusts. And the disease being there, it is not to be cured by more evidence, but by more consideration, and by the grace of God, and better resolutions.

The man is addicted to some vice or other, and that makes him unwilling to entertain those truths which would check and controul him in his course. The light of God's word is offensive to him, and therefore he would shut it out. This

account

account our blessed Saviour gives of the enmity of the *Jews* against him and his doctrine, *John* iii. 19. *Light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; for every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh he to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.* Upon the same account it is, that men resist the doctrine of the holy scriptures; not because they have sufficient reason to doubt of their divine authority; but because they are unwilling to be governed by them, and to conform their lives to the laws and precepts of that holy book: For the wills of men have a great influence upon their understandings, to make assent easy or difficult; and as many are apt to assent to what they have a mind to, so they are slow to believe any thing which crosseth their humours and inclinations; so that tho' greater evidence were offer'd, it is likely it would not prevail with them, because the matter does not stick there. Their wills are distemper'd, *men hate to be reformed*, and this makes them *cast the laws of God behind their backs*; and if God himself should speak to them from heaven, as he did to the people of *Israel*; yet for all that, they might continue *a stiff-necked and rebellious people*. Tho' the evidence were such as their understandings could not resist; yet their wills might still hold out, and the present condition of their minds might have no lasting influence upon their hearts and lives; such a violent conviction might affect them for the present, but the sense of it might perhaps wear off by degrees, and then they would return to their former hardness. Men by a long and obstinate continuance in sin, may bring themselves to the temper and disposition of devils; who though *they believe and tremble* at the thoughts of God and his threatenings, yet they are wicked still; for so long as men retain a strong affection for their lusts, they will break through all conviction, and what evidence soever be offer'd to them, they will find some way or other to avoid it, and to delude themselves. The plain truth of the case is this, (if men will honestly speak their consciences, they cannot deny it) they do not call for more evidence, either because they want it, or are willing to be convinced by it; but that they may seem to have some excuse for themselves, for not being convinced by that evidence which is afforded to them.

4^{thly}, Experience does abundantly testify, how ineffectual extraordinary ways are to convince and reclaim men of depraved minds, and such as are obstinately addicted to their lusts. We find many remarkable experiments of this in the history of the Bible. What wonders were wrought in the sight of *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians*! yet they were harden'd under all these plagues. *Balaam*, who *greedily followed the wages of unrighteousness*, was not to be stop't by the admonition of an Angel. The *Jews*, after so many miracles which their eyes had seen, continu'd to be *a stiff-necked and gain-saying people*; so that it is hard to say which was more prodigious, the wonders which God wrought for them, or their rebellions against him; and when *in the fullness of time*, the son of God came, and did among them *the works which never man did*, such, as one would have thought might have brought the worst people in the world to repentance, those of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, yet they repented not. Yea the very thing which the rich man here in my text requested of *Abraham* for his brethren, was done among them; *Lazarus did rise from the dead, and testified unto them, and they were not persuaded.*

And which is yet more, our Saviour himself, according to his own prediction while he was alive, *rose again from the dead the third day*, and was visibly taken up into heaven; and yet how few among them did *believe, and give glory to God*! So that we see the very thing here spoken of in the text, made good in a famous instance; they who *believed not Moses and the Prophets*, which testified of the *Messias*, were *not persuaded* when he *rose from the dead*.

And does not our own experience tell us, how little effect the extraordinary providences of God have had upon those who were not reclaimed by his word. It is not long since God shewed himself among us, by *terrible things in righteousness*, and visited us with three of his sorest judgments, war, and pestilence, and fire; and yet how does all manner of wickedness and impiety still reign and rage among us! it is a very sad consideration to see how little those who have

out-lived the plagues, have been reformed by them ; *we have not return'd to the Lord, nor sought him for all this.*

I may appeal to the experience of particular persons. How frequently do we see men, after great afflictions, and tedious sufferings, and dangerous sicknesses, return to their former evil courses ! and tho' they have been upon the brink of eternity, and *the terrors of death have compassed them about, and the pains of hell have almost taken hold of them,* tho' they have had as lively and sensible convictions of another world, as if they had spoken with those that had come from thence, or even been there themselves ; yet they have taken no warning, but upon their deliverance and recovery, have been as mad, as furious sinners as they were before ; so that it ought to be no such wonder to us, which the text tells us, *that if men hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* Especially, if we consider in the

5th and last place, that an effectual persuasion (that is, such a belief as produceth repentance and a good life) is the gift of God, and depends upon the operation and concurrence of his grace, which is not to be expected in an extraordinary way, where men have obstinately rejected the ordinary means appointed by God for that end. To be effectually persuaded to change our lives, and become new men, is a work not to be done without the assistance of God's grace, and there is little reason to expect that God will afford his grace to those who reject and despise the counsels of his word. The doctrine of salvation contain'd in the holy scriptures, and the promises and threatnings of God's word, are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the conversion of men, and to bring them to repentance ; and if we sincerely use these means, we may confidently expect the concurrence of God's grace, to make them effectual ; but if we neglect and resist these means, in confidence that God should attempt our recovery by some extraordinary ways ; though he should gratify our presumptuous and unreasonable curiosity, so far as to send *one from the dead to testify unto us* ; yet we have no reason to expect the assistance of his grace, to make such a conviction effectual to our repentance, when we have so long despised his word, and resisted his spirit, which are *the power of God unto salvation.*

Without his grace and assistance, the most probable means will prove ineffectual to alter and change our corrupt natures ; *by grace we are saved, and that not of our selves, it is the gift of God.* This grace is revealed to us in the gospel ; and the assistances of it are conveyed to us by the gospel ; and it is great presumption to promise to our selves the assistance of God's grace in any other way than he hath been pleased to promise it to us.

And thus I have shewn you, as briefly and plainly as I could, how unlikely it is, that those who obstinately reject a clear and publick revelation of God, should be effectually convinced and brought to repentance by any apparitions from the dead.

I shall only make two or three inferences from this discourse which I have made, and so conclude.

1st, Since the scriptures are the public and standing revelation of God's will to men, and the ordinary means of salvation, we may hence conclude, that people ought to have them in such a language as they can understand. This our Saviour plainly supposeth in the discourse which he represents between *Abraham* and the rich man, desiring that *Lazarus* might be sent from the dead to his brethren, to testify unto them ; to which request *Abraham* would not have given this answer and advice, *they have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them,* had he supposed that the scriptures then were, or for the future ought to be lockt up from the people in an unknown tongue ; for the rich man might very well have replied, *ay, father Abraham,* but they are not permitted to have *Moses and the Prophets* in such a language as they can understand ; and therefore there is more need why *one should be sent from the dead to testify unto them.*

Nor would *Abraham* have said again, *if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded.* For how should men hear what they cannot understand, so as to be persuaded by it ?

It is evident then, that our Saviour, according to the reasoning of this parable, takes it for granted, that the holy scriptures are the standing and ordinary means of bringing men to faith and repentance, and that the people are to have the free use of them. But since our Saviour's time, the church of *Rome* hath found a mighty inconvenience in this, and therefore hath taken the scriptures out of the hands of the people. They will not now let them *have Moses and the Prophets*, the gospel of our blessed Saviour, and the writings of his Apostles, because they are really afraid they should *hear them*, and by hearing of them, be convinced and *persuaded* of the errors and corruptions of their church; but instead of the scriptures of the Old and New Testament, they have put into their hands a legend of famous apparitions of *men from the dead, testifying unto them* concerning purgatory and transubstantiation, and the worship of the blessed Virgin and the Saints, and the great benefit and refreshment which souls in purgatory have by the indulgences of the Pope, and the prayers of the living put up to Saints and Angels on their behalf; so that in the church of *Rome*, quite contrary to our Saviour's method, men are *persuaded* of their religion, of their new articles of faith, and ways of worship, not by *Moses and the Prophets*, not by the doctrine of the holy scriptures (for *they* every where testify against them) but by absurd romances, and ill-contriv'd fictions of apparitions *from the dead*. I will dismiss this matter with this one observation, that however interested and confident men may set a bold face upon any thing, yet it cannot to considerate men but seem a very hard case, that there should be no salvation to be had out of the church of *Rome*; and yet the ordinary, and (in our Saviour's judgment) the most effectual means of salvation are not to be had in it.

But I pass from this, to that which does more immediately concern our practice.

2dly, Let us hear and obey that publick revelation of God's will, which in so much mercy to mankind, he hath been pleased to afford us. This is an inestimable privilege and advantage which the world in many ages was destitute of, having no other guide to conduct them to eternal happiness but the light of nature, and some particular revelations, which now and then God was pleased to make of his will to men: But now God hath set up a great and standing light in the world, the doctrine of the holy scriptures; and by the gospel of his blessed son, hath *given the knowledge of salvation to all men, for the remission of their sins, through the tender mercies of God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace*, to convince us of the error of our ways, and to direct us in our duty. *We, upon whom the ends of the world are come*, do enjoy all the advantages of divine revelation which the world ever had, and as great as the world ever shall have. *God in these last days hath spoken unto us by his son*, and if we will not hear him, God will employ no other extraordinary prophet and messenger to us. *If the wrath of God so clearly revealed from heaven by the gospel of our blessed Saviour, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*; if the terror of the great day, and the fear of eternal torment; if the dreadful sufferings of the son of God for our sins, and the mercifull offers of pardon and reconciliation in his blood, and the glorious hopes of eternal life and happiness will not prevail with us to leave our sins, and to amend our lives, we have no reason to expect that God should use any farther means to reclaim us; that he should ever make any more attempts for our recovery. And therefore,

3dly, and lastly, Those who are not brought to repentance, and effectually *persuaded* by this clear and public revelation which God hath made of his will to men in the holy scriptures, have reason to look upon their case as desperate.

Methinks it should not be a desirable thing to any of us to be convinced by an apparition, the thing is so dreadful and full of terror; besides, that it argues men to be strangely harden'd in a bad course, and obstinately bent upon their evil ways, when nothing will affright them from their sins, but what will almost

put them out of their wits ; when nothing will keep them from running into hell, but a fearfull and ghastly messenger from thence. What a terrible fight would it be to any of us, to meet one of our companions, whom we had lately known in this world fresh come out of those flames, with a smell of fire and brimstone upon him ! What imagination can paint to it self the dread and horror of such a spectacle ! The rich man here in the parable, when he was in hell, is represented as sensible of the inconvenience of this, and therefore he did not desire to be sent himself to his brethren, but desired that *Lazarus* might go and testify unto them : he was apprehensive how frigthfull a fight he himself must needs have been to them ; and therefore he desires that they might have a gentle warning by one, who from out of *Abraham's* bosom had seen the miseries of the damned, but enjoyed the states of the blessed.

But let not us tempt God by any such unreasonable demand, who speaks to us every day by the plain declarations of his word, and hath of late years call'd so loudly upon us by the voice of his providence to repent and turn to him ; by so many miracles of mercy and deliverance, as God hardly ever wrought for any prince and people, and by such terrible vollies of judgments, and full *viols of wrath*, as have seldom been poured out upon any nation. God speaks to you by his ministers, men like your selves (God knows, poor frail and sinfull men !) but we are sure, that when we call you to repentance, we deliver to you the will and pleasure, the counsels and commands of the great God, which (whatever account may be made of us) do certainly challenge your most awfull attention and regard. And we are sensible that we are call'd to a very difficult and unpleasant work, to contend with the lusts and vices of men, to strive against the strong and impetuous streams of a wicked and perverse generation ; and nothing in the world could move us to this unwelcome and grievous importunity, but a great and just sense of our own duty, and your danger. And if we will not take these warnings, why should we expect that God should vouchsafe to send an express messenger to us from the other world, to certify us how all things are there, and that not so much to help the weakness of our faith, as to humour the perverseness of our infidelity ? And why should we imagine that this course would prove more effectual ? *Let us not deceive our selves*, the same lusts which now detain men so strongly in impenitency and unbelief, would in all probability hurry them on to hell, tho' an Angel from heaven should meet them in their way, to give a stop to them. This indeed might startle us ; but nothing is like to save us, if the word of God and his grace do not.

But are we in earnest, and would we *be persuaded if one should rise from the dead* ? God hath condescended thus far to us, there is *one risen from the dead to testify unto us*, Jesus the son of God, who *died for our sins, and rose again for our justification*, and is ascended into heaven, and set down at the right hand of God, to assure us of a blessed resurrection, and a glorious immortality. And if this will not satisfy us, God will gratify our curiosity no farther. If we *will not believe him, whom God hath sent*, and to convince us that he hath sent him, hath *raised him up from the dead, we shall die in our sins*, and perish in our impenitency. God hath in great mercy to mankind done that which is abundantly sufficient to convince those who are of a teachable temper and disposition : but in great wisdom and justice he hath not thought fit to provide any remedy for the willfull obstinacy and intractable perverseness of men.

Now God who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, persuade us all, to *break off our sins by repentance, and to give glory to God*, before death and darkness come, and the day of our final visitation overtake us, when we may perhaps be surprized by a sudden stroke, or seized upon by a violent disease, and may have no sense and apprehension of our approaching danger ; or if we have, *may find no place for repentance, tho' we seek it with tears* ; which God grant may never happen to be the case of any of us, for his mercy's sake in Christ Jesus. *To whom with the father, &c.*

S E R M O N LXXV.

The Children of this World wiser than the Children of Light.

LUKE XVI. 8.

For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

Preached
at White-
hall, An.
1684.

TH E S E words are in the parable of the rich man's steward, who being called upon to give up his accounts, in order to his being discharged from his office, cast about with himself, what course he had best to take, to provide for his subsistence, when he should be turned out of his employment. At last he resolves upon this; that he will go to his lord's debtors, and take a favourable account of them; and instead of *a hundred measures of oil, write down fifty*; and instead of *a hundred measures of wheat, write down fourscore*; that by this means he might oblige them to be kind to him in his necessity. The Lord hearing of this, commends the unjust steward, *because he had done wisely*; that is, he took notice of his dishonesty, but praised his shrewdness and sagacity, as having done prudently for himself, though he did not deal justly with him; and this is usual among men; when we see a man ingeniously bad, to commend his wit, and to say it is great pity he doth not use it better, and apply it to good purposes. Upon the whole, our Saviour makes this observation; *that the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*; as if he had said, thus did this worldly-wise man, thus provident was he for his future security and subsistence. He no sooner understands that he is to be turned out of his office, but he considers what provision to make for himself against that time. And is it not pity, that good men do not apply this wisdom to better and greater purposes? For is not every man such a steward, intrusted by God with the blessings of this life; and many opportunities of doing good? For all which, since he must shortly give an account, he ought in all reason so to use them, as thereby to provide for the happiness of another life, against this temporal life have an end.

And this is all the parallel intended in this parable, as we may see by our Saviour's application of it. For parables are not to be stretched to an exact parallel in all the parts and circumstances of them, but only to be applied to the particular point and purpose intended. A parable, and the moral accommodation of it, being (as one well observes) not like two planes, which touch one another in every part; but like a globe upon a plane, which only toucheth in one point. Thus our Saviour separates the wisdom of this steward from his injustice, and proposeth *that* to our imitation; *The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light*.

The words are a comparison; in which we have

1st, The persons compared, *the children of this world*, and the *children of light*. It is a very usual phrase among the *Hebrews*, when they would express any thing to partake of such a nature or quality, to call it the son or child of such a thing. Thus good men are called *the children of God*, and bad men *the children of the devil*; those who mind earthly things, and make the things of this world their greatest aim and design, are called *the children of this world*; and those who are better enlighten'd with the knowledge of their own immortality, and the belief of a future state after this life, are call'd *the children of light*.

2^{dly},

2dly, Here is the thing, wherein they are compared, and that is, as to their wisdom and prudence.

3dly, The object of this prudence, which is not the same in both; as if the sense were, that *the children of this world are wiser than the children of light*, as to the things of this world; but here are two several objects intended, about which the prudence of these two sorts of persons is respectively exercised; the concernments of this world and the other. And our Saviour's meaning is, that *the children of this world are wiser in their generation*; that is, in *their way*, viz. as to the interests and concernments of this world, *than the children of light* are in *theirs*, viz. as to the interests and concernments of the other world.

4thly, Here is a decision of the matter, and which of them it is that excels in point of prudence, in *their way*; and our Saviour gives it to the *children of this world*; *they are wiser in their generation than the children of light*.

Now this proposition is not to be taken in the utmost strictness and rigour; as if it were universally true, and without any exception, as if no man had ever been so wise and provident for his soul, and the concernments of another world, as worldly men are for the interests and concernments of this life. For there are some that are fools at large, and imprudent in their whole conduct and management, both as to the affairs of this world, and the other; who are in too strict a sense, *the children of this world*: They mind nothing but this world, and yet are grossly imprudent, even in their prosecution of their temporal interests. They neglect and forego all other worldly advantages, for the sake of a little sensual pleasure; and then they lose and destroy that too, by an over-hot and eager pursuit of it, and turn it at last into gall and wormwood. And there are others (as St. Paul for instance) who, I doubt not, have been as prudent and zealous, and industrious of the promoting of religion, and the salvation of themselves and others, as any man can be about the affairs of this present life; and I hope there are some such in every age, but God knows they are very few, and their wisdom and industry is seldom so equal, and constant, and uniform, as that of *the men of this world*.

So that we are to understand this saying of our Saviour's with the same allowance as we generally do all moral and proverbial speeches, that they are true for the most part, and the instances and exceptions to the contrary are very rare. It is seldom seen, that good men are so wise for the concernments of their souls, and of religion, as many worldly men are for their worldly interests.

In speaking to this proposition, I shall do these *three* things.

First, Confirm and illustrate the truth of it, by considering the several parts and properties of wisdom.

Secondly, Give some probable account of this, by considering what advantages *the children of this world* have above *the children of light*.

Thirdly, I shall draw some inferences from the whole, by way of application.

First, I shall endeavour to confirm and illustrate the truth of this, by considering the several parts and properties of wisdom. Now this is wisdom, to mind and regard our chief end, and by all means to promote it; and this regard to our chief end doth express it self chiefly in these particulars; in our being firmly fix'd and resolved upon it; in chusing the fittest means for the compassing and accomplishing of it; in a diligent use of those means; in an invincible constancy and perseverance in the prosecution of it; and in making all things to submit and to stoop to it. These are the principal parts and properties of wisdom; and I shall shew that in all these *the children of this world* do usually excel *the children of light*.

1st, They are usually more firmly fix'd and resolved upon their end. Whatever they set up for their end, riches, or honours, or pleasures, they are fix'd upon it, and steady in the prosecution of it. If they set up for riches or honour, they neglect and despise pleasure, if it cross either of those ends. And this fix'd resolution of the end is the great spring of action, and that which inspires men with

with vigour and diligence in the use of means; and the more resolved men are upon the end, the more active and industrious they will be in the use of means, for the end governs the means, and gives law and measure to our activity and industry in the use of them, and sweetens and allays the trouble and difficulty of them.

So that where the end is once firmly fix'd and resolv'd upon, there will not be wanting fervour of prosecution; but if we be wavering and unsteady as to our end, this will weaken our hands, and quench the heat of our endeavours, and abate the eagerness of our pursuit, and according to the degree of it, will derive a debility and inconstancy into all our motions. *The double-minded man* (as St. James says) *is unstable in all his ways.* Now *the children of this world* are commonly more fix'd and resolved upon their end, than *the children of light.* 'Tis rare to see the whole life and actions of a good man, so constantly and uniformly conspiring to the furtherance of his great end, so directly tending to the salvation of his soul, and the increase of his glory and happiness in another world; as the actions of a worldly man, and the whole course of his life do to the advancing of his worldly interests. The covetous or ambitious men seldom do any thing to the best of their knowledge, that is impertinent to their end, much less contrary to it; through every thing that they do, one may plainly see the end they aim at, and that they are always true to it: Whereas the best men do many things, which are plainly cross and contrary to their end, and a great many more, which have no relation to it; and when they mind it, it is rather by fits and starts, than in any even course and tenour of actions.

And of this we have a famous instance in that worldly and secular church, which now for several hundred of years hath more steadily pursu'd the end of secular greatness and dominion, than any other church hath done the ends of true religion, the glory of God, and the salvation of the souls of men, so that there is hardly any doctrine or practice peculiar to that church, and differing from our common christianity, but it hath a direct and visible tendency to the promoting of some worldly interest or other. For instance, why do they deny the people the holy scriptures and the service of God in a language which they can understand; but that by keeping them in ignorance, they may have them in more perfect slavery and subjection to them? Why do they forbid their Priests to marry but that they may have no interest distinct from that of their church, and leave all to it when they die? To what end is auricular confession; but to keep people in awe, by the knowledge of their secrets? Why must the laity only receive the Sacrament in one kind, but to draw a greater reverence to the Priest, whose privilege it shall be to receive in both? And why is the intention of the Priest necessary to the efficacy of the sacraments; but to persuade the people, that notwithstanding the gracious intention of God toward mankind, they cannot be saved without the good will of the Priest? The doctrines of purgatory and indulgences are a plain device to make their markets of the sins and souls of men. I might instance in a hundred things more in that church which are of the same tendency. This St. John foretold should be the character of the spirit of Antichrist, that it should be a worldly spirit, and the doctrines of it should serve a secular interest and design, 1 John iv. 5. *They are of the world, and they speak from the world, and the world hears them.* What church is there in the world, so true throughout to the interest of religion, as this worldly church hath been to its own secular power and greatness.

2dly, *The children of this world* are wiser in the choice of means in order to their end; and this is a great part of wisdom. For some means will bring about an end, with less pains and difficulty, and expence of time than others. And the men of the world are very ingenious in discerning the fitness and force of means to their several ends. To what a certainty have men reduced all the ways and arts of gain, and growing rich, and of rising to honour and preferment? What long trains will men lay to bring about their desired end? What subtil methods have men devised, to insinuate themselves into court; and when they are there, to plant themselves in the eye of their prince, and in the sun-shine of his

his favour; and then they have as many ways of worming others out, as of screwing themselves in.

But in the concernments of our souls, and the affairs of another world, how dull and injudicious are we? and how awkwardly and untowardly do we apply means to ends, as if men were *only wise to do evil, but to good had no understanding*, as the Prophet complains? By what incongruous and irregular means do many (who would seem to be, and sometimes perhaps are very zealous in religion) endeavour (as they think) to promote God's glory, by pious frauds and counterfeit miracles, and telling officious lies for God? What a compass do many men fetch to go to heaven, by innumerable devices of will-worship, by voluntary severities, neither pleasing to God, nor profitable to men? By tedious pilgrimages and senseless ceremonies, and innumerable little external observances of no virtue or efficacy in religion? and by wandering through a wilderness of opinions, and the bushes and brakes of unprofitable questions, and controversies? Whereas the way to heaven lies plain and straight before us, consisting in simplicity of belief, and in holiness and innocency of life. Not but that there are great differences in the church of *Rome*, between the secular Priests and the regular; between the *Jansenists* and the *Jesuits*: but they still unite in a common interest, and are subject to *Antichrist* their common head. They do not separate from one another, and excommunicate one another, and declare against one another, that they are not of the true church. *Satan never casts out Satan*; and though he loves divisions among christians, yet he always takes care, that *his own kingdom be not divided against it self*, so as to endanger the ruin of it. And whenever they have any hopeful design for the extirpation of Protestants, they can lay aside their enmities, and be reconciled in such a design. Then the Pope and the Kings of the earth *take counsel together* and, like, *Herod and Pilate*, when Christ was to be crucified, can be made friends at a days warning. Whereas the divisions of the true church are pernicious to it, and as we see at this day among our selves, our senseless differences and wild heats on both sides, do contribute to the setting up of popery, and the ruin of the reformed religion; and yet no persuasion, no experience can make us wiser.

3dly, *The children of this world* are commonly more diligent in the use of means for the obtaining of their end; they will sweat and toil, and take any pains, *rise up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread of carefulness*; their thoughts are continually running upon their business, and they catch at every opportunity of promoting it; they will pinch nature, and harass it; and rob themselves of their rest, and all the comfort of their lives to raise their fortune and estate. What drudges were *Cesar* and *Alexander* in the way of fame and ambition? How did they tire themselves and others with long and tedious marches? To what inconveniences and dangers did they expose themselves and thousands more? What havock and destruction did they make in the world that they might gain to themselves the empty title of conquerors of it. When the men of the world engage in any design, how intent are they upon it, and with what vigour do they prosecute it? They do not counterfeit a diligence, and seem to be more serious and industrious than in truth they are; they are rather hypocrites the other way, and would conceal their covetousness and ambition, and not seem to aspire after riches and honours so much as indeed they do.

But in the pursuit of better things how cold and remiss are we? With what a careless indifference do most men mind their souls? How negligent and formal, and many times hypocritical are they in their service of God, and the exercise of religion? With what a pitiful courage, and with what faint spirits do they resist sin, and encounter the temptations of it? And how often, and how easily are they foil'd and baffl'd by them.

4thly, The men of the world are more invincibly constant and pertinacious in the pursuit of earthly things; they are not to be bribed or taken off by favour or fair words; not to be daunted by difficulties, or dash't out of countenance by the frowns and reproaches of men. Offer an ambitious man any thing short

short of his end and aim, to take him off from the prosecution of it; he scorns the motion, and thinks you go about to fool him out of his interest. Bait a covetous man with temptations of pleasure, to get his money from him; how generously will this mean-spirited man trample upon pleasure, when it would tempt him from his design of being rich?

Difficulties do not daunt them, but whet their courage, and quicken their endeavours, and set a keener edge upon their spirits. Give an ambitious man almost a demonstration of the impossibility of his attempt; *contra audentior ibit*, he will go on so much the more boldly and resolutely. In the ways of religion men are apt to be discouraged and put out of countenance, by contempt and reproach: but a covetous man is not to be jeer'd and flurled out of his money and estate; he can be content to be rich, and give leave to those that are not so, to laugh at him.

Populus mihi sibilat, at mihi plaudo.

The rich worldling can hug himself in his bags, when the world hisseth at him; he can bear *to be hated, and persecuted, and have all manner of evil spoke against him for money sake*. And in the pursuit of these designs, men will, with great resolution, encounter enmity and opposition, and endure great sufferings and persecution. How many have been martyrs to their lusts, and have sacrificed their ease and health, and even their lives in the prosecution of their ambitious, and covetous, and voluptuous designs?

But on the other hand, how easily are men check'd and diverted from a good course, by the temptations and advantages of this world? How many are cold in their zeal for religion, by the favour and friendship of this world? And as their goods and estates have grown greater, their devotion hath grown less. How apt are they to be terrified at the apprehension of danger and sufferings; and by their fearfull imaginations, to make them greater than they are; and with the people of *Israel*, to be dishearten'd from all further attempts of entering *into the land of promise*, because it is *full of giants, and the sons of Anak*? How easily was *Peter* frighted into the denial of his master? And when our Saviour was apprehended, how did his disciples forsake him, and fly from him? And tho' they were constant afterwards to the death, yet it was a great while before they were perfectly armed and steel'd against the fear of suffering.

5thly, The men of the world will make all things stoop and submit to that, which is their great end and design; their end rules them, and governs them, and gives law to all their actions; they will make an advantage of every thing, and if it will not serve their end one way or other, they will have nothing to do with it. If an ambitious man seek wealth, it is but in order to his design to purchase friends, and strengthen his interest, and to make his rising the easier; he will lay his whole estate at the stake, rather than miss of his end. The covetous man will quit his pleasure, when it lies cross to his interest; if he have any expensive lust, and chargeable vice, he will turn it off, or exchange it for some more frugal and profitable sin.

But in the affairs of religion, and the concernments of our souls, how frequently do men act without a due regard and consideration of their great end? And instead of making other things submit to it, they often bow and bend it to their inferior interest. They make heaven stoop to earth, and religion to serve a worldly design; and the glory of God to give way to gain; and the great concernments of their souls, and their eternal salvation, to their temporal profit and advantage. The men of the world are generally true to their great end, and pay it that respect which is due to it, and will suffer nothing to take place of it in their esteem and affection; and if men were as wise for their souls and for another world, they would bring all things to their great end, and make all the concernments of this temporal life to yield and give way to the great concernments of their eternal happiness. I proceed in the

Second place to give some account of this, whence it comes to pass, that *the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light*. And this I shall do, by considering what advantages *the children of this world* have

as to the affairs of this world, above what good men have, as to the concerns of another world. I shall instance in four or five of the chief.

1st, The things of this world are present and sensible, and because of their nearness to us, are apt to strike powerfully upon our senses, and to affect mightily, to excite our desires after them, and to work strongly upon our hopes and fears : but the things of another world being remote from us, are lessen'd by their distance, and consequently are not apt to work so powerfully upon our minds? they are invisible to us, and only discerned by faith, which is a more obscure and less certain perception of things, than we have of those objects which are presented to our bodily eyes. *The things which God hath prepared for them that love him, the glory and happiness of the next world, are things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard. The children of light do not see God, as the children of this world see Mammon.*

2^{dly}, The sensual delights and enjoyments of this world, are better suited and more agreeable to the corrupt and degenerate nature of men, than spiritual and heavenly things are to those that are regenerate. In this lapsed and degenerate state of mankind, appetite and sense are apt to prevail above reason ; and therefore those things which are most delightfull to sense we favour and mind, and love to busy our selves about them, because they are most suitable to the animal life, which is the governing principle of corrupt nature.

And the reason of this is plain, because that principle in worldly and sensual men which pursues earthly things, is in those who are unregenerate entire, and undivided, and consequently the affections and inclinations of the whole man do all tend one way, and run out towards those things in a full and undivided stream : whereas good men are but regenerate in part, and tho' they have a principle of spiritual life in them, yet their affections are divided, and there is a great struggling and conflict between flesh and spirit, and it is a great while before the spiritual principle doth clearly prevail, and get a perfect victory over our sensual appetites and inclinations. Mens affections to the world are entire and unbroken, and therefore they pursue these things with all their might : But the best men are but good in part ; and that heavenly principle which is in them, is very much hinder'd in its operations by a contrary principle, our earthly and sensual inclinations, which are hardly ever perfectly subdu'd and brought under in this world.

3^{dly}, The worldly man's faith, and hope, and fear of present and sensible things, is commonly stronger than a good man's faith, and hope, and fear of things future and eternal. Now faith, and hope, and fear, are the great principles which govern and bear sway in the actions and lives of men. If a man be once firmly persuaded of the reality of a thing, and that it is good for him, and possessed with good hopes of obtaining it, and great fears and apprehensions of the danger of missing it, this man may almost be put upon any thing. The merchant trafficks, and the husbandman plows and sows in faith and hope, because he is convinced that bread is necessary to the support of life, and hopes that God will so bless his labours, that he shall reap the fruit of them ; and plainly sees, that if he do not take this pains, he must starve. But how few are there that believe, and hope, and fear concerning the things of another world, as *the children of this world* do concerning the things of this world ! If any man ask me, how I know this? I appeal to experience ; it is plain and visible in the lives and actions and endeavours of men. Good men are seldom so effectually and thoroughly persuaded of the principles of religion, and the truth of the sayings contained in the holy scriptures, as the men of the world are of their own sayings and proverbs. Men do not believe that *Honesty is the best policy*, or as *Solomon* expresseth it, that *he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely* ; as the men of the world believe their own mixims, that *a man may be too honest to live* ; that *plain-dealing is a jewel, but he that wears it shall die a beggar*. Few men's hopes of heaven are so powerfull and vigorous, and have so sensible an effect upon their lives, as the worldly man's hopes of gain and advantage. Men are not so afraid to swear, as they are to speak treason ; they are not so firmly persuaded

persuaded of the danger of sin to their souls and bodies in another world, as of the danger to which some crimes against the laws of men do expose their temporal lives and safety ; therefore they will many times venture to offend God, rather than incur the penalty of human laws.

4thly, The men of the world have but one design, and are wholly intent upon it, and this is a great advantage. He that hath but one thing to mind, may easily be skill'd and excell in it. When a man makes one thing his whole business, no wonder if he be very knowing and wise in that. Now the men of the world mind worldly things, and have no care and concernment for any thing else. It is a saying I think of *Thomas Aquinas*, *Cave ab illo qui unicum legit librum : He is a dangerous man that reads but one book* ; he that gives his mind but to one thing, must needs be too hard for any man at that. Application to one thing, especially in matters of practice, gains a man perfect experience in it, and experience furnisheth him with observations about it, and these make him wise and prudent in that thing.

But good men, tho' they have a great affection for heaven and heavenly things, yet the business and necessities of this life, do very much divert and take them off from the care of better things ; they are divided between the concernments of this life and the other, and tho' there be but *one thing necessary* in comparison, yet the conveniencies of this life are to be regarded ; and tho' our souls be our main care, yet some consideration must be had of our bodies, that they may be fit for the service of our souls ; some provision must be made for their present support, so long as we continue in these earthly tabernacles ; and this will necessarily engage us in the world, so that we cannot always and wholly apply ourselves to heavenly things, and mind them as the men of the world do the things of this world.

5thly, and *lastly*, The men of the world have a greater compass and liberty in the pursuit of their worldly designs, than good men have in the prosecution of *their* interests. The *children of light* are limited and confin'd to the use of lawfull means, for the compassing of their ends ; but the men of the world are not so strait-laced, *quocunque modo rem* ; they are resolv'd upon the point, and will stick at no means to compass their end. They do not stand upon the nice distinctions of good and evil, of right and wrong, invented by speculative and scrupulous men, to puzzle business, and to hinder and disappoint great designs. If *Abab* have a mind to *Naboth's* vineyard, and *Naboth* will not let him be honest, and have it for a valuable consideration, he will try to get it a cheaper way. *Naboth* shall by false witness be made a traitor, and his vineyard by this means shall be forfeited to him. And thus the unjust steward in the parable provided for himself ; he wronged his Lord, to secure a retreat to himself in the time of his distress.

The *third* and *last* thing only remains, to make some inferences from what hath been said by way of application. And,

I. Notwithstanding the commendation which hath been given of the wisdom of this world, yet upon the whole matter it is not much to be valued and admired. It is indeed great in its way and kind : but it is applied to little and low purposes, employ'd about the concernments of a short time and a few days, about the worst and meanest part of our selves, and accompanied with the neglect of greater and better things, such as concern our souls, and our whole duration, even our happiness to all eternity. And therefore that which the world admires and cries up for wisdom, is in the esteem of God, who judgeth of things according to truth, but vanity and folly. *The wisdom of the world* (saith St. *Paul*,) *is foolishness with God*. The rich man in the parable, who increased his goods, and enlarged his barns, and laid up for many years, did applaud himself, and was no doubt applauded by others for a very wise man : but because *he laid up treasure for himself, and was not rich toward God*, that is, did not employ his estate to good and charitable purposes, therefore God, who calls no body out of his right name, calls this man *fool* ; *thou fool, this night shall thy soul be taken from thee, and then whose shall all these things be* ? And our Saviour here in the

text, while he commends the *wisdom of the children of this world*; he adds that which is a considerable blemish and abatement to it, *The children of this world are wiser*, εἰς τὴν γυναικὶν τῶν αἰώνων, *for their age*, for the concernments of this present life; but this is but a short and purblind wisdom, which sees but a little way, and considers only things present and near at hand: whereas true wisdom hath a larger and farther prospect, and regards the future as well as the present, and takes care to provide for it. Nay, our Saviour gives the wisdom of this world its utmost due, when he says, *The children of this world are wise for their generation*; for this is the very best that can be said of it, it seldom looks so far, and holds out so long. Many men have surviv'd their own projects, and have lived to see the folly and ill fate of their covetous and ambitious designs. So the Prophet tell's us, *Jer. xvii. 11. As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.*

This is wisdom, to regard our main interest; but if we be wrong in our end (as all worldly men are) the faster and farther we go, the more fatal is our error and mistake. *The children of this world* are out of their end, and mistaken in the main; they are wise for the world, which is inconsiderable to eternity; wise for a little while, and fools for ever.

2dly, From what hath been said we may infer, that if we lose our souls, and come short of eternal happiness, it is through our own fault and gross neglect; for we see that men are wise enough for this world; and the same prudence, and care, and diligence applied to the concernments of our souls would infallibly make us happy. Nay, our Saviour here in the text tells us, that usually less wisdom and industry than the men of this world use about the things of this world, is exercised by *the children of light*, who yet at last, through the mercy of God, do attain eternal life.

So that it is very plain, that if men would but take that care for their immortal souls, which they generally do for their frail and dying bodies; and be, as heartily concern'd for the unseen world, and for eternity, as they are for things visible and temporal, they would with much more certainty gain heaven; than any man can obtain worldly riches and honours. And can we in conscience desire more, than to be happy for ever, upon as easy and upon more certain terms, than any man can be rich or great in this world? For we may miss of these things after all our travail and pains about them; or if we get them, we may lose them again: But if we *seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*, if we be sincerely good, we are sure to have the reward of it, even that *eternal life, which God that cannot lie, hath promised*; if we *lay up for our selves treasures in heaven*, they will be safe and secure there, where *no moth can corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.*

If we would seriously think of the other world, and were thoroughly possess'd with a firm belief of the eternity of that happiness or misery, which remains for men after this life, we should pray to God, and hear his word, and perform all the duties of religion, with the same care and concernment, with the same fervour and intention of mind, as men prosecute their worldly business. Were we fully persuad'd of the unseen glories and torments of the other world, we should be much more affected with them, than with all the temptations and terrors of sense; because in reason they are much more considerable. The disgrace of the pillory will fright men from perjury; and will not everlasting shame and confusion? The fear of death will deter many men from robbing and stealing, who would perhaps venture upon these crimes, if there were no danger in them; and will not the horrors of the *second death*, of *the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched*, have as great an awe and influence upon us? if they have not, it is a sign that we do not equally believe the danger of human laws and the damnation of hell.

Surely men have not the same belief of heaven, and affection for it, that they have for this world. If they had, their care and diligence about these things would be more equal. For we are not so weak as we make our selves;

we are not yet so degenerate, but if we would set our selves seriously to it, and earnestly beg the assistance of God's grace, we might come to know our duty, and our wills might be engaged to follow the directions of our understandings, and our affections to obey the command of our wills, and our actions to follow the impulse of our affections. Much of this is naturally in our power; and what is wanting, the grace of God is ready to supply. We can go to the church, and we can hear the word of God, and we can consider what we hear; we can pray to God, and say *we believe, Lord help our unbelief*, and enable us to do what thou requirest of us; and we can forbear a great many sins, which we rashly and willfully run into: a great present danger will fright us from sin, a terrible storm will drive us to our devotion, and teach us to pray; a sharp fit of the gout will take a man off from drinking; the eye of a master or magistrate will restrain men from many things, which they say they cannot forbear. So that we do but counterfeit, and make our selves more cripples than we are, that we may be pitied: for if fear will restrain us, it is a sign that we can forbear; if *the rod of affliction will fetch it out* of us, and make us do that which at other times we say we are unable to do, this is a demonstration that it is in us, and that the thing is in our power.

It is true, we can do nothing that is good without the assistance of God's grace; but that assistance which we may have for the asking, is in effect in our own power. So that if the matter were searched to the bottom, it is not want of power that hinders us from doing our duty, but sloth and negligence; for God hath *given us exceeding great and precious promises, whereby we may be made partakers of a divine nature*; and by virtue whereof, if we be not wanting to our selves, we may *cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God*.

3dly and lastly, What a shame and reproach is this to *the children of light*! Our Saviour speaks this by way of upbraiding, as we may judge by the terms of comparison which he useth, that *the children of this world* should be *wiser than the children of light*, that is, than *Wisdom's own children*; and that they should be *wiser in their generation*, that is, for the concerns of a short and inconsiderable time, than the others are of all eternity.

How should it make our blood to rise in our faces, and fill us with confusion, that the men of this world should be more prudent and skillfull in the contrivance and management of their little affairs; more resolute and vigorous in the prosecution of them, than we are about the everlasting concerns of our souls! That a worldly church should use wiser and more effectual means to promote and uphold ignorance, and error, and superstition, than we do to build up the true church of Christ in knowledge and faith and charity! That the men of the world should toil and take more pains for *the deceitfull riches*, than we do for *the true*; and be contented to hazard more for *a corruptible crown*, than we for *an incorruptible*! That they should love pleasure more, than we do God, and mind their bodies and temporal estates more than we do our souls and our eternal happiness!

Do but observe the men of the world, what a pace they go, what large and nimble steps they take in the pursuit of earthly things; do not seek riches *as if they sought them not*, and love the world *as if they loved it not*, and enjoy the present delights of this world, *as if they possessed them not*; tho' *the fashion of this world passeth away*: but we seek heaven, *as if we sought it not*, and love God *as if we loved him not*, and mind eternity and the world to come, *as if we minded them not*; and yet *the fashion of that world doth not pass away*.

But to all this it may be said, you have already told us, that *the children of this world* have so many advantages above *the children of light*, that it is no wonder if they excell and out-strip them: and it is very true, that in many respects they have the advantage of them. But if *the children of light* would look about them, and take all things into consideration, they might see something very considerable to balance the advantages on the other side. It is true the things of this world are present and sensible; but so long as we have sufficient assurance

assurance of the reality of a future state, and of the rewards and punishments of it, the greatness and eternity of these is such an amazing consideration that no distance can render them inconsiderable to a prudent and thinking man. And tho' the men of the world have an entire principle, which is not divided between God and the world; whereas in good men there is a great conflict of contrary principles, the flesh and spirit: yea this advantage is likewise balanced by that powerful assistance of God's grace, which is promised to all good men, who heartily beg it of him, and are sincerely resolved to make use of it. And *lastly*, tho' the men of the world have many ways to compass their ends; yet *the children of light* have one great and infallible one. All the means which the men of the world use to accomplish their designs, may fail and miscarry; for *the race is not to the swift, and the battle to the strong, nor yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to all*: but he that sincerely serves God, and useth the means for the attaining of everlasting salvation, is sure to attain it; if we *seek the righteousness of God* as we ought, we shall certainly be *admitted into his kingdom*. And this surely is an unspeakable advantage which *the children of light* have above *the children of the world*, that if we faithfully use the means, we cannot fail of the end; if we *have our fruit unto holiness, our end shall be everlasting life*; which God of his infinite goodness grant to us all, for his mercy's sake.

S E R M O N LXXVI.

Concerning the Perfection of GOD.

MATTH. V. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.

TH E S E words are the conclusion which our Saviour draws from those precepts of *greater perfection*, than any laws that were extant in the world before, *ver. 44. I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for those that despitefully use you and persecute you*. And to persuade them hereto he propounds to them the pattern of the *divine perfection*; telling them, that being thus affected towards their enemies, they should resemble God, *v. 45. That ye may be the children of your heavenly father; for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust*.

And then he tells us, that if we be not thus affected towards our enemies, and those that have been injurious to us, we are so far from being like God, that we are but just level with the worst of men, *ver. 46, 47. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you; do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only; what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?* And then concludes, that if we would attain that *perfection* which the christian religion designs to advance men to, we must endeavour to be like God in these *perfections* of goodness and mercy, and patience; *Be ye therefore perfect, as your father which is in heaven is perfect*. In which words we have,

First, The absolute *perfection* of the divine nature supposed? *As your father which is in heaven is perfect*.

Secondly, It is propounded as a pattern to our imitation. *Be ye therefore perfect, &c.*

In handling of these words I shall do these *four* things.

I. Consider how we are to conceive of the *divine perfection*.

II. I shall lay down some rules whereby we may govern and rectify our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God.

III. How far we are to imitate the *perfections* of God, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. I shall endeavour to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here intended by our Saviour is not impossible to us ; and then conclude this discourse with some usefull inferences from the whole.

I. I shall consider how we are to conceive of the *divine perfections* : These *two* ways.

1. By ascribing all imaginable and possible *perfection* to God.

2. By separating and removing all manner of *imperfection* from him.

1. By ascribing all imaginable and possible *perfection* to God ; absolute and universal *perfection*, not limited to a certain kind, or to certain particulars ; but whatever we can conceive and imagine to be a *perfection*, is to be ascribed to him ; yea and beyond this, whatever possible *perfection* there is, or possible degree of any *perfection*, which our short understandings cannot conceive or comprehend, is to be ascribed to him. For we are not to confine the *perfection* of God to our imagination, as if we could find out the *Almighty to perfection* : But, on the contrary, to believe the *perfection* of the divine nature to be boundless and unlimited, and infinitely to exceed our highest thoughts and apprehensions.

More particularly, all kinds and degrees of *perfection* are to be ascribed to God, which either do not imply a plain contradiction, or do not argue some *imperfection*, or are not evidently inconsistent with some other and greater *perfection*.

Some things may seem to be *perfections*, which in truth are not ; because they are plainly impossible, and involve a contradiction : as that what has once been, should by any power be made not to have been ; or that any thing, which by its nature is limited and confin'd to one place, should at the same time be in another. These things in reason are impossible, and therefore not to be supposed to fall under any power how unlimited soever. For if we once ascribe contradictions to God, we destroy his being ; because then to be, and not to be, power, and no power, would be all one.

And then there are some *perfections*, which do argue and suppose imperfections in them ; as motion, the quickness and swiftness whereof in creatures is a *perfection*, but then it supposeth a finite and limited nature : for a boundless and immense being, that is every where present at once, hath no need to move from one place to another ; and therefore though motion be a *perfection* in creatures, there is no reason to ascribe it to God, because it supposeth a greater *imperfection*.

And there are also some imaginable degrees of *perfection*, which because they are inconsistent with other *perfections*, are not to be admitted in the divine nature. For instance, such degrees of goodness and mercy may be imagin'd, as would quite exclude and shut out justice ; and on the other hand such a strictness and a rigour of justice, as would leave no room at all for patience and mercy ; and therefore such degrees are not really to be esteemed *perfections*. For this is a certain truth, that nothing is a divine *perfection*, which evidently clasheth with any other necessary and essential *perfection* of the divine nature. We must so consider the *perfections* of God, that they may accord and consist together ; and therefore it cannot be a *perfection* of God to be so good and gracious, as to encourage sin, and to overthrow the reverence of his own laws, and government. 'Tis not goodness, but easiness and weakness, to be contented to be perpetually injur'd and affronted. 'Tis not patience, to be willing to be everlastingly trampled upon. So likewise on the other hand, 'tis not a *perfection* to be so severe and rigorous, as to smite a sinner in the instant that he offends, not to be able to refrain from punishment, and to give time for repentance.

But whatever *perfection* is conceivable or possible, and argues no *imperfection*, nor is repugnant to any other necessary *perfection*, is to be ascribed to God; for this is the most natural and easy conception that we can have of God, that he is the most *perfect* being. This natural light doth first suggest and offer to the minds of men, and we cannot conceive of God as meer power and will without wisdom and goodness. Hence it is that the *Greeks* call God very often τὸ Κρείττον, *the best of Beings*; and the *Latin*, *Optimus Maximus, the best and the greatest, beatissima & perfectissima natura constans & perfecta ratio, the happiest and most perfect nature, immutable and absolute reason*; and many other such expressions which we meet with in the writings of the heathen Philosophers. I readily grant, that the first and most obvious thought which men have of God, is that of his greatness and majesty; but this necessarily involves or infers his goodness; as *Seneca* excellently reasons, *Primus deorum cultus est deos credere, deum reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla Majestas*, "The first worship of the Gods, is to believe their Being; next to ascribe to them greatness and majesty, to ascribe to them goodness, without which there can be no majesty."

And we shall find all along in *Plato* and *Tully*, and the best and wisest writers among the heathens, that they every where attribute the highest excellencies and *perfections* to the divine nature, and do steer and govern all their discourses of God by this principle, that *perfection* is to be ascribed to him: And whenever any thing is said of God, they examine whether it be a *perfection* or not; if it be, they give it him as his due; if it be not, they lay it aside, as a thing not fit to be spoken of him.

And in the scripture we do every where find *perfection* ascribed to the nature and works, and laws of God, to every thing that belongs to him, or proceeds from him: *Job xxxvii. 16. Dost thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?* And again, *Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* *Psal. xviii. 30. As for God his way is perfect. Pf. xix. 7. The law of the Lord is perfect.*

I shall not need to consider particularly the several *perfections* of the divine nature, I shall only give you a brief scheme and draught of them. Whatever *perfection* can be imagined either in the manner of being or acting, is to be ascribed to God; therefore as to his nature we say that he is a Spirit, that is, that he is not meer body or matter, because that would exclude several other *perfections*; for meer matter is incapable both of knowledge and liberty, being determined by necessary laws of motion; and yet without knowledge and liberty, there can be no wisdom nor goodness. We say of God, that he is of himself, and without cause, and does not owe his Being to any other; and consequently that he is necessarily, and that he cannot but *be*, and cannot be otherwise than he is; for that which is of itself did not chuse whether it would be or not, nor whether it would be thus or otherwise; for to suppose any thing to deliberate or consult about its own Being, is to suppose it to be before it is.

We must say of God likewise that he is immense, and every where present, because to be limited is an *imperfection*; and that is eternal, that is, ever was, and shall be; for to cease to be, is a greater *imperfection* than sometime not to have been.

And then we are to say of God, that he is the cause of all other Beings, that they are made by him and depend upon him; that he knows all things, and can do all things in the most perfect manner, by a glance of his mind, and by the meer beck and nod of his will, without long study or deliberation, without laborious pains and endeavours, and consequently that nothing is exempted from his knowledge, and power, and providence, and that he administers all things in a way of goodness and wisdom, of justice and truth; and therefore all things are to be referred to him, as their last end. All these *perfections*, and all other that are possible, we are to look upon the divine nature as fully and immutably possessed of, and that in an higher and more excellent degree, than our finite understandings are able to conceive or comprehend.

2. As we are to ascribe all imaginable possible *perfections* to God, so we are to separate and remove all manner of *imperfection* from him. We must not obscure or blemish the divine nature with the least shadow or blot of *imperfection*. If we once admit of this, to ascribe any thing to God which argues *imperfection*, we strike at the foundation, and destroy one of the clearest and most essential notions, which men have of God. And therefore we find the scripture very careful to remove all kind of natural or moral *imperfection* from God. *Gen. xviii. 25. That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous shall be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the judge of all the world do right?* *Deut. xxxii. 4. A God of truth and without iniquity.* *Rom. ix. 14. What shall we say then, is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid, far be it from him.*

Hence it is that scripture-holiness is so frequently ascrib'd to God, which signifies the purity and freedom of the divine nature from that which we call sin; and God is very solicitous to give us such a notion of himself, as may remove sin and unrighteousness at the greatest distance from him, because that is the greatest of *imperfections*. Is it an *imperfection* to countenance sin? The scripture acquits God of it, *Psal. v. 4, 5. Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee.* Is it an *imperfection* to go from ones word, or to change ones mind? This likewise is remov'd from God, *1 Sam. xv. 29. The strength of Israel will not lie or repent; he is not a man, that he should repent.* Is it an *imperfection* to want any thing, to be liable to any thing, to depend upon any thing without ones self for happiness? This also is to be set far from him. *Job xxii. 2, 3. Can a man be profitable to God? Or is it a gain to him that thou makest thy way perfect?* *Job xxxv. 6, 7. If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? Or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou art righteous, what givest thou him? Or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the son of man.* Is it an *imperfection* to tempt, or to be tempted to sin? This is to be separated from God, *He cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man,* saith St. James, *Chap. i. 17.* And to mention no more, is it an *imperfection* to be in any respect mutable? This is denyed of God. *With him there is no variableness, or shadow of turning.* Thus you see how we are to conceive of the *perfections* of God, by ascribing all imaginable and possible *perfections* to him, and removing all shadow of *imperfection* from him. I proceed in the

II. Place, to lay down some rules by which we may rectifie and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God: The best I can think of, are these following.

First, Let us begin with the most natural, and plain, and easy *perfections* of God, and lay them for a foundation, and rectify all our other apprehensions of God, and reasonings about him, by these; and these are his power, wisdom, and goodness, to which most of the rest may be reduced. Right apprehensions and a firm belief of these will make it easily credible to us, that all things were made and are governed by him; for his goodness will dispose and incline him to communicate being to other things, and to take care of them when they are made. And infinite power and wisdom render him able to do all this without any labour or difficulty, and without any disturbance of his ease or happiness, as *Epicurus* would seem vainly to fear; who in truth did not believe a God, but pretended only to deny his providence, and that he either made or govern'd the world, because he was loath to lay so much trouble upon him. Vain man! as if those things which are impossible and difficult to our weakness and folly, might not be infinitely easy to infinite power and wisdom.

Particularly the goodness and justice of God are not so difficult to apprehend, as the disputes and controversies about them have rendered them to many. When we consider infinite knowledge and power, we may easily lose our selves, and go out of our depth, by wading too far into them: There is something concerning these, that is unimaginable, and unaccountable to our reason; we may not be able to understand how something may be produc'd from nothing; because it

argues such an excess of power, as we cannot comprehend ; but yet we are forc'd to acknowledge, that either the world must be produc'd from nothing, or that matter was eternally of it self, which is every whit as hard to imagine, as that infinite power should be able to produce it from nothing. So likewise we are not able to conceive, how God can certainly know future events, which depend upon voluntary and uncertain causes, because we cannot comprehend infinite knowledge ; but this we may easily be satisfied in, that infinite power and knowledge may be able to do, and know many things, which we cannot conceive how they can be known or done, no more than a child can imagine how a great mathematician can demonstrate his propositions. Only this we are sure of, as we can be of any thing, that no power can do that which is evidently impossible, and implies a plain contradiction.

We are not able perhaps to reconcile the particular providences of God with his universal goodness, justice, and wisdom, because we cannot see to the end of his ways and works at one view, and see every part with relation to the whole ; which would appear very wise, if we knew the whole series of things, and saw the entire design together, as God himself does, to whom (as *Solomon* tells us) *all his ways are known from the beginning.*

So that however we may be at a loss in our conceptions of God's infinite knowledge and power, yet goodness, and justice, and truth, are notions easy and familiar ; and if we could not understand these, the whole Bible would be insignificant to us. For all revelation from God supposeth us to know what is meant by goodness, justice, and truth : And therefore no man can entertain any notion of God, which plainly contradicts these. And it is foolish for any man to pretend, that he cannot know what goodness, and justice, and truth in God are : for if we do not know this, 'tis all one to us, whether God be good or not, nor could we imitate his goodness ; for he that imitates, endeavours to make himself like something that he knows, and must of necessity have some idea of that to which he aims to be like : So that if we had no certain and settled notion of the goodness, and justice, and truth of God, he would be altogether an unintelligible being ; and religion, which consists in the imitation of him, would be utterly impossible.

Now these being the most easy, and intelligible *perfections* of God, by which he is said in scripture to declare his name, that is, to make himself known to us, we should govern all our reasonings about God (as concerning his decrees, and his concurrence with the free actions of men, and his particular providence, which are things more dark and obscure) by what is more clear ; and we shall find in scripture, that in all these points holy men do constantly appeal to these unquestionable and intelligible *perfections* of God. *Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked? (saith Abraham) That be far from thee. Shall not the judge of all the world do right?* We may be mistaken ; but God certainly knows who are wicked, and who are righteous ; and he knows how to punish the wicked, and save the righteous : But we cannot be mistaken in this principle, *that the judge of all the world will do right.* Thus *Moses* satisfies himself and others, concerning the particular providences of God towards the people of *Israel*. Deut. xxxii. 3, 4. *I will publish the name of the Lord : All his ways are judgment ; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.* This we certainly know of God. So *St. Paul*, Rom. ii. 2. *Thou art inexorable, O man ! Whatsoever excuse men may pretend for their faults, he lays down this for a principle, We are sure the judgment of God is according to truth.*

Secondly, Let us always consider the *perfections* of God in conjunction, and so as to reconcile them with one another. Do not consider God as meer power and sovereignty, as meer mercy and goodness, as meer justice and severity ; but as all these together, and in such a measure and degree as may make them consistent with one another. The greatest mistakes in religion are certainly sprung from this root, from separating the *perfections* of God, and considering them singly, and framing such wide and large notions of one, as to exclude another : whereas the *perfections* of God agree together, and that is not a divine *perfection* which

which contradicts any other *perfection*. Among men indeed an eminent degree of any one excellency does usually shut out some other ; and therefore it is observ'd, that power and moderation, love and discretion, do not often meet together ; that a great memory and a small judgment, a good wit and an ill nature, are many times found in conjunction. But in infinite *perfection* all *perfections* do eminently meet and consist together ; and it is not necessary that one excellency should be raised upon the ruins of another.

And if this had been well consider'd, men would not, by being too intent upon God's sovereignty, with neglect of his other *perfections*, have spoken those hard things about predestination : for the sovereignty of God doth by no means set him above the eternal laws of goodness, and truth, and righteousness. And if this were considered, men would not, by poring upon the justice and severity of God, be so swallowed up in despair : for God is not so severe, but he is merciful to the penitent, and hath left a retreat for the returning sinner. If this were well consider'd, it would check the presumption of those, who encourage themselves in sin, by fancying to themselves a God all of mercy and goodness ; and *because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore their heart is fully set in them to do evil* : For it is not goodness and mercy finally to bear with and forgive obstinate offenders ; but want of prudence and good government.

Thirdly, Among different opinions concerning God (as there always have been and will be in the world) chuse those which are farthest from extremity ; because truth as well as virtue usually lies between the extreams. And here I will instance in that controversy, which has much disquieted the church almost in all ages, concerning the decrees of God ; about which there are two extreams, the one that God peremptorily decrees the final condition of every particular person, that is, their everlasting happiness or misery, without any regard or consideration of the *good* or *bad* actions of men. The other, that God decrees nothing concerning any particular person, but only in general, that men found under such and such qualifications shall be happy or miserable, and puts it into their own power to qualify themselves. Now he that is doubtful in this matter, as every man must be that understands the difficulties on both sides, had best take up in the middle opinion, that God decrees the final condition of particular persons with respect to certain qualifications, which speaking absolutely are not in every man's power, but yet under the influence of God's grace, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, may be said to be in our power, in the same sense, as St. Paul says, *I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me* : For besides that this in all probability is the truth, there will be this advantage in it, that he that stands in the middle, is like to be more moderate towards the dissenters on both sides, than either of them will be to one another ; because the middle is not so far from either extream, as the extreams are from one another. At the worst, he stands fairest for an impartial enquiry after truth, and when he has satisfied himself where the truth lies, he may more silently pass over to it, without any great imputation of inconstancy ; which cannot but be remarkable in him, who passeth from one extream to another.

Fourthly, and lastly, Entertain no opinion concerning God, that doth evidently contradict the practice of religion, and a good life, though never so specious and subtil arguments may be used to persuade it. Truth is most easily seen, and discern'd in those reasonings and opinions which tend to practice ; because the absurdity and inconvenience of them is soonest discovered : whereas we cannot so certainly find out the truth or falshood of those opinions, which speculative men devise in their studies, without any consideration whether they serve any real purpose of life, or not. Men indeed are very apt to form those notions, which are most remote from common sense and use ; because more pains and wit are required to make them plausible : but there needs no other argument to make a wise man despise them, than that they are unprofitable, and signify nothing to our practice, and to make men truly better :

This is universally true in all kind of knowledge, but most considerable in the knowledge of God and religion; because that knowledge is of the greatest consideration. We need not scruple to admit some things, not so evident to natural reason, if we be satisfied of the truth of them, from an higher and more cogent reason: As that God has reveal'd it, and said it; this general reason may persuade us of a thing that is above and beyond natural reason: But we may not admit any thing for a divine revelation, which evidently contradicts and weakens the practice of an holy life; because this is the main end of all divine revelation; and we know God, only in order to the service and imitation of him.

Let us then look upon all knowledge, that contradicts practice, as vain and false, because it destroys its end. There are many things that seem probable enough in speculation, which yet we most pertinaciously deny, because they are not practicable; and there are many things, which seem doubtfull in speculation, and would admit of great dispute, which yet because they are found true in practice and experience, are to be taken for certain and unquestionable. The *ἀργός λόγος*, the idle reasoning of the *Stoicks*, was a thing contemned by the wiser Philosophers, as vain and useles subtilty. *Zeno* pretends to demonstrate there is no motion; and what is the consequence of this speculation, but that men must stand still? But so long as a man finds he can walk, all the sophistry in the world will not persuade him, that motion is impossible. In like manner, they that would persuade us, that men can do nothing, nor contribute any more to their own sanctification, than stocks or stones, and upon scripture-metaphors misunderstood, (as *our being dead in trespasses and sins*, and *created to good works*) graft notions, which are impossible and absurd in practice, do not consider that the natural consequence of this is, that men must do nothing at all in religion, never think of God, nor pray to him, nor read his word, nor go to church; but sit still, and be wholly passive to the operations of God's grace: but however this may seem plausible, and men may think they add much to the glory of God's grace, while they deny any power in the creature; yet every considerate man will presently apprehend, that this is by no means to be admitted, because it contradicts practice, and makes all the commands and exhortations of God's word vain and to no purpose; because it destroys religion, and discourages the endeavours of men; makes them slothfull and careless of *working out their own salvation*, than which nothing can set a man farther from God's grace and assistance, and more immediately dispose him for ruin; and upon some such false reasoning as this, the *slothful servant* in the parable *hid his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth*; but when he was called to account, his excuse was not admitted, but *he was cast into utter darkness*. The two other particulars, namely how far we are to imitate the divine *perfections*, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation, and likewise to clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here enjoyn'd, *Be ye perfect, as your father which is in heaven is perfect*, is not impossible to us: Both these I shall refer to another opportunity.

S E R M O N LXXVII.

Concerning our imitation of the DIVINE PERFECTIONS.

MATTH. V. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.

IN these words we have, *First*, The absolute *perfection* of the divine nature supposed, not only in those before mentioned, of goodness and mercy, and patience; but in all other excellencies whatsoever.

Secondly, The *perfection* of God is propounded as a pattern for our imitation.

In the handling of these two particulars, I propounded to proceed in this Method.

I. To shew how we are to conceive of the divine *perfection*.

II. To lay down some rules, by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God.

III. To shew how far we are to imitate the *perfections* of God, and particularly what those divine qualities are which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here intended by our Saviour is not impossible to us; and then to draw some usefull inferences from the whole.

The *two* first I have already spoken to, I now proceed to the *third* particular, which is, to shew how far we are to imitate the *perfections* of God, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation. For though these words do suppose the absolute *perfections* of God which are incommunicable, and a creature, as such, is utterly incapable of them, these cannot be suppos'd to be intended for a pattern to us. As the necessity and independency of the divine nature; and the self-sufficiency of it to his own happiness; to be the original cause of all things; and consequently supream Lord and Governor: the immensity and eternity of his Being; these, and perhaps several other *perfections*, are incommunicable to a creature; and it would be an unsufferable pride, and a kind of High Treason against the divine Majesty, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our own state, as we are creatures, to think to resemble God in these excellencies, of which the condition of a creature is utterly incapable. This was the sin of *Lucifer*, an ambition to step into the throne of God, and *to be like the Most High*.

So that in our imitation of the divine *perfection*, we are to keep within the station of creatures, not affecting an independency and sovereignty like the Most High, and to be omnipotent as he is, *to have an arm like God, and to thunder with a voice like him*, as the expression is in *Job*: But to endeavour to resemble him, *pro modulo creaturæ*, according to the rate and capacity of a creature, in those divine qualities, and in such measures and degrees, as our finite and dependant nature is capable of.

More especially and chiefly in the moral *perfections* of the divine nature; such as are his goodness, and mercy, and patience, his justice, and truth, and faithfull-

faithfullness, these, and only these, the scripture seems to comprehend under the name of holiness; not all the excellencies of the divine nature in general, but those which we call moral excellencies and perfections, such as those which I have named; for with these, and hardly with any other, is the holiness of God join'd in scripture, as *holy and righteous, holy and true, &c.* And therefore when God says, *be ye holy, for I am holy*, it signifies that we are to imitate God in his goodness, and mercy, and patience, and righteousness, and faithfulness, and truth; for these are the holiness of the divine nature, which set him at the greatest distance from that which we call moral impurity and sin.

For that which our Saviour here in the text more peculiarly recommends to our imitation, is the goodness of God, of which his mercy and patience are two eminent branches. The mercy of God is his goodness to those that are in misery, or are liable to it. The patience of God is his mercy in sparing those who have deserved punishment, and are liable to it. And the goodness of God is then greatest, when it is exercised towards the evil and unthankfull; those who are so far from deserving it, that they have given great and just provocations to the contrary. And this affectionate temper of mind, which is so remarkable in God towards the unworthy and unthankfull sons of men, our Saviour recommends to our imitation here in the text, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect. Be ye therefore*--- this article of inference *therefore*, hath a plain relation to something spoken before; and if we look back to *ver. 44.* we shall find our Saviour there enjoining his Disciples *to love their enemies; to bless them that curse them; to do good to them that hate them; and to pray for those that despitefully use them, and persecute them.* And by what other argument doth he enforce the practice of this difficult duty, but by telling us, that this is to be like God, to be good to the evil and unthankfull, *ver. 45. That ye may be the children of your heavenly father, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good; and his rain to fall on the just, and on the unjust.* God is good to all, and exerciseth great mercy and patience even towards the evil and unjust. And then he concludes, that if *perfection* it self be fit to be a pattern, we should labour after these qualities; *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.* So that though the universal perfection of the divine nature be here supposed, yet the attributes of his goodness, and mercy, and patience, are here particularly pointed at, and propounded to us for our pattern; and the precept of imitating the divine *perfection* is more especially to be understood of those *perfections* which our Saviour had been discoursing of before, *viz.* the goodness and mercy of God. And that this is undoubtedly so, is evident from St. Luke's rendring this precept, *ch. vi. 36. Be ye therefore οὐκ ἐκ μισοῦς, benefici, ready to do good, full of kindness and benignity; mercifull as your fathers which is in heaven is mercifull;* that is, endeavour you to be such as I have described God to be. And this St. Matthew calls perfection, because the goodness of God is his great perfection, and the glory of the divine nature, that which reflects a lustre and beauty upon all his other attributes, and takes off the terror of them. From all which it is plain, what those perfections of the divine nature are, which our Saviour doth here particularly recommend to our imitation. I come now in the

IVth and last place, To clear the true meaning of this precept, and to shew that the duty here required, and intended by our Saviour (when he says, *Be ye perfect, as your father which is in heaven is perfect*) is not impossible to us. And to this purpose be pleased to consider these *three* or *four* things.

1. That our imitation of God is certainly restrained to the communicable perfections of God, and such as creatures are capable of; as I have shewn before. For it is so far from being a duty to affect or attempt to be like God in his peculiar perfection, that it was probably the sin of the apostate angels.

2. Our imitation of the divine perfections, which are communicable to creatures, is likewise to be restrain'd to such degrees of these perfections, as creatures are capable of. For no creature can ever be so perfectly good, as God is; nor

nor partake of any other excellency in that transcendent degree, in which the divine nature is possessed of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a pattern propounded to us of so great perfection, as is above our reach to attain to ; and there may be great advantages in it. The way to excell in any kind is, *optima quæque exempla ad imitandum proponere*, to propose the highest and most perfect examples to our imitation. No man can write after too perfect and good a copy ; and though he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one less perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is sure to come short of, is like to shoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Besides, that the excellency of the pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, so it kindles ambition, and makes men strain and contend to the utmost to do better : And though he can never hope to equal the example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect pattern is no hindrance, but an advantage rather to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be supposed to be our duty, which is absolutely beyond our power, a precept of this nature may with as much reason be supposed to be so, as any thing that can be instanc'd in : because in such a case, if we do our best, and be continually pressing forward towards the mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably ; and whatever the law may require to try and raise our obedience, yet in all equitable interpretation, such a will and endeavour will be acceptable with God for the deed. For if the perfection of the law do really exceed our ability, and be beyond the possibility of our performance, the assurance we have of God's goodness will sufficiently secure us from any danger and prejudice upon that account. And we may reasonably presume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this precept, will be as acceptable to God, and as beneficial to our selves, as if our power had been greater, and we had perfectly fulfill'd it. If our heavenly father, to try the readiness and cheerfulness of our obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do something towards it, we may be sure that he will be very well pleased when he sees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may in this case reason as our Saviour does ; *If we that are evil would deal thus with our children, how much more shall our heavenly father ?* The goodness of God signifies very little, if it does not signify this, that in any instance of real and unquestionable goodness, God is much better than any father upon earth.

However at the worst, that wherein we fall short of the *perfection* of the law, may be supplied on our part, by an humble acknowledgment of our own weakness and imperfection ; and on God's part, by mercy and forgiveness, for the sake of the perfect obedience of our blessed redeemer. This is the least benefit we can expect in this case from the grace, and mercy, and equity of the gospel.

5. And *lastly*, which will fully clear this matter ; this precept doth not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it ; that we be perpetually ascending and climbing up higher, still advancing from one degree of goodness to another, and continually aspiring after a nearer resemblance to God : And this certainly is possible to us, to endeavour to be as like God as we can, in this weak and imperfect state.

Whereas any equality with God, even in the communicable attributes of his goodness, and mercy, and patience, is not only impossible to us in this state of sin and imperfection, but above the condition of a creature, even of *the spirits of just men made perfect*, and of the highest Angels in glory ; for their perfection is not absolute, but in comparison with our present state. And I think there is no great reason to doubt, but that the blessed spirits above, who continually behold the face of their father, are still writing after this copy, which is here propounded to us ; and endeavouring *to be perfect, as their father which is in heaven is perfect* ; still aspiring after a nearer and more perfect resemblance of God, whose goodness and mercy is so far beyond, and before that of any crea-

ture, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this seems to be no inconsiderable ingredient, and enhancement of the happiness of heaven, that the holiness of good men (which is the similitude of God) is never at a stand, nor at its full growth and period; but that the glorified Saints (yea and blessed Angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themselves still become better and happier to all eternity. And this in my apprehension is no undervaluing the happiness of heaven, that it is not so perfect at first, as it shall be afterwards; because it is granted on all hands, that the happiness of those good souls, who are already in bliss, shall be more perfect and compleat at the resurrection. And why may it not then be continually increasing, and be augmented still more and more, without any stint or final period of its perfection? In this world we are apt to faint in a long course of goodness, and to be *weary of well-doing*. But in the other state, when men shall be strongly byassed to goodness, and having nothing to pull them back, it will then be so far from being a trouble, that methinks it should be a mighty pleasure to the blessed, to find that there is no end of their doing good and becoming better. For if conformity to God be the ground and foundation of all happiness, then our blessedness will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This I confess were a dismal consideration, to think that in heaven we should be liable to relapse, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy state. But this is a comfortable consideration, that our holiness and happiness shall never be at a stand, that it is secure so far as it goes, and that we cannot lose what we have once attain'd, as we may do in this world. This methinks should be a trouble to no man, that as good and happy as he is at first, he shall still be better and better, more and more happy without end.

But be that as it will, and as God pleaseth (for we do but talk in the dark about our future state,) this is certain, that an equality with God in any of his *perfections* is not to be attained by any creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be the meaning of this precept: But that which our Saviour requires, is a vigorous imitation of this pattern; that we have this example of the divine *perfection* allways before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring our selves to the nearest resemblance of God, that possibly we can. And if this be our sincere care and study, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with God, and that he will be graciously pleased to esteem us for his children; and if there need a pardon for it, that God will forgive us where we fall short of the *perfection* of that pattern, which we can never imitate to perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble, that when we had done all we could, we must still fall much short of the *perfection* of God's law, and the duty therein laid upon us. Alas! which of us does near so much as we can, and is not conscious to himself that it is through his own fault and neglect, that he is so unlike his heavenly father in goodness and mercy, in righteousness and true holiness; and that he still partakes in so great a measure of those, not only unreasonable and brutish, but even devilish passions of malice and hatred, of rage and cruelty, of impatience and implacable revenge; and that these ungodlike qualities do so frequently prevail upon us, and have so much dominion over us!

We are so far from being what we ought, in these and many other respects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our duty with care and conscience, and make it our sincere endeavour to subdue our selves to a conformity to God, and to a perfect holiness in his fear.

Would we but often set God before our eyes, and represent to our selves those excellent and amiable *perfections* of the divine nature, which are so comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we stand so infinitely oblig'd, his goodness and mercy and patience, upon which all our hopes of happiness do depend, and to which we are indebted, that we are not miserable past recovery; that goodness and patience which he continually exerciseth towards us, (for we provoke

voke him every day,) and exerciseth towards us on purpose to endear those *perfections* to us, from which we reap so much comfort and advantage; that by the pattern of *perfection* it self, and the example of him who is so much above us, no ways obliged to us, nor tyed by any interest to be concerned for us; and who being happy in himself, neither hopes nor fears any thing from us; I say, by an example that has all these advantages, we might be provok'd to be so affected towards one another (who have mutual obligations one to another, and mutual expectations of good or evil one from another) as we have always found God to be towards us, and as we desire he should still continue; and miserable creatures are we, whenever he ceaseth to be so: And we have reason to fear he will cease to be so, if this example of his goodness and patience towards us, do not transform us into the image of the divine *perfections*, and prevail upon us to imitate those excellencies, which we have so much reason to approve and admire, and be in love withall.

These considerations taken both from ingenuity and interest, should awaken our sloth, and stir up our most resolute and vigorous endeavours after that *perfection* which our Saviour here requires, and make us ashamed of our lazy complaints, that our duty is set on high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it; when yet we have hardly made one step towards it, and are so remiss and unconcern'd about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greatest ease, and at an hour's warning, before we leave the world, could fulfill this precept of our Lord, of *being perfect as our father which is in heaven is perfect*.

And yet let me tell you, so far as any of us are from resembling our heavenly father in some good degree and measure, so far are we distant from heaven, and the temper of the blessed; so far we are utterly unqualified for the blissfull sight and enjoyment of God: for unless we be first *like him*, we cannot *see him as he is*: Only *the pure in heart shall see God*; and therefore *every man that has this hope in him, should purify himself, even as he is pure*.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, dispatch'd the *four* things I propounded for the explication of this text; namely, how we are to conceive of the divine *perfections*, and to give some rules to regulate and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and *perfections* of God; to explain the extent of this duty, and vindicate the possibility of it.

All that now remains, is to draw some usefull inferences from this discourse which I have made; and they shall be these *two*.

I. That the strongest and surest reasonings in religion, are grounded upon the essential *perfections* of God.

II. That the truest and most substantial practice of religion, consists in the *imitation* of God.

I. That the strongest and surest reasonings in religion are grounded upon the essential *perfections* of God; so that even divine revelation it self doth suppose these for its foundation, and can signify nothing to us, unless these be first known and believed. Unless we be first persuaded of the providence of God, and his particular care of mankind, why should we believe that he would make any revelation of himself to men? Unless it be naturally known to us, that God is true, what foundation is there for the unbelief of his word? And what signifies the laws and promises of God, unless natural light do first assure us of his sovereign authority and faithfulness? So that the principles of natural religion are the foundation of that which is revealed; and therefore in reason nothing can be admitted to be a revelation from God, which plainly contradicts his essential *perfection*; and, consequently, if any pretends divine revelation for this doctrine, that God hath from all eternity absolutely decreed the eternal ruin of the greatest part of mankind, without any respect to the sins and demerits of men, I am as certain that this doctrine cannot be of God, as I am sure that God is good and just: because this grates upon the notion that mankind have of goodness and justice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite goodness; and therefore if *an Apostle or Angel from heaven* teach any doctrine which plainly overthrows the goodness and justice

justice of God, *let him be accursed*. For every man hath greater assurance that God is good and just, than he can have of any subtle speculations about predestination and the decrees of God.

And for the same reason I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibility of any man or church in the world, that God would not have men understand their publick prayers, and the lessons of scripture which are read to them. A lesson not to be understood is nonsense: a lesson is something to be learn'd, which how it can be without being understood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe upon the authority of any person or church whatsoever, that God should reveal his will to men in the holy scriptures, with a design to have it hid, and lock'd up from the generality of mankind in an unknown tongue. And much less can I believe (which yet is the express doctrine of the council of *Trent*) that the saving efficacy of the sacrament depends upon the intention of the priest. Which is to say, that though people believe, and live never so well, they may be damned by sholes and whole parishes together at the pleasure of the priest, and for no other reason, but because he is so wicked as not to intend to save them. Can any man believe this, that hath any tolerable notion of God's goodness? May we not in this case appeal, as *Abraham* did, to the goodness and justice of God, and expostulate with greater reason than he did, much after the same manner, *Wilt thou destroy the righteous for the wicked? That be far from thee to do after this manner*. To damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people should lie at the mercy of a wicked priest, to be damned or saved at his pleasure, *that be far from thee; shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* And can there be a greater affront to the goodness and justice of God, than to imagine he should deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no possibility of doing wrong.

And to give but one instance more; I can never believe, upon the authority of any man, or church whatsoever, that our Saviour, in the celebration of his last supper, did with his own hands give away his own natural body into the hands of his Disciples, and give his blood shed, before it was shed; that the whole doctrine of christianity should mainly rely upon the evidence of miracles, the assurance of which depends upon the certainty of sense; and yet that an essential part of that doctrine should overthrow the certainty of sense. I can never while I live believe these two things, that the last thing our Saviour did before his death should be to teach his Disciples not to believe their own senses, as he must do if he taught them transubstantiation; and that the very first thing he did after he was risen from the dead, should be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of sense for the proof of his resurrection; for when they doubted of his resurrection, *Luke xxiv. 38. He said unto them, why are ye troubled? And why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I my self, handle me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have*. If this be a good argument, that it was a real body which they saw, because they saw and felt flesh and bones: is it not as good an argument on the other side, that what they saw in the sacrament was not his real and natural body, because they could neither see nor handle flesh and bones? So that I cannot believe transubstantiation, unless I can believe that truth it self can contradict and destroy it self.

You see of what use it is to have right and steady apprehensions of the divine *perfections*, that, these being laid for a foundation, we may upon all occasions have recourse to them, and govern our opinions and reasonings in religion, about all doubtfull matters, by such principles as are clear and unquestionable. The

II. Inference is, that the truest and most substantial practice of religion, consists in the imitation of the divine *perfections*, especially the moral *perfections* of the divine nature, which the scripture is wont to comprehend under the name of holiness; and such are the goodness, and mercy, and patience of God, his justice, and truth, and faithfulness. To imitate God in these, is true religion; or, as St. *James* expresses it, *pure religion, and undefiled*, ἀμίαντος, without

without any flaw or blemish, alluding to precious stones, the greatest commendation of which is to be clear and without flaw. *Religio est imitari quem colis; this is religion, to imitate him whom we worship.* This the heathens by the light of nature did discover to be the great end of religion, and the best worship of the deity, to be like God. *Pythagoras* was wont to say, "That we honour God most, when we are most like him in the temper and disposition of our minds:" And *Plato* to the same purpose, "That the height and perfection of goodness is to resemble God, as near as is possible; and that we resemble God, in being just, and holy, and wise." So likewise *Hierocles*, "That a good man imitates God in the measures of love and friendship, who hates no man, and extends his benignity to all mankind." *Plutarch* hath an excellent discourse about the patience of God towards sinners, and gives this as one reason why God doth not presently punish offenders; "That he might give an example to us of gentleness and patience, and check the fury and violence of men in revenging injuries upon one another; which nothing will do more effectually, than to consider that gentleness and forbearance are an imitation of the divine perfection." And then he cites an excellent saying of *Plato*, "That God manifested himself, and displayed his perfections in the world for our imitation; true virtue being nothing else, but an imitation of the divine nature." For there is no greater benefit man can receive from God's hand, than to become virtuous by the imitation and pursuit of those excellencies and perfections which are in God. *Seneca* likewise hath many passages to this purpose, *inter viros bonos ac Deum amicitia est, imò etiam necessitudo & similitudo, between God and good men there is a friendship, yea, and an intimacy and likeness;* and that a virtuous man is *discipulus æmulatorque & progenies Dei, a disciple and imitator, and the very genuine off-spring of God.* So that the light of nature and the reason of mankind, have always placed the perfection of religion in the imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections.

And this is very agreeable to the language and sense of the holy scriptures, which every where make the practice of religion to consist in our conformity to God, and the laws which he hath given us; which are nothing else but a transcript of his nature. The great business of religion is to do the will of God; and *this is the will of God, our sanctification;* and our sanctification is our conformity to the holiness of God; and this is the scope of the general exhortations of scripture, to persuade us to holiness, that is, to an imitation of the moral perfections of the divine nature. 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved! let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.* 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. *As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy,* 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. speaking of the christian religion, which he calls *the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby also* (says he) *are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* So that the holiness the gospel designs to bring us to, is a participation of the divine nature, which we can no otherwise partake of, but by an imitation of the divine perfections. This is that which the scriptures expresses to us by the terms of *regeneration, the new man, and the new creature.* And therefore those who are converted from a wicked and sinful state, and reclaimed to goodness, are said to *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and the holiness of truth.* Eph. iv. 23. *To be renewed after the image of him that created us.* Coloss. iii. 10. This is to be the sons and children of God; to imitate and resemble God in our dispositions and manners. Eph. v. 1. *Be ye therefore, μιμηται τοῦ Θεοῦ, imitators of God, as dear children.* Phil. ii. 15. *That ye may be blameless and sincere, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation.* 1 John. iii. 10. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil, whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God.* There have been great enquiries concerning the marks of a child of God; this is the true character, and that which in effect comprehends all others, our imitation and resemblance of God in those perfecti-

perfections, wherein he is set forth for a pattern to us. And in this mainly consists the practice both of natural religion, and of true christianity.

But does not religion consist very much in the duties of God's worship, in the exercise of piety and devotion, in constant and frequent prayers to God, and in the celebration of his goodness by praise and thanksgiving, in reading and hearing, and meditating upon God's word, in fasting and abstinence, and keeping our bodies in subjection to our spirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy sacrament? To this I answer, that religion doth consist very much in the due performance of these duties, and they are unquestionable and necessary parts of religion, and the means appointed by God for the begetting and increasing in us such dispositions of mind, as render us most like to God, and for the production of all the fruits of goodness, and holiness, and righteousness in our lives.

But then it is to be considered, that these exercises of piety and devotion are but the *means* of religion, and not the ultimate end and design of it. All these do but serve to bring us to a nearer resemblance of God; and where they fail of this end, and are performed for their own sakes only, and we rest in them, without aiming at any thing farther, they lose their nature; because they are not used as *means*, but rested in, as if they were the *end* of religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal mistake about religion, and think that if they do but serve God in their families, and go to church, and behave themselves there with devotion and reverence, and at certain seasons receive the sacrament, they are truly religious, and very good christians; when all this while they take no care to improve themselves in real goodness, by an inward conformity of their minds to God, and the real reformation and amendment of their lives, by mortifying their lusts, and subduing their appetites and passions to the laws of reason and religion, by *putting on, as the elect of God, bowels of kindness*; by being true and faithfull, righteous and just, patient and mercifull, *as their father which is in heaven is so*; and by *forbearing one another*, in case of provocation, and *forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us*; by *purifying themselves as God is pure*, and endeavouring to *be holy in all manner of conversation, as he who hath called them is holy*; when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly-minded, and to serve their covetousness, will strain a point of truth or justice, and hardly do an act of charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by meer importunity, or some such urgent necessity, in point of decency and reputation, that for shame of the world they know not how to avoid it; when their passions are as fierce and ungoverned, their hearts as full of gall and bitterness, their tongues of slander and evil-speaking, their humours as proud, and surly, and censorious, as theirs can be who are openly prophane, and seem to neglect and despise all religion: And yet because they serve God (as they call it) and make an external appearance of piety and devotion, are good church-men, and attend upon the ordinances of God, they think they have discharged the whole business of religion admirably well, and are very good *children of God*, and in a state of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all these duties, and the use of all these means separated from that which is the great end of religion, the conformity of our selves to God, in those qualities and dispositions which I have mention'd, is so far from finding acceptance with God, that it is an abomination to him. So God every where declares in scripture, telling us, that *the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*; and that he disdains to be praised by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unless with *the praises we offer to him, we order our conversation aright, we shall not see the salvation of God*. With what contempt does he speak of this formal external religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil? He hath shewed thee, O man! what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Is not this the fast which I have chosen, to break the bands of wickedness, and to let the oppressed*

go free, to deal thy bread to the hungry ; and that thou bring the poor, that are cast out, to thine house ; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him ; and that thou hide not thy self from thine own flesh ?

Nor is it *bearing of the word* that will avail us, unless we be doers of it. *Blessed are they* (says our Saviour) *that hear the word of God and keep it. He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man, who hath built his house upon a rock.* Nor will bare receiving the sacrament recommend us to God ; but performing the obligation, which thereby we take upon our selves to abstain from all sin and wickedness ; otherwise we tread under foot the son of God, and prophane the blood of the covenant, whereby we should be sanctified, as if it were an unholy thing. Can any man think that to be religion, which has no effect upon the lives of men, which does not teach them to govern their words and actions, who reads those plain words of St. James, *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.* When religion produceth these real effects, then the means of religion do truly serve the end of it, and we are not only bearers of the word, but doers of it, and shall be blessed in our deed.

So that as there is an obligation upon us to use the means of religion, which God hath instituted with great care and conscience ; so we should chiefly mind that which is the end of all religion, which is to make us partakers of a divine nature, and makes us like to God, especially in those amiable and excellent qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the divine nature, his benignity and goodness, his mercy and patience. These, because they are the primary perfections of God, are the principal duties both of natural and revealed religion, and of an eternal and indefensible obligation ; because they have their foundation in the nature of God, which is fixt and unalterable. And all positive institutions, when they come in competition with these, are to stoop and veil to them. Natural and moral duties, especially those of goodness, and mercy, and charity, are so strongly bound upon us, that nothing in any reveal'd religion can cancel the obligation of them, or justify the violation of these great and indispensable laws. Our Saviour in his religion has declar'd nothing to the prejudice of them ; but on the contrary has straiten'd our obligation to them as much as is possible : *The son of man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them ;* so that they know not what manner of spirit they are of, who think to please God by hating men, who are made after the image of God, and by killing one another, to do him good service ; who, to advance his cause and religion in the world, will break through all the obligations of nature and civil society, undermine government, and disturb the peace of mankind.

Whereas our Saviour did not by any thing in his religion design to alter the civil government of the world, or to lessen and diminish the rights of princes, or to set men loose from allegiance to them, or to make treason and rebellion, bloody wars and barbarous massacres lawfull, for the propagating of his faith. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the pope ; but yet he deposed no princes, nor excommunicated and discharged their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion ; he hath assumed no such power to himself. *By what authority then doth his vicar do these things ; and who gave him this authority ?* Our Lord tells us plainly, *his kingdom was not of this world ;* and that without any distinction of *in ordine ad spiritualia*, and therefore he wrested no prince's kingdoms out of his hand, nor seized it as forfeited to himself.

But this power the pope claims to himself, and hath exercised it many a time disturbing the peace of nations, and exercising the most barbarous cruelties in the world, under a pretense of zeal for God and religion ; as if because religion is so very good a thing in it self, it would warrant men to do the very worst things for its sake ; which is the ready way to render religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the best things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

If we would preserve in the minds of men any reverence and esteem for religion, we must take heed how we destroy the principles of *natural religion*, and undermine the peace and happiness of human society, for the glory of God, and under pretence of following divine revelation, and being led by a church that cannot err: for every church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the principles and dictates of natural religion, and utterly inconsistent with the essential *perfections* of God, and with the peace and order of the world: for *God is not the God of confusion, but of order*; which St. Paul appealeth to, as a principle of eternal truth, and naturally known: But they that pretend that religion prompts men to sedition and cruelty, do represent God as *the God of confusion, and not of order*.

Therefore whatever men may through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious ends, pretend to be religion; let us place it in that which is unquestionable, the imitation of the divine *perfections*, and let us (as the Apostle exhorts) *put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, and above all let us put on charity, which is the very bond of perfection*. The great *perfection* of the divine nature, or rather the very essence of God is love. So St. John speaks, *God is love*; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. And 'tis very remarkable, that in these very qualities of charity, and kindness, and compassion, which we peculiarly call *humanity*, we approach nearest to the *divinity* it self, and that the contrary dispositions do transform us into wild beasts and devils.

And yet as severely as I speak against these principles and practices, I have an hearty pity and compassion for those who are under the power of so great a delusion; and upon a pretence of being made the only true christians in the world, are seduced from *humanity* it self; and so far from being made good *christians* by these principles, that they are hardly left to be *men*; *being blinded, and led by the blind, they fall into the ditch of the grossest and foulest immoralities*; such as are plainly enough condemn'd by the light of nature, if there were no bible in the world.

Not but that we protestants have our faults and our follies too, and those (God knows) too many and too visible; we possess more truth, but there is little peace among us; and yet God is as well and as often in scripture called *the God of peace*, as *the God of truth*. In this great light and liberty of the reformed religion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out; we are full of heats and animosities, of schisms and divisions, *and the way of peace we have not known*. God grant that at last *in this our day* (when it concerns us so much) we may *know the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes*.

You see in what things the practice of religion mainly consists, in our likeness to God, and resemblance of him in holiness and goodness; and without this we are utterly incapable of happiness: we cannot *see* God, unless *we be like him*. The presence of God can administer no pleasure, no felicity to us, till we be changed into his image; till we come to this temper, to hate sin, and delight in purity and holiness, we can have no delightfull communion with the holy God; till our passions be subdued, and our souls dispossessed of those diabolish and ungodlike qualities of hatred and malice, of revenge and impatience, and till we be endued with the spirit of universal goodness and charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly father; we are not qualified *to dwell with God, who is love, and dwells in love*. So far as we are defective in these divine qualities and perfections, so far we fall short of the temper of happiness.

There is a direct and eternal opposition between the holy and good God, and the evil dispositions of wicked men; and till this opposition be removed, it is impossible we should find any felicity in the enjoyment of God. Now the nature of God is fix'd and unchangeable; God cannot recede from his own *perfection*, and therefore we must quit our sins: Thou canst not change God, therefore change thy self; and rather think of putting off thy corrupt nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, *with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning*. God condescended to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happiness; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy.

S E R M O N LXXVIII.

The Happiness of God.

I TIM. I. II. *The Blessed God* —

The whole Verse runs thus :

According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.

SINCE all men naturally desire *happiness*, and thirst after it ; methinks we should all desire to know what it is, and where it is to be found, and how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it. What *Job* says of *wisdom* may be said also of *happiness*, *God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.* He only, who is perfectly possessor of it himself, knows wherein it consists, and what are the true ingredients of it.

So that to direct us in our search after *happiness*, the best way will be to contemplate and consider the divine nature, which is the perfect pattern and idea of *happiness*, the original spring and fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of. And to that end, I have pitched upon these words, wherein the Apostle attributes this perfection of *blessedness* or *happiness* to God, *The blessed God.*

And tho' this be as essential a part as any other of that notion which mankind have of God from the light of nature, yet I nowhere find in all the New Testament, this attribute of *happiness* given to God, but only twice in this epistle. 'Tis true indeed, the title of *blessedness* is frequently given both to God and Christ, but in another sense, and in a quite different notion : As *Mark* 14. 61. where the High-priest asks our Saviour, *Art thou the Christ the son of the blessed?* τὸ εὐλογητὸν of him that is celebrated and praised; *2 Cor.* xi. 31. *The God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is blessed for evermore.* So likewise, *Rom.* i. 25. *The creator blessed for evermore:* Which likewise is said of Christ, *Rom.* ix. 5. *Of whom Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for evermore ; that is, for ever to be praised and celebrated.* But in all these texts the Greek word is εὐλογητός which tho' we translate *blessed*, yet it is a quite different notion from the title of *blessedness* which is given to God in the text, where the word is not εὐλογητός but μακάριος the *blessed* or *happy* God ; and this title is not anywhere in all the New Testament, (that I know of) given to God, but here in the text, and *Chap.* vi. v. 15. where our Lord Jesus Christ (who also is God) is called *the blessed and the only potentate.* And whether this title of *the blessed* or *the happy* God, be here in the text given to God the father, or to his eternal son, our Lord Jesus Christ ; is not so much material to my present purpose to enquire. For, suppose it be Christ who is here call'd *the blessed God* ; this however is certain, that *blessedness* or *happiness* is a title belonging to God, which is all that is necessary for a foundation of my present discourse.

In speaking of this argument, I shall do these three things.

I. Shew what we are to understand by the *happiness* of God, and what are the essential ingredients of it.

II. That this title doth belong to God, and that the divine nature is perfectly *blessed* and *happy*.

III. How far creatures are capable of *happiness*, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it : And shall then make some inferences from my discourse upon this argument.

I. I will consider what we are to understand by the *blessedness* or *happiness* of God, and what are the essential ingredients of it. Now the notion of *happiness* taken at its highest pitch (as we must necessarily do when we apply it to God) is no other than a fix'd and immoveable state of contentment and satisfaction, of pleasure and delight, resulting from the secure possession and enjoyment of all that is good and desirable, that is, of all excellency and perfection; so that these following ingredients must go to make up a perfect state of *happiness*.

1. Perfect knowledge, to understand what it is that constitutes *happiness*, and to know when one is really possess'd of it. For as he is not *happy*, who is so only in imagination or a dream, without any real foundation in the thing; for he may be pleas'd with his condition, and yet be far enough from being truly *happy*: so, on the other hand, he that has all other necessary ingredients of *happiness*, and only wants this, that he doth not think himself so, cannot be *happy*. For this we often see in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men who have all the materials and circumstances of a worldly *happiness* about them, yet by the unskillful management of the matter, and from a lightness and injudiciousness of mind, not knowing when they are well, they make an hard shift, even when they are in as good circumstances as it is almost possible for men to be in this world, to be very discontented and miserable in their own opinions. But God perfectly knows both what makes *happiness*, and that he is possess'd of it.

2. To perfect *happiness* is likewise requir'd a full power to do whatever conduceth to *happiness*, and likewise to check and controul whatever would be an hindrance and disturbance to it; and therefore no being is as happy as it can be, that is not all-sufficient, and hath not within its power and reach whatever is necessary to an happy condition, and necessary to secure and continue that *happiness* against all attempts and accidents whatsoever.

3. There is wisdom also requir'd to direct this power, and manage it in such a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very different from meer power abstractedly consider'd; for one may have all the materials of *happiness*, and yet want the wisdom and skill to put them so together, as to frame an happy condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not thoroughly understand the proper method and means of compassing and securing his own *happiness*.

4. Another most considerable and essential ingredient of *happiness* is goodness; without which, as there can be no true majesty and greatness, so neither can there be any *felicity* or *happiness*. Now goodness is a generous disposition of mind to communicate and diffuse it self, by making others partakers of its *happiness* in such degrees as they are capable of it, and as wisdom shall direct: For he is not so happy as he may be, who hath not the pleasure of making others so, and of seeing them put into an happy condition by his means, which is the highest pleasure (I had almost said *pride*, but I may truly say *glory*) of a good and great mind: For by such communications of himself, an immense and all-sufficient being doth not lessen himself, or put any thing out of his power, but doth rather enlarge and magnify himself; and does, as I may say, give great ease and delight to a full and fruitfull being, without the least diminution of his power and happiness. For the cause and original of all other beings can make nothing so independent upon it self, as not still to maintain his interest in it, to have it allways under his power and government; and no being can rebel against his maker, without extream hazard to himself.

5. Perfect *happiness* doth imply the exercise of all other virtues, which are suitable to so perfect a being, upon all proper and fitting occasions; that is, that so perfect a being do nothing that is contrary to, or unbecoming his holiness and righteousness, his truth and faithfulness, which are essential to a perfect being; and for such a being to act contrary to them in any case, would be to create disquiet and disturbance to it self: For this is a certain rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to its own nature without reluctancy and displeasure, which in moral agents is that which we call *guilt*; for *guilt* is nothing

thing else but the trouble and disquiet which ariseth in one's mind, from the conscioufness of having done something which is contrary to the perfective principles of his being, that is, something that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done; which we cannot imagine ever to befall so perfect and immutable a being as God is.

6. Perfect *happiness* implies in it the settled and secure possession of all those excellencies and perfections; for if any of these were liable to fail, or be diminish'd, so much would be taken off from perfect and compleat *happiness*. If the deity were subject to any change or impairment of his condition, so that either his knowledge, or power, or wisdom, or goodness, or any other perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of *happiness*. And from all these does result in the

7th and last place, Infinite contentment and satisfaction, pleasure and delight, which is the very *essence* of *happiness*.

1. Infinite contentment and satisfaction in this condition. And well may *happiness* be contented with it self; that is, with such a condition, that he that is possesst of it, can neither desire it should be better, nor have any cause to fear it should be worse.

2. Pleasure and delight, which is something more than contentment: For one may be contented with an affliction, and painfull condition, in which he is far from taking any pleasure and delight. *No affliction is joyous for the present, but grievous*, as the Apostle speaks *Heb. xii.* But there cannot be perfect *happiness* without pleasure in our condition. Full pleasure is a certain mixture of love and joy, hard to be expressed in words, but certainly known by inward sense and experience.

And thus I have endeavour'd to describe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect conceptions and expressions of God, the *happiness* of the divine nature, and wherein it consists. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propos'd, which was to shew, that this attribute of perfection doth belong to God; and that the divine nature is *perfectly blessed and happy*; and this is so universal an acknowledgment of natural light, that it would be a very superfluous and impertinent work, to trouble you with particular citations of heathen authors to this purpose; nothing being more frequent in them than to call the deity, *beatissimam* & *perfectissimam naturam*, the most happy and most perfect being, and therefore *happy*, because felicity doth naturally result from *perfection*. It shall suffice to take notice of these *two* things out of heathen writers, to my present purpose.

1. That they accounted *happiness* so essential to the notion of a God, that this was one of the ways which they took to find out what properties were fit to attribute to God, and what not; to consider, what things are consistent with *happiness*, or inconsistent with it; and whatever did signify *happiness*, and was a perfection consistent with it, they ascribed to God, as a suitable property of the divine nature; and whatever was otherwise, they remov'd it from God, as unfit to be said of him.

2. Whatever differences there were among the philosophers concerning the *perfections* of the *divine nature*, they all agreed in the *perfect felicity* of it; even *Epicurus* himself, who so boldly attempted to strip the *divine nature* of most of its perfections, by denying that God either made or govern'd the world; whereby he took away at once his being the first cause and original of all things, and his goodness likewise, and wisdom, and power, and justice, or at least made all these useless, by taking away all occasion and opportunity for the exercise of them; yet this man does frequently own, and profess to believe the *happiness* of the divine nature; and then out of an ignorant and officious kindness to the deity, and (as he pretended) for the security of his felicity, did in effect take away his other perfections; he would by no means put God to the trouble and burden of making the world, or taking care of the affairs of it, lest this should discompose the deity, or be an interruption or disturbance of his ease and felicity. For thus *Lucretius*, the great disciple of *Epicurus*, describes his opinion of the divine nature.

Omnis enim divum, per se, natura necesse est,
 Immortali ævo summâ cum pace fruatur,
 Semota à nostris rebus, sejunctaque longè.
 Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
 Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
 Nec benè pro meritis capitur, nec tangitur irâ.

That is, *It is necessary that the divine nature should be happy, and therefore altogether unconcern'd in our affairs ; free from all grief and danger, sufficient for it self, and standing in need of no body, neither pleased with our good actions, nor provoked by our faults.* This was a very false notion both of God and happiness, to imagine that the care of the world should be a pain and disturbance to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodness. But this is not now my business to consider ; that which is to my present purpose, is, that the *happiness* of the divine nature was universally owned ; and that *blessedness* is so inseparable from the notion of a deity, that whoever professes to believe a God, must acknowledge him to be *perfectly happy*.

As for the testimony of scripture, I have already told you, that there are but two texts wherein this title of *μικροῦ*, the happy or blessed, is given to God ; but by consequence the scripture every where declares the *happiness* of the divine nature, *viz.* where-ever it speaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge, and power, and wisdom, and goodness, and righteousness, and of the eternity and unchangeableness of these, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in the enjoyment of these *perfections*. I shall now proceed to the

III. And *last thing*, which I proposed to consider, *viz.* How far *creatures* are capable of *happiness*, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it. They are not capable of *absolute* and *perfect happiness*, because *that* results from *infinite perfection*, which is no where to be found but in God : It remains then, that *creatures* are only capable of being *happy* in a *finite* and *limited* degree, by the resemblance of *God*, and by the enjoyment of him ; by being like to him, and by our likeness to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him.

As we are *creatures* of a *finite power*, and limited understandings, and a mutable nature, we do necessarily want many of those *perfections*, which are the cause and ingredients of a *perfect happiness*. We are far from being sufficient for our own happiness ; we are neither so of our selves, nor can we make our selves so by our own power ; for neither are we wise enough for our own directions, nor good enough for our own satisfaction. All the *happiness* that we are capable of, is, by communication from him, who is the original and fountain of it ; by our being made *partakers of the divine nature*, (as St. Peter speaks, by our resemblance of God in those *perfections* which are the most essential ingredients of happiness, his goodness, and righteousness, and truth, and holiness ; these do immediately qualify us for the favour and friendship of Almighty God, and for the blessed sight and enjoyment of him ; and the favour of God, and the light of his countenance lifted upon us, and his friendship and good-will to us, supplies all defects of power and wisdom in us : For God being our friend, we have an interest in all his *perfections*, and a security, that as occasion requires, they will all be employ'd for our benefit and advantage ; so that tho' we are *weak in our selves*, we are *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*, and are *able to do all things through him strengthening us* ; and tho' we want wisdom, we may have free recourse to the fountain of it, and *ask of God, who gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not*. And it is next to having these *perfections* in our selves, to know where to have them for asking, whenever we stand in need of them, so far as is necessary to our *happiness*.

So that tho' our happiness depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify our selves for it, (and God is allways ready to assist us by his grace to this purpose)

pose) it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as safe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were sufficient for our selves. However, this is the highest *happiness* that the condition of a *creature* is capable of, to have all our defects supply'd in so liberal a manner by the bounty of another, and to have a free recourse to the fountain of happiness, and at last to be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of him, *in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore.* I have done with the *three* things I propos'd to speak to.

But to what purpose, may some say, is this long description and discourse of *happiness*? How are we the wiser and the better for it? I answer; very much, in several respects.

1. This plainly shews us, that *atheism* is a very melancholy and mischievous thing; it would take away the *fountain* of *happiness*, and the only perfect *pattern* of it; endeavours at once to extinguish the being of God, and all the life and comfort of mankind, so that we could neither form any idea of *happiness*, or be in any possibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not sufficient for it of our selves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing that can make us so. God is *the true light of the world*, and a thousand times more necessary to the comfort and happiness of mankind, than the sun it self, which is but a dark shadow of that infinitely more bright and glorious being; *the happy and only potentate* (as the Apostle describes him in the latter end of this epistle) *who only hath immortality, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see,* meaning in this mortal state.

So that the greatest enemies, and most injurious of all others to mankind, are those who would banish the belief of a God out of the world; because this is *to lay the ax to the root of the tree*, and at one blow to cut off all hopes of happiness from mankind. So that he is a *fool* indeed, that *says in his heart, there is no God*; that is, that wisheth there were none; because it is not possible for a man to wish worse to himself, and more effectually to destroy his own happiness.

2. If the divine nature be so *infinitely* and *completely* happy, this is a very great confirmation of our faith and hope concerning the happiness of another life, which the scripture describes to us, by the sight and enjoyment of God. As we are creatures, we are not capable of the happiness that is absolutely and infinitely perfect; because our nature is but finite, and limited; but *the blessed God* who is *infinitely happy* himself, can also make us *happy* according to our *finite* measure and capacity. For, as he that is the first and original being, can communicate being to other things, so he that is the fountain of happiness, can derive and convey happiness to his creatures.

And we shall the more easily believe this, when we consider that *goodness* as it is the prime perfection, so is it likewise the chief felicity of the divine nature. It is his glory and delight to communicate himself, and shed abroad his goodness; and the highest expression of the *divine goodness*, is to communicate happiness to his creatures, and to be willing that they should share and partake with him in it. Base and envious natures are narrow and contracted, and love to confine their enjoyments and good things to themselves, and are loath that others should take part with them; but the most noble and most generous minds are most free and enlarged, and cannot be happy themselves unless they find or make others so.

This is the highest pitch of goodness, and consequently the highest contentment, and the supream delight of the divine nature. Now it is natural to every being, to be most frequent and abundant in those acts, in which it finds the greatest pleasures; *to be good*, and *to do good* is the supream felicity of God himself; therefore we may easily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy, by all the ways that are agreeable to his wisdom and righteousness; and that he is also willing to make us abundantly so, and to advance us to the highest degree of felicity, of which our nature is capable, if we do not render our selves incapable of such a blessing, by an obstinate refusal of it, and utter indisposition for it.

This, I say, is very credible, because the *happiness* of God himself consists in that propension and disposition of nature, which tends to make others *happy*. And if there can be any accession to that which is *infinite*, God himself finds a new pleasure and felicity in the communication of his goodness to his creatures, and therefore is represented in scripture, as glad of *the conversion of a sinner*, because the sinner hereby becomes capable of the *happiness* which God design'd for his creatures, and is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they are qualified for it, and he can, with the honour of his own perfections, bestow it upon them.

There are *two* things which raise our hopes and expectation of good from any person, if he be *able* and *willing* to bestow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer *happiness* upon us, it is he who is *infinitely* possessor of it, and hath all the treasures of it in himself; and *that* God only is, who as he is *able*, so he is *willing* to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happiness to make others happy, for even that goodness which inclines him to communicate happiness to others, is a great part of his own felicity; so that, as our Saviour argues, *because I live, you shall live also*, we may reason in like manner, that *because God is happy, we shall be happy also*, if we do but sincerely desire and endeavour to qualify our selves for it. The goodness of God does strongly incline him to desire our happiness, and makes him willing and ready to bestow it upon us, whenever we are capable to receive it.

So that the *goodness* of God is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmest ground of our assurance of a blessed immortality. It is the happiness of the divine nature to communicate himself; and the communications of God's goodness to us are the cause of our happiness; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the *goodness* of God ought always to be represented to the greatest advantage, and we should endeavour to possess our minds with a firm belief and persuasion of it, and to remove from the divine nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodness than is to be found in any of the sons of men) whatever we would not attribute to a good man, and to vindicate God from all suspicion of envy and ill-will, of cruelty and arbitrary dealing with his creatures. And I cannot apprehend why men should be averse from these so agreeable and delightful apprehensions of God; or how it should be any man's interest to lessen the *goodness* of God; for most certainly the better God is in himself, the better and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

3. From what hath been said concerning the *happiness* of the *divine nature*, we may learn wherein our *happiness* must consist, namely, in the *image* and in the *favour* of God; in the *favour* of God, as the cause of our happiness; and in the *image* of God, as a necessary inward disposition and qualification for it. Unless God love us, we cannot be *happy*; for miserable are they whom he hates: for God to say of any man, that *his soul hath no pleasure in him*, imports as great misery, and as dreadful a curse as can be imagin'd, and *his soul can have no pleasure* in a bad man; for *he loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity: he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the wicked shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity*. Nay, if we could suppose that he could love and take pleasure in any person that is unlike to him, (which is impossible) yet that person could not be *happy*, because he would want that inward frame and disposition of mind, which is necessary to *happiness*. For the very same causes and ingredients which make up the *happiness* of God, must in an inferior degree be found in us, otherwise we cannot be *happy*; no, tho' a man were in heaven, if he be still a bad man, *Cælum, non animum mutavit*, he hath only *changed the climate*, and is gone into another *country*, but he bears *himself* still about him, and his *mind* is not changed, which would signify a thousand times more to his *happiness*, than any *place* or *outward circumstance* whatsoever. A bad man, wheresoever he goes, hath *a root of gall and bitterness* within him, and is miserable from *himself*; he hath a fiend in his own breast, and the fuel of hell in a guilty conscience.

For there is a certain temper and disposition of mind, that is necessary and essential to *happiness*, and *that is holiness and goodness*, which is the nature of God; and so much as any person departs from this temper, so far he removes himself, and runs away from *happiness*: And as sin is a *departure from God*, so the punishment of it is likewise expressed by *departing from him*; *depart from me ye cursed*; *depart from me all ye that work iniquity, I know you not*.

And this is one great part of the misery of those degenerate and accursed spirits; the devils, who are for ever banish'd from the presence of God, that they are of a temper quite contrary to God, wicked and impure, envious and malicious, mischievous and cruel; and such a temper is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself. And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil disposition of our minds; and till this be cur'd, and set right, it is as impossible for any of us to be *happy*, as it is for a limb that is out of joint to be at ease. And the external presence of God, and a *local* heaven (if we could imagine such a person to be admitted into it, and see all the glories of that place, and the pleasures and delights of that state) all this, I say, would signify no more to make a bad man *happy*, than heaps of gold and diamonds, and comforts of the most delicious musick, and a well-spread table, and a rich and costly bed would contribute to a man's ease in the paroxysm of a fever, or in a violent fit of the stone; because the man hath *that* within which torments him, and till *that* be removed, he cannot possibly be at ease. The man's spirits are out of order, and off the hinges, and tost from their centre, and till they be set right, and restor'd to their proper place and state by goodness and holiness, the man will be perpetually restless, and cannot possibly have any ease or peace in his mind: For how can there be any peace, how can there be *happiness* to him, who is of a temper directly opposite to it? *The wicked*, saith the Prophet, *Isa. lvii. 20, 21. is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt*. So long as there is impurity in our hearts, and guilt upon our consciences, they will be restlessly working; *there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked*. The Hebrew word which we translate *peace*, signifies *all kind of happiness*; there can be no *felicity* to a bad man. The consideration whereof should put us upon the most serious and earnest endeavours to be like God, that we may be capable of his favour, and partakers of his felicity. The divine nature is the only perfect idea of *happiness*, and nothing but our conformity to it can make us *happy*.

I have been so long upon this argument, on purpose to convince men of the necessity of holiness and goodness, and all other virtues, to our present and future *happiness*. They understand not the nature of *happiness*, who hope for it, or imagine they can attain it in any other way. The author and the fountain of *happiness*, he that made us, and alone can make us *happy*, cannot make us so in any other way, than by planting in us such a disposition of mind, as is in truth a *participation of the divine nature*, and by endowing us with such qualities as are the necessary materials and ingredients of *happiness*. There is no way to partake of the *felicity of God, blessed for ever*, but by becoming holy and righteous, good and mercifull, as he is.

All men naturally desire *happiness*, and seek after it, and are as they think travelling towards it, but generally they mistake their way. Many are eager in the pursuit of the things of this world, and greedily catch at pleasures, and riches, and honour, as if *these* could make them *happy*; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but clouds and shadows, and that there is no real and substantial *felicity* in them. *Many say, who will shew us any good?* meaning the good things of this world, *corn and wine and oil*: But wouldest thou be *happy* indeed? Endeavour to be like the *pattern of happiness*, and the *fountain* of it; address thy self to him in the prayer of the Psalmist, *Lord lift thou up upon me the light of thy countenance, and thou shalt put more joy and gladness into my heart*, than the men of the world can have, *when their corn and their wine increaseth*.

Many say, *lo here*, and *lo there*! That *happiness* is in a great place, or in a plentiful estate, or in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and delights; but *believe them*

them not; happiness is something that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is within thee, in thine heart, and in the very inward frame and disposition of thy mind.

In a word, if ever we would be *happy*, we must be *like the blessed God*, we must be *holy*, and *mercifull*, and *good*, and *just*, *as he is*, and then we are secure of his favour; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance will behold the upright*. Then we shall be qualified for the enjoyment of him, and take pleasure in communion with him, because we shall be like him. For the surest foundation of love and friendship is a similitude of temper and disposition; every thing naturally affects its own likeness, and moves towards it, and greedily catcheth at it; and gladly runs into the embraces of it. God and man must be like one another, before they can take pleasure in one another; if we be unlike to God, it is in the nature of the thing impossible that we should be *happy* in one another, and therefore there must be a change either in God or us, to bring about this likeness. The nature of God is inflexible, fixt, and unchangeable; therefore change thy self, sinner, and endeavour to be like God; for since he cannot depart from his holiness, and purity, thou must leave thy sins, and *be holy as he is holy*, if ever thou hopest to be *happy*, *as he is*: *Every man that hath this hope in him, must purify himself, even as he is pure.*

Now to this happy and only potentate, king of kings, and lord of lords, who only hath immortality, and dwelleth in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, or can see; to him be honour, and power everlasting. Amen.

S E R M O N LXXIX.

The Unchangeableness of G O D.

J A M E S I. 17.

With whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

The whole Period runs thus:

Do not err, my beloved brethren, every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

THE connexion and dependance of the words upon the former is briefly this; the Apostle had asserted before, that God is not the author of sin and evil, *ver. 13, 14. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God is not tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed*; and here in the text he asserts, that God is the fountain and author of all good; *do not err, my beloved brethren*; as if he had said, do not mistake me, tho' sin and evil be not from God, but from our selves, and our own corrupt hearts; yet all good is from God, and not from our selves: tho' we be the authors of the sins we commit, yet we are not so of the good that we do, *that is from God; every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights*. Sin which is nothing but evil and imperfection, is not from God, but wholly from our selves; whatever is good and perfect, is not from our selves, but from God; we are neither inclined to that which is good, nor are able of our selves to perform it; both the inclination and the power are from God, who is the fountain of goodness and perfection, and can never be otherwise, and can never change

change nor cease to be so, *for with him is no variableness nor shadow of turning.*

Every good gift, and every perfect gift; all that goodness, and all those degrees of perfection, which are in the creatures, in the highest angels or saints, in the best of the sons of men, whatever there is of excellency and perfection, of goodness or happiness in any of them, *is from above*, that is, from heaven; it is *the gift of God*, and cometh down from that perfect, good and glorious being, whom the apostle here calls *the father of lights*, in allusion to the sun, which is a kind of universal benefactor to the world, and liberally dispenseth his light and heat and influence upon all things here below: but then there is this difference, the sun changeth its habitudes and positions in reference to us, and varies its shadows; it riseth and sets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwise with this intellectual and immaterial sun, *the father of lights, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*, παραμυνη ἢ τροπῆς ἀποκρίσιν, which are all astronomical words; the first, παραμυνη signifies the various habitudes and positions wherein the sun appears to us every day, at its rising in the meridian, and when it sets; τροπή is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly course of the sun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the northern or southern tropicks; and hence it is that it casts several shadows to people in several countries; and agreeably to this, the word ἀποκρίσιν, *casting of shadows*, being joyned with τροπή, signifies the variation of the shadows according to the course and motion of the sun.

But God is an eternal spring of light, which never riseth or sets, which hath no mixture of shadow nor darkness, hath no changes nor variations, but is always the same free and liberal dispenser of good things to his creatures; *the father of lights, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*; which words signify *the immutable perfection and goodness of the divine nature*; which shall (by God's assistance) be the subject of my present discourse; in which I shall proceed in this method.

First, I shall briefly explain what is meant by the *immutability* or *unchangeableness* of the divine nature.

Secondly, I shall shew that this is a perfection essential to God, to be *immutable* what he is, that is, *good* and *perfect*.

Thirdly, I shall answer an objection which lies against it, from the mention so often made in scripture of *God's repenting himself*. And

Fourthly, Apply the consideration of it to our selves.

I. For the explication of it. By the *immutability* of God, we mean, that he allways is, and was, and to all eternity will be the same; that he undergoes no changes either of his essence and being, or of his properties and perfections. In reference to the *unchangeableness* of his *being*, he is said to be *eternal, incorruptible, and only to have immortality*. In reference to his *perfections*, he is allways the same infinitely wise, and good, and powerfull, and holy, and just being; from whence it follows, that he is constant and immutable in all his decrees and councils, his purposes and promises. We are uncertain and mutable in our very nature and beings, and in all those qualities and perfections which belong to us, in all our purposes, resolutions and actions; we are continually growing or decreasing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extremum to another, from that which is more perfect to the contrary, now knowing, and then ignorant, sometimes wise, and oftener foolish, stronger and weaker, better or worse, as it happens, and as we order our selves, continually waxing or waning in our knowledge, and wisdom, and goodness, and power; we frequently change our minds, and alter our purposes, and break our promises, and contradict our firmest and most serious resolutions, and speak a thing and do it not, say it and do not bring it to pass; but God is everlastingly the same in all his perfections, constant to his intentions, steady to his purposes, immutably fixed and persevering in all his decrees and resolutions. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, namely, to shew that this *perfection* is essential to God, to be *unchangeably* what he is. And this I shall endeavour to make manifest

both from natural reason, and from the divine revelation of the holy scriptures.

1. From the dictates of natural reason, which tells us, that nothing argues greater weakness and imperfection than inconstancy and change. This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one state; this is the vanity of the world in general, that *the fashion of it passeth away*; and of man in particular that he is liable to so many natural changes, by age, and diseases, and death, for which reason he is said by the Psalmist, to be *in his best estate altogether vanity*; and that he is liable to so many moral changes, to be deluded and deceived in his understanding, and to alter his opinion so often, to be so fickle in his will, and to change so often his purposes and resolutions, according to the alteration or appearance of things. We attribute change and inconstancy to persons of the weakest age and understanding, as children, who are liable *to be toſſ'd to and fro, and carried about with every wind*, as the Apostle speaks, *Eph. iv. 14.*

Now if the divine nature were subject to change, this would cast an universal cloud upon all the divine perfections, and obscure all other excellencies, and make them *like the flower of the field*, which, how gay and glorious soever, is fading and perishing; and the greater the divine perfections are, the greater imperfection would mutability be, for *as the corruption of the best things is the worst*, so the better any thing is, so much the worse it would be to have it liable to corruption and change.

And as mutability in God would darken all his other perfections, so would it take away the foundation and comfort of all religion; the ground of our faith, and hope, and fear, of our love and esteem of God would be quite taken away. We could have no great honour or esteem for a being that is fickle and inconstant, if his power and justice were uncertain, his threatenings would in a great measure lose their awe and force; if his truth and faithfulness could fail, no promises, and declarations, how gracious soever, would be any security or firm ground of trust and confidence.

And this reasoning is not the result of *divine revelation*, but clearly founded in the *natural* notions and suggestions of our minds, as will appear by citing one or two testimonies to this purpose, of those who had no other guide but natural light. *Plato* in his *Phædo* enquires, “Whether the most perfect (that is God) be always the same, or sometimes thus, and sometimes otherwise, that is (saith he) whether that which is equality and goodness and bounty it self, receives any the least change at any time, and be not constant and uniform, and of it self always the same, *Καὶ ἑδραμὴν ἑδραβῶς ἀμείων ἐδερμίαν ἐνδέχεται*, and is never in any wise, upon any account, subject to any change or alteration whatsoever? To which he answers, that it is necessary that he should be the same always alike. And *Lib. 2. de Repub.* where he lays down the fundamental laws and constitutions of Religion, he mentions these two (which one would almost think he borrow'd from *St. James*, but that he lived so long before him) *viz.* First, “That God is the cause of all good, and in no wise of any evil; answerably to what our Apostle here asserts, that *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but that every good and perfect gift is from him.* Secondly, “That God doth not deceive us, by making various representations of himself to us; sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another; for he is unchangeable and always the same, and cannot, *τῆς ἐαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαλεῖν*, pass out of his own idea, or be any other than what he is; which he further confirms by this excellent reasoning, “That which is the best and most perfect being is not liable to any alteration; but such a being is God, and therefore he cannot be changed by any thing that is weaker and less perfect than himself, and he cannot will to change himself; for if he should, it must either be for the better or for the worse; it cannot be for the better, for being already possessor of all perfection, there can be no accession of any to him by any change; and certainly there is no wise being, as God is, that will change for the worse, and therefore he concludes, *καλλέει καὶ ἀείρει τὸν εἰς*

τὸ δυνατὸν μένει αἰὲ ἀπλῶς καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ μορφῇ, "That being the goodliest and best being that is possible, he allways continues simply the same." Seneca likewise speaking of the immutability of God's counsels l. 6. *Benef. statuerunt* (says he) *quæ non mutarint, neque unquam primi consilij deos pœnitent*, the gods make such unchangeable decrees, and never repent them of their first counsel.

2. This will yet more clearly appear from the divine revelation of the holy scriptures, which tell us that God is *unchangeable* in his nature, and in his perfections, in all his decrees, and purposes, and promises. In his *essence* and *being*, Exod. iii. 14. *I am that I am*; this is his name, whereby he made known himself to the comfort of his people, and to the terror of the *Egyptians* their oppressors. *Psal. xcii. 2. From everlasting to everlasting thou art God. Psal. cii. 27. Thou art the same, and thy years fail not. Mal. iii. 6. I am the Lord and change not.* Hence it is that the title of *the living God* is so frequently attributed to him; and he swears by this, as denoting not only his *eternity* but his *unchangeableness*; *As I live, saith the Lord.* Hither likewise we may refer those texts where he is call'd the *incorruptible God*, Rom. i. 23. *The immortal king*, 1 Tim. i. 17. and is said *only to have immortality*, 1 Tim. i. 16. And he is immutable likewise in his *perfection*; hence it is so often said in the *Psalms*, that *his goodness* and *his mercy endure for ever*; *his righteousness is likewise said to endure for ever.* Psal. cxi. 3. and Psal. xxxvi. 6. *To be like the great mountains*, not only *visible* and *conspicuous*, but *firm* and *immoveable*; and the same likewise is said of his *truth* and *faithfulness*, Psal. xi. 72. *His truth endureth for ever*; and of his *power*, Isa. xxvi. 4. *In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

And so likewise in his *decrees and purposes*, Psal. xxxiii. 11. *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations. Isa. xiv. 24. Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. Numb. xxiii. 19. God is not a man that he should lie, or as the son of man that he should repent; hath he spoken, and shall not he do it? hath he said it, and shall not he bring it to pass?* If he hath made any promise, or enter'd into any covenant with us, it is *firm* and *immutable*, Psal. lxxxix. 33. *He will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips.* His covenant and his promise are in themselves immutable; but for our further assurance, God hath given us his oath, the highest sign of immutability; so the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, chap. vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, (viz. his promise and his oath) in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope which is set before us.* I proceed to the

III. Thing I promised; which is to answer an objection, which may seem to lie against what hath been said, from the mention so often made in scripture of *God's repenting himself*; as Gen. vi. 6. where it is said, that *it repented God that he had made man.* 1 Sam. xv. 11. *That he repented that he had made Saul king.* And 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. *When the Angel had stretched out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, it is said, that the Lord repented him of the evil.* And *Psal. cxxxv. 14.* the Lord saith there, that *he will repent himself concerning his servants.*

To all which I answer, That this expression of *God's repentance* we are to understand (as many others in scripture) after the manner of men, and as spoken by way of condescension and accommodation to our weakness and capacity, and not as casting any imputation of mutability and inconstancy upon God, as if out of levity, or for want of foresight he did alter his mind; but when God is said *to repent that he made man*, or *that he made Saul king*, the change was not in *him*, but *them*; and it signifies not that God was absolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reasonable expectation; and therefore the scripture cloaths God with the human passion of *repenting* and *grieving* for what he hath done, as men use to do when they are greatly disappointed and fall short of their expectation.

And as for the other instances, wherein God is said *to repent him of the evils threaten'd*, the expression only signifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which seem'd to us to have been his peremptory purpose and resolution, that is, he is pleas'd to do otherwise than his threatenings seem'd openly to

exprefs, becaufe of fome tacit condition implied in it, which he did not think fit to acquaint us with. And this doth not at all derogate from the *constancy* and *immutability* of God: for when God did threaten, he fpake what he did really purpofe and intend, if fomething did not intervene to prevent the judgment threaten'd, upon which he was refolved at that time when he threaten'd, to be taken off and to ftay his hand: and in thus doing, God doth not *mutare confilium fed fententiam*; he doth not change his inward counfel and purpofe, but takes off the fentence, which was paft with *referved conditions*, and *unknown to us*, on purpofe to urge us the more effectually to repentance.

And that God ufually referves fuch conditions, not only in his threatenings but fometimes alfo in his promifes, appears from that remarkable text, *Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. At what instant I fhall fpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation againft whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them: at what instant I fhall fpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my fight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I faid I would benefit them.* And from this very confideration the fame Prophet encourageth the people to repentance, *Jer. xxvi. 13. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced againft you.* And we have a famous instance of this in the cafe of *Nineveh*, the destruction whereof within forty days after, God had openly proclaimed by his Prophet; yet he ftops the execution of the fentence upon their repentance, *Jonah iii. 10. The men of Nineveh turned from their evil ways, and the Lord repented of the evil he faid he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

All that now remains is to apply this doctrine of the *immutability of the divine nature* to our felves; and the confideration of it may ferve to feveral good purpofes, both in reference to bad and good men.

First, In regard to finners and wicked men.

And, 1st, *The unchangeableness of God* is matter of great terror to wicked men. Let but the finner confider what God is, and the confideration of his *unchangeable nature* muft needs terrify him; *He is a holy God, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, Hab. i. 12. He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickednefs, neither fhall evil dwell with him: the foolifh fhall not ftand in his fight, he hateth all the works of iniquity, Pfal. v. 4, 5. He is likewise a juft God, and will by no means clear the guilty, nor let fin go unpunifhed, Exod. xxxiv. 7. He is alfo omnipotent, and be able to execute the vengeance threaten'd againft finners. Who knoweth the power of thine anger. Pfal. xc. 11. Thou, even thou, art to be feared; and who may ftand in thy fight when once thou art angry. Pfal. lxxvi. 7. Strong is the Lord God who judgeth, Rev. xi. 8.* And which gives a fad accent to all this, he that is thus holy and juft and powerfull, continues *for ever the fame*, and will never alter or put off any of thefe properties, will never ceafe to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent finners: and is it not a *fearfull thing to fall into the hands of this holy and juft and omnipotent God who lives for ever, and can punifh for ever?* Let all obftinate finners hear this and tremble: you cannot be more obftinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily refolved to make you miserable. If you be determined upon a finfull courfe; God is alfo determined how he will deal with you, that *he will not fpare, but that his anger and jealousy fhall make againft you, and that all the curfes that are written in his book fhall light upon you, and that he will blot out your name from under heaven; he hath fworn in his wrath, that unbelieving and impenitent finners fhall not enter into his reft*: and for the greater affurance of the thing, and that we may not think, that there is any condition implied in thefe threatenings, he hath confirm'd them by an *oath*, that by this *immutable fign, in which it is impoffible for God to lie*, finners might have *ftong terrors*, and not be able to fly to any in hopes of refuge.

2^{dly}, The confideration of God's *unchangeableness*, fhould likewise be a very powerfull argument to urge finners to repentance. If they will but leave their fins

sins and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them upon their repentance and submission; for *he is a God gracious and mercifull, slow to anger, and ready to forgive*; he is *unchangeably good*, and *his mercy endureth for ever*: but if they will not come in, and submit to these terms, there is nothing before them but ruin and destruction; nothing then *remains but a fearfull looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume them*. God hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace, and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his nature, nor will he alter the terms of his covenant: there is a perfect and eternal opposition between the holy nature of God, and an impenitent sinner; and 'tis impossible such an one should be happy, till this opposition be remov'd; and to do that, there are but *two* ways imaginable, by *changing God*, or by *changing our selves*; the nature of God is *fixed and unalterable*; God cannot recede from his own pure nature; therefore *we must depart from our sinfull and corrupt nature*: God cannot quit his holiness; therefore *we must leave our sins*: we can have no hope *to change God*; therefore *we must change our selves*. Rectify, sinner, thine own corrupt nature, and renounce thy lusts; do not venture upon impossibilities, rather think of altering *thy sinfull nature*, which *may be changed*, than of altering *the divine nature*, which is *essentially immutable, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning*. God hath once condescended so far, as *to take our nature upon him*, to make us capable of happiness; but if this will not do, he can go no lower, he will not, he cannot *put off his own nature* to make us happy.

Secondly, In reference to good men, the consideration of God's *unchangeableness* is matter of great consolation to them; in all the changes and vicissitudes of the world, their main comfort and hope is built upon a rock, *the rock of ages*, as the expression is in the prophet *Isaiah xxvi. 4.* it relies upon the *unchangeable* goodness and faithfulness of God, *all whose promises are yea, and amen*, truth and certainty. All other supports and hopes may fail us: but *God will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, his covenant will be not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of his lips*, as the Psalmist assures us, *Psal. lxxxix. 33.* Men may break their word, and be less than their promises: but *God is faithful, who hath promised to give grace and glory, and to with-hold no good thing from them that walk uprightly*: he is not as man, that he should lie, or as the son of man, that he should repent. *Hath he spoken, and shall he not do it? Hath he said it, and shall not he bring it to pass?*

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of a change in God, it is usually on the *mercifull* side; as when he stops the execution of his threatenings upon the repentance of a sinfull nation; as in that remarkable text which I mention'd before, *Jer. xviii. 7, 8.* *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them*: and so likewise when his faithful people and servants are in great distress, and there is no visible help and means of relief, in this case likewise God is said *to repent*. And to appear for their rescue. *Deut. xxxii. 36.* *The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone.*

Thus we should comfort our selves in the greatest extremities with the consideration of the *immutable* goodness and faithfulness of God. The things of the world are mutable, and the men of the world; even those things which seem most constant, as the heavens; and to be settled upon the surest foundations, as the earth; yet these shall be changed, *Psal. cii. 25, 26, 27.* *Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands: they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.* From whence the Psalmist infers this comfort to the church and people of God, *ver. 28.* *The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*

Nothing that is mutable can be a solid foundation of comfort and confidence. Men are inconstant, and riches are uncertain, and all other things which men commonly trust to, and therefore the Apostle *chargeth them that are rich in this world, not to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.* He only that *lives for ever* is a firm foundation of hope and confidence.

When God would comfort the *Israelites* in *Ægypt* under their great oppression, he bids *Moses* only to declare to them his *immutability*, *Exod. iii. 14.* Say unto them, *I am that I am, hath sent me unto you*; and this is the great comfort of Christians, that *he* who is *their saviour*, and *their hope*, is *the same yesterday, to day, and for ever*; *he that was, and that is, and that is to come*, in all durations the same.

We are continually changing, and are not the same we were; some of us were young and now are old; once perhaps flourished in great prosperity, but now are poor and needy; were once strong and healthfull, but now sickly and weak: It should comfort us in all these changes, that *God is still the same*, and he alone is instead of all other comforts and supports; when all other things fail, we may *re-joice in the Lord, and joy in the God of our salvation.* Youth, and health, and riches, and friends may forsake us; but God hath promised, that *he will not leave us nor forsake us*; that *he will not leave us when we are old, nor forsake us when our strength faileth*; when *our strength fails, and our heart fails*, then is *he the strength of our hearts, and our portion for ever*; and when our great change shall come, and the terrors of death shall take hold of us, we have still the same comfort, *the Lord liveth, and blessed be the God of our salvation.*

In a word, the consideration of God's *immutability* should keep us fixed and unmoved in all the changes and accidents of this world, and not apt to be startled and surprized at them, according to that of the Psalmist, *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, because his heart is fixed, trusting in God.* This should make us constant to him and his truth, *stedfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know, that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord*; it should make us *hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering*, in full assurance, that *God will be as good to us as his word*, and in a firm hope and persuasion of *that eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised.*

S E R M O N LXXX.

The Knowledge of G O D.

I S A M. II. 3.

The Lord is a God of knowledge.

I Come now to speak of those properties and perfections which relate to the divine understanding, and will, and manner, and power of acting. *Knowledge* considers things absolutely, and in themselves; *wisdom* considers the respects and relation of things one to another, and under the notion of means and ends. The *knowledge* of God is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, with all their powers, and qualities, and circumstances; the *wisdom* of God is a perfect comprehension of the respects and relation of things one to another; of their harmony and opposition; of their fitness and unfitness to such and such ends. The *knowledge* of God only implies his bare understanding of things; but his *wisdom* implies the skill of ordering and disposing things to the best ends and purposes, to make every thing, and to govern and administer all things in number, weight, and measure. I shall at present speak of the *first*

first of these, the *knowledge* of God, which, as I said, is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, and of every thing belonging to their nature : of the powers, and qualities, and circumstances of things.

These words signify God to be *the fountain of knowledge* ; that is, that he pos- sesseth it himself, and communicates it to others. In the handling of this, I shall

First, Endeavour to prove, that this attribute belongs to God.

Secondly, Shew the perfection and the prerogatives of the divine *knowledge*.

Thirdly, Draw some practical inferences from the whole.

First, For the proof of it, I shall attempt it *two* ways.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason.

2. From scripture or divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason. I begin with this first, be- cause, unless this be establish'd, all divine revelation falls to the ground ; unless natural reason assures us, that God is endowed with *knowledge* and *understand- ing*, it is in vain to enquire after divine revelation. For to make any revelation credible, two things are requisite on the part of the revealer, *ability*, and *inte- grity* ; that he have a perfect *knowledge* and *Understanding* of the thing which he reveals, so that he cannot be deceived himself ; and so much goodness and truth that he will not deceive us. Now unless our reason assure us that God is endowed with *knowledge* and *understanding*, the *first* condition is evidently wanting, *viz.* *Ability*, and consequently the *second*, *integrity* ; for there cannot be goodness and veracity without *knowledge*.

This being premised, I proceed to the proof of it from such arguments as our natural reason suggests to us. I have formerly told you, that the divine *perfecti- ons* are not to be proved by way of *demonstration*, but by way of *conviction*, by shewing the absurdities and inconveniencies of the contrary ; for if we deny knowledge to God, we must deny it to be a perfection ; we must deny it to be in any of the creatures ; we must attribute many other imperfections to God ; all which are absurd to our natural reason ; for natural reason dictates to us, that knowledge is a perfection, that it is to be found in the creatures, and that the de- nial of it to God will argue many other imperfections in the divine nature ; now these are so many arguments which natural reason offers to us to prove, that *know- ledge belongs to God*.

1. It is a perfection, and therefore belongs to God. Natural reason tells us, tho' the scripture had not said it, that *knowledge excels ignorance as much as light doth darkness* ; now whatever is *perfect* and *excellent*, is to be attributed to the divine nature, for this is the *first* notion we have of God, that he is a *being absolutely perfect*.

2. Knowledge is to be found in some of the creatures, and therefore is much more in God the creator, because it is derived from him. Our very understand- ings whereby we know God, or any thing else, are an argument that *knowledge* and *understanding* are in God. If he gives *wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding*, if he communicates this perfection to the crea- tures, he himself is much more possessed of it. The scripture indeed useth this argument, but I mention it as that which natural reason doth suggest to the most brutish and ignorant of men. *Psal. xciv. 8, 9, 10. Understand ye brutish among the people, and ye fools when will ye be wise ? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear ? He that formed the eye, shall he not see ?*

3. The denial of this *perfection* to God, argues many other imperfections in the divine nature. Nothing would more eclipse the divine nature, than to take away this *perfection* from it ; this would bring an universal obscurity upon God's other perfections ; this would be to put out the light of heaven, and to turn *the brightness of the morning* into the *shadow of death*. If we remove this *perfection* from God, we deny his *wisdom*. He that does not know the nature and qualities of things, cannot know how to apply means to ends, to fit or suit one thing to another : And we weaken his *power*. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would *power* be without *knowledge* ? what irregular things would

it produce? What untoward combinations of effects would there be, if *infinite power* were let loose to act without the conduct of *knowledge* and *understanding*? And consequently we take away his *providence*; for without *knowledge* there can be no counsel, no fore-cast of events, no provision for the future, no government of the world. And this is not all, for without *knowledge* there could be no such thing as *goodness*; for he is not good that does good out of ignorance, or from a blind necessity. There could be no *veracity*, nor *justice*, nor *mercy* in God; for all these suppose *knowledge*. He that speaks truth must know it; he that is just, must understand right from wrong; he that shews mercy, must know who are miserable, and how they may be relieved; and not to labour in a thing so plain and easy, take away the *knowledge* of God, and you render him incapable of any *honour* from his creatures; for if we know not what honour we do him, it is lost labour to give him any. And that we may see these are the deductions of natural reason, without the advantage of revelation, we shall find the heathens, who were destitute of divine revelation, did attribute this perfection to God. *Tully* tells us, that *Thales* was wont to say, *Deos omnia cernere*; and we know the heathens were wont to swear, *Diis immortalibus testibus interpositis*, which is an owning of his *omniscience*: *Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, curiosum & negotii plenum deum.* De Nat. Deor. l. i.

2. From scripture and divine revelation. I will not heap up all those testimonies of scripture, which might be gathered together upon this argument? I will only instance in two or three. *Job xxxvi. 4. He that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee.* --- *xxxvii. 16. Dost thou know the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?*

Hither we may refer those texts which represent God by way of condescension to our infirmity, as having eyes and ears, which signify his *knowledge* of what is done in the world; and those which speak of him, as communicating to us all the knowledge which we have; *he giveth wisdom to the wise, and understanding to them that know understanding*, Dan. ii. 21. And those which speak of God, as knowing the most secret things, *the hidden things of darkness*, the hearts and the thoughts of men; and those things which are at the greatest distance, as future things; and of the greatest uncertainty, as the contingent acts of free creatures; each of these I shall particularly consider; for in proving that God knows all these, his *knowledge* of all other things will be proved with advantage: for if any thing be out of the reach of the *divine understanding*, it must in all probability be either those things which are secret and hidden, as mens secret actions, or their thoughts; or else those things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cause, as future contingencies: and the proving of this may be of great use to us, as having a great influence upon practice; it tends very much to the advancement of religion, and the good government of our lives. I begin with the

First of these, *viz.* That God takes very exact and particular notice of all the actions of men, even those that are most secret. And in the handling of this, I shall speak distinctly to these *three* things.

1. That God takes knowledge of all our actions; *his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings*, Job xxxiv. 21.

2. That he is a curious observer of them; *he seeth all his goings, he marks all his steps*, takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden; *there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves*, Job xxxiv. 22.

1. That God takes notice of all our actions. And that this notion was planted in the mind of man, and a beam of the light which comes with us into the world, will appear by the general agreement of heathens in it. I will but produce one or two testimonies to this purpose. *Tully* lays down this principle, as that which makes men regular and orderly, and fit for society; *sic igitur hoc persuasum civibus, qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat deos*

intueri.

intueri. Socrates, as Xenophon tells us, was wont to say, πάντων θεὸς εἰδέναι τὰ τε λεγόμενα καὶ θεωτούμενα καὶ τὰ σὺν βελούτοις. Arrian in his discourse upon Epictetus tells us, it is necessary that every one should be persuaded of this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν θεωτούμενων ἑοράσθαι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, that every thing that is done by men is seen of God.

The scripture frequently mentions this, *Psal.* cxxxix. i. *Ec.* Prov. v. 21. *The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.* Jer. xxxii. 19. *Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

2. He is a curious observer, one that takes exact notice of all that we do. *Job* saith, *he seeth all our steps*; and *Solomon*, that *he pondereth all our goings*; the word is, *he weighs them in a balance.* So *1 Sam.* ii. 3. *The Lord is a God of knowledge, by him actions are weighed.* *Job* xxxi. 4. *Doth he not see my ways, and count all my steps?* Which doth not imply the difficulty, but the perfection and exactness of God's knowledge; he knows the quality of our actions, and all the circumstances of them, all the degrees of good and evil that are in them, whatever may commend an action, or blemish it, whatever may aggravate a sin or excuse it. *Is.* xxvi. 7. *Thou most upright doth weigh the path of the just.* There's not a good word that we speak, but God hears it, *Mal.* iii. 16. *And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him; and all we do is noted in his book,* *Psal.* lvi. 8.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden, the good as well as bad; when we *do our alms in secret*, when we *enter into our closets and shut the doors, our father seeth in secret*, *Mat.* 6. Nor can we retire our selves to any place, where we can sin so as God shall not see us, where we can hide our sins from his sight, or our selves from his wrath. Hear how sensibly a heathen speaks of this; ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ στήσῃτε ἐνδὸν ποιήσετε, μέμνητε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνον ἔσε: ἐγὼ ἔσε, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἐνδὸν ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, τίς τέτοις χρεῖα φάτος, εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τι ποιεῖτε; Arrian in *Ep.* l. i. c. 14.

The scripture is full of testimonies to this purpose, *Psal.* xc. 8. *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance*; those sins which we commit in the dark are in the light of the divine knowledge, *darkness and light are all one to him*; *Psal.* cxxxviii. 11, 12. *Jer.* xvi. 17, 23, 24. *Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him.*

II. God knows the hearts and thoughts of men; which implies these two things.

1st. His perfect knowledge of them.

2dly. That this is his peculiar prerogative.

1st. God perfectly knows the hearts of men, *Jer.* xvii. 10. *I the Lord search the heart and try the reins*; where by *heart and reins*, which are the most inward parts of the body, and lie least open to discovery, are signified the most secret thoughts and motions of the soul; these God is said to *search* and *try*, not as if it were a work of labour and difficulty to the divine knowledge to penetrate the hearts of men, and to dive into their thoughts, but to signify to us the perfection and exactness of the divine knowledge; as when men would know a thing exactly, they search into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly; so God is said to *search the heart*, to signify to us that he knows the hearts of men, as thoroughly as we do any thing upon the strictest search and most diligent examination; upon the same account he is said elsewhere in scripture to *weigh the spirits of men*, *Prov.* xvi. 2. *All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth his spirits*; that is, he hath as perfect a knowledge of the secret motions and inclinations of mens hearts, as men have of those things which they weigh in a balance with the greatest exactness.

Now that God hath this perfect knowledge of mens hearts, the scripture frequently declares to us; that he knows the hearts of all men, *1 Kings* viii. 39. *For thou, even thou knowest the hearts of all the children of men*, *1 Chron.* xxviii. 9. *The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* How close and reserved soever men may be, what disguise soever they may use

to hide their purposes from men, yet God sees them; the things which are most dark and secret are open to his view. *Psal. xlv. 21. He knoweth the secrets of the hearts.* *Prov. xv. 11. Hell and destruction are before him, how much more the hearts of the children of men?* Whatever pretences men may make, God sees through them, and discovers the very intentions of their hearts. *Psal. vii. 9. The righteous Lord tryeth the heart and reins.* *Heb. iv. 13.* It is said there of the word of God, that it is a discernier of the thoughts and intentions of the heart; for all things are naked and open to the eye of him with whom we have to do, and there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; nay, he knows our thoughts at a distance what they will be, before any actually are. *Psal. cxxxix. 2. Thou knowest my thoughts afar off.* 'Tis true indeed every man is conscious to his own thoughts, and privy to the motions of his own mind, when they are present, and when they are past, if he have not forgot them; but no man knows what he shall think to-morrow; but this God knows; for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do our selves; *God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things.* 1 John iii. 20.

And tho' the scripture had not revealed this so plainly, yet we had not been wholly ignorant of it; it is a principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural notion which men have of God; the reason of our minds tells us that God knows our hearts; and the fears and jealousies of our minds are an evidence of it.

(1st.) The reason of every man's mind tells him, that the supreme being whom we call God, is endowed with all perfection, and among his other perfections, that *he excell's in knowledge*; and to the perfection of knowledge it is required, that it extend itself to all objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The knowledge of God in respect of all objects, is like the sun in respect of this lower world, *nothing is hid from the light of it.* We have naturally this apprehension of God, that he is an immense being, every where present; that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and consequently that he is present to our spirits, and sees all the motions of our minds, and discerns the very secrets of our hearts; and there can be no such thing as secrecy and retirement from an eye that is every where, and a knowledge that pierceth into all things.

And to convince us that these are the dictates of natural reason, without the help and assistance of divine revelation, we shall find that the heathens, who had only the advantage of natural light, were firmly possessed with this apprehension, that God knows the hearts of men. This may be sufficiently collected from the frequent sayings of the wiser heathens to this purpose; that the best and most acceptable worship of the deity is that which is inward, that of the heart and mind. To this sense *Tully* speaks, *Cultus autem deorum est optimus, idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimisque pietatis, ut eos semper purâ, integrâ atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*; The best and holiest worship of the gods, is to worship them with a pure, and upright, and sincere mind. To the same purpose is that known saying of the poet,

*Compositum jus fasque animi, sanctosque recessus
Mentis, & incoctum generoso pectus honesto,
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis & farre litabo;*

do but offer to God a mind inwardly resolved to be just and honest, and the plainest sacrifice will please him. Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our hearts and thoughts, and an honest disposition of mind, to be most acceptable to their gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did most firmly believe that God knows the secrets of mens hearts; otherwise there had been no need for men to endeavour to recommend themselves this way to the divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by consequence; there are many express passages in their writings, which do sufficiently signify their belief of this principle. *Thales*, one of their most ancient philosophers, being asked, *if an unjust man could conceal himself from God?* he answer'd, *he cannot so much as hide from him the very thoughts and design of it.* *Socrates* (as *Xenophon* tells) was wont to inculcate this

this principle upon his scholars, that *the Gods know all things, what we say, and what we do, and what we think in silence.* To the same purpose *Arrian* in his dissertations upon *Epictetus*, laying down the principles of a virtuous life, *first of all*, saith he, *we must learn this, that there is a God who takes care of the world, and that there is nothing hid from him, not only what we do, but not so much as what we think, and design.* So likewise *Tully* in his book of laws, *let every man be firmly persuaded of this, that the Gods see what every man is, and with what mind and devotion they serve them:* I will add but one testimony more, and that is of *Seneca* in his epistles, *nihil deo clausum est, interest animis nostris, & cogitationibus mediis intervenit, we can keep nothing close from God, for he is present to our minds, and intimate to our thoughts;* so that you see this principle is deeply rooted in the minds of men, and that men do naturally reason themselves into it.

(2.) The natural fears of men are likewise a secret acknowledgment of this; and I take this to be a great truth, that a man's natural actions, and such as happen upon surprize, and without deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate sense of our minds, and do more truly discover what lies at the bottom of our hearts, and what notions are natural to us, than our contrived and deliberate discourse. If I see a man upon the sudden sight of a serpent recoil and start back, tho' he tell me never so often that he is not afraid, yet I am sufficiently convinc'd of the contrary, because I see in his countenance and carriage a natural acknowledgement of fear and danger; so if men find that upon the designing of a secret wickedness, which never went further than their own hearts, their consciences do sting and lash them, that they have a sense of guilt, and feel inward frights and horrors, whatever they may say to the contrary, this is a natural acknowledgement of an invisible eye that sees them, and disallows their wicked designs. If that be true which the heathen poet says, That

*Scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet.*

He that meditates any secret wickedness in his heart, is guilty to himself, as if he had committed it; this is a plain confession, that the man stands in awe of something besides himself, and is jealous that there is one that is conscious to what he thinks.

2. That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of mens hearts, is the peculiar prerogative of God. This is imply'd in the answer to that question, *Who can know the heart of man?* Jer. xvii. 10. *I the Lord search the heart, and try the reins;* this is the prerogative of God, and one of his chief titles, that he is *καρδιογνώστης, a knower of the heart.* 1 Kings viii. 39. *Thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men.* Men may make a probable conjecture at the thoughts and designs of others, from their words and actions; but God only knows them. Men are conscious to their own thoughts and purposes; *the spirit of a man that is in him, knows the things of a man;* but they cannot see into the secrets of another man's mind; 'tis God alone that knows the hearts of all men, the heart of a man is a privileg'd place, and the secret and inward workings of it are not subject to the cognizance of any but God alone. The limits of human knowledge are the outward appearances of actions, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. *The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart;* our knowledge is but superficial, and glides upon the outside and surface of things, but the divine knowledge pierceth to the very center of every thing. Now the darkest place, the most inward retirement, the privatest closet in the whole world, is the heart of man, and this God only is privy to; *Deus auctor omnium & speculator omnium, à quo nihil secretum esse potest, tenebris interest, interest & cogitationibus nostris quasi alteris tenebris,* saith *Min. Felix*, *God made all things, and sees all things, and therefore nothing can be secret from him; he is present in darkness, and he is present to the thoughts of men; which are as it were another and a thicker darkness.*

The devil indeed pretends to this knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of *Job's* heart better than God himself, and that notwithstanding

ing the testimony which God gave of his integrity ; yet if he were but soundly tried by affliction, he would renounce God, and curse him to his face : but the event proved how groundless and malicious this suggestion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the passages of some divines concerning the devil's immediate access to the minds of men, and his power to cast wicked thoughts into them ; which seems by consequence to grant him some knowledge of mens hearts ; for by the same reason that he can imprint thoughts upon mens minds, he may see those that are imprinted there.

That the devil is a very sagacious spirit, and can make very shrewd conjectures at the bent and inclinations of mens minds, and the probable workings of our thoughts, from a general knowledge and observation of our tempers and passions, of our interests and designs, and from the general tenour of our actions in publick and private, and from our prayers and confessions to God (if he permit him at any time to be so near good men) I think there is no doubt : but this is far from a knowledge of our hearts ; all this is but conjecture, and such as men may make of one another in a lower degree.

But as to the business of casting blasphemous and despairing thoughts into the minds of men, to this I would say these *three* things.

1. That there are few of these cases which may not more probably be resolved into the wickedness and infidelity of mens hearts, or into the darkness and melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raise and suggest strange thoughts to men, and such as we may be apt to think have no rise from our selves, not considering what an odd and strange influence the disorder of our bodily humours may have upon our minds, as we see in violent fevers, and several other diseases ; and *melancholy*, tho' the workings of it are more still and quiet, is as truly a *disease* as any other ; so that I chuse rather to ascribe as much of these to a bodily distemper as may be, because it is a very uncomfortable consideration, to think that the devil hath such an immediate power upon the minds of men.

2. I do not see how by any means it can be granted, without prejudice to this prerogative of God, which the scripture plainly gives him, of being *the only knower of the heart*, that the devil can have so immediate an access to our minds, as to put wicked thoughts into them ; nor can I think, that when it is said, 1 Chron. xxi. 1. That *satan provoked David to number the people*, and Luke xxii. 3. That *the devil enter'd into Judas*, and Acts v. 3. That *satan had filled the heart of Ananias to lie unto the holy ghost*, and Eph. ii. 2. That *the devil is the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience* ; I say, I cannot think that any or all of these expressions do amount to such an immediate power of putting wicked thoughts into mens minds, but they only signify that the devil hath a greater hand in some sins than others, and that a heart wickedly bent and inclined, give him a great advantage to tempt men more powerfully, by presenting the occasions of such wicked thoughts and actions to them ; for it is usual in scripture-phrases, as to ascribe all good motions to God's spirit, so all evil thoughts and actions to the devil, not that he is the immediate cause of them, but because he is always ready to tempt men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I see no reason to grant (as many have done) an immediate power to the devil over the fancies and imaginations of men, and that he may know the workings of them, tho' not the secret thoughts of mens minds ; for this seems to me to be in effect to grant him the knowledge of mens hearts, and to give him a key to that closet which God hath reserved to himself : for it is a very nice distinction which is here made between the thoughts of mens minds, and the images of their fancies ; and if these should happen to be but words that signify the same thing, we shall unawares intrench upon the prerogatives of God. Therefore because the scripture is a stranger to these nice and subtle distinctions between the imaginations of the fancy, and the thoughts of the heart, I think it is much safer to assert the prerogative of God in that latitude that the scripture useth the word *heart*, for all the inward motions of the mind, for the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our souls are totally exempted from the immediate cognizance of any other spirit but

but God's alone; and that neither angel nor devil hath any further knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferr'd in a way of probable conjecture from the particular knowledge of mens tempers, and habits, and designs, and the course of their actions. I proceed to the

III. Particular; God's knowledge of future events. This God purposes as the way to discern the true God from idols, *Isaiah xli. 21, &c. Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons; saith the king of Jacob; that is, let them bring some argument that may convince us that they are gods; and he instanteth in foretelling future events, ver. 22. Let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods.* God puts it upon this issue, if they can foretell future things, then they are gods; if not, they are vanity, and a work of naught, and he is an abomination that chuseth them, ver. 24. By things to come, I understand such effects as do not depend upon any necessary cause, but upon the will of free agents, and so may be, or may not be; from whence it is plain, that it is the prerogative of God, proper and peculiar to him, to know future events. And here I shall consider these two things.

1. That God knows future events.

2. That he only knows them.

I. God knows future events; which will appear from the dictates of natural light, and from scripture.

(1.) From the dictates of natural light, as it is a perfection, and that which among men is accounted the best part of wisdom; and unless this did belong to God, how could he govern the world? The heathens, except only the *Epicureans*, generally granted this, as appears in those wise counsels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpose, that we should not be anxious for the future; but having done our endeavour, leave the events of things to God, who only knows them and disposeth them.

*Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris. Juv.*

And afterward saith he, *We are importunate with God for wife and children: At illis notum, qui pueri, qualisque futura sit uxor.* And that this was their opinion, appears yet more clearly from those apprehensions which they had of *divination*. Tully lays down this for a principle, *Deos posse nobis signa futurarum rerum ostendere; de Legibus.* And in his book *de Devin.* he tells us, *that there was such a thing as divination, for it was an old opinion, Jam usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque pop. Rom. & omnium gentium firmata consensu:* and afterward, *that this divination was not, sine instinctu afflatuque divino.*

I know they did variously explain this, according to their several opinions about *fate* and *contingency*, and their apprehensions about the *providence* of God. One sect of them, the *Stoicks*, held that there was a fatal chain of causes from first to last, and things did necessarily follow one another; and by this means they made fore-knowledge easy and explicable; and tho' in their disputes they seem to grant no such things as *events* and *contingencies*, yet they are agreed in the thing, that those things which we call *events*, tho' they would not call them so, were fore-known to God. And for this I shall only cite one testimony of *Seneca*, speaking of God's fore-knowledge of the most contingent things, the dispositions of men long before they are born; he adds, *nota est enim illis operis sui series, omniumque illis rerum per manus suas iturarum scientia in aperto semper est; nobis ex abdito subit; & quae repentina putamus, illis provisa veniunt & familiaria;* and how peremptory soever this sect is in their disputes about *fate*, yet when they speak of the *τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῶν*, and generally in their moral discourses, they seem plainly to me to exempt the will of man from this fatal necessity.

And those other sects of the philosophers that denied *fate*, did generally grant God's fore-knowledge of contingent things. I grant indeed, that they did rather make

God's

God's fore-knowledge an *arbitrary* and *voluntary*, than a *necessary* perfection, that is, that God, when he pleased to apply himself to it, could fore-know all future events: but their general opinion was, that as his providence did not extend to small and inconsiderable things, so neither his fore-knowledge. But *Tully* seems to attribute a very perfect providence to him, and a fore-knowledge of the least things, *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, & omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum & negotii plenum Deum?* But I cannot say he is constant to himself: but they all agree in granting to him this perfection of knowing all future things, if he pleased to trouble himself with it; and had they not in this mistaken the nature of God, they might easily have apprehended, that 'tis no trouble nor weariness to an infinite understanding that is always in act, to know the least things how many soever they be.

2. From scripture, which gives us testimonies and arguments of it.

(1.) Testimonies, *Isa.* xlviii. 3, &c. *Acts* 15. 18. *Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world, ἀπ' αἰῶνος from everlasting*; which by the way I cannot but compare with the forecited place of *Sen.* *Nota enim illis operis sui series*, &c.

(2.) By arguments from scripture, I will mention but one; the clear and particular predictions of future events long before they happened. *Gen.* xv. 13. God foretells the children of *Israel's* deliverance after 430 years, which he punctually accomplish'd. *Exod.* xii. 40, 41. The Prophet that prophesied against the altar at *Bethel* named the man that should do it, *Josias* 350 years before-hand, *1 Kings* xiii. 2. The deliverance of the children of *Israel* from the *babylonish* captivity was foretold 100 years before to be done particularly by *Cyrus*; which is so strange, that the Prophet brings it in with a preface of God's wisdom and power, *Isa.* xlv. 24, &c. Which was afterward precisely fulfill'd, when the 70 years were expired. How are the life and death of the *Messias*, with many particular circumstances foretold? And did not he foretell the destruction of *Jerusalem* 40 years before?

But because there may be no contingency in good things, God himself may be resolved to effect them, or excite men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you shall find that the worst things have been foretold; the apostacy of the children of *Israel*, *Deut.* xxxi. 16. and their infidelity in times of the gospel, *Isa.* liii. 1, 5, 9, 26. Our Saviour foretold the treachery of *Judas* and *Peter's* denial of him; now these are so evil, that it were blasphemy to suppose the holy God to have any hand in them; and therefore are foretold by him meerly by virtue of his *foreknowledge*, and the *infiniteness* of his *understanding*, which reacheth things at the greatest distance, that are most contingent.

S E R M O N LXXXI.

Of the Knowledge of God.

I S A M. II. 3.

The Lord is a God of Knowledge.

I Have consider'd this perfection of God, in some of the greatest and most difficult instances of it, his knowledge of the most secret things, the hearts of men, and future events; against the last of which there are some objections, which I come now briefly to consider, and pass on to what remains.

Object. the first; The *impossibility* of the thing. The certainty of all knowledge depends upon the certainty of the object, therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate

determinate knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true; but future events, which may or may not be, have no certain and determinate truth, that is, it is not certain either that they will or will not be, because they have no certain cause, therefore there can be no infallible knowledge concerning them.

Ans. This I confess is the grand difficulty; I shall not be so solicitous to take it away, as to give satisfaction to it.

1. I might say with a very fair probability, that the certainty of knowledge doth not depend upon the uncertainty of the *cause*, but of the *object*, which may be certain, tho' the *cause* be contingent. Which I prove thus, whatever event hath actually happened, as because now it is past, it is certainly true, that *it was*; so because it once was, it was certainly true before it was, that *it would be*; as in *Peter's* denying of Christ. If it be now true, that *he hath denied him*, it was true before, that *he would deny him*; and it being determinately true, God saw it *as it was*; so that here is an *object* of a certain knowledge.

2. Tho' we could not explain the possibility of God's knowing future contingencies, much less the manner how; yet we are sufficiently assured that God doth know them. I will give but one instance for the proof of this: Nothing more evident than the sin of *Adam*; yet God foreknew this, how else was Christ *decreed before the foundation of the world*? Christ was a remedy upon the occasion of sin; now the remedy could not be designed before the sin was foreseen: and this being certain, *cum constet de re, frustra inquiritur de modo, when we are certain of the thing, 'tis not necessary to know the manner*. We are satisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know; we believe the union of the soul and body, tho' no man can explain how a spirit can be united to matter; we believe the continuity of matter, that is, that the parts of it hang together, of which whosoever saith he can give an account, doth but betray his own ignorance. And so in many other things; that man doth not know himself, nor the measure of his own understanding, nor the nature and obscurity of things, that will not confess himself posed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many *ἀπαύταστα*, many things the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our best reason and understanding can give no account.

3. 'Tis very unreasonable to expect we should know all the ways which infinite knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite faculties and measures, which bear no proportion to infinite powers and objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite knowledge knows things, we should be *like God in knowledge*, our understandings would be infinite like his; and in this case especially it becomes us to put on the modesty of creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant spirits take it for an affront to their understandings, that any one should expect they should believe any thing, tho' they have the highest assurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it; they make nothing to deny God's knowledge of future events, unless they may be satisfied of the particular way how he knows them.

I know there are those who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some say that God sees future events *in speculo voluntatis*; others say that the eternity of God is actually commensurate to all duration, as his immensity to all space, and so God doth not so properly *fore-see* and *fore-know*, as *see* and *know* future things by the presentiality and co-existence of all things in eternity; for they say that future things are actually present and existing to God, tho' not in *mensurâ propria*, yet in *mensurâ alienâ*; the school-men have much more of this jargon and canting language; and I envy no man the understanding these phrases, but to me they seem to signify nothing, but to have been words invented by idle and conceited men, which a great many ever since, lest they should seem to be ignorant, would seem to understand; but I wonder most, that men, when they have amused and puzzled themselves and others with hard words, should call this *explaining* things.

The summ of the answer is this; that when we have done all we can, God's fore-knowledge of future events may seem contradictory and impossible to us,
much

much less do I expect ever to be able to give a particular account of the manner of it : but we have sufficient assurance of the thing, and unless we had infinite understandings, it were vanity to pretend to explain all the ways of infinite knowledge.

Secondly, It is objected, That if we can admit such a knowledge in God as seems contradictory and impossible to our reason, why may we not allow and frame such notions of his goodness and justice ?

To this I answer, There is a great difference between those perfections of God which are imitable, and those which are not. Knowledge of future events is a perfection wherein we are not bound to be like God ; and if we are assured of the thing, that he doth know them, it is not necessary that we should know the manner of it, and disentangle it from contradiction and impossibility : But it is otherwise in God's goodness and justice, which are imitable ; he that imitates, endeavours to be like something that he knows, and we must have a clear idea and notion of that which we would bring our selves to the likeness of ; these perfections of God we are capable of knowing, and therefore the knowledge of these perfections is chiefly recommended to us in scripture, *Jer. ix. 24.* By these God reveals himself, and declares his name, and makes himself known to us, even by those attributes which declare his goodness, and mercy, and justice, *Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Psal. lxxxvi. 15. Deut. xxxii. 3, 4, 5.* When God would give a description of himself to *Moses*, he promises *to cause his goodness to pass before him*. So that it doth not follow, that because God's knowledge of future events is to be admitted, notwithstanding the seeming contradiction and impossibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any notion of God's justice or goodness that seems contradictory or impossible. The

Third Objection is made up of several inconveniences that would follow from God's knowledge of future events.

1. It would prejudice the liberty of the creature. For if God have an infallible knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly foresees we will do ; for otherwise his knowledge would be fallible.

Answer. God's fore-knowledge lays no necessity upon the event ; in every event, we may consider the effect *in it self*, or with relation to the *cause*, and the manner how it comes to pass ; consider'd *in its self*, it is *future*, with relation to its *causes*, it is *contingent*. God sees it as *both*, and so, as that which till it is, may be or not be ; and when it comes to pass, he sees the man do it freely ; and so before it be done, it hath no necessity ; but upon supposition of foresight ; as *when it is*, as *Origen* excellently explains it. Fore-knowledge is not *the cause* of the things that are fore-known ; but because the thing is future and shall be, this is, the reason why it is fore-known ; for it doth not, because it was known, come to pass ; but because it was to come to pass, therefore it was fore-known ; and bare knowledge is no more the cause of any event, which because it is known must infallibly be, than my seeing a man run, is the cause of his running, which, because I do see, is infallibly so.

2dly. If God infallibly fore-knows what men will do, how can he be serious in his exhortations to repentance, his expectation of it, and his grieving for the impenitency of men ?

Answer. All these are founded in the liberty of our actions. God exhorts to repentance, and expects it, because by his grace we may do it ; he is said to grieve for our impenitency, because we may do otherwise, and will not. Exhortations are not in vain themselves, but very proper to their end, tho' through our obstinacy and hardness they may be render'd vain to us and without effect. If the weight of the objection lies upon *serious*, and you ask how God can exhort men *seriously* to that which he fore-sees that they will not do, those whom he fore-knows will be finally impenitent ? I answer, if his exhortations were not *serious*, he could not foresee the final impenitency of men. To foresee mens final impenitency, is to foresee their willfull contempt of God's warnings and exhortations, and rejection of his grace ; now mens willfull contempt of his warnings and exhortations cannot be foreseen, unless God foresee that his exhortations are *serious* and in good earnest.

Having

Having answer'd the objections against God's fore-knowing future events, I proceed to shew,

II. That God only knows future events. *Isa. xlv. 6, 7. Thus saith the Lord, the king of Israel, and his redeemer, the Lord of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God: and who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the antient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come; let them shew unto them. Isa. xlv. 9, 10. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else. I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from antient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.*

The reason is evident, because the knowledge of future events is beyond the reach of any finite understanding; especially if we grant it to be beyond our finite understanding, to explain the possibility of such a knowledge; for to be sure, that is out of the reach of our knowledge, which we cannot so much as understand how it is possible it should be known by any understanding.

But it may here be objected; Did not the oracles among the heathens foretell several things, which christians are satisfied came from the devil? I have not time at present to examine the business of heathen oracles; I could easily shew there was much imposture in them: but grant they were really delivered and given out by a spirit; yet the darkness and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is such as shews that the devil was conscious to himself of the uncertainty of his knowledge in those matters; and those few that came to pass, and are in any tolerable sense said to be accomplished, were in such matters, either wherein prudent conjecture might go far (and I grant the devil to be a sagacious spirit;) or else in dis-junctive cases, as when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it must either be so, or so, in which a bold guessing may often hit right: but *guessing* at future things, is far from a *knowledge* of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular predictions of things, with circumstances of time and person, such as we find in scripture in many instances, to the prediction of which, the greatest sagacity and the utmost guessing could do nothing, such as those predictions of which I gave instances out of scripture.

I have now done with the *first* general head I propos'd to be spoken to from these words, *viz.* To prove that this Attribute of *knowledge* belongs to God: I proceed to the

Second, *viz.* To consider the perfection and prerogative of the divine knowledge; which I shall speak to in these following particulars.

1. God's knowledge is *present* and *actual*, his eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more *power* than *act*: it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we do actually know: 'tis but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once, and apply our minds to; we can remove them to another object, but then we must take off our minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of God is an actual and steady comprehension of things; he being every where present, and all eye, nothing to escape his sight, but all the objects are at once in the view of the divine understanding. *Heb. iv. 13. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

2. God's knowledge is an *intimate* and *thorough* knowledge, whereby he knows the very nature and essence of things. The knowledge which we have of things is but in part, but outward and superficial; our knowledge glides upon the superficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it seldom reacheth further than the skin and outward appearance of things; we do not know things in their realities, but as they appear and are represented to us with all their masks and disguises: but God knows things as they are. *1 Sam. xvi. 7. The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart:* God knows things throughout all that can be known of them. The quick and piercing eye of God penetrates

into every thing, the light of the divine understanding lays all things *open and naked*, Heb. iv. 13. In which expression the Apostle alludes to the sacrifices of beasts, which were flead and cleft down the back-bone, that the Priest might look into them, and see whether they were without blemish. To the eye of our understandings most objects are close, and have their skins upon them: but to the eyes of God all things are uncovered and dissected, and lie open to his view.

3. God's knowledge is *clear and distinct*. Our understandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confusion; we are often deceived with the near likeness and resemblance of things, and mistake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, which doth not sufficiently separate and distinguish things from one another, we see things many times together and in a heap, and do but know them in gross: but there is no confusion in the divine understanding, *that* is a clear light which separates and distinguisheth things of the greatest nearness and resemblance; God hath a particular knowledge of the least things, *Luke xii. 7. Even the very hairs of your head are all number'd*; those things which are of the least consideration, and have the greatest likeness to one another, *the very hairs of your head*, are severally and distinctly known to God.

4. God's knowledge is *certain and infallible*. We are subject to doubt and error in our understanding of things, every thing almost imposeth upon our understandings, and tinctures our minds, and makes us look on things otherwise than they are; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our interest and advantage, our humours and distempers, these all misrepresent things, and darken our minds, and seduce our judgments, and betray us to error and mistake: but the divine understanding is a clear, fixed, constant, and undisturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no stain from affection, or interest, or any other thing. Men are many times confident and apt to impose upon others, as if they were infallible: but this is the prerogative of God, the privilege of the divine understanding, that it is secure from all possibility of error: 'tis *God only that cannot lie*. Tit. i. 2. because he cannot be deceived; the *infallibility* of God is the foundation of his *veracity*.

5. The knowledge of God is *easy and without difficulty*. We must dig deep for knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little; we do not attain the knowledge of things without search and study, and great intention of mind; we strive to comprehend some things, but they are so vast that we cannot; other things are at such a distance, that our understanding is too weak to discern them; other things are so little, and small, and nice, that our understanding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot contract our minds to such a point as to fasten upon them: but the understanding of God being infinite, there is nothing at a distance from it, nothing too great and vast for its comprehension, nor is there any thing so little that it can escape his knowledge and animadversion. The great wisdom of *Solomon* is compared to *the sand on the sea-shore*; the shore is vast, but the sands are little (saith one) to signify that the vast mind of *Solomon* did comprehend the least things. 'Tis much more true of God, his understanding is a vast comprehension of the least things, as well as the greatest; and all this God does without difficulty or pain; he knows all things without study, and his understanding is in continual exercise without weariness. How many things are there which we cannot find out without search, without looking narrowly into, and bending our minds to understand them? But all things are obvious to God, and lie open to his view.

He is said indeed in scripture *to search the heart*, and *to try the reins*, and *to weigh the spirits*; but these expressions do not signify the *painfulness*, but the *perfection* of his knowledge, that he knows those things as perfectly, as we can do any thing about which we use the greatest diligence and exactness.

6. The knowledge of God is *universal*, and extends to *all objects*. We know but a few things, our ignorance is greater than our knowledge, *maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus*: but the divine understanding

is vast and comprehensive, and by an imperious view commands all objects ; *he is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things* ; he knows himself, and the excellency and perfection of his own nature, and the secrets of his will, 1 Cor. ii. 11. *The spirit of God searcheth the deep things of God* ; he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their powers and qualities. The knowledge of God is infinite, *Psal. cxlvii. 5. His understanding is infinite* ; he knows himself and his own perfections, and all the possibilities of things, which are all infinite. Now the understanding of God being infinite, is incapable of any addition, or diminution, or change. Our finite understandings are liable to alterations they may grow or decline : but the knowledge of God is a full constant light, 'tis always the same, not liable to any eclipse, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the same.

Thirdly, I come now to draw some inferences from the several parts of this discourse.

I. From the perfection of God's knowledge.

1. The perfection of the divine knowledge calls for our veneration. Every excellency commands reverence, and raiseth our admiration, and none more than *knowledge* ; there is nothing that we value our selves or others more by, than this : the highest knowledge of man, the most glorious understanding, that ever any one of the sons of men were endowed with, is, compared to the knowledge of God, but as a glow-worm to the sun. If we admire these *candles of the Lord*, which shine so imperfectly in the dark ; if we reverence a little knowledge, compass'd about with ignorance ; how should we admire *the father of lights, in whom is no darkness at all*, that knowledge which hath nothing of blemish or imperfection in it !

2. We may hence learn humility, and that on this double account, as we have all our knowledge from him ; *what have we that we have not received* ? And as our knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the divine understanding. We are blind and ignorant, 'tis but a few things that we are capable of knowing ; and we know but a few of those things which our natures are capable of knowing ; and of those things we do know, our knowledge is very imperfect, 'tis slight and superficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confusion in the use of it ; the clearest reason, and the brightest understanding of man hath many flaws and defects in it ; so that the more we know of God, and of our selves, the more humble we shall be. It is *an empty knowledge, and falsely so called*, that *puffs up* ; as the empty ears of corn are pert, and raise up themselves ; but those which are big and full, droop and hang down their heads : so 'tis only ignorance that is proud and lifts men up, but true knowledge makes men humble.

3. This is matter of comfort and encouragement. He knows our wants and weakness, *and will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear, for he considers that we are but dust* ; he knows the rage and malice of our enemies, and can when he pleases *put a hook in their nose, and his bridle in their lips*, as he did to *Senacherib*, 2 Kings xix. 28.

I. From God's knowing our secret actions, I infer,

1. If God sees our most secret actions, this discovers and confutes the secret atheism of many. He that commits the most secret sin, denies the omniscience of God. Thus *David* describes the atheism of some in his days ; *he hath said in his heart, God hath forgot ; he hideth his face, he will never see it ; the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it*. And is not this, in effect, to deny God's being ? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A man may as well deny there is a sun, as deny that it shines and enlightens the world.

There are some relics of this even in the best men, which do at sometimes discover themselves, *Psal. lxxlii. 10, 11. Therefore his people return hither ; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, how doth God know ? is there knowledge in the most high ?* that is, the people of God come to this, when they are come to an afflicted state, and see the prosperity of wicked men ; they come to this, to question the providence of God, whether he takes knowledge of the

affairs of the world. But this atheism reigns in wicked men; while they live in their sins, they live in the denial of God's omniscience; for did men really believe that *God sees in secret*, that his eyes perceives the darkness, and lays *open and naked* all things before it, how durst they lie, and steal, and swear falsely? Vain man! why dost thou seek darkness and retirement? How art thou alone, if thou believest that God is every where? How canst thou retire from him? How canst thou shut him out? If thou believest that *he is the light*, what security is darkness to thee? If he look upon thee, who is the greatest and best person in the world, who is thy sovereign, thy judge, thy father, and thy master, and thy best friend (for we use to reverence persons under these notions and relations, and to be ashamed to do any thing that is vile and unseemly before them) if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not ashamed? Why does not thy blood rise in thy face? Why should not shame and fear work upon the apprehension of God's seeing us, as if men did behold us? for this, that God sees thee, is a greater surprize and discovery, and threatens thee with more danger, than if the whole world stood by thee.

2. Live as those that believe this; be continually under the power of this apprehension, that God takes a particular and exact notice of all thy actions. The firm belief of this would have a double influence upon us, it would encourage us in well doing, and be a restraint upon us as to sin; *sic vivamus tanquam in conspectu vivamus. Sen.* It were well if men would live as if any body saw them; but to live as if some worthy and excellent person were always present with us, and did observe us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are some sins of that ugliness and deformity, that a man would not commit them in the presence of any one, of a child or a fool; and there are some persons of such worth and reverence, *quorum interventu perditique quoque homines vitia supprimerent. Epicurus* had this good conceit of himself, that he could advise others so to act as if he stood by, *fac omnia tanquam spectet Epicurus*; but *Seneca* instanceth much better in *Scipio*, or *Laelius*,

Ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus,

and shall not the presence of the divine majesty be an eternal restraint upon us?

This was *David's* course to keep himself from sin, *Psal. xxxix. 1. I will take heed to my way while the wicked is before me*; how much more in the presence of God? *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee, Psal. cxix. 168.* And it was wisely advised by *Seneca*, *That we should so live when we are among men, as believing God sees us; and when there is none but he sees us, let us behave our selves before him, as if men did stare upon us.*

III. God's knowledge of the heart teacheth us,

1. The folly of hypocrisy; how vain it is to make a shew of that outwardly, which inwardly and in our hearts we are not; to put on a mask of religion, and paint our selves beautifully without, when *inwardly we are full of rottenness and uncleanness*; to honour God with our lips, when our hearts are far from him. If we were to deal with men, this were not a very wise way, for there is danger of discovery even from them, therefore the best way for a man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear; but having to deal with God, who *knows our thoughts afar off*, to whom all our disguises are transparent, and all our little arts of concealment signify nothing, 'tis a madness to hide our iniquity in our bosom. With this argument our Saviour convinceth the hypocritical Pharisees, *Luke xvi. 15. Ye are they that justify your selves before men; but God knoweth your hearts.*

2. If God know your hearts, then endeavour to approve your hearts to him; charge your selves with inward purity and holiness, because of the pure eyes which behold the most intimate and secret motions of your souls; therefore *cleanse your hearts from wickedness; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?* Fear and shame from men lay a great restraint upon our outward actions; but how licentious are we many times in our hearts? What a strange freedom do we
take

take within our own breasts? This is an argument of the secret atheism, that lies at the bottom of our hearts. He that allows himself in any wicked thoughts and imaginations, which (out of a regard to men) he will not put in practice, this man plainly declares, that he reverenceth men more than God; that he either disbelieves a God, or despiseth him.

Therefore *keep your hearts with all diligence*, because they are peculiarly under God's inspection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your thoughts because no eye sees you, ask your selves, *Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? And he that keepeth thy soul doth he not know it?* As the wisest man speaks, *Prov. xxiv. 12.*

And whatever you do in the service of God, *do it heartily as to the Lord.* Indeed if we did only worship God, *to be seen of men*, an external worship would be sufficient: but religion is not intended to please men but God; he is a spirit, and sees our spirits, therefore we must *worship him in spirit and in truth*, 1 Thess. ii. 4. *Not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts.* David useth this argument to his Son Solomon, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. *And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* Whatever liberty we may take to our selves now, and how careless soever we are of our thoughts, and the inward frame of our hearts, yet the scripture assures us, that he who knows our hearts, will one day judge us according to them. *Jer. xvii. 10. I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways.* And the Apostle speaks of a day coming wherein God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, *Heb. iv. 13. Rev. ii. 23.*

3. This is matter of encouragement to us in many cases. In our secret troubles, *Psal. cxlii. 3. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knowest my path.* In cases of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men, which tho' we do not know, yet God knows them. So the Apostles, *Acts i. 24. when they did not know whom to chuse for an Apostle, they refer it to God, and they prayed and said, thou Lord which knowest the hearts of all, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.* But especially this is matter of comfort to us, when we suffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes of hypocrisy and falseness, and insincerity, then to be able to appeal to the *searcher of hearts*, as to our innocency and sincerity, and to say with the Prophet *Jeremiah, O Lord of hosts that tryest the righteous, and seeest the reins and the heart, unto thee have I opened my cause*, Ch. xx. 12. and with St. Peter, *God which knoweth the hearts bear them witness*, *Acts xv. 8.*

4. This renders all deep and profound policies of wicked men a vain thing. *The Lord knows the thoughts of men that they are vanity*, because he knows them, and can defeat them; he can *bring their counsels to nought, and make their devices of none effect.* He is conscious to the first motions of their hearts; he sees those cobwebs which they are spinning, and can blow them away with a breath, he can snare them in their own policies, and *turn their counsels into foolishness.* Thou that puttest a mask upon a wicked design, and hidest the malice and revenge of thine heart, under a dissembling countenance, God sees thy design, and hath a thousand ways to prevent it. When the politicians of the world think they have laid their design with all imaginable caution, and that their counsels cannot miscarry, being out of all possibility of human discovery or prevention, for all this *their counsels may come to nought*, and tho' they have resolved it, yet it may not stand; *he that sits in the heavens laughs at them, the Lord hath them in derision.* As wise as they are, they are guilty of this oversight, that they did not take God into consideration, by whom they are surprized and discover'd. He that sees their design can blast it in a moment; he *can speak the word, and thy breath shall go forth, and thou shalt return to thy dust, and in that very day thy thoughts perish*, *Psal. cxlvi. 4.*

5. If God only knows the hearts of men, then *what art thou, O man that judgest another's heart?* This condemns the uncharitableness of men, who take upon them

them to judge and censure mens hearts : which is *to speak evil of the things which they know not* ; to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. James saith, ch. iv. 12. *There is one law-giver, that is able to save and to destroy ; who art thou that judgest another ?* is proportionably true in this case ; there is but *one that knows the heart* ; *who art thou then that judgest another man's heart ?* Who art thou, O man ! that takest upon thee to sit in judgment upon thy brother, and to pass sentence upon his heart, to pronounce him a hypocrite, a wicked man, and a damned wretch ? Art thou *a man and the son of man*, and wilt thou assume to thy self the prerogative of God ? Man can only look to the *outward appearance* ; but *God seeth the heart*.

There's nothing doth more palpably discover the unchristian spirit of that new sect which is of late risen up among us, than their taking upon them to judge men's hearts, and as confidently to censure every man they meet, as if they had a window into his breast : But they are not alone guilty of this ; those who are so ready to call men hypocrites, they invade this prerogative of God. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the rule ; or a man wicked, as to his present state, if the general course of his life and actions be wicked ; for our Saviour tells us, *by their fruits ye shall know them*. This we may do, provided we be called to it, and be sure it is so : but to call any man an hypocrite, who makes an outward profession of religion, and whose external conversation is unblameable ; this is to judge a man in a matter of which thou canst have no evidence ; this is *to ascend into heaven*, and step into *the throne of God*, and to be *like the most high* ; for *he, even he only, knows the hearts of the children of men*.

IV. From God's knowledge of future events, we may learn,

1. The vanity of astrology, and all other arts that pretend to foretell future events, things that depend on the will of free agents. The vanity of these arts hath been sufficiently shewn by learned men, from the weakness and uncertainty of the principles they rely upon : I shall only for the present take notice, that it contradicts this principle of religion, that *God only knows future events*. From prudent collections and observations, probable conjectures may be made of what will happen in some cases ; but there are no certain perspective-glasses, with which we can see future events, but divine revelation ; therefore whoever takes upon him to foretell future events without divine revelation, he arrogates to himself that which is the prerogative of the deity ; and God delights to chastise the curiosity, and cross the predictions of these vain pretenders, *Isa. xlv. 24, 25. Thus saith the Lord, that formed thee ; I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth by my self ; that frustrateth the tokens of the lyars, and maketh diviners mad ; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish*. As he also in scripture threatens those who consult them, and rely upon them. Those who go to astrologers, or wise men, as they call them, to know their fortunes, and enquire of the events of their life, they *forsake God*, and *betake themselves to lying vanities*.

2. Refer future things to God, who only knows them ; trust him with all events ; *cast your care upon him*. When you have used your best prudence, and wisdom, and diligence for your supply and security for the future, leave the rest to God, *for your heavenly father knoweth both your wants and your dangers*. When we are over-sollicitous about future things, we take God's proper work out of his hands, and usurp the government of the world. Why do we *take too much upon us ? We are but of yesterday, and know not what will be to morrow*.

Mind your present duty and work, and leave events to God. *Secret things belong to the Lord our God ; but those things that are revealed to us and our children for ever, to do all the words of this law*, Deut. xxix. 29. Do your duty, *commit the rest to God in well-doing*.

In this world we are in a mixt condition, which is made up of good and evil, of happiness and misery : what is good for us to know, is revealed, that is our duty ; but in great wisdom and pity to mankind, God hath concealed and hid the rest from us. He hath hid from us the good that may happen

to us, because the best things of this world are but shallow and empty, and if we could see them before-hand, we should prevent our selves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the sweetness which is in them by delightfull fore-thoughts of them. And he hath concealed future evils from us, lest we should torment our selves with the fearfull expectation of them.

*Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginosa Nocte premit Deus.
Ridetque, si mortalis ultra fas trepidat.*

What a folly is it to make your selves miserable with fear of being so; *ante miseriam miser*. Use all wise means to prevent what you fear, and then be satisfied, and be as happy as you can till misery come; go not forth to meet it, *sufficient for the day is the evil thereof*; do not anticipate the evils of to morrow, and take present possession of an evil to come; *cast your care upon him* who hath promised to care for you.

S E R M O N LXXXII.

The Wisdom, Glory, and Sovereignty of G O D.

J U D E XXV.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and ever.

I AM treating of the attributes of God; particularly of those which relate to the divine understanding, his *knowledge* and *wisdom*. The *knowledge* of God only implies his bare understanding of things, but his *wisdom* implies the skill of ordering and disposing things to the best ends and purposes, the skill of making and governing, and administering all things in number, weight, and measure. The *knowledge* of God rather considers things absolutely, and in themselves: The *wisdom* of God considers rather the respects and relations of things, looks upon things under the notions of means, and ends; accordingly I describe them thus. The *knowledge* of God is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, with all their qualities, powers, and circumstances. The *wisdom* of God is a perfect comprehension of the respects and relations of things, one to another; of their harmony and opposition, their fitness and unfitness to such and such ends. I have largely spoken to the *first* of these; I come now to the

Second, The *wisdom* of God in general; together with his *majesty* and *sovereignty*, as they are here joyn'd together; I begin with the

First, That *God is the only wise God*. In handling of this I shall shew,

1. In what sense God may be said to be the *only wise God*.
2. Prove that this attribute belongs to God.

1. In what sense God may be said to be the *only wise God*. For answer to this, we may take notice, that there are some perfections of God that are *incommunicable* to the creatures; as his *independency* and *eternity*. These God only possesseth, and they are to be attributed to him alone, God only is *independent* and *eternal*: But there are other perfections which are *communicable*, that is, which the creatures may in some measure and degree partake of, as *knowledge*, and *wisdom*, and *goodness*, and *justice*, and *power*, and the like; yet these the scriptures do particularly attribute to God, not that they are altogether incommunicable to the creature, but that they belong to God in such a peculiar and divine manner, as doth shut out the creature from any claim or title to them, in that

that degree and perfection wherein God possesseth them. I shall give you some instances of this. His *goodness*, this is reserved to God alone, *Matth. xix. 17. Why callest thou me good? there is none good, but one, that is God*: His *power and immortality*, *1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. Who is the blessed and only potentate; who only hath immortality*: His *wisdom*, *1 Tim. i. 17. The only wise God*: *Rom. xvi. 27. To God only wise be glory*: His *holiness*, *Rev. xv. 14. For thou only art holy*. The transcendent degree and singularity of these divine perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive: so that altho' the creatures partake of them, yet in that degree and perfection wherein God possesseth them, they are peculiar and proper to the deity: so that in this sense, *there is none good but God*; he only is *holy*, he is *the only wise*; in so inconceivable a manner doth God possess even those perfections, which in some degree he communicates, and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesseth them; so that when we consider any of these divine perfections, we must not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature; but we must say that the *goodness* and *wisdom* of God are all this which is in the creature, and much more which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premised in general, God may be said to be *only wise* in these two respects.

I. As being *originally and independently* wise.

II. As being *eminently and transcendently* so.

I. God only is *originally and independently* wise. He derives it from none, and all derive it from him, *Rom. xi. 33, 34. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever, Amen.* He challengeth any creature to come forth and say that they have given wisdom, or any other perfection to God; no, all creatures that are partakers of it, derive it from him. *Prov. ii. 6. For the Lord giveth wisdom.* *Eccl. ii. 26. God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.* *Dan. ii. 21. He giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.*

2. He is *eminently and transcendently* so: And this follows from the former, because God is the fountain of wisdom; therefore it is most eminently in him. *Psal. xciv. 9, 10. He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see? he that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?* In like manner we may reason concerning all other attributes of God, that if he communicate them, he is much more eminently possessed of them himself; the greatest wisdom of the creatures is nothing in opposition to the wisdom of God, nothing in comparison to it.

Nothing in opposition to it; *Job v. 13. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.* *Job ix. 4. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardened himself against him, and prosper'd?* *Prov. xxi. 30. There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.* *1 Cor. i. 19. He will destroy the wisdom of the wise; v. 29. and by foolish things confound the wise.*

Nothing in comparison of it. There are a great many that pretend to wisdom, but most are destitute of true wisdom; and those who have it, have it with many imperfections and disadvantages. Usually those who are destitute of true wisdom, pretend most to it. *Job xi. 12. Vain man would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's colt.* The high and the great of this world pretend to it. *Job xxxii. 9. Great men are not always wise.* Learned men, they pretend to it; the heathen philosophers were great professors of wisdom. *Rom. i. 22. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools: they were wise to do evil, but to do good they had no understanding,* as the prophet speaks, *Jer. iv. 22. The politicians of the world, they pretend to it; but their's is rather a craftiness than a wisdom; men call it prudence, but they are glad to use many arts to set it off, and make it look like wisdom; by silence, and secrecy, and formality, and affected gravity, and nods, and gestures. The scripture call's it the wisdom of this*

this world, 1 Cor. ii. 6. and a *fleshy wisdom*, 2 Cor. i. 12. 'Tis wisdom misapply'd, 'tis the pursuit of a wrong end. The petty plots and designs of this world are far from wisdom. 1 Cor. iii. 20. *The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.* That cannot be wisdom, which mistakes its great end, which minds mean things, and neglects those which are of greatest concernment to them. *Job xxii. 2. He that is wise, is profitable to himself.* Prov. ix. 12. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thy self.* Tully tells us, *Ennius* was wont to say, *Nequicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non quiret.* The wise sages of the world as to the best things are fools. *Mat. xi. 25. God hath hid these things from the wise and prudent.* There are many that are *wise in their own conceits*; but there is more hope of a fool than of them, Prov. xxvi. 12. So that the greatest part of that which passeth for wisdom among men, is quite another thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quam nihil sapere*; we talk much of prodigies, *maximum portentum vir sapiens.* Tul. Those few in the world that are the children of true wisdom, they have it in a very imperfect degree; they are not usually so wise for their souls, and for eternity, as men of this world. *Luke xvi. 8. The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.* It is attended with many inconveniencies. *Eccl. i. 18. In much wisdom there is much grief*: he speaks of the wisdom about natural things.

But we need not instance in the folly of wicked men, and worldly men, and in the imperfect degrees of wisdom which are to be found in good men, in *wisdom's own children*; the wisdom of God needs not these foils to set it off: the wisdom of man in innocency, or of the highest angel in heaven, bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite wisdom of God. We mortal men many times mistake our end out of ignorance, and apply unfit and improper means for accomplishing good ends; the angels in glory have not a perfect comprehension of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitness and opposition of them one to another: but the divine wisdom propounds to it self the highest and best ends, and hath a perfect comprehension of the fitness and unfitness of all things one to another; so that angels are but foolish beings to God; *Job iv. 17. His angels he chargeth with folly.* *Job*, upon a full enquiry after wisdom, concludes that it only belongs to God, that he is only perfectly possessed of it. *Job xxviii. 12, &c. But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?* In such an eminent and transcendent degree it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; God only hath it, *ver. 23. God knoweth the place thereof.*

II. I shall prove that this perfection belongs to God.

1. From the dictates of natural reason, and,
2. From scripture.

1. From the dictates of natural reason. I have often told you the perfections of God are not to be proved by way of *demonstration*, because there is no cause of them: but by way of *conviction*, by shewing the absurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The contrary is an imperfection, and argues many other imperfections, therefore wisdom belongs to God. Among men folly is look'd upon as the greatest defect; it is accounted a greater reproach and disgrace than vice and wickedness; it is of so ill a report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted knaves than fools; but in a true esteem and value of things, it is, next to wickedness, the greatest imperfection; and, on the contrary, wisdom is the highest perfection next to holiness and goodness; it is usually more cryed up in the world than any thing else. Reason tells us, tho' the scripture had not said it, that *wisdom excells folly as much as light doth darkness.* *Eccl. ii. 13. The wisdom of a man maketh his face to shine.* *Eccl. viii. 1. Wisdom is a defence,* --- *vii. 12. and v. 19. Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men that are in the city.*

And the denial of this perfection to God would argue many other imperfections; it would be an universal blemish to the divine nature, and would darken all his other perfections. It would weaken the power of God. How impotent and ineffectual would power be without wisdom! what irregular

things would it produce! what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power should act without the conduct and direction of infinite wisdom! it would eclipse the providence of God, and put out the eyes that are in the wheels, as the Prophet represents God's providence. There can be no counsel, no forecast, no orderly government of the world without wisdom. The goodness and mercy, and justice, and truth of God, could not shine with that lustre, were it not for his wisdom, which doth illustrate these with so much advantage.

I need not bring testimonies from heathen writers to confirm this; their books are full of expressions of their admiration of God's wise government of the world. I need not trouble you with quotations of particular testimonies. *Epicurus* indeed denied that God either made or govern'd the world; but he must needs acknowledge him to have been a very wise being, because he made him happy, which cannot be without wisdom, tho' he had taken away all other evidence of his wisdom. *Aristotle* seems to have supposed the world to be a necessary result and emanation from God: but then the other sects of Philosophers did suppose the world to be the free product of God's goodness and wisdom.

2. From scripture; *Job* ix. 4. *He is wise in heart*; ---xxxvi. 5. *He is mighty in strength and wisdom*. *Dan.* ii. 20. *Blessed be the name of God for ever, and ever, for wisdom and might are his*. Hither we may refer those texts, which attribute wisdom to God in a singular and peculiar manner, *Rom.* xvi. 27. and those which speak of God as the fountain of it, who communicates and bestows it upon his creatures, *Dan.* ii. 21. *James* i. 5. and those texts which speak of the wisdom of God in the creation of the world, *Psal.* civ. 24. *O Lord, how wonderfull are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all?* *Jer.* x. 11. *Who hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched forth the heavens by his discretion*; in the providence and government of the world. *Dan.* ii. 20. *Wisdom and strength are his, and he changeth times and seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings*: and in many other places, in the redemption of mankind. Therefore Christ is called *the wisdom of God*, *1 Cor.* i. 24. and the dispensation of the gospel, *the hidden wisdom of God, and the manifold wisdom of God*, *Eph.* ii. 10.

If then God be *only wise*, the original and only fountain of it, from thence we learn,

First, To go to him for it, *Jam.* i. 5. *If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God*. There are many conceited men, that think they are rich and increased, and stand in need of nothing. The Apostle doth not speak, as if there were some that did not want wisdom, but because there are some so proud and conceited, that they think they lack nothing; those are stark fools, and God *resists* such foolish and proud men: But if any man, sensible of his defect and imperfection, cometh to God, *he gives liberally, and upbraids no man*. We are ashamed to learn wisdom of men, lest they should condemn and upbraid us with our folly: Men are envious and unwilling that others should be as wise as themselves; but God's goodness make him willing to impart wisdom, *he gives liberally, and upbraids no man*.

This is the most desirable accomplishment and perfection; *Happy is the man that getteth wisdom; wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom*: It is better than those things that are of the highest value among men, as *Solomon* often makes the comparifon. Now because *it comes down from above*, we should look up for it; its by the revelation of his will, and the wise counsels of his word, that we are made *wise unto salvation*; therefore we would beg of him, that *he would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself*, *Eph.* i. 17.

2. If God be *only wise* in such an eminent and transcendent degree, then let us be humble. There's no cause of *boasting*, seeing *we have nothing but what we have received*. The lowest instance, the least specimen of divine wisdom out-shines the highest pitch of humane wisdom; *the foolishness of God is wiser than men*, *1 Cor.* i. 25. therefore *let not the wise man glory in his wisdom*, *Jer.* ix. 29. Of all things we should not be proud of wisdom; the proud man throws down the reputation

of his wisdom, by the way that he would raise it. No such evidence of our folly, as a conceit that we are wise; *sapientis animus nunquam turgescit, nunquam tumet*. Cic. To pride our selves in our wisdom, is the way to have our folly made manifest. God threatens to destroy the wisdom of the wise men, and to turn their wisdom into foolishness.

3. We should labour to partake of the wisdom of God, so far as it is communicable. The greatest wisdom that we are capable of, is to distinguish between good and evil; *to be wise to that which is good*, as the Apostle speaks, *Rom. xvi. 19.* that is, to provide for the future in time, to make provision for eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear God and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive instruction, and to win souls; these are the characters which the scripture gives of wisdom. When Job had declared that excellency of the divine wisdom was not to be attained by men, he tells us what that wisdom is, which is proper for us; *And unto man he said, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding*. There are many that are wise to worldly ends and purposes, as our Saviour tells us; wise to get riches, and to ascend to honours: But this is not the wisdom which we are to labour after; this is but a short-witted prudence, to serve a present turn, without regard to the next world, and the eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wise for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If God be only wise, then put your trust and confidence in him. Whom should we trust rather than infinite wisdom, which manageth and directs infinite goodness and power? In all cases of difficulty trust him for direction; *acknowledge him in all thy ways*, that he may direct thy steps; *commit thy way unto the Lord, and lean not to thine own understanding*. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but the providence of God disposeth all these things. And if we rely upon our own wisdom, that will prove a broken reed. And as our wisdom is a broken reed, so the wisdom of other men. *Isa. xxxi. 1, 2.* God curseth them that go down into Egypt, and trust to their strength and wisdom, but look not to the holy one of Israel, neither seek the Lord; yet he also is wise, saith the Prophet.

5. Let us adore the wisdom of God, and say with St. Paul, *1 Tim. i. 17.* *To the only wise God be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen*: and with Daniel, *Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his*. Veneration is the acknowledgment of an infinite excellency and perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of wisdom in men; but the divine wisdom, which is perfect and infinite, is matter of our adoration, and blessing, and praise. Thanksgiving respects the benefits we receive: but we bless God when we acknowledge any excellency: for as God's blessing us, is to do us good; so our blessing him, is to speak good of him: As all God's perfections are the objects of our blessing, so more especially his wisdom is of our praise; for the praise of God is to take notice of the wise design and contrivance of his goodness and mercy towards us.

Before I pass on to the other particulars contained in these words, I cannot but take notice, that this *wise God*, here spoken of, is styl'd *our Saviour*, which some understand of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and bring this place as an argument to prove his divinity: and if that were so, it were all one to my purpose, which is in the next place to shew, that glory and majesty, and dominion and power belong to the divine being. But altho' I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the divinity of Christ, yet seeing there are so many plain texts in scripture for the proof of it, we have the less reason to stretch doubtful places; and that this is so, will appear to any one who considers that the title of *Saviour* is several times in scripture attributed to God the father; besides that in a very antient and authentic copy we find the words read somewhat otherwise, and so as to put this out of all controversy, *μὴν δὲ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα, &c.*

Having premised thus much for the clearing of these words, I shall briefly consider, first, God's glory and majesty, and then his dominion and sovereignty.

First, God's glory and majesty. By majesty, we may understand the greatness,

or eminent excellency of the divine nature, which results from his perfections, and whereby the divine nature is set and placed infinitely above all other beings ; I say the eminent excellency of the divine nature, which results from his perfections, more especially from those great perfections, his goodness, and wisdom, and power, and holiness.

And his *glory* is a manifestation of this excellency, and a just acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in scripture God is said to be *glorious in power*, and *glorious in holiness*, and his goodness is call'd *his glory*; and here in the text, *glory* and *majesty* are ascribed to him upon the account of his *wisdom* and *goodness*.

That these belong to God, I shall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The heathens did constantly ascribe greatness to God, and that as resulting chiefly from his goodness, as appears by their frequent conjunction of these two attributes, *goodness* and *greatness*. *Opt. Max.* were their most familiar titles of the deity ; to which I will add that known place of *Seneca*, *Primus deorum cultus est deos credere, dein reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine quâ nulla majestas.*

2. From scripture. It were endless to produce all those texts wherein greatness and glory are ascribed to God. I shall mention two or three. *Deut. x. 17. the Lord is a great God*; *Psal. xxiv. 10. he's call'd the king of glory*; --- *civ. 1. he is said to be cloathed with majesty and honour. The whole earth is full of his glory.* Hither belong all those doxologies in the Old and New Testament, wherein greatness, and glory, and majesty are ascribed to God.

From all which we may learn,

1. What it is that makes a person great and glorious, and what is the way to majesty, *viz. real worth and excellency*, and particularly that kind of excellency which creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is *goodness*; this is that which advanceth a person, and gives him a pre-eminency above all others; this casts a lustre upon a man, and *makes his face to shine.* *Aristotle* tells us, that *honour* is nothing else but the *signification of the esteem which we have of a person for his goodness*; for, saith he, *to be good, and to do good, is the highest glory.* God's goodness is his highest glory; and there is nothing so glorious in any creature, as herein to be like God.

2. Let us give God the glory which is due to his name; *Ascribe ye greatness to our God, Deut. xxxii. 3. Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and power, Psal. xxix. 1.* The glory and majesty of God calls for our esteem and honour, our fear and reverence of him. Thus we should *glorify God in our spirits*, by an inward esteem and reverence of his majesty. The thoughts of earthly majesty will compose us to reverence: how much more should the apprehensions of the divine majesty strike an awe upon our spirits in all our addresses to him? *His excellency should make us afraid*, and keep us from all saucy boldness and familiarity with him. Reverence is an acknowledgment of the distance which is between the majesty of God, and our meanness. And we should *glorify him in our bodies*, with outward worship and adoration; that is, by all external significations of reverence and respect; and we should glorify him in our lives and actions. The highest glory a creature can give to God, is to endeavour to be like him, *satis illos coluit, quisquis imitatus est, Sen.* Hereby we manifest and shew forth his excellency to the world, when we endeavour to be conformed to the divine perfections. And in case of sin and provocation, we are to give glory to God by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his holiness, who hates sin; and of his justice, which will punish it; and of the mercy of God, which is ready to pardon it; for it is *the glory of God to pass by a provocation.*

3. He should take heed of robbing God of his glory, by giving it to any creature, by ascribing those titles, or that worship to any creature, which is due to God alone. This is the reason which is given of the second Commandment; *I the Lord am a jealous God*; God is jealous of his honour, and will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images, *Isa. xlii. 8.* Upon this account we find the Apostle reproves the idolatry of the heathens, because there-

by

by they debased the esteem of God, and did shew they had unworthy thoughts of him. *Rom. i. 21, 23.* *When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations : and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.* Hereby they denyed the glorious excellency of the divine nature ; that is, that he is a spirit, and so incapable of being represented by any material or sensible image.

Secondly, I come now to speak of the *sovereignty* and *dominion* of God. In which I shall shew,

First, What we are to understand by the *sovereignty* and *dominion* of God. By these we mean the full and absolute right and title and authority which God hath to, and over all his creatures, as his creatures, and made by him. And this right results from the effects of that goodness, and power, and wisdom, whereby all things are and were made ; from whence there doth accrue to God a *sovereign* right and title to all his creatures, and a full and absolute authority over them ; that is, such a right and authority, which doth not depend upon any superior, nor is subject and accountable to any for any thing that he does to any of his creatures. And this is that which is call'd *summum imperium*, because there is no power above it to check or controul it, and therefore there can be no greater than this. And it is *absolute*, because all the creatures have what they have from God, and all depend upon his goodness, and therefore they owe all possible duty and perpetual subjection so long as they continue in being, because it is solely by his power and goodness, that they continue ; and therefore whatever right or title any one can pretend to any person or thing, *that God hath to all things, in Deo omnes tituli, omnia jura concurrunt.*

So that *sovereignty* and *dominion* signifies a full right and title and propriety in all his creatures, and an absolute authority over them, to govern them and dispose of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaseth, that is not contrary to his essential dignity and perfection, or repugnant to the natural state and condition of the creature.

And for our better understanding of this, and the preventing of mistakes which men are apt to fall into about the *sovereignty* of God, I will shew,

I. Wherein it doth not consist. And,

II. Wherein it doth consist.

I. Wherein it doth not consist.

i. Not in a right to gratify and delight himself in the extream misery of innocent and undeserving creatures ; I say, not in a *right* ; for the *right* that God hath in his creatures is founded in the benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the obligations they have to him upon that account. Now there's none, who because he hath done a benefit, can have, by virtue of *that*, a *right* to do a greater evil than the good which he hath done amounts to ; and I think it next to madness, to doubt whether extreme and eternal misery be not a greater evil, than simple being is a good. I know they call it *physical goodness* ; but I do not understand how any thing is the better for being call'd by a hard name. For what can there be that is *good* or *desirable* in *being*, when it only serves to be a foundation of the greatest and most lasting *misery* ? and we may safely say, that the just God will never challenge more than an *equitable right*. God doth not claim any *such sovereignty* to himself, as to crush and oppress innocent creatures without a cause, and to make them miserable without a provocation. And because it seems some have been very apt to entertain such groundless jealousies and unworthy thoughts of God, he hath given us his oath to assure us of the contrary. *As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner ; but rather that he should turn and live.* So far is he from taking pleasure in the misery and ruin of innocent creatures, that in case of sin and provocation, he would be much rather pleased, if sinners would, by repentance, avoid and escape his justice, than that they should fall under it. The good God cannot be glorified or pleased in doing evil to any, where justice doth not require it ; nothing is further from infinite goodness, than to rejoyce in evil. We account him a ty-

rant and a monster of men, and of a devilish temper, that can do so; and we cannot do a greater injury to the good God, than to paint him out after such a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The *sovereignty* of God doth not consist in imposing laws upon his creatures, which are impossible either to be understood or observed by them. For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the divine nature, but contradict the nature of a reasonable creature, which, in reason, cannot be obliged by any power to impossibilities.

3. The *sovereignty* of God doth not consist in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to necessitate them to sin, or effectually to procure the sins of men, and to punish them for them. For as this would be contrary to the holiness, and justice, and goodness of God, so to the nature of a reasonable creature, who cannot be guilty or deserve punishment for what it cannot help. And men cannot easily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagine that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a secret design to circumvent the greatest part of men into destruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot against heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raise a revenue of glory to his justice. There's no generous and good man, but would spit in that man's face, that should charge him with such a design; and if they who are but very drops of goodness, in comparison of God, the infinite ocean of goodness, would take it for such a reproach, shall we attribute *that* to the best being in the world, which we would detest and abominate in ourselves?

II. Wherein the *sovereignty* of God doth consist.

1. In a right to dispose of, and deal with his creatures in any way that doth not contradict the essential perfections of God, and the natural condition of the creature.

2. In a right to impose what laws he pleaseth upon his creatures, whether natural and reasonable; or positive, of trial of obedience; provide they contradict not the nature of God or of the creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deserved punishment in a case of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his creatures, so the evil he inflicts be short of the benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther in a right when he pleaseth to annihilate the creature, and turn it out of being, if it should so seem good to him, tho' that creature have not offended him; because what he gave was his own, and he may without injury take it away again when he pleaseth. In these the *sovereignty* of God consists; and if there be any thing else that can be reconciled with the essential perfections of God.

Secondly, For the proof and confirmation of this. This is universally acknowledged by the heathens, that God is *the lord and sovereign of the world, and of all creatures*. Hence *Plato* calls him *ὁ πάντων ἡγεμὼν*; and *Tully*, *omnium rerum Dominum, Lord of all*; and this the scripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him *Lord of all, King of kings, and Lord of lords*; to which we may refer all those doxologies, in which power, and dominion, and authority are ascribed to God. I will only mention that eminent confession of *Nebuchadnezzar*, a great king, who, when his understanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge, that *God was the most high*. Dan. iv. 34, 35. I infer,

First, negatively we cannot, from the *sovereignty* of God, infer a right to do any thing that is unsuitable to the perfection of his nature; and consequently that we are to rest satisfied with such a notion of *dominion* and *sovereignty* in God, as doth not plainly and directly contradict all the notions that we have of *justice* and *goodness*: nay, it would be little less than a horrid and dreadful blasphemy, to say that God can, out of his sovereign will and pleasure, do any thing that contradicts the nature of God, and the essential perfections of the deity; or to imagine that the pleasure and will of the holy, and just, and good God is not always regulated and determined by the essential and indispensable laws of goodness, and holiness, and righteousness.

Secondly, Positively; we may infer from the *sovereignty* and *dominion* of God:

1. That

1. That we ought to own and acknowledge God for *our lord and sovereign*, who by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himself a right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmost possibility of our love, *to love him with all our hearts, and souls, and strength*; because the souls that we have, he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his gift; and when we render these to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We owe to him all imaginable subjection, and observance, and obedience; and are with all diligence, to the utmost of our endeavours, to conform our selves to his will, and to those laws which he hath imposed upon us.

4. In case of offense and disobedience, we are, without murmuring, to submit to what he shall inflict upon us, *to accept of the punishment of our iniquity*, and *patiently to bear the indignation of the Lord*, because we have sinned against him, who is *our lord and sovereign*.

S E R M O N LXXXIII.

The Wisdom of God in the Creation of the W O R L D.

P S A L M CIV. 24.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all.

I Am treating of the attributes and properties of God, particularly those which relate to the divine understanding, which I told you are his *knowledge* and *wisdom*. I have finished the *first*, the *knowledge* of God. The last day I spake concerning the *wisdom* of God in general; but there are *three* eminent arguments, and famous instances of God's *wisdom*, which I have reserved for a more large and particular handling. The wisdom of God shines forth in the creation of the world, in the *government* of it, and in the *redemption* of mankind by Jesus Christ. Of these *three* I shall speak severally.

I begin with the *first*, the argument of God's *wisdom*, which the creation doth furnish us withal. In this visible frame of the world, which we behold with our eyes, which way soever we look, we are encounter'd with ocular demonstrations of the *wisdom* of God. What the Apostle saith of the *power* of God is true likewise of his *wisdom*, Rom. i. 20. *The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, by being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead*: So the *eternal wisdom* of God is understood *by the things which are made*. Now, the *creation* is an argument of the *wisdom* of God, as it is an effect of admirable counsel and wisdom. As any curious work, or rare engine doth argue the wit of the artificer; so the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitness of the works of God, argue the *infinite wisdom* of him who made them; a work so beautifull and magnificent, such a stately pile as heaven and earth is, so curious in the several pieces of it, so harmonious in all its parts, every part so fitted to the service of the whole, and each part for the service of another; is not this a plain argument that there was *infinite wisdom* in the contrivance of this frame?

Now I shall endeavour to prove to you, that this frame of things which we see with our eyes, which we call the *world* or the *creation*, is contrived after the best manner, and hath upon it evident impressions of counsel and wisdom. I grant the *wisdom* of God is infinite, and that many of the ends and designs of his *wisdom* are *unsearchable, and past finding out*, both in the works of creation and providence;

providence; and that *tho' a wise man seek to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end, he shall not be able to do it*; and we shall never be able to exhaust all the various wisdom and contrivance which is in the works of God; though the oftener, and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we shall see to admire in them; the more we study this book of the creation, the more we shall be astonish'd at the wisdom of the author: but this doth not hinder, but that we may discover something of the wisdom of God, tho' it be infinite. As the effects of *infinite power* may fall under our *senses*, so the designs of *infinite wisdom* may fall under our *reason and understanding*; and when things appear to our best reason, plainly to be order'd for the best, and the greatest advantages of the world and mankind, so far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwise, as they might have been a hundred thousand ways, they would not have been so well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwise, is the result of *wisdom*.

Now the wisdom of God in the creation will appear by considering the works of God. Those who have studied nature, can discourse these things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect skill in *astronomy*, to declare the motions and order of heavenly bodies; and in *anatomy*, to read lectures of the rare contrivance of the bodies of living creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, so it would probably be above most of your capacities; therefore I shall content myself with some general and more obvious instances of the divine wisdom, which shine forth so clear in his works, that *he that runs may read it*.

1. I shall take a short survey of the several parts of the world.

2. Single out a man, the master-piece of the visible creation.

1. If we survey the world, and travel over the several parts of it in our thoughts, we shall find that all things in it are made with the greatest exactness, ranged in the most beautifull order, and serve the wisest and best ends.

If we look up to heaven, and take notice only there of what is most visible, the sun; you see how by the wise order and constancy of its course it makes day and night, winter and summer. This the Psalmist takes notice of, *Psal. xix. 1, 2. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech; and night unto night sheweth knowledge*. It may easily be imagin'd many ways, how the sun might have had another course in reference to the earth; but no man can devise any other, that should not be very much to the prejudice of the world; so that this being the best, it is an argument that wisdom had the ordering and disposing of it.

If we look down to the earth, we shall see *gods ascending and descending*; I mean clear representations of divine wisdom in the treasures that are hid in the bowels of it, and those fruits that grow upon the surface of it. What vast heaps, and what variety of usefull materials and minerals are scatter'd up and down in the earth as one would think with a careless hand, but yet so wisely dispers'd, as is most proper for the necessities and uses of several countries! Look upon the surface of the earth, and you shall find it cloathed and adorned with plants of various and admirable frame, and beauty, and usefullness. Look upon the vast ocean, and there you may see the wisdom of God in bridling and restraining that unruly element, I mean, in sinking it below the earth; whereas the water might have been above and cover'd the earth, and then the earth had been in a great measure useless, and incapable of those inhabitants which now possess it.

Look again upon the earth, and in the air, and sea, and you shall find all these inhabited and furnished with great store of living creatures of several kinds, wonderfully made in the frame of their bodies, endowed with strong inclination to increase their kinds, and with a natural affection and care towards their young ones; and every kind of these creatures armed either with strength or wit to oppose their enemy, or swiftness to flee from him, or strong holds to secure themselves. But the creation is a vast field, in which we may easily lose our selves. I shall therefore call home our wandering thoughts; for we need not go out of our selves for a proof of divine wisdom. I shall therefore,

2. Select the choicest piece of it, *man*, who is the top and perfection of this visible world. What is said of the elephant, or *behemoth*, *Job* xl. 19. in respect of the vast bigness and strength of his body, is only absolutely true of man, that he is *divini opificii caput, the chief of the works of God, and upon earth there is none like him*. Man is *mundi utriusque nexus, the bond of both worlds*, as *Scaliger* calls him, in whom the world of bodies, and the world of spirits do meet, and unite; for in respect to his body, he is related to this visible world, and is of the earth; but in respect of his soul, he is allied to heaven, and descended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the several representations of God's wisdom, and the several parts of the creation; but we have not yet consider'd the best piece of the visible world, which we may speak of, without flattery of our selves, and to the praise of our maker. God, when he had made the world, *he made man after his own image*. When he had finished the other part of the creation, he was pleased to set up this picture of himself in it, as a memorial of the workman. Now we shall a little more particularly consider this piece of God's workmanship, being it is better known and more familiar to us, as it is more excellent than the rest, and consequently a higher instance of the divine wisdom. It is observed by some, that concerning the parts of the creation, God speaks the word, *let there be light, and let there be a firmament, and there was so*: but when he comes to make man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into consultation about him; *And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion*, *Gen. i. 26.* as if *man*, above all the rest, were the effect and result of divine wisdom, and the creature of his counsel.

Man may be consider'd either in himself, and in respect of the parts of which he consists, soul and body; or with relation to the universe, and other parts of the creation.

1. Consider him in himself, as compounded of soul and body. Consider man in his outward and worse part, and you shall find *that* to be admirable, even to astonishment; in respect of which, the Psalmist cries out, *Psal. cxxxix. 14. I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well*. The frame of our bodies is so curiously wrought, and every part of it so full of miracle, that *Galen* (who was otherwise backward enough to the belief of a God) when he had anatomized man's body, and carefully survey'd the frame of it, viewed the fitness and usefullness of every part of it, and the many several intentions of every little vein, and bone, and muscle, and the beauty of the whole, he fell into a pang of devotion, and wrote a hymn to his creator. And those excellent books of his, *de usu partium, of the usefullness and convenient contrivance of every part of the body*, are a most exact demonstration of the divine wisdom, which appears in the make of our body; of which books, *Gassendus* saith, the whole work is writ with a kind of *enthusiasm*. The wisdom of God, in the frame of our bodies, very much appears by a curious consideration of the several parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate skill in *anatomy*, I chuse rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unskillfullness, to be injurious to the divine wisdom.

But this *domicilium corporis, the house of our body*, tho' it be indeed a curious piece; yet it is nothing to the noble *inhabitant* that dwells in it. This *cabinet*, tho' it be exquisitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely short in value of the *jewel* that is hid and laid up in it. How does the glorious faculty of reason and understanding exalt us above the rest of the creatures! Nature hath not made that particular provision for man, which it hath made for other creatures, because it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a mind and reason. Man is not born cloathed, nor armed with any considerable weapon for defence; but he hath reason and understanding to provide these things for himself; and this alone excells all the advantages of other creatures: he can keep himself warmer and safer; he can foresee dangers, and provide against them; he can provide weapons that are better than horns, and teeth, and paws, and by the advantage of his reason, is too hard for all other creatures, and can defend himself against their violence.

If we consider the mind of man yet nearer, how many arguments of divinity are there in it! That there should be at once in our understandings distinct comprehensions of such variety of objects; that it should pass in its thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things past, and take a prospect of the future, and look forward as far as eternity! Because we are familiar to our selves, we cannot be strange and wonderfull to our selves; but the great miracle of the world, is the mind of man, and the contrivance of it an eminent instance of God's wisdom.

2. Consider man with the relation to the universe, and you shall find the wisdom of God doth appear, in that all things are made so usefull for man, who was design'd to be the chief inhabitant of this visible world, the guest whom God design'd principally to entertain in this house which he built. Not that we are to think, that God hath so made all things for man, that he hath not made them at all for himself, and possibly for many other uses that we can imagine; for we much over-value our selves, if we think them to be only for us; and we diminish the wisdom of God in restraining it to one end: but the chief and principal end of many things is the use and service of man; and in reference to this end, you shall find, that God hath made abundant and wise provision.

More particularly we will consider man,

1. In his *natural* capacity, as a part of the world. How many things are there in the world for the service and pleasure, for the use and delight of man, which, if man were not in the world, would be of little use? Man is by nature a contemplative creature, and God has furnished him with many objects to exercise his understanding upon, which would be so far useless and lost, if man were not. Who should observe the motions of the stars, and the courses of those heavenly bodies, and all the wonders of nature? Who should pry into the secret virtues of plants, and other natural things, if there were not in the world, a creature endowed with reason and understanding? Would the beasts of the field study astronomy, or turn chymists, and try experiments in nature?

What variety of beautiful plants and flowers is there! which can be imagin'd to be of little other use but for the pleasure of man. And if man had not been, they would have lost their grace, and been trod down by the beasts of the field, without pity or observation; they would not have made them into garlands and nosegays. How many sorts of fruits are there which grow upon high trees, out of the reach of beasts! and indeed they take no pleasure in them. What would all the vast bodies of trees have served for, if man had not been to build with them, and make dwellings of them? Of what use would all the mines of metal have been, and of coal, and the quarries of stone? Would the mole have admired the fine gold? Would the beasts of the forest have built themselves palaces, or would they have made fires in their dens?

2. Consider man in his *geographical* capacity, as I may call it, in relation to his habitation in this or that climate or country. The wisdom of God hath so order'd things, that the necessities of every country are supply'd one way or other. *Egypt* hath no rains; but the river *Nilus* overflows it, and makes it fruitfull. Under the line, where there are excessive heats, every day there are constant gales and breezes of cool wind, to fan and refresh the scorched inhabitants. The hotter countries are furnished with materials for silk, a light cloathing; we that are cooler here in *England*, with materials for cloth, a warmer cloathing; *Russia* and *Muscovy*, which are extream cold, are provided with warm furs, and skins of beasts.

3. Consider man in his capacity of *commerce* and *intercourse*. Man is a *sociable creature*; besides the advantages of *commerce* with remoter nations, for supplying every country with those conveniencies and commodities which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the wisdom of God does plainly appear, in disposing the sea into several parts of the world, for the more speedy commerce and intercourse of several nations. Now if every country had brought forth all commodities, *that* had been needless and superfluous, because they might have been had

had without commerce; besides that the great encouragement of intercourse among nations, which is so agreeable to humane nature, would have been taken away: If every country had been, as now it is destitute of many things other countries have, and there had been no sea to give an opportunity of traffick; the world had been very defective as to the use of man. Now here appears the wisdom of God, that the world, and all things in it, are contriv'd for the best.

Thus I have endeavour'd to do something toward the displaying of God's wisdom in the workmanship of the world; altho' I am very sensible how much I have been master'd and oppress'd by the greatness and weight of so noble an argument. For *who can declare the works of God! and who can shew forth all his praise!*

The use I shall make of what has been said, shall be in three particulars.

1. This confutes the *Epicureans*, who impute the world, and this orderly and beautifull frame of things to chance. Those things which are the proper effects of counsel, and bear the plain impressiion of wisdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to chance. What a madness is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wisest agent upon counsel and design had contriv'd them; and yet to ascribe them to chance! Now he that denies things to be so wisely framed, must pick holes in the creation, and shew some fault and irregularity in the frame of things, which no man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any *anatomist* pretend to shew how the body of man might have been better contriv'd, and fitter for the uses of a reasonable creature than it is; or any *astronomer* to rectify the course of the sun. As for the extravagant and blasphemous speech of *Alphonsus*, *That if he had stood at God's elbow when he made the world, he could have told him how to have made it better*; besides his *pride*, it shews nothing but his *ignorance*; that he built his *astronomy* upon a false hypothesis, as is generally believed now by the learned in that science; and no wonder he found fault with the world, when he mistook the frame of it: But those who have been most vers'd in nature, and have most pried into the secrets of it, have most admired the workmanship both of the great world, and the less.

But if we must suppose the world to be as well made, as wisdom could contrive it, which is generally granted; it is a monstrous folly to impute it to chance. A man might better say, *Archimedes* did not make any of his engines by skill, but by chance; and might more easily maintain, that cardinal *Richlieu* did not manage affairs by any arts or policie, but they fell out by meer chance. What pitifull shifts is *Epicurus* put to, when the best account he can give of the world, is this; *That matter allways was, and the parts of it in motion, and after a great many tryals, the parts of matter at length hamper'd themselves in this fortunate order wherein they now are; that men, at first, grew out of the earth, were nourish'd by the navel-string, and when they were strong enough, broke loose and weaned themselves; that the nostrils were made by the waters making themselves a passage out of the body; and the stomach and bowels by the waters forcing a passage downward; that the members of the body were not made for those uses for which they serve, but chanced to be so, and the uses afterwards found out.* Is it worth the while to advance such senseless opinions as these, to deny the wisdom of God? Is it not much easier, and more reasonable to say, that the wisdom of God made all these things, than to trouble our selves to imagine how all things should happen thus conveniently by chance? Did you ever know any great work, in which there was variety of parts, and an orderly disposition of them required, done by chance, and without the direction of wisdom and counsel? How long time might a man take to jumble a set of four and twenty letters together, before they would fall out to be an exact poem; yea, or to make a book of tolerable sense, tho' but in prose? How long might a man sprinkle oil and colours upon canvas, with a careless hand, before this would produce the exact picture of a man? And is a man easier made by chance, than his picture? He that tells me that this great and curious frame of the world was made by chance, I could no more believe him, if he should tell me that *Henry the VII's chapel in Westminster* was not built

built by any mortal man, but the stones did grow in those forms into which they seem to us to be cut and graven; that the stones, and timber, and iron, and brass, and all the other materials came thither by chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themselves into that delicate order, in which we see them so close compacted, that it must be a great chance that parts them again. Now is it not much easier to imagine how a skillfull workman should raise a building, than hew timber, and stones, and how that variety of materials which is required to a great and stately building, should meet together all of a just bigness, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themselves into that order? I insist the longer upon this, because I am sensible how much atheism hath gained in this age.

2. Let us admire, and adore, and praise the *wisdom* of God, *who hath establish'd the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding; who hath made all things in number, weight, and measure*; that is, by *exact wisdom*. The wise works of God are the proper object of our praise; and this is a day proper for the work of praise and thanksgiving. Now under the gospel, since Christ was clearly revealed, we have new matter of praise and thanksgiving; but as God has given us *Christ*, so he hath given us our *beings*. We are not so to remember our *redeemer*, as to forget our *creator*. The goodness, and power, and wisdom of God, which appears in the creation of the world, ought still to be matter of admiration and praise to christians. It is a great fault and neglect among christians, that they are not more taken up with the works of God, and the contemplation of the wisdom which shines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little toys; but we overlook this vast curious engine of the world, and the great artificer of all things. It was truly said by one, that most men are so stupid and inconsiderate, as to admire the works of a painter or carver, more than the works of God. There are many that have bestowed more eloquence in the praise of a curious picture, or an exact building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquisite frame of the world, or any of the other works of God. We can admire the wisdom, and design, and skill of petty artists, and little engineers; but *here is wisdom* in the beauty and order of the *creation*. Did we love God, and take pleasure in the effects of his wisdom and power, we should be more in the contemplation of them. *Psal. cxi. 2. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein*: Let us then say with the Psalmist, *O Lord how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches, &c.*

More particularly let us, with an humble thankfulness, admire the wisdom which hath made and disposed all things so fitly for our use and service, and with so mercifull a respect to us: the light and influence of heaven; the beasts and the fruits of the earth. We find the Psalmist often praising God upon this account, *Psal. cxxxvi. 4, 5, &c.* The wisdom which hath framed these bodies of ours. *Psal. cxxxix. 14, 15, 16.* Which hath endowed us with knowledge and understanding. *Elihu* complains, that men were apt to overlook these great blessings of God. *Job xxxv. 10, 11, 12. But none saith, where is God my maker, who gives songs in the night? who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven? There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men.*

3. Use; Trust the wisdom of God, which made the world, to govern it, and the affairs of it; and the wisdom which hath framed thy body in so curious and exquisite a manner, and formed thy spirit within thee, and hath made so many creatures, with reference to thy necessity and comfort, trust him for thy future provision. *Mat. vi. 25. I say unto you, take no thought for your lives, what ye shall eat, &c. Is not the life more than meat? and the body than raiment?* He hath given us our souls, he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made these bodies without our care and thought; he hath done the greater, will he not do the less? When thou art ready anxiously and solicitously to say, what shall I do for the necessities of life? Consider whence thou didst receive thy life, who made this body of thine; thou may'st be assured that the wisdom which hath created

created these, consider'd how to supply them ; the wisdom of God knew that you would want all these; and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore *fear not.*

S E R M O N LXXXIV.

The Wisdom of God, in his Providence.

I P E T E R V. 7.

Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.

Preached
at Kenning-
ton.

AMongst the several duties, which towards the conclusion of this epistle the Apostle exhorts christians to, this is one, not to be over-much solicitous and concerned about what may befall us, but to refer our selves to the providence of God, which takes care of us. In speaking to this argument, I shall

I. Consider the nature of the duty here required, which is *to cast our care upon God.*

II. The argument used to persuade us to it : Because *he careth for us.*

I. For the nature of the duty here required. The word *μεριμνα* signifies an *anxious care* about events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and disquiet of mind about what may befall us ; about the good that we hope for, and desire ; or about the evil which we fear may come upon us. This the Apostle exhorts us to throw off ; and to leave to the providence of God, and his care, all those events which we are apt to be so solicitous and disquieted about. The expression seems to be taken out of *Psal. lv. 22. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.*

Now that we may not mistake our duty in this matter, I shall shew what is not here meant by *casting all our care upon God*, and then what is meant by it.

The Apostle doth not here intend to take men off from *a provident care and diligence* about the concernments of this life ; this is not only contrary to reason, but to many express precepts and passages of scripture, wherein diligence is recommended to us, and the blessing of God, and the good success of our affairs promised thereto ; wherein we are commanded to provide for those of our family, which cannot be done without some sort of care ; and wherein slothfulness and negligence are condemned, and threaten'd with poverty ; so that this is not *to cast our care upon God*, to take no care of our selves, to use no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the good which we desire, and the prevention of the evil we fear ; this is to tempt the providence of God, and to cast that burden upon him, which he expects we should bear our selves.

But by *casting our care upon God*, the Apostle intends these *two things.*

1. That after all prudent care and diligence have been used by us, we should not be *farther solicitous*, nor trouble our selves about the event of things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this certainly is our Saviour's meaning, when he bids us, *take no care for the morrow.* When we have done what is fit for us for the present to do, we should not disquiet and torment our selves about the issue and event of things.

2. *Casting our care upon God*, implies, that we should refer the issue of things to his providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to dispose all things to the best ; entirely confiding in his wisdom and goodness, that he will order all things for our good, and in that confidence resolving to rest satisfied

satisfied and contented with the disposals of his providence, whatever they be.

You see then the nature of the duty which the Apostle here exhorts to, *viz.* That after all prudent care and diligence have been used on our parts, we should not be disquieted in our minds about the event of things, but leave them to God, who hath the care of us, and of all our concerns. Which is the

II. Thing I proposed to speak to, and which I intend chiefly to insist upon, *viz.* The argument which the Apostle here useth to persuade us to this duty, of *casting all our care upon God*, because *it is he that careth for us*: and this implies in it these two things.

1. In general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns it self in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us.

2. More particularly, that this providence is peculiarly concerned for good men, and that he takes a special care of them and their concerns; *He careth for you*. The Apostle speaks this to them, not only as *men*, but as *christians*. And thus the *Psalmist*, from whom these words seem to be taken, does apply and limit this promise; *Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved*.

1. That God taketh care of us, implies in general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns it self in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us. I shall not now enter upon a large proof of *the providence of God*; that is too large and intricate an argument for a short discourse, and hath a great deal of nicety and difficulty in it; and tho' it be a fundamental principle of religion, and hath been almost generally entertained and believed by mankind, and that upon very good reason; yet because the vindication of many particular appearances of providence, does in a great measure depend upon a full view and comprehension of the whole design, therefore we must necessarily refer our selves, for full satisfaction, as to several difficulties and objections, to the other world, when we shall see God's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole design, and then many particular passages, which may now seem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themselves, will, in relation to the whole, appear to have a great deal of reason and regularity in them.

Therefore I shall at present only briefly, and in the general, shew that it is very credible, that there is a wise providence, that governs the world, and interests it self in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events which happen to us.

And I desire it may be observed in the entrance upon this argument, that the handling of this question concerning *providence*, doth suppose *the being of God*, and that *he made the world*, as principles already known and granted, before we come to dispute of his *providence*, for it would be vain, to argue about the *providence* of God, with those who question his *being*, and whether *the world was made by him*: But supposing these two principles, *that God is*, and *that he made the world*, it is very credible, that he should *take care of the government of it*, and especially of one of the noblest parts of it, the race of *mankind*. For we cannot believe, that he who employed so much power and wisdom, in the raising of this great and magnificent pile, and furnishing every part of it with such variety of creatures, so exquisitely, and so wisely fitted for the use and service of one another, should so soon as he had perfected it, forsake his own workmanship, and take no further care of it; especially considering that it is no trouble and disquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpose for the regulating of any disorders that may happen; for infinite knowledge, and wisdom, and power can do all things with all imaginable ease, knows all things, and can do all things, without any disturbance of its own happiness.

And this hath always been the common apprehension of mankind, that God knows all things, and observes every thing that is done in the world, and when he

he pleaseth, interposes in the affairs of it. 'Tis true indeed, the *Epicureans* did deny that God either made the world, or governs it; and therefore wise men always doubted whether they did indeed believe the being of God, or not; but being unwilling to incur the danger of so odious an opinion, they were content for fashion sake, to own his being, provided they might take away the best and most substantial arguments for the proof of it. The rest of the philosophers owned a providence, at least a general providence, that took care of great and more important matters, but did not descend to a constant and particular care of every person, and every little event belonging to them, *Interdum curiosus singulorum*, says Tully; *Now and then, when he pleases, he takes care of particular persons, and their lesser concernments*; but many of them thought that God did generally neglect the smaller and more inconsiderable affairs of the world, *Dii minora negligunt neque agellos singulorum & viticulas persequuntur*, *The Gods overlook smaller matters, and do not mind every man's little field and vine*. Such imperfect apprehensions had they of the providence of God. And tho' they would seem hereby to consult the dignity and ease of the deity, by exempting him from the care and trouble of lesser matters, yet in truth and reality, they cast a dishonourable reflection upon him, as if it were a burthen to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodness, to take care of every thing.

But now divine revelation hath put this matter out of doubt, by assuring us of God's particular care of all persons and events. Our Saviour tells us, that God's providence extends to the least and most inconsiderable creatures, *To the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven*, Mat. vi. 30. *To the fowls of the air*, and that to the least of them, even to the sparrows, *two of which are sold for a farthing, and yet not one of them falleth to the ground without God*, Mat. x. 29. Much more doth the providence of God extend to men, which are creatures far more considerable, and to the very least thing that belongs to us, *to the very hairs of our head, which are all number'd*, the lowest instance that can be thought on.

So that the light of nature owns a more *general providence*; and divine revelation hath rectified those imperfect apprehensions which men had about it, and hath satisfied us, that it extends itself to *all particulars*, and even to the least things and most inconsiderable. And this is no ways incredible, considering the infinite perfection of the divine nature, in respect of which God can with as much and greater ease, take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of religion. Men therefore pray to God for the good they want, and to be freed from the evils they fear, because they believe that he allways regards and hears them. Men therefore make conscience of their duty, because they believe God observes them, and will reward and punish their good and evil deeds. So that take away the providence of God, and we pull down one of the main pillars upon which religion stands, we rob our selves of one of the greatest comforts and best refuges in the afflictions and calamities of this life, and of all our hopes of happiness in the next.

And tho' there be many disorders in the world, especially in the affairs of men, the most irregular and intractable piece of God's creation; yet this is far from being a sufficient objection against *the providence of God*, if we consider that God made man a free creature, and capable of abusing his liberty, and intends this present life for a state of trial in order to another, where men shall receive the just recompense of their actions here: And then if we consider, that many of the evils and disorders, which God permits to happen, are capable of being over-ruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to serve wise and excellent purposes, and that the providence of God does sometimes visibly and remarkably interpose, for the prevention and remedy of great disorders and confusions; I say, considering all this, it is no blemish to the divine providence, to permit many of those irregularities which are in the world, and suffer the fates of good and bad men to be so cross and unequal in this life. For supposing another life after this, wherein men shall come to an account, and every man shall receive the just recompense of his actions, there will then be a proper season and full

full opportunity of setting all things streight, and no man shall have reason, then, either to glory in his wickedness, or to complain of his sufferings in this world. This is the *first*, that God's providence governs the world, and interests it self in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to them; and this is a very good reason, why we should *cast* our particular *cares upon him*, who hath undertaken the government of the whole.

2. The providence of God is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and he takes a more particular and especial care of them. The Apostle speaks this to christians, *cast all your care on him, for he careth for you*. And this David limits in a more particular manner to good men; *cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved*.

The providence of God many times preserves good men from those evils which happen to others, and by a peculiar and remarkable interposition, rescues them out of those calamities which it suffers others to fall into; and God many times blesteth good men with remarkable prosperity and success in their affairs. To which purpose there are innumerable declarations and promises in the holy scriptures, so well known, that I shall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithstanding which, it cannot be denied, that good men fall into many evils, and are harassed with great afflictions in this world: but then the providence of God usually ordereth it so, that they are armed with great patience to bear them, and find great comfort and support under them, and make better use and improvement of them than others; so that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the Apostle assures us, *Rom. viii. 28. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God*. All the evils and afflictions which happen to good men, conspire one way or other to the promoting of their happiness, many times in this world, to be sure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the same Apostle tells us, *2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not, &c.* And can we say God's providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal sufferings with eternal glory: When through *many hardships and tribulations*, he at last brings us to a kingdom? Was Joseph neglected by God, when by a great deal of hard usage, and a long imprisonment, he was raised to the highest dignity in a great kingdom? Or rather, was not the providence of God very remarkable towards him, in making those sufferings so many steps to his glory, and the occasion of his advancement? And is not God's providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious kingdom, by tribulation and sufferings; and making *our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*.

Thus you see what is implied in God's *care* of us in general; that he governs the world, and disposeth all events; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good men, and takes a more especial care of them. Let us now see of what force this consideration is, to persuade to the duty enjoined in the text, *to cast all your care upon God*; that is, after all prudent care and diligence hath been used on our part, not to be anxious and solicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to God. Now this consideration, that *God cares for us*, should be an argument to us, *to cast all our care upon him*, upon these two accounts:

1. Because if *God cares for us*, our concernments are in the best and safest hands.

2. Because all our anxiety and solicitude will do us no good.

1. Because if *God cares for us*, our concernments are in the best and safest hands, and where we should desire to have them; infinitely safer, than under any care and conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great satisfaction to our minds, and to free us from all disquieting thoughts; for if God undertakes the care of us, then we are sure that nothing shall happen to us, but by the disposal or permission of infinite wisdom and goodness. There are many things indeed, which to us seem *chance* and *accident*; but in respect of God, they are

providence

providence and *design*; they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill will and malicious intent of second causes, but they are all wisely designed; and as they are appointed or permitted by God, they are the result of the deepest counsel, and the greatest goodness. And can we wish that we and our concernments should be in better or safer hands, than of infinite power and wisdom, in conjunction with infinite love and goodness? And if we be careful to do our duty, and to demean our selves towards God as we ought, we may rest assured of his love and care of us; and if we do in good earnest believe the providence of God, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to those that love and serve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their concernments, and that he can, and will dispose them better for us, than we could manage them our selves, if we were left to our selves, and our affairs were put into *the hands of our own counsel*.

Put the case we had the entire ordering and disposal of our selves, what were reasonable for us to do in this case? We would surely, according to our best wisdom and judgment, do the best we could for our selves; and when upon experience of our own manifold ignorance and weakness, we had found our weightiest affairs and designs frequently to miscarry, for want of foresight, or power, or skill to obviate and prevent the infinite hazards and disappointments which human affairs are liable to, we should then look about us; and if we knew any person much wiser, and more powerfull than our selves, who we believed did heartily love us, and wish well to us, we would out of kindness to our selves, ask his counsel in our affairs, and crave his assistance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our concernments, we would commit them all to his conduct and government, in confidence of his great wisdom and good-will to us.

Now God is such an one, he loves us as well as we do our selves, and desires our happiness as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are most conducing to it, and will most effectually secure it. And every man that believes thus of God, (as every man must do, that believes there is a God, for these are the natural and essential notions which all men have of the deity) I say, every man that believes thus of God, the first thing he would do (if he knew not already that God had voluntarily, and of his own accord, undertaken the care of him and of his affairs) would be to apply himself to God, and to beseech him with all earnestness and importunity, that he would permit him to refer his concernments to him, and be pleased to undertake the care of them; and he would, without any any demur or difficulty, give up himself wholly to him, to guide and govern him, and to dispose of him as to him should seem best.

Now if God have prevented us herein, and without our desire taken this care upon himself, we ought to rejoyce in it, as the greatest happiness that could possibly have befallen us; and we should without any farther care and anxiety, using our own best diligence, and studying to please him, cheerfully leave our selves in his hands, with the greatest confidence and security, that he will do all that for us which is really best; and with a firm persuasion, that that condition, and those circumstances of life, which he shall chuse for us, will be no other but the very same which we would chuse for our selves, if we were as wise as he.

And it is so natural for men to think thus of God, that the very heathen poet had the same idea of him, and upon that ground, adviseth us to commit all our concernments to him.

*Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris;
Nam pro jucundis, aptissima quæque dabunt dii;
Charior est illis homo, quam sibi.*

Leave it, says he, to the wiser Gods, to consider and determine what is fittest for thee, and most for thy advantage; and tho' they do not always give thee what thou desirest, and that which pleaseth thee best, yet they will give that which is most fit and

convenient for thee; for man is more dear to the gods, than he is to himself. Not much different from this, is the divine counsel of Solomon, Prov. iii. 5, 6. *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* It is considerable who it is that gives this advice; the wisest of the sons of men; and yet he adviseth to *trust in God for direction, and not to lean to our understandings.*

If therefore we be fully persuaded of God's infinitely wise and good providence, we ought certainly to refer our selves to him, and perfectly to acquiesce in his disposal, and to rest satisfied in whatever he does, and whatever condition he assigns to us, we ought to be contented with it: if we be not, we find fault with his wisdom, and reproach his goodness, and wish the government of the world in better hands.

So that a firm belief of the providence of God, as it would take away all anxiety concerning future events, so would it likewise silence all those murmurings and discontents, which are apt to arise in us, when things fall out cross to our desires, when disasters and disappointments happen to us, and the providence of God casts us into sickness, or poverty, or disgrace. This quieted David, when he was ready to break out into murmuring at the afflictions and calamities which befell him. *I held my peace* (says he) *and spake not a word, because thou Lord didst it.* And this likewise should keep us from fretting and vexing at instruments and second causes; to consider that the wise providence of God overruleth and disposeth the actions of men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permission. This consideration restrained David's anger, under that high provocation of Shimei, when he follow'd him reproaching him, and cursing him; *Let him alone, the Lord hath said unto him, curse David.* He consider'd that God's providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from a higher hand, this calmed his passion, and made him bear it patiently. If a man be walking in the street, and one sling water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience; but no man is in a passion for being wet ten times as much by rain from heaven. What calamity soever befalleth us, when we consider it as coming from heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will still and hush our passion, and make us with Eli to hold our peace, or only to say, *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*

We are indeed liable to many things in this world, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to poverty, and pain, and reproach, and restraint, and the loss of our friends and near relations, and these are great afflictions, and very cross and distastfull to us; and therefore when we are in danger of any of these, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious and full of trouble, and when they befall us, we are prone to censure the providence of God, and to judge rashly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by it for the best: but we should consider, that we are very ignorant and short-sighted creatures, and see but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the designs of God, and to look to the end of his providence. We cannot (as Solomon expresth it) *see the work of God from the beginning to the end*; whereas if we saw the whole design of providence together, we should strangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and should see it to be very wise and good. And that which upon the whole matter, and in the last issue and result of things, is most for our good, is certainly best, how grievous soever it may seem for the present. Sickness caused by physick, is many times more troublesome for the present, than the disease we take it for; but every wise man composeth himself to bear it as well as he can, because it is in order to his health: The evils and afflictions of this life are the physic, and means of cure, which the providence of God is often necessitated to make use of; and if we did trust our selves in the hands of this great physician, we should quietly submit to all the severities of his providence, in confidence that they would *all work together for our good.*

When children are under the government of parents, or the discipline of their teachers, they are apt to murmur at them, and think it very hard to be denied so many things which they desire, and to be constrained by severities to a great many

many things which are grievous and tedious to them: but the parent and the master know very well, that it is their ignorance and inconsiderateness which makes them to think so, and that when they come to years, and to understand themselves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them so much discontent, was really for their good, and that it was their childishness and folly, which made them to think otherwise, and that they had in all probability been undone, had they been indulged in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not wit and consideration enough, to trust the discretion of their parents and governors, and to believe that even those things which were so displeasing to them, would at last tend to their good.

There is a far greater distance between the wisdom of God and men, and we are infinitely more ignorant and childish in respect of God, than our children are in respect of us; and being persuaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this world, under God's care and discipline, it is necessary for our good, that we be restrained in many things, which we eagerly desire; and suffer many things that are grievous to us; and that when we come to heaven, and are grown up to be men, and *have put away childish thoughts*, and are come to understand things as they truly are, and not *in a riddle*, and darkness, as we now do; then *the judgment of God will break forth as the light, and the righteousness of all his dealings as the noon-day*; then all the riddles of providence will be clearly expounded to us, and we shall see a plain reason for all those dispensations which were so much stumbled at, and acknowledge the great wisdom and goodness of them.

You see then what reason there is to refer our selves to the providence of God, and *to cast all our care upon him*, to trust him with the administration and disposal of our concerns, and firmly to believe, that if we love God, and be careful to please him, every thing in the issue will turn to the best for us; and therefore we should not anxiously trouble our selves about the events of things, but resign up our selves to the good pleasure of him, who disposeth all things *according to the counsel of his will*, entirely trusting in his goodness, and in his fatherly care of us, and affection to us; that he will order all things for us, for the best, referring the success of all our concerns to him, *in whose hands are all the ways of the children of men*, cheerfully submitting to his determination, and the declarations of his providence in every case.

And this is a proper expression of our confidence in God's wisdom and goodness, to refer things to him before the event, and to say with the christians, *Acts xxi. 14. The will of the Lord be done*; because this shews that we are persuaded that God will do better for us, than our own counsel and choice; and to submit to his will after the event, is likewise a great instance of our confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is best: For when God, by his providence declares his will in any case, we should look upon it, as the sentence of a wise and just judge, in which all parties concerned ought to acquiesce, and rest fully satisfied.

And this may well be expected from us christians, who have much greater assurance of the *particular* providence of God, than the heathens had; and yet some of them were able to free themselves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and discontent. Upon this consideration, *Epicetus* (as *Arrian* tells us) would express himself thus: *I had always rather have that which happens; because I esteem that better which God wills, than that which I should will.* And again, *Lift up thine eyes*, (says he) *with confidence to God, and say, henceforth, Lord, deal with me as thou pleasest*, *ἐμοι γὰρ ὡς βούλησῃ σοι, ὁ θεός. εἰμι.* *I am of the same opinion with thee, just of the same mind that thou art; I refuse nothing that seems good to thee; lead me where thou wilt; cloath me with what garments thou pleasest; set me in a publick place, or keep me in a private condition; continue me in mine own country, or banish me from it; bestow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and struggle with poverty, which of these thou pleasest, ἐγὼ σοι ὑπὲρ πάντων τέτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους ἀπολογίσομαι.* *If men shall censure this providence towards me, and say,*

thou dealest hardly with me, I will apologize for thee, I will undertake and maintain thy cause, that what thou dost is best for me. What could a christian say more or better, by way of resignation of himself to the providence of God? It almost transports me to read such passages from a *heathen*, especially if we consider in what condition *Epictetus* was; he had a maimed and deformed body, was in the extremity of poverty, a slave, and cruelly and tyrannically used, so that we can hardly imagine a man in worse and more wretched circumstances; and yet he justifies the providence of God in all this, and not only submits to his condition, but is contented with it, and embraces it; and since God hath thought it fittest and best for him, he is of the same mind, and thinks so too. I confess it doth not move me to hear *Seneca*, who flowed with wealth, and lived at ease, to talk magnificently, and to slight poverty and pain, as not worthy the name of evil and trouble: But to see *this poor man*, in the lowest condition and worst circumstances of humanity, bear up so bravely, and with such a chearfulness and serenity of mind to entertain his hard fortune; and this not out of stupidity, but from a wise sense of the providence of God, and a firm persuasion of the wisdom and goodness of all his dealings, *this*, who can chuse but be affected with it, as an admirable temper for a *christian*, much more for a *heathen*! To which we may apply that saying of our Lord, concerning the heathen centurion, *Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel*; so wise, so equal, so firm a temper of mind is seldom to be found, *no not amongst christians*. And this is a firm consideration, That if *God cares for us*, we and our concernments are in the best and safest hands, and therefore we should *cast all our care upon God*. The

2d is, Because all our anxiety and care will do us no good; on the contrary, it will certainly do us hurt. We may fret and vex our own spirits, and make them restless, in the contemplation of the evils and disappointments which we are afraid of, and may make our lives miserable, in the sad reflections of our own thoughts; but we cannot, by all our anxiety and care controul the course of things, and alter the designs of providence; we cannot by all our vexation and trouble over-rule events, and make things happen as we would have them. And this is the argument our Saviour useth to this very purpose, *Mat. vi. 27. Which of you by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature?* So that all this trouble is unreasonable, and to no purpose, because it hath no influence on the event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are governed and disposed by an higher hand, and placed out of our reach; we may deliberate and contrive, and use our best endeavours for the effecting of our designs, but we cannot secure the event against a thousand interpositions of divine providence, which we can neither foresee nor hinder; but yet notwithstanding, these our endeavours are reasonable, because they are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the procuring of good, and prevention of evil; and tho' they may miscarry, yet they are all we can do: But after this is done, trouble and anxiety about the event is the vainest thing in the world, because it is to no purpose, nor doth at all conduce to what we desire; *we disquiet our selves in vain*, and we distrust God's providence and care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and disappoint us.

Let us then by these considerations be persuaded to this duty, the practice whereof is of continual and universal use in the whole course of our lives; in all our affairs and concernments, after we have used our best endeavours, let us sit down and be satisfied, and refer the rest to God, whose providence governs the world, and takes care of all our interests, and of the interest of his church and religion, when they seem to be in greatest danger.

We cannot but be convinced, that this is very reasonable, to leave the management of things to him who made them, and therefore understands best how to order them. The government of the world is a very curious and complicate thing, and not to be tamper'd with by every unskillfull hand; and therefore as an unskillfull man, after he hath tamper'd a great while with a watch, thinking to bring it into better order, and is at last convinced that he can do no good upon

upon it, carries it to him that made it, to mend it, and put it into order ; so must we do, after all our care and anxiety about our own private concerns, or the public state of things, we must give over governing the world, as a business past our skill, as a province too hard, and *a knowledge too wonderfull for us*, and leave it to him, who made the world, to govern it, and take care of it.

And if we be not thus affected and disposed, we do not believe the providence of God, whatever profession we make of it ; if we did, it would have an influence upon our minds, to free us from anxious care and discontent. Were we firmly persuaded of the wisdom and goodness of the divine providence, we should confidently rely upon it, and according to the Apostle's advice here in the text, *cast all our care upon him, because he careth for us.*

S E R M O N LXXXV.

The Wisdom of God in the Redemption of Mankind.

I C O R. I. 24.

— *Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

I Have in the ordinary course of my preaching been treating of the attributes and perfections of God, more particularly those which relate to the divine understanding; the *knowledge* and *wisdom* of God. The *first* of these I have finish'd ; and made some progress in the *second*, the *wisdom* of God : which I have spoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly to consider those famous instances and arguments of the divine wisdom in the *creation* of the world ; the *government* of it ; and the *redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ*. The *two* first of these I have spoken to, namely, the wisdom of God, which appears in the *creation* and *government* of the world. I come now to the

III^d Instance of the divine wisdom, *the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ* ; which I shall, by God's assistance, speak to from these words, *Christ, the wisdom of God.*

The Apostle in the beginning of this epistle, upon occasion of his mentioning the divisions and parties that were among the *Corinthians*, where one said, *I am of Paul* ; another, *I am of Apollos* ; asks them, whether *Paul was crucified for them* ? or whether *they were baptized in the name of Paul* ? To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were baptized into his name, he tells them at the 14, and 15th verses ; that *he had not so much as baptized any of them, except two or three* ; so far was he from having baptized them into his own name ; and that the 17th *verse*, he says, that his work, his principal work, was *to preach the gospel*, which he had done, not with human eloquence, *not in wisdom of words*, but with great plainness and simplicity, *lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect* ; lest, if he should have used any artifice, the gospel should have been less powerfull. And indeed his preaching was unaffectedly plain, and therefore the gospel did seem to very many to be a foolish and ridiculous thing. The story which they told of *Christ crucified*, was *to the Jews a stumbling-block*, and *to the Gentiles foolishness*. The *Jews*, who expected another kind of *Messias*, that should come in great pomp and glory, to be a mighty temporal prince, were angry at the story of *a crucified Christ*. The *Greeks*, the philosophers, who expected some curious theories, adorned with eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact rules of art, derided this plain and simple relation of Christ, and of the gospel.

But

But tho' this design of the gospel appeared silly and foolish to rash and inconsiderate and prejudiced minds, yet *to them that are called*, to them that do believe, *both Jews and Gentiles, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God; Christ*, that is, the way of our redemption by *Jesus Christ*, which the Apostle preached, *the wisdom of God*, an eminent instance of it.

So that the *redemption of man by Jesus Christ*, is a design of admirable *wisdom*.

This I shall endeavour to confirm to you,

I. By general testimonies of scripture. And,

II. By a more particular enquiry into the nature of this design, and the means how it is accomplish'd.

1. By the testimonies from scripture. You know I have all along, in my discourses of the attributes of God, used this method of proving them, from the dictates of natural light, and the revelation of scripture: But now I must forsake my wonted method, for here the light of nature leaves me. The wisdom of the *creation* is manifest in *the things which are made; the heavens declare the glory of God's wisdom, and the firmament shews his handy-work*. The works of God do preach and set forth the wisdom of the creator; but the sun, moon, and stars, do not preach the *gospel*. The wisdom of *redemption* is *wisdom in a mystery, hidden wisdom, which none of the princes or philosophers of this world knew*. The sharpest wits, and the highest and most raised understandings amongst the heathens, could say nothing of this. Here *the wisdom of the wise, and the understanding of the prudent* is posed, and we may make the Apostle's challenge, *v. 20. of this chapter, Where is the wise? where is the disputer of this world?* There is no natural light discovers Christ; the *wise men* cannot find him out, unless a *star* be created on purpose to lead and direct to him. Therefore in this I shall only depend upon divine revelation. *1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. the gospel is called the wisdom of God in a mystery, even in the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew. Eph. i. 7, 8. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded towards us in all wisdom and prudence. Eph. iii. 10, 11. The manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. This work of our redemption by Jesus Christ is so various and admirable, that it is not below the Angels to know and understand it; To the intent, that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known the manifold wisdom of God.*

2. By enquiring more particularly into the nature of this design, and the means how it is accomplish'd. This is *wisdom*, to fit means to ends; and the more difficult the end, the greater wisdom is required to find out suitable and sufficient means for the accomplishment of the end. Now *the wisdom of redemption* will appear, if we consider the case of fallen man; and what fit, and proper, and suitable means, the wisdom of God hath devised for our recovery.

First, Let us consider the case of fallen man, which was very sad, both in respect of the misery, and the difficulty of it.

1. In respect of the misery of it. Man who was made holy and upright by God, having, by his voluntary transgression, and willfull disobedience, fall'n from him, did presently sink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miserable and cursed condition, of which heaven and earth, and his own conscience bore him witness. Man, being become a sinner, is not only deprived of the image of God, but is liable to his justice; here was his misery.

2. The difficulty of the case was this, man could not recover himself and raise himself out of his own ruin; no creature was able to do it; so that our help is only in God; and indeed he is a mercifull God, and doth not desire our ruin, nor delight in our destruction: But suppose his mercy never so willing to save us, will not his holiness, and justice, and truth, check those forward inclinations of his goodness, and hinder all the designs of his mercy? Is not sin contrary to the holy nature of God? Hath not he declared his infinite hatred of it? Hath not he threaten'd it with heavy and dreadful punishment? and said, that *the sinner shall die, that he will not acquit the guilty, nor let sin*

go unpunish'd? Should he now, without any satisfaction to his offended justice, pardon the sinner, remit his punishment, and receive him to favour? Would this be agreeable to his holiness, and justice, and truth? Would this become the wise governor of the world, who loves righteousness and order; who hates sin, and is obliged by the essential rectitude of his nature to discountenance sin?

So that here is a conflict of the attributes and perfections of God. The mercy of God pities our misery, and would recover us, would open *paradise* to us; but there is a *flaming sword* that keeps us out; the incensed justice of God that must be satisfied; and if he takes vengeance of us, we are eternally ruin'd; if he spares us, how shall *mercy and justice meet together*? how shall God at once express his love to the sinner, and his hatred to sin? here is the difficulty of our case.

II. Let us now enquire what means the wisdom of God useth for our recovery. The wisdom of God hath devised this expedient to accommodate all these difficulties, to reconcile the mercy and justice of God. The son of God shall undertake this work, and satisfy the offended justice of God, and repair the ruin'd nature of man. He shall bring God and man together, make up this gulph, and renew the commerce and correspondence between God and us, which was broken off by sin. The work that God designs is the redemption of man, that is, his recovery from a state of sin and eternal death, to a state of holiness and eternal life. The son of God is to engage in this design of our redemption, to satisfy the offended justice of God towards us, so as to purchase our deliverance from the wrath to come, and so as to restore us to the image and favour of God, that we may be sanctified, and be made heirs of eternal life.

For opening of this, we will consider,

1. The fitness of the person designed for this work.
 2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to accomplish it.
1. The fitness of the person design'd for this work; and that was the *eternal son of God*, who in respect of his infinite wisdom and power, the dignity and credit of his person, his dearness to his father, and interest in him, was very fit to undertake this work, to mediate a reconciliation between God and man.
2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to accomplish it; and these I shall refer to *two* heads, his *Humiliation* and *Exaltation*. All the parts of these are very subservient to the design of our redemption.

I. The *Humiliation* of Christ, which consists of *three* principal parts; his *incarnation*, his *life*, and his *death*.

1. His *incarnation*, which is set forth in scripture by several expressions; his being *made flesh, and dwelling among us*, John i. 14. His being *made of the seed of David according to the flesh*, Rom. i. 3. His being *made of a woman*, Gal. iv. 4. The *manifestation of God in the flesh*, 1 Tim. iii. 16. His *taking part of flesh and blood*, Heb. ii. 14. His *taking on him the seed of Abraham*, and being *made like unto his brethren*, Heb. ii. 16, 17. His *coming in the flesh*, 1 John ii. 2. All which signifies his taking upon him human nature, and being really a man as well as God. The eternal son of God, in the fullness of time took our nature; that is, assumed a real soul and body into union with the divine nature. Now this person, who was really both God and man, was admirably fitted for the work of our redemption.

In general, this made him a fit mediator, an equal and middle person to interpose in this difference, and take up this quarrel between God and man. Being both God and man, he was concerned for both parties, and interested both in the honour of God, and the happiness of man, and engaged to be tender of both; and to procure the one by such ways as might be consistent with the other.

More particularly, his *incarnation* did fit him for those *two* offices which he was to perform in his humiliation, of *prophet* and *priest*.

1. The office of *prophet*, to teach us both by his *doctrine* and his *life*.

By his *doctrine*. His being in the likeness of *man*, this made him more familiar to us. He was a *prophet raised up from among his brethren*, as *Moses* spake, and he makes this an argument why we should hear him. Should God speak to us immediately by himself, we *could not hear him and live*. God condescends to us, and complies with the weakness of our nature, and *raiseth up a prophet from among our brethren*; we should *hear him*. And then his being *God*, did add credit and authority to what he spake; he could confirm the *doctrine* which he taught by miracles. Of his teaching us by his *life*, I shall have occasion to speak presently.

2. For the office of *priest*. He was fit to be our *priest*, because *he was taken from among men*, as the Apostle speaks; fit to suffer as being *man*, having a *body prepared*, as it is, *Heb. x. 5.* and fit to *satisfy* by his sufferings for the sins of all men, as being *God*, which put an infinite dignity and value upon them, the sufferings of an *infinite person* being equal to the offences done against an *infinite God*. And thus the *mercy* of God is exalted without the diminution of his *justice*.

And as his *incarnation* did qualify him for suffering, so for compassion, and fellow-suffering with us, *Heb. ii. 17, 18.* *Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a mercifull and faithfull high-priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; for in that he himself hath suffer'd being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.*

2. His *life* was a means admirably fitted to bring men to holiness and goodness. I might go through all the parts of it, but because I intend to be very short upon these heads, I shall only take notice of that part of his life, which was spent in his public ministry; *he went about doing good*; the *doctrine* that he preached was calculated for the destroying of sin, and the promoting of holiness; the great end and design of it was to advance righteousness, and goodness, and humility, and patience, and self-denial; to make us mortify our sensual desires, and brutish passions, to contemn and renounce this present world; and this being the design of it, it was a most proper engine to demolish the works of the devil: And to make way for the entertainment of his *doctrine*, the whole frame of his *life*, and all the circumstances of it did contribute. His *life* was the practice of his *doctrine*, and a clear comment upon it. The meanness of his condition in the world, that had no share of the possessions of it, were a great advantage to his *doctrine* of self-denial and contempt of the world. *The captain of our salvation*, that he might draw off our affections from the world, and shew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himself have no share in it, *Mat. viii. 20.* *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.* The mean circumstances of his condition were very eminently for the advantage of his design; for had he not been stripp'd of all worldly accommodations, he could not have been so free from suspicion of a worldly interest and design; nay, he could not have been so considerable; he was really *greater* for his meanness. The very heathens did account this true greatness, (as we find in *Aristotle*) not to admire the pleasures, and greatness, and pomp of the world. And that his meanness might be no disadvantage to him, those evidences that he gave of his divinity in the wonderfull things that he did, render'd him considerable, and gained more reverence and authority to his *doctrine*, than his meanness could bring contempt upon it.

Besides, the manner of his conversation was a very great advantage to him; he was of a very sweet and conversable and obliging temper; and by this means he did gain upon the people, and was acceptable to them; and thus he did apply himself to them in the most human ways, to make way for the entertainment of his *doctrine*. The miracles that he wrought did confirm his *doctrine* beyond all exception, as being a divine testimony, and setting the seal of God to the truth of it; yet because many were blinded with prejudice and tho'

tho' they *did see*, yet *would not see*, Christ the *wisdom of God* did so order the business of his miracles, to make them human ways of winning upon them, for they were generally such as were beneficial, *he healed all manner of diseases* and *maldies* by this miraculous power; and so his miracles did not only tend to confirm his doctrine, as they were miracles, but to make way for entertainment of it, as they were *benefits*; this was a sensible demonstration to them that he *intended* them good, because he did them good; they would easily believe, that he who healed their bodies, would not harm their souls. This for his life.

III. His *death*, which was the lowest step of his humiliation, and the consummation of his sufferings. Now the death of Christ did eminently contribute to this design of our redemption. The death of Christ did not only expiate the guilt of sin, and pacify conscience, by making plenary satisfaction to the divine justice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of sin in us, *Rom. vi. 6. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we might not serve sin.* *Rom. viii. 3. God sending his own son in the likeness of sinfull flesh, and for sin* (that is, by being a sacrifice for sin) *condemned sin in the flesh.* The death of Christ convinceth sin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, because the impartial justice of God did so severely punish it in his own son, when he appeared in the person of a sinner; and this is the most powerfull argument to us to crucify sin, that it crucified our Saviour. That so innocent and holy a person should suffer so cruel and ignominious a death for our sins, should set us for ever against it, and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumstances of Christ's sufferings are with admirable wisdom fitted for the conquering of sin and satan. Sin came by the *woman*: The *seed of the woman* suffers for sin, and by suffering conquers it. Sin began in the *garden*: And there our Saviour began his sufferings for sin. Sin came by the *tree*: And Christ bears the curse of it *in hanging upon the tree*, and crucifies it by his cross.

And as he conquer'd sin, so he overcame satan by his own arts. The devil found Christ in the likeness of a man, he judged him mortal, and his great design was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. Christ permits him to bring about his design, he lets him enter into *Judas*, he lets the *Jews* crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great stone upon it: But here his *divine wisdom* appears, in ruining the devil by his own design, and *snaring him in the works of his own hands*, *Heb. ii. 14. By death he destroys him, that had the power of death, that is the devil.*

I know the sufferings of Christ were, by the *wise of the world*, made the great objection against the *wisdom* of this dispensation; the *cross of Christ was to the Greeks foolishness*: and yet the *wisest* of them had determined otherwise in general, tho' not in this particular case. *Plato* (in the second book of his *Commonwealth*) saith. "That if a man may be a perfect pattern of justice and righteousness, and be approved by God and men, he must be stripp'd of all the things of this world; he must be poor and disgraced, and be accounted a wicked and unjust man; he must be whipp'd, and tormented, and crucified as a malefactor"; which is, as it were, a prophetic description of our Saviour's sufferings. And *Arrian*, in his *Epist.* describing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls the Apostle, the messenger, the preacher and minister of God, saith, "He must be without house and harbour, and worldly accommodations; must be armed with such patience for the greatest sufferings, as if he were a stone, and devoid of sense; he must be a spectacle of misery and contempt to the world". So that by the acknowledgment of these *two wise* heathens, there was nothing in the sufferings of Christ that was unbecoming the *wisdom* of God, and improper to the end and design of Christ's coming into the world; besides, that they served a further end, which they did not dream of, *the satisfying of divine justice.*

Secondly, His *exaltation*. The several parts of which, his *resurrection*, and

ascension, and *sitting at the right hand of God*, were eminently subservient to the perfecting and carrying on of this design.

The *resurrection* of Christ is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he deliver'd, *Rom. i. 4. Declared to be the son of God with power, δεσποεύωντες ἡμᾶς ἐκ νεκρῶν, by the resurrection from the dead.* This great miracle of his *resurrection* from the dead did *determine* the controversy, and put it out of all doubt and question, that he was *the son of God*. And then this *ascension*, and *sitting at the right hand of God*, this gives us the assurance of a blessed immortality, and is a demonstration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlasting glory and happiness. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of obedience, and to make us dead to the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, than the assurance of eternal life and happiness?

And then the consequents of his *exaltation*, they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The sending of the Holy Ghost *to lead us into all truth*, to sanctify us, to assist us, and to comfort us under the greatest troubles and afflictions; and the powerfull *intercession* of Christ in our behalf; and his *return to judgment*; the expectation whereof is the great argument to repentance, and holiness of life. *Acts xvii. 30, 31. And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* And thus I have endeavoured to prove that the *redemption of man by Jesus Christ* is a design of *admirable wisdom*.

The *use* I shall make of it, is to convince us of the unreasonableness of unbelief, and the folly and madness of impenitency.

First, The unreasonableness of unbelief. The gospel reveals to us the wise counsel and dispensation of God for our redemption; and those who disbelieve the gospel, *they reject the counsel of God against themselves*, as it is said of the unbelieving *Pharisees* and *Lawyers*, *Luke vii. 30.* The gospel reveals to us a design so reasonable and full of *wisdom*, that they who can disbelieve it are desperate persons, devoted to ruin, *1 Cor. i. 18. The cross of Christ is to them that perish foolishness.* *2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.* The gospel carries so much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but such whose eyes are blinded by the devil and their lusts.

He that will duly weigh and consider things, and look narrowly into this *wise dispensation* of God, shall find nothing to object against it; nay, shall discover in it the greatest motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reasonable, especially if it be for our advantage; now this *wise dispensation* of God is not only reasonable in it self, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratify our understandings, and satisfy our interest; why should we not then believe and entertain it?

I. The design of the gospel is *reasonable*, and gratifies our understandings. And in this respect the gospel hath incomparable advantages above any other religion. The end of all religion is to advance piety and holiness, and real goodness among men; and the more any religion advanceth these, the more reasonable it is. Now the great incitements and arguments to piety, are the excellency and perfection of the divine nature; fear of punishment, and hopes of pardon and rewards. Now the gospel represents all these to the greatest advantage.

1. It represents the perfections of God to the greatest advantage, especially those which tend most to the promotion of piety, and the love of God in us; his *justice* and *mercy*.

(1.) His *justice*. The gospel represents it inflexible in its rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any case let sin go unpunish'd. The impartiality of the divine justice appears in this dispensation, that when God pardons the sinner, yet he will punish sin so severely in his own son who was the surety. Now what could more tend to discountenance sin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His

(2.) His *mercy*. This dispensation is a great demonstration of the mercy, and goodness, and love of God, in sending his son to die for sinners, and in saving us by devoting and sacrificing *him*, John iii. 16. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son.* Rom. v. 8. *But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us.* 1 John iv. 9, 10. *In this was manifest the love of God towards us, because God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.* Now this representation of God's mercy and love, which the gospel makes, is of great force and efficacy to melt our hearts into love to God.

2. The second argument to piety, is fear of punishment. The gospel hath revealed to us the misery of those who continue in their sin; it hath made clear and terrible discoveries of those torments which attend sinners in another world, and hath open'd to us the treasures of God's wrath; so that now under the gospel, *hell is naked before us, and destruction hath no covering*; and this is one thing which makes the gospel so powerfull an engine to destroy sin, Rom. i. 16, 18. *The gospel is the power of God unto salvation; for therein is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*

3. Hopes of pardon and reward. And this, added to the former, renders the gospel the most powerfull instrument to take men off from sin, and engage them to holiness, that can be imagin'd. The means to draw men from sin, when they are once awaken'd with the fear of vengeance, in hopes of pardon and mercy; and the way to encourage obedience for the future, is hope of reward. Now as an argument to us to retreat and draw back from sin, the gospel promises pardon and indemnity to us; and as an incitement to holiness, the gospel opens heaven to us, and sets before us everlasting glory and happiness, and gives us the greatest assurance of it.

This is the *first*, the design of the gospel is *reasonable*, in that it does eminently and directly serve for the ends of piety and religion.

II. This dispensation of God is *beneficial* to us, and satisfies our interest; and this adds to the unreasonableness of our unbelief, this design of God being not only *reasonable in it self*, but *desirable to us*, that it should be so; because of the eminent advantages that redound to us by it. The design of the gospel is to deliver from the guilt and dominion of sin, and the tyranny of satan; to restore us to the image and favour of God; and by making us partakers of a divine nature, to bring us to eternal life. And is there any thing of real advantage which is not comprehended in this? Is it not desirable to every man, that there should be a way whereby our guilty consciences may be quieted and appeased; whereby we may be delivered from the fear of death and hell? Is it not desirable to be freed from the slavery of our lusts, and rescued from the tyranny and power of the great destroyer of souls? Is it not desirable to be like God, and to be assured of his love and favour, who is the best friend, and the most dangerous enemy; and to be secur'd, that when we leave this world, we shall be unspeakably happy for ever? Now the gospel conveys these benefits to us; and if this be the case of the gospel, and there be nothing in this design of our redemption, but what is wise and reasonable, and exceedingly for our benefit and advantage; why should any man be so averse to the belief of it? Why should unbelief be counted a piece of wit? Is it wit to set our selves against reason, and to oppose our best interest? 'Tis wickedness, and prejudice, and inconsiderateness, which disbelieves the gospel. Those who do consider things, welcome this good news, and embrace these glad tidings. *Wisdom is justified of her children.* To them who are truly sensible of their own interest, and willing to accept of reasonable evidence, this is not only *a true saying*, but *worthy of all acceptation*; that *Christ came into the world to save sinners.*

Secondly, This doth convince men of the madness and folly of impenitency. Now the *wisdom* of God hath contriv'd such a way of our recovery, and by the declaration of God's wrath, and displeasure against sin, hath given us such arguments to repentance, and by discovering a way of pardon and mercy, hath

given us such encouragement to repentance, how great must the folly of impenitency be? For consider,

1. That impenitency directly sets it self against the *wisdom of God*. If after all this we continue in our sins, *we reject the counsel of God against our selves, we despise the wisdom of God, and charge that with folly*; and we do it *against our selves*, to our own injury and ruin. If we live in our sins, and cherish our lusts, we directly oppose the end of our redemption, we contradict the great design of the gospel, we condemn the admirable contrivance of *God's wisdom*, who sent his son into the world on purpose to destroy sin; for we uphold *that* which he came to destroy, 1 John iii. 5. *Ye know that he was manifest to take away our sins*. Now shall we continue in sin, when we know *the son of God was manifest to take away sin*? God cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out *the riches of his wisdom* in this design, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankfull to God, and injurious to our selves; 'tis such a madness, as if a condemned man should despise a pardon; as if a prisoner should be fond of his fetters, and refuse deliverance; as if a man desperately sick should fight with his physician, and put away health from him. If we do not comply with the *wisdom of God*, which hath contrived our recovery, *we forsake our own mercy, and neglect a great salvation; we love death, and hate our own souls*, Prov. viii. 14, 15, 16.

2. Consider, we cannot expect *the wisdom of God* should do more for our recovery, than hath been already done; *the wisdom of God* will not try any further means. Mat. xxi. 37. *Last of all he sent his son*. If we despise this way, if we *tread under foot the son of God, and count the blood of the covenant, whereby we are sanctified, an unholy thing, there would remain no more sacrifice for sin*, Heb. x. 26, 29. What can expiate the guilt of sin, if the blood of Christ do not? What shall take us off from sin, what shall sanctify us, if *the blood of the covenant* be ineffectual? We resist our last remedy, and make void the best means the wisdom of God could devise for our recovery, if, after the revelation of the gospel, we continue in our sins.

3. If we frustrate this design of *God's wisdom* for our recovery, our ruin will be the more dreadfull and certain. Impenitency under the gospel will increase our misery. *If Christ had not come, we had had no sin*, in comparison of what we now have; *but now our sin remains, and there is no cloak for our sin*, *αὐτοῦ ἐν ἑαυτῷ*. We shall not be able at the day of judgment to preface any thing by way of excuse or apology for our impenitency. What shall we be able to say to the *justice of God*, when that shall condemn us, who rejected his *wisdom*, which would have saved us? We would all be saved, but we would be saved without repentance; now *the wisdom of God* hath not found out any other way to save us from hell, but by saving us from our sins. And thou that wilt not submit to this method of *divine wisdom*, take thy course, and let's see *how thou wilt escape the damnation of hell*. I will conclude all with those dreadfull words which *the wisdom of God* pronounceth against those that despise her, and refuse to hearken to her voice, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26. *Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh*. They who will not comply with the *counsel of God* for their happiness, they shall inherit the condition which they have chosen to themselves; *they shall eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices*.

S E R M O N LXXXVI.

The Justice of God, in the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments.

G E N. XVIII. 25.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

IN treating of the *attributes* of God, I have considered *those* which relate to the *divine understanding*, viz. *knowledge* and *wisdom*; I come now to consider *those* which relate to the *divine will*, viz. these *four*, the *justice*, the *truth*, the *goodness*, and the *holiness* of God. I begin with the *first*, namely, the *justice* of God.

At the 17th *verse* of this *chapter*, God by a great and wonderfull condescension of his goodness, reveals to *Abraham* his intention concerning the destruction of *Sodom*; upon this *Abraham*, v. 23. interceded with God for saving of the righteous persons that were there; and to this end, he pleads with God his *justice* and *righteousness*, with which he apprehended it to be inconsistent, *to destroy the righteous with the wicked*, which, without a miracle, could not be avoided in a general destruction. *Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* This negative interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* that is, *undoubtedly he will*. This we may take for a certain and undoubted principle, that *in the distribution of rewards and punishments, the judge of the world will do righteously*.

So that the argument that lies under our consideration, is the *justice of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments*; for the clearing of which, we will consider it.

First, In *Hypothesis*, in regard to the particular case, which is here put by *Abraham* in the text.

Secondly, In *Thesis*, we will consider it in general, in *the distribution of rewards and punishments*.

First, We will consider it in *Hypothesis*, in regard to the particular case which is here put by *Abraham* in the text; and the rather, because if we look well into it, there is something of real difficulty in it, not easy to be cleared; for *Abraham's* reasoning, if it be true, does plainly conclude, that it would have been unrighteous with God in the destruction of *Sodom*, not to make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, but to involve them equally in the same common destruction. *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* as if he had said, *surely the judge of all the earth will never do so unrighteous a thing*.

And yet notwithstanding this, we see it is very usual for the providence of God to involve good men in general calamities, and to make no visible difference between the *righteous* and the *wicked*. Now this difficulty is, how to reconcile these appearances of providence with this reasoning of *Abraham* in the text.

And for doing of this, I see but one possible way, and that is this, that *Abraham* does not here speak concerning the judgments of God which befall men in the ordinary course of his providence, which many times happen promiscuously, and involve good and bad men in the same ruin; and the reason hereof

is plain, because God in his ordinary providence does permit the causes, which produce these judgments, to act according to their own nature, and they either *cannot* or *will not* make any distinction; for the calamities which ordinarily happen in the world, are produced by two sorts of causes, either those which we call *natural*, or those which are *voluntary*. *Natural* causes, such as wind and thunder, and storms, and the infection of the air, and the like, these acting by a necessity of nature, without any knowledge or choice, *can* make no distinction between the good and bad. And the *voluntary* causes of calamities, as men are, they many times *will* make no difference between the *righteous* and the *wicked*; nay, many times they are maliciously bent against the *righteous*, and the effects of their malice fall heaviest upon them. Now we say that things happen in the way of ordinary providence, when *natural* causes are permitted to act according to their *nature*, and *voluntary* causes are left to their liberty; and therefore in the course of ordinary providence, it is not to be expected, that such a distinction should be made; it is neither possible, nor does justice require it; it is not possible, supposing natural causes left to act according to their nature, and voluntary causes to be left to their liberty; nor does justice require it, for every man is so much a sinner, that no evil that befalls him in this world, can be said to be unjust in respect of God.

So that *Abraham* is not here to be understood, as speaking of such judgments as befall men in the ordinary course of God's providence, in which, if the good and bad be involv'd alike, it cannot be expected to be otherwise, nor is there any injustice in it; but *Abraham* here speaks of miraculous and extraordinary judgments, which are immediately inflicted by God for the punishment of some crying sins, and the example of the world to deter others from the like. And such was this judgment, which God intended to bring upon *Sodom*, and which *Abraham* hath relation to in this discourse of his. In *this* case it may be expected from the *justice* of God, that a difference should be made between the *righteous* and the *wicked*; and that for these reasons:

1. Because this is a judgment which God himself executes. It is not an event of common providence, which always follows the nature of its cause, but an act of God, as a *judge*. Now it is essential to a judge to make a discrimination between the good and the bad, so as to punish the one, and to spare the other; and this is as necessary to all *proper acts of judgment* in this world, as the other; there being no other difference between them, but that one is a *particular* judgment, and the other the *general* judgment of the whole world.

2. When God goes out of the way of his ordinary providence in punishing, it may reasonably be expected that he should make a difference between the good and the bad; for the reason why he does not in his common providence, is because he will not break and interrupt the established order of things upon every little occasion: But when he does go besides the common course of things in punishing, the reason ceaseth, which hinder'd him before from making a difference; and 'tis reasonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a *miraculous judgment*, a *miraculous difference* should be made. Without making this difference, the end of these miraculous judgments would not be attained, which is, remarkably to punish the crying sins of men, and by that example to deter others from the like sins: But if these judgments should fall promiscuously upon the *righteous* and the *wicked*, it would not be evident, that they were designed for the punishment of such sins, when men did see, that they fell likewise upon those who were not guilty of those sins, and consequently the example could not be so effectual to deter men from sin.

Upon all these accounts you see that *Abraham's* reasoning was very strong and well grounded, as to those judgments which are *miraculous* and *extraordinary*, and *immediately inflicted* by God, for the *punishment* of great and heinous sins, which was the case he was speaking of. And accordingly we find, that in those judgments which have been *immediately* and *miraculously* inflicted by God, he hath always made this difference between the *righteous* and the *wicked*. In the *deluge* which he brought upon the old world, the spirit of God gives
this

this reason why the judgment was so universal, because *all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth*; and the reason why he saved Noah and his family was, because in this general corruption of mankind, he alone was righteous; *Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation*. So likewise in that miraculous judgment of Korah and his company, when God made a new thing, and the earth opened her mouth to swallow them up, none perished but he and his complices; the rest had warning given them by God to remove from the tents of those wicked men. Thus you see that as to the particular case in this text, Abraham's reasoning concerning the justice of God is very firm and concluding. I proceed to the

Second thing, which was that which I principally intended to discourse upon, viz. to consider the justice of God in general, in the distribution of rewards and punishments. And here I cannot but grant, that the best evidence of this is yet wanting. We have clear demonstrations of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of God, in this vast and admirable frame of things which we see; but we must stay till the day of judgment for a clear and full manifestation of the divine justice; for which reason the day of judgment is in scripture call'd, the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. But in the mean time we may receive sufficient assurance of this, both from natural reason, and from divine revelation.

I. From natural reason, which tells us, that God loves righteousness, and hates iniquity, and consequently that it must be agreeable to his nature, to countenance and encourage the one, and to discountenance the other; that is, to give some public testimony of his liking and affection to the one, and of his hatred and dislike of the other; which cannot otherwise be done, but by rewards and punishments.

But however the heathen reasoned about this matter, whatever premisses they laid, they firmly believed the conclusion, that God is just. Plato lays down this as a certain and undoubted principle, "That God is in no wise unjust, but as righteous as is possible; and that we cannot resemble God more, than in this quality and disposition". So likewise Seneca tells us, "That the Gods are neither capable of receiving any injury, nor of doing any thing that is unjust". Antoninus the great emperor and philosopher, speaking doubtfully, whether good men are extinguished by death, or remain afterwards; "If it be just, says he, you may be sure it is so: if it be not just, you may certainly conclude the contrary; for God is just, and being so, he will do nothing that is unjust or unreasonable. And indeed the heathen philosophers looked upon this as the great sanction of all mortal precepts, that God was the witness and the avenger of the breach and violation of them, *Qui secus faxit, deus ipse vindex erit, if any man do contrary to them, God himself will punish it*; which shews, that there is a natural awe upon the minds of men of the divine justice, which will overtake offenders either in this world or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2d Place, from scripture, or divine revelation. And those texts which I shall produce to this purpose, may be reduced to these two heads; either such as prove the rectitude of the divine nature and his justice in general; or such as speak more particularly of the justice and equity of his providence in the distribution of rewards and punishments. I begin, first, with those which declare the rectitude of the divine nature, and the justice of God in general, and that either by attributing this perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, injustice and unrighteousness at the greatest distance from him.

I. Those which attribute this perfection to God. I shall mention but a few of many, *Psal. cxxix. 4. The Lord is righteous*. *Dan. ix. 7. O Lord! righteousness belongeth unto thee*. This good men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of God, *Ezra ix. 15. O Lord God of Israel, thou art righteous*. And this the worst of men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity, *Ex. ix. 27. then Pharaoh said, the Lord is righteous*. This hath been likewise acknowledged by those who have lain under the greatest temptation to doubt

doubt of it, *Jer. xii. 1. Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yea, let me talk with thee of thy judgments; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?* The prophet, notwithstanding he saw the prosperous condition of wicked men, and the afflicted state of the godly, which seemed hard to be reconciled with the justice of God's providence, yet before he would so much as reason about it, he lays down this as a certain conclusion, *Righteous art thou, O Lord.* To this head likewise belong all those texts which speak of *righteousness*, as *God's dwelling-place* and *his throne*, of *his delight in justice*, and of the *duration* and *eternity* of it, which I need not particularly recite.

2. There are likewise other texts, which remove the contrary, *viz. justice and unrighteousness* at the greatest distance from God, as being most contrary to his nature and perfection. *Deut. xxxii. 4. A God of truth, and without iniquity.* 2 Chron. xix. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor accepting of persons, nor taking of gifts.* Job viii. 3. *Doth God pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?* which is a vehement negation of the thing. *Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12. Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* Rom. ix. 14. *What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*

Secondly, There are other texts which speak more particularly of *the justice and righteousness of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments.* 'Tis true indeed, the *justice* of God doth not constantly appear in this world in the dispensations of his providence, because this is a time of patience and forbearance to sinners, and of tryal and exercise to good men; but there is a day a coming, when all things shall be set straight, and every man shall receive the just reward of his deeds, when the *justice* of God shall be evident to all the world, and every eye shall see it, and shall acknowledge *the righteous judgment* of God; and this the scripture most clearly and expressly declares unto us; and hence it is, that *the day of judgment* is call'd *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* The *righteousness* of God doth not now so clearly appear, but that there are many clouds over it; but there shall be *a day of revelation*, when the *righteousness* of God shall be made manifest to all the world.

The *remunerative justice* of God shall then appear in the rewarding the righteous; and the *punitive justice* of God in punishing the wicked and ungodly; so that a man shall say, *verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth the world.*

Now the *righteousness* of this vengeance of God, which God will take upon sinners, is further set forth to us in scripture, from the *equity* and *impartiality* of it.

I. From the *equity* of it.

1. In that the sins of men have justly deserved the punishment, that shall come upon them, *Rom. i. 32. Who knoweth the judgment of God, ἀδικωμεν τῷ Θεῷ, the righteous judgment of God, that they which commit such things, are worthy of death.*

2. In that the judgment of God shall be proportioned to the degree and heinousness of mens sins, so as the lesser or greater sins shall be punish'd with more or less severity. So our Saviour threatens to those who continue impenitent under the gospel, and the advantages of it, their case shall be more sad than *that of Tyre and Sidon*, and it shall be more tolerable for *Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgment, than for them.* Mat. xi. 20, 21. and *Luke xii. 47, 48.* There you have different degrees of punishment threatned, proportionable to the aggravations of the sins which men have committed; *The servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew him not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes;* and so proportionably of all other aggravations of sins, *for to whom much is given, of him shall much be required; and unto whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* So likewise God will vindicate

vindicate the contempt of the *gospel* more severely than of the *law*, because the confirmation of it is clearer, and the salvation offered by it greater. *Heb. ii. 3, 4. If the word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape? &c.* And so, *Heb. x. 28, 29. He that despiseth Moses his law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God? &c.*

II. The *righteousness* of this judgment is further set forth to us in scripture by the *impartiality* of it. Hither belong all those texts, which remove from God that *ωρεσσωπολιψία*, that *respect of persons*, which is so incident to human tribunals. Now *respect of persons* is in distribution of justice, and hath regard to some external qualities or circumstances of the persons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cause, and upon account of those circumstances, to deal unequally with those, whose case is equal; as when two persons, who are equally guilty of a crime, are brought to their tryal, and the one is condemned, and the other acquitted, upon the account of friendship, or relation, or some other interest, because one is poor, and the other rich, the one hath powerfull friends to intercede for him, the other not, the one brings a gift or bribe, the other not, or upon any other account, besides the pure merits of the cause; I say to deal thus in the distribution of justice, is *respect of persons*. Otherwise in matters of meer grace and favour *respect of persons* hath no place, according to that common rule of divines, *ωρεσσωπολιψία locum non habet in gratuitis, sed in debitis*. Now this the scripture every where speaks of, as a thing very far from God. *Deut. x. 17. The Lord your God is the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh rewards.* 2 Chron. xix. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.* Job xxxiv. 18, 19. *Is it fit to say to a king, thou art wicked? or to princes ye are ungodly? how much less to him that accepteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they are all the work of his hands.* Rom. ii. 6. *Who will render to every man according to his deeds: for there is no respect of persons with God.* Acts x. 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* Eph. vi. 8, 9. The Apostle there presseth the duties of servants to masters, from this consideration, that *whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free; and at the 9th verse, Ye masters, do the same thing unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him.* He maketh this likewise an argument, why men should not oppress and deal deceitfully one with another, *Col. iii. 25. But he that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons.* And in general, St. Peter urgeth this consideration upon all men to deter them from sin in any kind. 1 Pet. i. 17. *And if ye call on the father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*

And besides that the scripture doth remove this at the greatest distance from God, it gives us also several instances of the *impartiality of the divine justice*, that it is not to be perverted and turn'd aside by any of those extrinsical considerations which commonly sway with men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by flattery and intreaties. *Mat. vii. 21, 22. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven, &c.* The *divine justice* is not to be imposed upon by good words, and external shews, and false professions; so neither by any external relation to him; *For many shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness.*

And however men may bear up themselves now upon their worldly greatness and power, certainly there is a time coming, when the greatest persons in the world, those who overturn kingdoms, and lay wast countries, and oppress and

ruin millions of mankind for the gratifying of their own lusts and ambition, I say there is *a day a coming*, when even *these*, as much, nay, more than others, shall fear and tremble before *the impartial justice* of God. *Rev. vi. 15. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bond-man and every freeman shall hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?* The *impartial justice* of God will treat the greatest and the meanest persons alike. *Rev. xx. 12. I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works. All judged according to their works.*

I should next proceed to vindicate *the justice of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments*, from those *objections*, which seem to impeach it. But before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to satisfy one question, which hath occasioned great disputes in the world, and that is, how far *justice*, especially as to *the punishment of offenders*, is *essential to God*? And for the clearing of this matter, I shall briefly lay down these propositions.

First, I take this for a certain and undoubted truth, that every *perfection* is *essential* to God, and cannot be imagined to be separated from the divine nature, because this is the natural notion which men have of God, that he is *a being that hath all perfection*.

Secondly, The actual constant exercise of those divine perfections, the effects whereof are *without himself*, is not *essential* to God. For instance, tho' God be *essentially powerfull* and *good*, yet it is not necessary, that he should *always exercise* his power and goodness, but at such times, and in such a manner, as seems best to his *wisdom*; and this is likewise true of his *wisdom* and *justice*, because *these* are perfections, the effects whereof are terminated upon something *without himself*.

Thirdly, It is *essential* to God to love goodness, and hate sin, where-ever he sees them. It is not necessary there should be a world, or reasonable creatures in it: but upon supposition that God makes such creatures, it is agreeable to the divine nature, to give them good and righteous laws, to encourage them in the doing of that which is good, and to discourage them from doing that which is evil; which cannot be done, but by *rewards* and *punishments*; and therefore it is agreeable to the perfection of the divine nature, *to reward goodness*, and *to punish sin*.

Fourthly, As for those rewards which the gospel promiset, and the punishments which it threatens, there is some difference to be made between the *rewarding* and *punishing justice* of God.

1. As for that abundant *reward* God is pleased to promise to good men, the *promise* of it is founded in his *goodness*; and *the performance* of that promise, in his *justice*; for it is *justice* to *perform* what he promises, tho' the *promise* of so great and abundant a reward was mere *goodness*.

2. As for the *punishing justice* of God, about which hath been the great question, whether that be *essential* to God or not, it seems very plain, that it is not *necessary* that God should inflict those judgments which he threatens, *because* he hath threaten'd them; for there is not the like obligation upon persons *to perform their threatenings*, that there is *to perform their promises*; because God by his *promise* becomes a *debtor* to those to whom he makes the promise; but when he *threatens*, he is the *creditor*, and we are debtors to his justice; and as a *creditor*, he may remit the punishment which he hath threaten'd: But then if we consider God as *loving goodness* and *hating sin*; if we look upon him as *governor of the world*, and concerned to preserve good order, to encourage holiness and righteousness, and to discountenance sin, under this consideration it is *essential* to him *to punish sin* at such times, and in such manner and circumstances, as seem best to his *wisdom*.

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urged by some learned men to the contrary, that if *punishing justice* were *essential* to God, then he must punish the

the sinner *immediately*, so soon as he hath offended, and to the *utmost* of his power; because whatever acts *naturally*, acts *necessarily*, and to the *utmost*: For I do not *suppose* such a *justice* essential to God as acts *necessarily*, but *such a justice*, which as to the time, and manner, and circumstances of its acting, is regulated and determined by his *wisdom*; and there is the same reason likewise of his *goodness*.

I come now to the objections, which are taken partly from the dispensations of God in *this* world; and partly from the punishments of *the other*.

First, As to the dispensations of God in *this* world, there are these *two* things objected against the *justice* of the divine providence.

I. The *inequality* of God's dealings with good and bad men in this world.

II. The *translation* of punishments, punishing one man's sin upon another, as the sins of the fathers upon the children, of the prince upon the people. I begin with the

I. Objection, the *inequality* of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world. In this life things happen promiscuously, *there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked*; if the wicked suffer and are afflicted, so are the righteous; if the righteous sometimes flourish, so do the wicked; and is not this *unjust*, that those who are so unequal as to their deserts, should be equally dealt withall? Or if there be any inequality, it is usually the wrong way, the wicked do many times prosper more in the world, and the righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great objection of old against the providence of God, which the heathen philosophers took so much pains to answer, nay, it did often shake the faith of holy and good men in the Old Testament. *Job. xii. 6. The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure, into whose hand God bringeth abundantly*; and *chap. xxi. 7, 8, 9.* he expostulates the same matter again; and *David* says this was a great stumbling-block to him, *Psal. lxxiii. 2, 3.* and the like we find in the Prophets, *Jer. xii. 1.* and *Hab. i. 13.* This objection I have elsewhere considered; I shall now very briefly offer two or three things, which I hope will be sufficient to break the force of it.

1. It must be granted, that it is not necessary to *justice*, to shew it self *immediately*, and to dispense rewards and punishments so soon as there are objects for them. This is not thought necessary among men, much more ought we to leave it to the wisdom of God to determine the time and circumstances of the exercising of his justice: and we are not to conclude, that the providence of God is unjust, if he do not bestow rewards, and inflict punishments, just when we think he should.

2. If God intended this life for a state of tryal, wherein he would prove the obedience of men and their free inclination to good or evil, it is not reasonable to expect that he should follow men with present rewards and punishments; for that would lay too great a force upon men, so that there would hardly be any opportunity of *trying* them; but on the contrary, there is all the reason in the world to presume that God should exercise the graces and virtues of good men with afflictions and sufferings, and suffer bad men to take their course for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual checks, by frequent and remarkable judgments upon them, so often as they offend.

3. If there be another life after this, wherein men shall be judged *according to their works*, then this objection vanisheth, for that great day will set all things straight, which seem now to be so crooked and irregular. The deferring of rewards and punishments to the most convenient season, is so far from being a reflection upon the *justice* of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What *Claudian* says of *Ruffinus*, a very bad man, whose long impunity had tempted men to call in question the justice of God, is considerable in this case;

*Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pena tumultum,
Absolvitque deos.*

“ The punishment which overtook him at last, did quiet those tumultuous thoughts, and absolved the Gods from all blame. When men look but a little way,

way, and consider only the present state of things, they are ready to quarrel at the Justice of them; but if they would look at the end of things and have patience to stay till the last, to see the conclusion and winding up of things, they would then acquit God in their thoughts from all those imputations of injustice, which from the *inequality* of present dispensations, rash and inconsiderate men are apt to charge him withall.

II. Objection, from the *translation* of punishments, the punishing of one man's sin upon another, as of *the fathers upon the children*, which God threatens in the *second* commandment, and did in some sort fulfill in *Ahab*, in *bringing the evil he had threaten'd him withall, in his sons days*, 1 Kings xxi. 19. The punishing the sin of one person upon a people, as that of *Achan* upon the whole congregation, Josh. xxii. 20. *Did not Achan the son of Zerab commit a trespass in the accursed thing? and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel, and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.* And the sin of *David* upon the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. when *seventy thousand* died of the plague, for *David's* sin in numbring the people. Now how is this agreeable to *justice*? Is it not a known rule, *Noxa caput sequitur, Mischief pursues the sinner*? What can be more reasonable, *Quam ut peccata suos teneant authores, Than that mens faults should be charged upon the authors*, and punishment fall upon the guilty?

For answer to this,

1. It is not unreasonable that one man should bear the punishment of another's fault, if he be willing and content to bear it. *Volenti non fit injuria, There is no wrong done to those that are willing to undergo it*, tho' they be innocent; which was the case of our blessed Saviour suffering for us, *the just for the unjust*, as the scripture expresth it.

2. Where the person, upon whom the punishment is transferr'd, is likewise a *sinner*, and obnoxious to God, there can be no *injustice*; because he hath deserved it upon his own account, and God may take what occasion he pleaseth to punish them that deserve to be punisht.

3. In punishing the iniquity of *the father upon the children*, the guilty person, that is, *the father*, is punisht in the calamity of *his children*, for a man's *children* are *himself multiply'd*; and therefore it is very remarkable that in the *second* commandment, God promiseth to *shew mercy to thousands of generations of them that love him*; but *he visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, but to the third and fourth generation*, that is, so far as man may live to see them punisht, and suffer in their punishment.

4. As to the punishment of the *people* for the sins of their *princes and governors*, and *one part* of a community for *another*, supposing all of them to be *sinners*, which is the true case, God may lay the punishment where he pleaseth; and there is no more injustice than when a man is whipt on the *back* for the theft which his hand committed, a community being *one body*: besides the *prince* is punisht in the loss of his *people*, the *glory* of a king consisting in the *multitude* of his *subjects*.

The objection with respect to the *other* world, the punishment of *temporal* evils with *eternal*, is else-where answer'd.

The use we should make of this whole discourse is,

First, If God be *just* and *righteous*, let us acknowledge it in all his dispensations, even in those, the reason whereof is most hidden and obscure, *Neh. ix. 33.* speaking of the great afflictions that had befall'n God's own people, yet this he lays down as a firm principle, *howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us.*

Secondly, This is matter of terror to wicked men. God doth *now* exercise his *milder* attributes towards finners, his *mercy*, and *patience*, and *goodness*; but if we despise these, that *terrible* attribute of his *justice* will display it self; and this the scripture describes in a severe manner, *the Lord revengeth, and is jealous; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies.*

Thirdly, This is matter of comfort to good men, that the *righteous* God governs the

the world; and will judge it. *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoyce*, Psal. lcvii. 1. And he gives the reason of it in the next *verse*. *Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne*. Tho' he be *omnipotent*, we need not fear; for his *power* is allways under the conduct of *eternal righteousness*.

Fourthly, Let us imitate this *righteousness*, let us endeavour to be *righteous as he is righteous*; let us give to God the love, reverence, and obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is *just* and due to men. This duty hath an *immutable* reason, founded in the nature of God.

S E R M O N LXXXVII.

The Truth of God.

DEUT. XXXII. 4.

— *A God of Truth.*

IN speaking to this attribute, I shall

I. Shew you what we are to understand by the *truth* of God.

II. Endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to God, that he is a *God of truth*.

III. Answer some objections that may be made against it; and then make some *use* of it.

I. What we are to understand by the *truth* of God. I shall take it as the scripture useth it in a large sense, so as to include not only the *veracity* of God, but his *faithfulness*. Hence it is that in scripture *truth* and *faithfulness* are so often put together, and frequently put one for another. *Isa. xxv. 1. Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth*. *Rev. xxi. 5. These words are true and faithful*. And the *faithfulness* of God in *performing his promises*, is frequently call'd his *truth*. And because the scripture useth them promiscuously, we need not be very solicitous to find out distinct notions of them; but if you will, they may be distinguish'd thus; the *truth* or *veracity* of God hath place in *every declaration* of his mind; the *faithfulness* of God only in his *promises*.

For the *first*, The *veracity* or *truth* of God; this hath place in *every declaration* of his mind; and signifies an exact correspondence and conformity between his *word* and his *mind*, and consequently between his *word* and the *truth* and *reality* of *things*. The correspondence of his *word* with his *mind*, depends upon the *rectitude* of his *will*; the conformity of his *word* with the *reality* of *things*, not only upon the *rectitude* of his *will*, but the *perfection* of his *knowledge*, and the *infallibility* of his *understanding*; so that when we say God is *true*, or *speaks truth*, we mean thus, that his *words* are a plain declaration of his *mind*, and a true representation of *things*, in opposition to *falsehood*, which is speaking otherwise than we *think*. For instance, when God declares any thing to be so, or not to be so, to have been thus, or not to have been thus, the thing really is so, and he thinks so; when he expresseth his desire of any thing, he does really desire it; when he commands any thing, or forbids us any thing, it is really his mind and will that we should do what he commands, and avoid what he forbids; when he declare and foretells any thing future, it really shall come to pass, and he really intended it should; if the declaration be to be understood absolutely, it shall absolutely come to pass; if the declaration be to be understood conditionally, it shall come to pass, and he intends it shall, if the condition be performed.

Secondly, The *faithfulness* of God. This only hath place in his *promises*, in which there is an obligation of *justice* superadded to his *word*; for God by his promise doth not only declare what he intends, and what shall be; but confers a right upon them to whom the promise is made, so as that the breach of his promise

promise would not only cast an imputation upon his *truth*, but upon his *justice*.

II. That this perfection belongs to God. And this I shall endeavour to prove,
First, From the dictates of *natural light*.

Secondly, From *scripture*.

First, From the dictates of *natural light*. *Natural light* tells us, that *truth* and *faithfulness* are *perfections*, and consequently belong to the divine nature; and that *falsehood* and a *lie* are *imperfections*, and to be removed from God. There is nothing that is amongst men esteemed a greater contumely and reproach, than to give a man the lie, to call him a *liar*, because it is an argument of so much baseness, and of a low and mean and servile spirit; the usual temptation to it being fear of losing some advantage, or incurring some danger. Hence was that saying, that *it is the property of a slave to lie, but of a free man to speak truth*: Now what-ever argues baseness or imperfection, our reason tells us is infinitely to be separated from the most perfect being. *God cannot be tempted with evil*, the divine nature being all-sufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwise than good and just, and true and faithful. Men are tempted to lie by advantage, and out of fear: but the divine nature hath the security of its fullness and all-sufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increase, nor fear any impairment of its estate. Men are unfaithful, and break their words, either because they are rash and inconsiderate in passing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconstant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: but none of these are incident to God; his infinite wisdom, and perfect knowledge, and clear foresight of all events, secure him both from inconsiderateness, and inconstancy, and forgetfulness; and his infinite power renders him able to perform what he hath spoken, and to make good his word. And that these are the *natural* dictates and suggestions of our minds, appears clearly from the reasonings of the heathen in this matter, who were destitute of divine revelation, *Plato de Repub. l. 2.* lays down this as a certain truth, "That lying and falsehood are imperfections, and odious to God and men," τὸ μὲν ψεῦδος ἔ μόνον ἀπὸ θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται. And afterwards "he tells us, That the divine nature is free from all temptations hereto, either from advantage or fear; καὶ ἂν ὅτιν ἐνέχῃ ἂν θεὸς ψεύδοιτο; πάντῃ ἅρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον; and concludes, "Therefore God is true, and deals plainly with us, both in his words and actions, and is neither changed himself, nor deceives us". *Porphyry* in the life of *Pythagoras* tells us, "That this was one of his precepts, μάλιστα δ' ἀληθεύειν; τὸ τοῦ μόνον δύνασθαι τὰς ἀνθρώπους ποιεῖν θεῶ παραπλησιές", and afterwards he adds, "That truth is so great a perfection, that if God would render himself visible to men, he would chuse light for his body, and truth for his soul.

Secondly, From *scripture*. The scripture doth very frequently attribute this to God, *2 Sam. vii. 28.* And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true. *Psal. xxv. 10.* All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth. *Psal. xxxi. 5.* Into thy hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. *Rev. iii. 7.* These things saith he, that is holy, he that is true. *Rev. vi. 10.* How long, O Lord, holy and true? --- *xv. 3.* Just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints. --- *xvi. 7.* True and righteous are thy judgments. Hither we may refer those texts which speak of the plenty and abundance of God's truth, *Ex. xxxiv. 6.* Abundant in goodness and truth. *Psal. lxxxvi. 15.* Plenteous in mercy and truth; and those which speak of the duration and eternity of it. *Psal. c. 5.* And his truth endureth to all generations. --- *cxvii. 2.* And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. --- *cxlvi. 6.* Who keepeth truth for ever.

As the scripture doth attribute this perfection to God, so it removes the contrary from him with the greatest abhorrence and detestation. --- *xxiii. 19.* God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall not he do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? They are *Balaam's* words, but God put them into his mouth. *1 Sam. xv. 29.* The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent. *Rom. iii. 4.* Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar. Nay, the scripture goes further, does not only remove lying and falsehood and inconstancy from God, but speaks of these as things impossible to the divine nature; *Tit. i. 2.*

In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began. Heb. vi. 18. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.

And the scripture doth not only in general attribute this perfection to God, but doth more particularly assure us of his *sincerity* and *truth*, and *faithfulness*. Of his *sincerity*, that he deals plainly with us, and speaks what he intends, that his words are the image of his thoughts, and a true representation of his mind. God is very carefull to remove this jealousy out of the minds of men, who are apt to entertain unworthy thoughts of God, as if notwithstanding all that he hath declared, he had a secret design to ruin men; therefore he interposeth his oath for our greater assurance, *Ezek. xxxiii. 11. As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.* When God speaks to us, he speaks his mind, and hath no design to circumvent and possess us with error and delusion: if he offer life and happiness, we may believe he is real, and that if he did not intend to bestow it upon us, or if there were no such thing as a future glory, he would not have declared it to us; this was the temper of our Saviour, who was *the express image of the father, full of grace and truth.* John xiv. 2. *In my father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.*

And as the scripture assures us of his *sincerity*, so of his *truth* and *faithfulness* in the *accomplishment* of all his *predictions*, and *performances* of all his *promises*. As for the truth of his *predictions*, and certain accomplishment of them, the scripture frequently useth this proverbial speech, to assure us of the certainty of their accomplishment; *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,* Matth. xxiv. 35. For the faithfulness of God in his *promises*, the scripture makes frequent mention of it. *Deut. vii. 9. Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy.* Psal. lxxxix. 33, 34. *I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail; my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of my lips.* The scripture doth record God's punctual and full performance of his promises; particularly of that promise to *Abraham*, after four hundred years to bring the children of *Israel* out of *Egypt*, and to give them the land of *Canaan* for an inheritance, Gen. xv. 13. the punctual accomplishment you have recorded, *Exod. xii. 41. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt:* See likewise *Josh. xxi. 44, 45.* and *xxiii. 14.* *1 Kings viii. 56.* And upon this account it is that God is so frequently in scripture styl'd *the God that keepeth covenant,* *1 Kings viii. 23.* *Neh. i. 5. ix. 32.* and in several other places. And so likewise of *predictions of evil to come*, God is true in fulfilling his word, *1 Sam. xv. 29.* When the prophet had threatened *Saul* to rent the kingdom from him, he adds, *the strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a man, that he should repent.*

III. I come to remove some objections that may be made against the *truth* and *faithfulness* of God.

First, It is objected against the *sincerity* of God and his *plain dealing*, that he is sometimes represented in scripture, as inspiring prophets with false messages, *1 Kings xxii. 20, &c. Jer. iv. 10. --- xx. 7. Ezek. xiv. 9.*

Ans. As to three of these texts, it is a known *hebraism* to express things in an imperative and active form, which are to be understood only permissively. So where *the devils besought Christ, that he would suffer them to enter into the herd of swine, he said unto them, go.* Matth. viii. 31. He did not command, but permit them. And so *John xiii. 27.* where our Saviour says to *Judas*, *what thou dost, do quickly*, we are not to understand, that he commanded him to betray him, tho' that seem to be express'd in the form. So likewise here, where an *evil spirit* offer'd himself to be a *lying spirit in the mouth of the prophet*, and God says, *go forth and do so*; this only signifies a permission, not a command. And so *Jer. iv. 10.* where the prophet complains that God had greatly deceived the people, *saying they should have peace, when the sword reacheth to the soul*; we are to understand this no otherwise, but that

that God *permitted* the false prophets to deceive them, prophesying peace to them, as appears by the history. *Ezek. xiv. 9. I the Lord have deceived that prophet*, that is, *permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people*, as a just judgment upon them for their infidelity with respect to his true prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verse; *I will take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols*; because they have chosen to themselves false Gods, I will suffer them to be deceived with false prophets; and that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, *and I will stretch my hand upon him, and I will destroy him from the midst of my people*: now God will not punish that whereof he is the author.

That text, *Jer. xx. 7. Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived*, signifies no more, but that he had mistaken the promise of God to him, who when he gave him his commission, told him he would be with him, by which he understood that no evil should come to him, and now he was become a derision, and the people mocked him; and in his passion and weakness he break's forth into this expression, *thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived*; whereas it was his own mistake of the meaning of God's promise, which was not that he should not meet with scorn, and opposition, and persecution, but that they should not prevail against him, as you may see at the latter end of the first chapter.

Second Objection against the faithfulness of God as to performance of his promise. 'Tis objected that God did not give the children of *Israel* all the land which he promised to *Abraham*, as will appear by comparing *Gen. xviii. 19, 20.* with *Josh. xiii. 1, &c.* and *Judg. ii. 20, 21. Gen. xv. 18.* God promised to give *Abraham* and his seed such a land, the bounds whereof he describes, *Josh. xiii. 1.* 'Tis said there, that *there remained very much land* yet unconquer'd, which they had not got the possession of. And *Judg. ii. 20.* 'tis said that the people having not performed their part of the covenant, God would suspend the further performance of his promise, and *would not drive out* any more of the nations before them; and it is probable that the *Israelites* never were possess of the promised land in the full latitude and extent of the promise.

Answer. This covenant of God with *Abraham*, was upon consideration of his past faith and obedience, tho' it seems the full performance of it did likewise depend upon the future obedience of his posterity; in pursuance of this covenant notwithstanding all the murmurings, and rebellions of that people, God did bring them into the promised land, tho' *they provoked him to destroy them many a time*; because he remembred his covenant with *Abraham*; when they were possess of it, God gave them a title to the rest, and would have assisted them in the conquest of it, if they had performed the condition required on their part, that is, continued faithful and obedient to him; but they did not, and thereby discharged God from any further performance of his promise; and God when he had done this, had fully performed the covenant he made with *Abraham*, so far as concerned his part, as appears by the acknowledgment of *Joshua*, even in a time when a great part of the land was unconquer'd, *Josh. xxi. 44.* and of *Solomon*, *1 Kings viii. 56.* yea, and had it not been that God had made this covenant, as well upon consideration of *Abraham's* faith and obedience, as upon condition of the future obedience of his posterity, the rebellions and disobedience of the people in the wilderness had released God wholly from the promise, and he had not been unfaithful if he had destroyed utterly that people, and made a full end of them, and they had never entered into that land; because a failure of the condition doth make the obligation to cease; and that this condition was imply'd in this covenant with *Abraham*, appears by these texts, *Deut. vii. 12, 13. II. 22. 23. 42.* and *Judg. ii. 20.* God gives this reason why he suspended the compleat performance of his promise, *the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he said, because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearken'd to my voice, I also will not henceforth drive out any of the nations which Joshua left when he died.*

Third Objection, God is not punctual in performing his threatenings; as when he threaten'd *Adam*, *Gen. ii. 17. In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely*

surely die; which yet was not accomplish'd, for he lived many hundred years after. God threaten'd *Ahab to bring evil upon him and his family*, 1 Kings xxi. 21. But upon his humiliation he is pleased to respite it, *verse 29*. So God threaten'd *Hezekiah with death*, but upon his prayer *adds fifteen years to his life*. Thus *Nineveh* was threaten'd, but upon their repentance, *God repented of the evil*, Jon. iii. 10. Now how is this deferring and turning away of judgment consistent with the *truth* of God? doth not this seem to charge him with *falsehood or levity*?

Ans. This may be said in general, that every one that understands the nature of God, cannot but be very well assur'd, that *falsehood* and *levity*, are very far from God; and tho' he could not untie some particular knots, and answer all difficulties, yet he ought to rest satisfied in this assurance. I confess this objection is troublesome, and requires a distinct consideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters, but I shall, with submission, offer these things in answer to it.

1. As for the expression of *God's repenting*, we are to understand it, as many others in scripture, *after the manner of men*, and spoken by way of *condescension* to our weakness, and accommodated to our capacities, and not as casting any imputation of *falsehood* or *inconstancy* upon God, as if either he did not intend what he saith, or out of levity did alter his mind. When God is said to *repent*, the expression only signifies thus much, that God *doth not execute* that which *seemed* to us to have been his purpose, that he is pleased to do otherwise than his threatenings *seemed openly to express*, because of some *tacit condition* implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the *truth*, or *sincerity*, or *constancy* of God in his word. Not from his *truth*; for he speaks what he intends really, if something did not intervene to prevent the judgment threaten'd, upon which he was resolved, when he threaten'd, to be taken off and stop his judgments: Nor doth it derogate from his *sincerity* and *plainness*; for he hath told us that his threatenings have such conditions imply'd in them: Nor doth it derogate from the *constancy* and *immutability* of God; because God doth not *mutare consilium sed sententiam*, he doth not change his counsel and purpose, but take off the sentence which he had past with reserved conditions.

2. As to the instances, that I may give more particular satisfaction to them, I shall consider the threatenings of God with this double respect, either with relation to a *law*, or with relation to the *event*; as they are *predictions* of something to come.

(1.) Some threatenings have only relation to a *law*, and they are the *sanction* of it. And thus consider'd, they differ from *promises*; for *promises* confer a *right*, *omne promissum cadit in debitum*; but a *threatening* doth not convey any *right*, nor if forborn, can the party complain of *wrong* done to him; and therefore in this case it can only signify what the offense against the law deserves, and what the offender may expect; for the *end* of threatening is not *punishment*, but the *avoiding* of it. And this may answer the *first* instance. God gave *Adam a law*; and by way of *sanction*, not of *prediction* of an event, he threaten'd the breach of it with death: Now God did not execute the punishment threaten'd at the time threaten'd, but deferr'd it, and this without any impeachment of his *justice* or *truth*, because this threatening was only the *sanction of the law*.

(2.) We may consider threatenings with relation to the *event*, and as *predictions*; and as to the accomplishment of these, there seems to be a greater degree of necessity, because the honour of God's *knowledge*, and *power*, and *truth*, seem to be concerned in them; for if his word be not fulfill'd, it must either be for want of knowledge to foresee events, or power to bring them to pass, or *constancy* to his word. Now if we consider threatenings with respect to the event, as they are predictions of future judgments, I think all the other instances may be satisfied, by laying down this rule for the understanding of them, *viz.* "That all prophetic threatenings or predictions of judgment are to be understood with this *tacit condition*, if there do not intervene the humiliation, and repentance, and prayer of the persons against whom the judgment is threaten'd; and if so, God may upon repen-

“ rance, without any impeachment of the honour of his *truth*, or *knowledge*, or “ *power*, either defer, or abate, or remit the punishment”. And that the *predictions* of judgments are to be understood with this condition, appears clearly from that known text, *Jer.* xviii. 7, 8.

I come now to the last thing I proposed, to make some *use* of this doctrine.

First, If God be a *God of truth*, then this gives us assurance that he doth not deceive us, that the faculties which he hath given us are not false, but when they have clear perceptions of things, they do not err and mistake. Were it not for the *veracity* of God, we might, for any thing we know, be under a constant delusion; and no man could demonstrate the contrary, but that this is our make and our temper, and the very frame of our understandings, to be then most of all deceived, when we think our selves to be most certain; I say, no man could be assured of the contrary, but from hence, because *veracity* and *truth* is a *divine perfection*; and therefore God cannot be the author of error and delusion. Therefore we may be assured, that the frame of our understandings is not a cheat, but that our faculties are true, and unless it be our own fault, we need not be deceived in things that are necessary to our happiness.

Secondly, If God be a *God of truth*, then there is reason why we should believe and assent to whatever we are satisfied is revealed to us by God. A divine revelation is a sufficient ground for the most firm assent; for this very thing, that any thing is revealed by God, is the highest evidence, and ought to give us the most firm assurance of the truth of it. Hence it is that the word of God is call'd *the word of truth*, yea, and *truth it self*, *John* xvii. 17. *Thy word is truth*.

Therefore whoever entertains the scripture as the word of God, and is satisfied of the divine authority of them, ought in reason to believe every thing contained in them, yea, tho' there be some things of which no reasonable account can be given, and which our reason and understanding cannot give us particular satisfaction in; yea, because we are satisfied that they are revealed by *God who cannot lie*, whose knowledge is infallible, and whose word is true, we ought upon this higher and superior reason to yield a firm assent to the truth of them: if we do not, we dishonour this perfection of God, and rob him of this *essential property*, his *veracity*. 1 *John* v. 10. *He that believeth on the son of God, hath the witness of himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believed not the record that God gave of his son*. As on the other hand, if we do believe what God hath revealed, we glorify this perfection of his, and set our seal to his veracity. So 'tis said of *Abraham*, *Rom.* iv. 20. *That he was strong in faith, giving glory to God*. And *St. John* the baptist, speaking concerning our Saviour, saith, *John* iii. 33. *He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal, that God is true*.

Thirdly, If God be a *God of truth*, and faithfull in performing his promise, then here is a firm foundation for our hope and trust. If God have made any promise, we may securely rely upon it, that it shall be made good; we may *hold fast* our hope *without wavering*, because he is *faithfull who hath promised*, *Heb.* x. 23. Hence it is that the blessings of God's covenant are call'd *sure mercies*, *Isa.* lv. 3.

We attribute much to the word of a faithfull friend, and look upon the promise of an honest man as very good security; but *men* may fail us when we rely upon them: but *God is true* tho' *all men should prove lyars*. Men are fickle and mutable; but the nature of God is fixed, he cannot fail those that trust in him. When God hath made any promise to us, we may plead it with him, and urge him with his faithfulness. So we find *David* did, 2 *Sam.* vii. 25, &c.

Only we should be careful to perform the *condition* which is required on our part, *Heb.* iv. 1. we should *take heed lest a promise being left us, anyone should come short of it*, by not performing the *condition*; for *that* doth release and discharge him of the promise, and *he is faithfull*, tho' he doth not perform what he promised, because he did not promise but upon *condition*; and this seems to be the meaning of those words, 2 *Tim.* ii. 13. *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithfull, he cannot deny himself*. He said before, that if we perform the conditions required, God will bestow the blessings promised. *It is a faithfull saying, for if we*
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be dead with him, we also shall live with him; if we suffer, we also shall reign with him; but if we deny him, the curse threaten'd will then take place, and he will deny us; and God is not unfaithfull in doing this, he does not deny himself.

Now if we have such assurance, we may trust him with our greatest concerns, and venture our souls with him. *Psal. xxxi. 5. Into thy hands I commit my spirit, O Lord God of truth.* We should rely upon him, when there are the greatest improbabilities of the accomplishment of his promises. Thus did *Abraham*, *Rom. iv. 17, &c.*

This should make us also *patient in hope*; if a promise be not speedily accomplish'd, we should not be dejected or disquieted. *David* challengeth himself upon this account, *Psal. xlii. 11. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* And so likewise in reference to the rewards of another world, tho' at a distance, yet we should, as the Apostle speaks, *wait for the blessed hope.*

Fourthly, The truth of God is matter of terror to the wicked. All the threatenings of temporal evils may justly be expected, because their sins deserve them, and there is no condition implied in them, upon which thou canst reasonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the evils threaten'd, but of *humiliation* and *repentance*; and if notwithstanding these threatenings, thou continuest in thy sins, and *blessest thy self, saying, I shall have peace, tho' thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart*, by this very thing thou provokest the justice of God, *not to spare thee*, and makest *his wrath and his jealousy to smoke against thee*; and if thou continuest impenitent, however he may defer the execution of temporal evils, his *truth* and *veracity* is concerned to inflict eternal punishments upon thee; for *he hath sworn in his wrath, that such shall not enter into his rest.*

Fifthly, Let us propound to our selves the truth of God for our pattern and imitation. Would you be like God? be *true* and *faithfull*. *Truth and faithfulness* are *divine perfections*; but *lying* and *falsehood* are the properties of the devil, and the predominant qualities of *hell*. The character of the devil is, that *he abode not in the truth, and there is no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, 'tis of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it.* John viii. 44.

One of the first and most natural notions that we have of religion is, that it is *to imitate God*, and to endeavour to be like him, so far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the divine excellencies and perfections is the highest sin, because it is against the clearest dictates of our mind, and contrary to those principles which are most deeply rooted in our nature. No man can be cruel and unmercifull, false and treacherous, without a very high degree of guilt, because these sins are contrary to the chiefest and most essential perfections of God. *Lying* is a sin that would fly in the face of an heathen, because it directly contradicts those natural notions which every man hath of God and religion; therefore we find that there is hardly any thing that men are more ashamed of, than *to be taken in a lie*, and 'tis esteemed the highest reproach to be charged with it, it argues such a direct contrariety to that which is the rule of perfection, *the nature of God*, and consequently so much imperfection and baseness; he that tells a lie out of fear, is at once bold towards God, and base towards men.

Upon these accounts God expresseth himself highly offended with those that practise *lying* and *falsehood*, and to have a detestation of them, *Prov. xii. 22. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.* It renders us unlike to him, *Eph. iv. 24, 25. Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (or in the holiness of truth.)* And from hence he infers, *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth to his neighbour: for we are members one of another.* Col. iii. 9, 10. *Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds: And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him:* that is, because we profess to be conformed to *the image of God*. More particularly, we should charge our selves with *truth* and *faithfulness* towards God and men.

1. *Towards God*, in our *oaths*, and *vows*, and *covenants*. In our oaths, when we swear in any matter, we tell God that what we speak is truth, and invoke him to bear witness to it. To falsify in an *oath* is one of the most solemn affronts that we can put upon the God of truth.

And so in our *vows*, which are a solemn promise to God, of such things in which we have no precedent obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth truth, will neither be rash in making a vow, nor careless to perform it. *Eccles. v. 4. When thou vowest a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools.* Not to perform what we have vowed, is an argument of folly; either of rashness in the making of it, or of inconstancy in not keeping it.

So likewise in all our *covenants* with God, to serve him and obey him, and keep his commandments, we should directly charge our selves with performance of these. There is a natural obligation upon us to these things from the very law of our creation, tho' we should never solemnly make any such promise, nor enter into any such engagements, because it is a *tacit* condition of our beings; but the taking of this *covenant* solemnly upon us in *baptism*, strengthens this obligation, and makes our unfaithfulness the greater sin. All our hopes of happiness are founded in the faithfulness of God; and if thou be false to him, how canst thou expect he should be faithful to thee? 'Tis true indeed, that *he abides faithful, he cannot deny himself*; but if thou hast any ingenuity in thee, this should be an argument to thee to be faithful to him; I am sure this can be no encouragement to thee to be unfaithful; for if thou breakest the covenant thou hast enter'd into, and neglectest the conditions upon which God hath suspended the performance of his promise, thou dischargest the obligation on his part.

2. *Towards men*; we should charge our selves with *truth* in all our *words*, and *faithfulness* in all our *promises*. It becomes us who worship *the God of truth*, to speak truth; to use plainness and sincerity in all our words, to abhor falshood and dissimulation, and those more refined ways of lying by equivocation of words, and secret reservations of our minds on purpose to deceive. Those that plead for these, 'tis a sign they do not understand the nature of God, and of religion, which is to conform our selves to the divine perfections. We meet with many complaints in the Old Testament, of the want of truth and faithfulness among men. *Psal. xii. 1, 2. Isa. lix. 13, 14, 15. Jer. vii. 2, 8, 9. --- 2. 4, 5, 6. Hos. iv. 1.* I am afraid there is as much reason for this complaint now; for we live in an age of greater *light*, which doth *reprove* and *make manifest* this *work of darkness*; and methinks there is no sadder sign of the decay of christianity, and of the little power and influence that the gospel hath upon us, than that there is so little regard had by christians to these *moral* duties, which because *moral* (however men may slight that word) are therefore of *eternal* and *indispensable* obligation, having their foundation in *the nature of God*.

To conclude all, that man that can dispense with himself as to *moral* duties, that makes no conscience of *telling a lie*, or *breaking his word*, what badge soever he may wear, what title soever he may call himself by, it is as impossible that such a man should be a *true christian*, as it is to reconcile *the God of truth* and *the father of lies*.

S E R M O N LXXXVIII.

The Holiness of God.

I P E T. I. 16.

Be ye holy, for I am holy.

I N speaking to this attribute, I shall

I. Enquire what we are to understand by the *holiness* of God.

II. Endeavour to shew, that this perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to understand by the *holiness* of God. There is some difficulty in fixing the proper notion of it; for tho' there be no property more frequently attributed to God in scripture, than this of *holiness*, yet there is none of all God's attributes, which divines have spoken more sparingly of than this.

The general notion of *holiness* is, that it is a *separation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent use*. And this notion of *holiness*, is applicable either to *things* or *persons*. To things; thus the vessels of the tabernacle, and the vestments of the priests were said to be *holy*, because they were separated from common use, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent use of the service of God. *Holiness* of *persons* is twofold, either *relative* and *external*, which signifies the peculiar relation of a person to God; such were called *separés, priests* or *holy men*: or else *habitual* and *inherent*; such is the *holiness* of good men, and it is a *separation from moral imperfection*, that is, from *sin* and *impurity*. And this is called *ἁγιότης*, and the primary notion of it is *negative*, and signifies the absence and remotion of sin. And this appears in those explications which the scripture gives of it. Thus 'tis explain'd by opposition to sin and impurity. 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness*; where *holiness* is opposed to *all filthiness*. Sometimes by the negation of sin and defilement: So we find *holy and without blame* put together, Eph. i. 4. *Holy and without blemish*, Eph. v. 27. *Holy, harmless, and undefiled*, Heb. vii. 26. 'Tis true indeed, this *negative* notion doth imply something that is *positive*, it doth not only signify the absence of sin, but a contrariety to it; we cannot conceive the absence of sin without the presence of grace; as takes away crookedness from a thing, and it immediately becomes straight. Whenever we are made *holy*, every lust and corruption in us is supplanted by the contrary grace.

Now this *habitual holiness* of persons, which consists in a *separation from sin*, is a *conformity to the holiness of God*; and by this we may come to understand what *holiness* in God is; and it signifies the *peculiar eminency of the divine nature, whereby it is separated and removed at an infinite distance from moral imperfection, and that which we call sin*; that is, there is no such thing as malice, or envy, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience; or cruelty, or tyranny, or injustice; or falshood, or unfaithfulness in God; or if there be any other thing that signifies sin and vice, and moral imperfection, *holiness* signifies that the divine nature is at an infinite distance from all these, and possess of the contrary perfections.

Therefore all those texts that remove moral imperfection from God, and declare the repugnancy of it to the divine nature, do set forth the *holiness* of God. Jam. i. 13. *God cannot be tempted with evil*. Job viii. 3. *Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert justice?* Job xxxiv. 10, 12. *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. Yea, surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment*. Rom. ix. 14.

ix. 14. *Is there then unrighteousness with God? God forbid.* Zeph. iii. 5. *The just Lord is in the midst thereof, he will not do iniquity.* And so falshood and unfaithfulness and inconstancy. Deut. xxxii. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity.* 1 Sam. xv. 29. *The strength of Israel will not lie.* Tit. i. 2. *In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised.* Heb. vi. 18. *That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie.* Therefore you shall find, that holiness is joyned with all the moral perfections of the divine nature, or put for them. Hof. ix. *I am the holy one in the midst of thee; that is, the mercifull one.* Psal. cxlv. 17. *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* Rom. vii. 12. *The commandment is holy, and just, and good.* Rev. iii. 7. *These things saith he that is holy, he that is true.* Rev. vi. 10. *How long, O Lord, holy and true?* Psalm cv. 42. *He remembered his holy promise; holy, that is, in respect of the faithfulness of it.* Isaiah lv. 3. *The sure mercies of David; $\pi\alpha\sigma\iota\alpha$, the holy mercies of David, which will not fail.*

So that the holiness of God is not a particular, but an universal perfection, and runs through all the moral perfections of the divine nature; 'tis the beauty of the divine nature, and the perfection of all his other perfections. Take away this, and you bring an universal stain and blemish upon the divine nature; without holiness, power would be an oppression; and wisdom, subtilty; and sovereignty, tyranny; and goodness, malice and envy; and justice, cruelty; and mercy, foolish pity; and truth, falshood. And therefore the scripture speaks of this, as God's highest excellency and perfection. God is said to be glorious in holiness. Exod. xv. 11. *Holiness is call'd God's throne.* Psal. xlvii. 8. *He sitteth upon the throne of his holiness.* This is that which makes heaven. Isaiah lxiii. 15. It is called, *The habitation of his holiness, and of his glory*; as if this were the very nature of God, and the summ of his perfections. The knowledge of God is called *the knowledge of the holy one.* Prov. ix. 10. *To be made partakers of a divine nature, and to be made partakers of God's holiness,* are equivalent expressions. 2 Pet. iii. 4. Heb. xii. 10. And because there is no perfection of God greater, therefore he is represented as swearing by this. Psal. lx. 6. *God hath spoken in his holiness.* Psal. lxxxix. 35. *Once have I sworn by my holiness.* The Angels and glorified spirits they sum up the perfections of God in this, Isa. vi. 3. *And one cryed unto another, and said, holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.* Rev. iv. 8. *And they rest not day and night, saying, holy, holy holy, Lord God almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.* There is no attribute of God, so often repeated as *this*; in some copies it is nine times.

II. I shall endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to God;

First, From the light of nature. The philosophers in all their discourses of God agree in this, that whatever sounds like vice and imperfection, is to be separated from the divine nature; which is to acknowledge his holiness. Plato speaking of our likeness to God, saith, $\delta\mu\lambda\omega\iota\varsigma\ \delta\epsilon\ \delta\iota\gamma\mu\iota\omicron\nu\ \kappa\epsilon\ \sigma\iota\omicron\iota\nu\ \mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\ \phi\epsilon\rho\eta\sigma\epsilon\omega\varsigma\ \gamma\epsilon\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$. Dan. iv. 9. King Nebuchadnezzar calls God by this title, *I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee.* In a word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of God's moral perfections, proves his holiness.

Secondly, From scripture. There is no title so frequently given to God in scripture, and so often ingeminated as this of his holiness. He is called holiness it self, Isa. lxiii. 15. Where heaven is call'd *the habitation of his holiness*, that is, of God. His name is said to be holy. Luke i. 49. *And holy is his name.* He is called *the holy one*, Isaiah xl. 25. *The holy one of Israel.* Isaiah xli. 20. *The holy one of Jacob*, --- xlix. 23. He is said to be *holy in all his works and promises*, Psal. cv. 42. *In all his ways and works*, Psal. cxlv. 17. This title is given to each of the three persons in the blessed Trinity: To God the father in innumerable places: To God the son, Dan. ix. 24. *To anoint the most holy.* The devil cannot deny him this title, Luke iv. 34. *I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God.* And the spirit of God hath this title constantly given it, *the Holy Ghost*, or *the holy spirit*, or *the spirit of holiness*. The scripture attributes this perfection in a peculiar manner to God. 1 Sam. ii. 2. *There is none holy as the Lord.* Rev. xv. 4. *For thou only art holy.* Holiness is a communicable perfection; but

but no creature can partake of it in such a manner and degree as the divine nature possesteth it. God is eternally holy, the fountain of holiness : the creatures are derivatively and by participation holy. God is eminently and transcendently so ; the creatures in a finite degree. God is immutably so, 'tis impossible it should be otherwise : but no creature is out of an absolute possibility of sin. In this sense it is said, *Job* iv. 18. That *he putteth no trust in his saints, and his angels he chargeth with folly.* And *Chap.* xv. 15. *He putteth no trust in his saints, and the heavens are not pure in his sight.* From all which I shall draw these inferences.

1. If *holiness* be a perfection of the divine nature, and a property of God, if in the notion of God, there be included an everlasting separation and distance from moral imperfection, and eternal repugnance to sin and iniquity ; from hence we may infer, that there is an *intrinsical good and evil* in things, and the reasons and respects of *moral good and evil* do not depend upon any mutable, and inconstant, and arbitrary principle, but are fixt and immutable, eternal and indispensable. Therefore they do not seem to me to speak so safely, who make the divine will, precisely and abstractedly consider'd, the rule of *moral good and evil*, as if there were nothing good or evil *in its own nature* antecedently to the will of God, but that all things are therefore good or evil because God wills them to be so. For if this were so, goodness, and righteousness, and truth, and faithfulness, would not be essential, and necessary, and immutable properties of the divine nature, but accidental, and arbitrary, and uncertain, and mutable ; which is to suppose that God, if he pleased, might be otherwise than good, and just, and true. For if these depend merely upon the will of God, and be not *necessary* or *essential* properties of the divine nature, then the contrary of these, malice, and envy, and unrighteousness, and falsehood do not imply any essential repugnancy to the divine nature ; which is plainly contrary to what the scripture tells us, that *God cannot be tempted with evil* ; that *'tis impossible he should lie* ; that he *cannot be unrighteous*.

If any man say that God hath now declared himself to be just, and good, and faithful, and now he cannot be otherwise, because *he is a God of truth, and he changeth not* ; this is to grant the thing ; for this supposeth the *veracity* and *immutability* of God to be *essential* and *necessary* perfections of the divine nature, and why not *justice* and *goodness* as well ? I say it supposeth *veracity* and *immutability* to be *essential* perfections, and not to depend upon the will of God, that is, that God cannot will to be otherwise than true and unchangeable ; for if he could, what assurance can we possibly have, but that when he declares himself to be good and just, as he is or may be otherwise ?

But I need not insist upon this, which seems to be so very clear, and to carry its own evidence along with it. I will only use this argument to prove it, and so leave it. No being can will its own nature and *essential* perfections, that is, chuse whether it will be thus or otherwise ; for that were to suppose it to be before it is, and before it hath a being, to deliberate about its own nature. Therefore if this be the nature of God, (which I think no body will deny) to be good, and just, and true, and necessarily to be what he is ; then goodness and justice, and truth, do not depend upon the will of God, but there are such things, such notions antecedently to any act of the divine will. And this does no ways prejudice the liberty of God ; for this is the highest perfection, to be necessarily good, and just, and true ; and a liberty or possibility to be otherwise, is impotency and imperfection. For liberty no where speaks perfection, but where the things and actions about which 'tis conversant are indifferent ; in all other things 'tis the highest perfection not to be free and indifferent, but immutable and fixt, and necessarily bound up by the eternal laws of goodness, and justice, and truth, so that it shall not be possible to swerve from them ; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, which we call his *holiness*.

2. If holiness be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, this shews us what account we are to make of sin, and wickedness, and vice. We may judge of every privation by the habit, for they bear an exact proportion
one

one to another. Light and darkness are opposed, as habit and privation; if light be pleasant and comfortable, then darkness is dismal and horrid. And so *holiness* and *sin* are opposed; if *holiness* be the highest perfection of any nature, then *sin* is the grand imperfection and the lowest debasement of any being; because it is the most opposite to *that*, and at the furthest distance from *that* which is the first excellency and perfection.

This should rectify our judgment and esteem of things and persons. We admire and esteem riches, and power, and greatness; and we scorn to condemn poverty, and weakness, and meanness; yea, grace and holiness, if it be in the company of these. We are apt to reverence and value the great, and the rich, and the mighty of this world, tho' they be wicked; and to *despise the poor man's wisdom and holiness*; but we make a false judgment of things and persons. There is nothing that can be a foundation of respect, that ought to command our reverence and esteem, but real worth and excellency, and perfection; and according to the degrees of this, we ought to bestow our respect, and raise our esteem. What St. James saith of *respect of persons*, I may apply in this case, *Jam. ii. 4. Are ye not then partial your selves, and become judges of evil thoughts?* We are extremely *partial*; we make a false judgment, and reason ill concerning things, when we admire gilded vices, and weakness exalted to high places; I mean ungodly rich men, and ungodly great men; for wicked men are properly ungodly, unlike to God; and when we condemn poor, and mean, and afflicted holiness, and piety. Were but our eyes open, and our judgment clear and unprejudic'd, we should see a beauty and refulgency in goodness; even when it is under the greatest disadvantage, when it is cloathed with rags, and sits upon a dunghill, it would shine through all these mists, and we should see a native light and beauty in it, through the darkness of a poor and low condition: And we should see wickedness to be a most vile and abject thing when it appears in all its gallantry and bravery; we should look upon the poor *righteous* man, as *more excellent than his neighbour*; and the profane gallant, as the *off-scouring of the earth*. We should value a man that *does justice, and loves mercy, and speaks the truth to his neighbour*; we should esteem any one more upon the account of any one of these simple qualities, than we should another man destitute of these, upon the account of a hundred titles of honour, and ten thousand acres of land. A wicked unholy man, he is a *vile person*, who deserves to be contemned; and a holy man, he is the *right honourable*. *Psal. xv. 4. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord.* The *vile person* is opposed to him that *fears the Lord*. He that is bold to affront God, and sin against him, is the *base and ignoble* person. God himself, who is possessor of all excellency and perfection, and therefore knows best how to judge of these, he tells us how we should value our selves and others, *Jer. ix. 23, 24. Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.* To know these divine qualities and perfections, signifies here, to understand them so as to imitate them. I do not speak this to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this world, or to lessen the respect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued, but wickedness and vice; and I would have those who have store of worldly advantages to recommend them, to add *religion* to their *riches*, and *holiness* to their *honour*, that they may be current for their *intrinsic* value, rather than for the *image and picture* of worth which the world hath stamp'd upon them.

3. If *holiness* be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, then what an absurd and unreasonable thing is it, to scorn and despise *holiness*, to mock and deride men under this very title! The world is much blinded, that they do not see the great *evil* of *sin*, and the *beauty* and *excellency* of *holiness*; but that men should be so infatuated, as to change the nature of things, and to mistake things of so vast difference, as *sin* and *holiness*; to call good evil, and evil

evil good; that *sin*, which is the vilest thing in the world, should be esteemed and cherish'd, accounted a piece of gallantry, and reckon'd amongst the excellencies and accomplishments of human nature; and *holiness*, which is so great a perfection, should be a name of hatred and disgrace, to be contemned and persecuted; that that which is the glory of heaven, and the most radiant perfection of the divine nature, should be matter of scorn and contempt, as the Apostle speaks in another case, *Behold! ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.* Do ye think the holy and just God will put up these affronts, and indignities? Ye do not only despise *men*, but ye despise God also. You cannot condemn that which God accounts *his glory*, without reviling the divine nature, and offering despite to God himself. The malice reacheth heaven, and is levell'd against God, whenever ye slight *holiness*.

4. If God be a *holy* God, and hath such a repugnancy in his nature to sin, then this is matter of terror to wicked men. The *holy* God cannot but hate sin, and be an enemy to wickedness; and the hatred of God is terrible. We dread the hatred of a great man, because where hatred is back'd with power, the effects of it are terrible. But the hatred of the almighty and eternal God, is much more dreadful, because the effects of it are greater, and more lasting, than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We know the utmost they can do, *they can but kill the body*; after that, *they have no more that they can do*; they cannot hurt our souls; they cannot follow us beyond the grave, and pursue us into another world: But the effects of God's hatred and displeasure are mighty and lasting, they extend themselves to all eternity; for who knoweth the power of his anger? Who can tell the utmost of what omnipotent justice can do to sinners? *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; because he that *lives for ever*, can *punish for ever*. We are miserable, if God do not love us. Those words, *my soul shall have no pleasure in him*, signify great misery, and express a dreadful curse; but it is a more positive expression of misery, for God *to hate us*; that signifies ruin and destruction to the utmost, *Psal. v. 4. Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee.* This is a *misnomer*, and expresseth less than is intended. God is far from being of an indifferent negative temper towards sin and wickedness; therefore the Psalmist adds, *thou hatest all the workers of iniquity*; and then in the next *verse*, to shew what is the effect of God's hatred, *thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing.* Therefore, sinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of God's *holiness*.

5. Imitate the *holiness* of God; this is the inference here in the text, *be ye holy; for I am holy.* *Holiness*, in one word, contains all the imitable perfections of God; and when it is said, *be ye holy*, 'tis as much as if he had said, be ye good, and patient, and mercifull, and true, and faithfull; for I am so. Therefore religion is call'd the *knowledge of the holy one*, *Prov. ix. 10.* and *Chap. xxx. 3.* And our imitation of God is expressed by our *putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*, *Eph. iv. 24.* Seeing then this is the chief excellency and perfection of God, and the sum of all the perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like God, let us conform our selves to the *holy* God; endeavour to be *habitually holy*, which is our conformity to the *nature* of God; and *actually holy*, which is our conformity to the *will* of God. I will not enlarge upon this, because I have press'd the imitation of these particular perfections, goodness, patience, justice, truth, and faithfulness upon other texts. I shall only mention *two* Arguments, to excite and quicken our desires, and endeavour after *holiness*.

1. *Holiness* is an imitation of the *highest* excellency and perfection. *Holiness*, I told you, signifies a separation from sin and vice, and all moral imperfection, and consequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral perfections of the divine nature, the goodness, and mercy, and patience, and justice, and veracity, and faithfulness of God; now these are the very *beauty* and *glory* of the divine nature. The first thing that we attribute to God, next to his *being*, is his *goodness*, and those other *attributes* which have a necessary connection with it; his *greatness* and *majesty* is nothing else but the *glory* which results from his

his *united perfections*, especially from his goodness, and those perfections which are a-kin to it. Separate from God these perfections, which holiness includes in it, and what would be left but an *omnipotent evil*, an eternal being, infinitely knowing, and infinitely able to do mischief? which is as plain and notorious a contradiction, and as impossible a thing as can be imagin'd; so that if we have any sparks of ambition in us, we cannot but aspire after *holiness*, which is so great an excellency and perfection of God himself. There is a vulgar prejudice against *holiness*, as if it were a poor mean thing, and below a great and generous spirit; whereas *holiness* is the only true greatness of mind, the most genuine nobility, and the highest gallantry of spirit; and however it be despised by men, it is of a heavenly extraction, and divine original. *Holiness* is the first part of the character of *the wisdom that is from above*. Jam. iii. 17. *The wisdom that is from above, is first pure; then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

2. *Holiness* is an *essential and principal ingredient of happiness*. *Holiness* is a state of peace and tranquility, and the very frame and temper of *happiness*: and without it, the divine nature, as it would be imperfect, so it would be miserable. If the divine nature were capable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injustice, or unfaithfulness, it would be liable to vexation and discontent, than which nothing can be a greater disturbance of *happiness*: so that *holiness* is necessary to our felicity and contentment; not only to the *happiness* of the next life, but to our present peace and contentment. If reasonable creatures could be happy, as brute beasts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved appetites, and following the dictates of sense and fancy, God would not have bound us up to a *law and rule*, but have left us as he hath done unreasonable creatures, to satisfy our lusts and appetites, without check and controul: but angels and men, which are reasonable creatures, have the notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of comeliness and filthiness, so woven and twisted in their very natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruin of their beings; and therefore it is impossible that such creatures should be happy otherwise, than by complying with these notions, and obeying the natural dictates and suggestions of their minds; which if they neglect, and go against, they will naturally feel remorse and torment in their own spirits; their minds will be uneasy and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and displeased with themselves for what they have done. So the Apostle tells us, *Rom. i.* That even the most degenerate heathens had *consciences*, which did *accuse, or excuse them*, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of natural light. God, therefore, who *knows our frame*, hath so adapted his *law* to us, which is *the rule of holiness*, that if we live up to it, we shall avoid the unspeakable torment of a guilty conscience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we shall always be at discord with our selves, and in a perpetual disquiet of mind; for nothing can do contrary to *the law of its being*, that is, *to its own nature*, without displeasure and reluctance, the consequence of which, in *moral actions*, is *guilt*, which is nothing else, but the trouble and disquiet which ariseth in ones mind, from consciousness of having done something that contradicts the perfective principle of his being, that is, something which did not become him, and which, being what he is, that is, *a reasonable creature*, he ought not to do.

So that in all *reasonable* creatures there is a certain kind of *temper and disposition* that is *necessary and essential to happiness*, and that is *holiness*; which as it is the *perfection*, so it is the great *felicity* of the divine nature: And on the contrary, this is one chief part of the misery of those wicked accursed spirits the devils, and of unholy men, that they are of a temper contrary to God, they are envious, and malicious, and wicked, that is, of such a temper as is naturally a torment and disquiet to it self: and here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil dispositions of our spirits, and till *that* be cured, which can only be done by *holiness*, 'tis as impossible for a wicked man to be happy and contented in himself, as it is for a sick man to be at ease; and the external presence of God,

and

and local heaven would signify no more to make a wicked man happy and contented, than heaps of gold, and comforts of musick, and a well-spread table, and a rich bed, would contribute to a man's ease in the paroxysms of a fever, or in a violent fit of the stone. If a sensual, or covetous, or ambitious man were in heaven, he would be like *the rich man in hell*, he would be *tormented* with a continual *thirst*, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent desires, and would not meet with the least *drop* of suitable pleasure and delight, to *quench* and *allay* the heat; the reason is, because such a man hath *that* within him, which torments him, and he cannot be at ease till *that* be removed. *Sin* is the violent and unnatural, and uneasy state of our soul, every wicked man's spirit is out of order, and till the man be put into a right frame by *holiness*, he will be perpetually disquieted, and can have no rest within himself. The Prophet fitly describes the condition of such a person, *Isa. lvii. 20, 21. But the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt: there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.* So long as a man is unholy, so long as filthiness and corruption abound in his heart, they will be restlessly working, like wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged it self of its dregs and foulness. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the spirit of a wicked man; it is like the *sea*, when it roars and rages through the strength of contrary winds; it is the scene of furious lusts and wild passions, which as they are contrary to holiness, so they maintain perpetual contests and feuds among themselves.

All sin separates us from God, who is the foundation of our happiness. Our limited nature, and the narrowness of our beings will not permit us to be happy in ourselves: it is peculiar to God to be his own happiness; but man, because he is finite, and therefore cannot be self-sufficient, is carried forth by an innate desire of happiness, to seek his felicity in God. So that there is in the nature of man a spring of restless motion, which with great impatience forceth him out of himself, and tosses him to and fro, till he comes to rest in something that is self-sufficient. Our souls, when they are separated from God, like *the unclean spirit* in the gospel, when it was *cast out*, *wander up and down in dry and desert places, seeking rest, but finding none.* Were the whole world calm about a man, and did it not make the least attempt upon him, were he free from the fears of divine vengeance, yet he could not be satisfied with himself; there is something within him that would not let him be at rest, but would tear him from his own foundation and consistency; so that when we are once broken off from God, the sense of inward want doth stimulate and force us to seek our contentment elsewhere. So that nothing but *holiness*, which re-unites us to God, and restores our souls to their primitive and original state, can make us *happy*, and give peace and rest to our souls. And this is the constant voice and language of scripture, and the tenor of the bible. *Acquaint thy self with God, that thou mayest be at peace, Job xxii. 21. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart, Ps. xcvi. 11. The work of righteousness is peace, and the effects of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever, Isa. xxxii. 17.*

Seeing then *holiness* is so high a perfection, and so great a happiness, let these arguments prevail with us, to aspire after this temper, that *as he who hath called us is holy, so we may be holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy.*

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

THE following sermon was placed here, before the rest of the sermons on the *attributes*, to make up the sixth volume in *octavo*; and is continued here still on account of the *Table*.

S E R M O N LXXXIX.

Of doing Good.

GALAT. VI. 9, 10.

Being a
Spittal
Sermon
preach'd
at Christ-
Church on
Easter-
Tuesday,
April 14.
1691.

Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not : As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

THE Apostle in these words recommends unto us a great and comprehensive duty, *the doing of good*; concerning which the text offers these *five* particulars to our consideration.

I. The nature of the duty it self, which is called *well doing*, v. 9. and *doing good*, v. 10.

II. The extent of this duty in respect of its object, which is all mankind, *Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them, who are of the household of faith.*

III. The measure of it, *as we have opportunity.*

IV. Our unwearied perseverance in it; *let us not be weary in well doing.*

V. The argument and encouragement to it, because *in due season we shall reap, if we faint not : Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good, &c.*

I. I will consider the nature of the duty it self; of *well doing*, and *doing good*. And this I shall explain to you as briefly as I can, by considering the extent of the act of doing good, and the excellency of it. And,

1. The extent of the act. It comprehends in it all those ways wherein we may be beneficial and usefull to one another. It reaches not only to the bodies of Men, but to their souls, that better and more excellent part of our selves, and is conversant in all those ways and kinds, whereby we may serve the temporal or spiritual good of our neighbour, and promote either his present, or his future and eternal happiness.

To instruct the ignorant, or reduce those that are in error, *to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, and reclaim those that are engaged in any evil course, by good counsel, and seasonable admonition, and by prudent and kind reproof; to resolve and satisfy the doubting mind; to confirm the weak; to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort the melancholy and troubled spirits: These are the noblest ways of charity, because they are conversant about the souls of men, and tend to procure and promote their eternal felicity.

And then *to feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, release the imprisoned*; to redeem the captives, and to vindicate those who are injur'd and oppress'd in their persons, or estates, or reputation; to repair those who are ruin'd in their fortunes; and, in a word, to relieve and comfort those who are in any kind of calamity or distress.

All these are but the several branches and instances of this great duty here in the text, of *doing good*; tho' it hath, in this place, a more particular respect to the charitable supply of those, who are in want and necessity; and therefore with a more particular regard to that, I shall discourse of it at this time. You see the extent of the duty. We will in the

2. Place, briefly say something of the excellency of it, which will appear, if we consider, that it is the imitation of the highest excellency and perfection. To do good, is to be like God, who *is good, and doth good*; and it is to be like to him

him, in that which he esteems his greatest glory. It is to be like the son of God, who, when he was pleased to take our nature upon him, and live here below, and to dwell amongst us, *went about doing good*. And it is to be like the blessed angels, the highest rank and order of God's creatures; whose great employment it is to be *ministring spirits, for the good of men*. So that for a man to be kind, and helpfull, and beneficial to others, is to be a good angel, and a saviour, and a kind of god too.

It is an argument of a great, and noble, and generous mind, to extend our thoughts and cares to the concernments of others, and to employ our interest, and power, and endeavours for their benefit and advantage; whereas a low, and mean, and narrow spirit, is contracted and shrivel'd up within it self, and cares only for its own things, without any regard to the good and happiness of others.

It is the most noble work in the world, because that inclination of mind, which prompts us to do good, is the very temper and disposition of *happiness*. *Solomon*, after all his experience of worldly greatness and pleasure, at last pitched upon this, as the great felicity of human life, and the only good use that is to be made of a prosperous and plentiful fortune. *Eccles. iii. 12. I know*, says he, (speaking of riches) *that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoyce and do good in his life*. And certainly the best way to take joy in an estate, is to do good with it; and a greater and wiser than *Solomon* has said it, even he *who is the power and wisdom of God* has said it, that *it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive*.

Consider farther, that this is one of the great and substantial parts of religion, and next to the love and honour, which we pay to Almighty God, the most acceptable service that we can do to him; it is one table of the law, and next to the *first and great commandment* of *loving the Lord our God*, and very like to it. *And the second is like unto it*, (says our Saviour) *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*; like to it in the excellency of it; and equal to it, in the necessary obligation of it. *For this commandment* (says *St. John, 1 Epist. Chap. iv. v. 21.*) *we have from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also*. The first commandment indeed excell's in the dignity of the object, because it enjoins the love of God; but the second seems to have the advantage in the reality of its effects: for the love of God consists in our acknowledgment, and honour of him; but our *righteousness and goodness extends not to him*; we can do him no real benefit and advantage: But our love to men is really usefull and beneficial to them; for which reason God is contented in many cases, that the external honour and worship which he requires of us by his positive commands, should give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another. *I will have mercy* (says God in the Prophet *Amos*) *and not sacrifice*.

And to shew how great a value God puts upon this duty, he hath made it the very testimony of our love to himself; and for want of it, hath declared that he will reject all our other professions and testimonies of love to him as false and insincere. *Whoso hath this world's good*, (saith *St. John, 1 Epist. iii. 17.*) *and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?* And again, *chap. iv. ver. 20. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?*

You see the duty here recommended, both in the extent and in the excellency of it; *let us do good*. I proceed to consider, in the

II. Place, the extent of this duty, in respect of its object, which is all mankind, but more especially christians, those that are of the same faith and religion. *Let us do good unto all men, especially unto those that are of the household of faith*. So that the object, about which this duty is conversant, is very large, and takes in all mankind; *let us do good unto all men*. The *Jews* confined their love and kindness to their own kindred and nation; and because they were prohibited

hibited familiarity with idolatrous nations, and were enjoyned to maintain a perpetual enmity with *Amalek*, and the seven nations of *Canaan*, whom God had cast out before them, and devoted to ruin ; they looked upon themselves as perfectly discharg'd from all obligation of kindness to the rest of mankind : And yet it is certain, that they were expressly enjoyn'd by their law, to be kind to strangers, because they themselves had been strangers in the land of *Egypt*. But our Saviour hath restored this law of love and charity to its natural and original extent ; and hath declared every one that is of the same nature with our selves, to be our *neighbour* and our *brother* ; and that he is to be treated by us accordingly, whenever he stands in need of our kindness and help ; and to shew that none are out of the compass of our charity, he hath expressly commanded us to extend it to those, who of all others can least pretend to it, even our *enemies* and *persecutors*.

So that if the question be about the extent of our charity in general, these *two* things are plainly enjoyned by the christian religion.

1. Negatively, that we should not hate, nor bear ill-will to any man, nor do him any harm or mischief. *Love worketh no evil to his neighbour*, (saith the Apostle) *Rom. xiii. 10.* And this negative charity every man may exercise towards all men, without exception, and that equally, because it does not signify any positive act, but only that we abstain from enmity and hatred, from injury and revenge, which it is in every man's power, by the grace of God, and the due care and government of himself, to do.

2. Positively, the law of charity requires, that we should bear an universal good-will to all men, and wish every man's happiness, and pray for it, as sincerely as we wish and pray for our own ; and if we be sincere in our wishes, and prayers for the good of others, we shall be so in our endeavours to procure and promote it.

But the great difficulty is, as to the exercise of our charity, and the real expressions and effects of it, in doing good to others ; which is the duty here meant in the text, and (as I told you before) does more particularly relate to the relief of those who are in want and necessity. And the reason of the difficulty is, because no man can do good to all in this kind, if he would ; it not being possible for any man to come to the knowledge of every man's necessity and distress ; and if he could, no man's ability can possibly reach to the supply and the relief of all mens wants. And indeed this limitation the text gives to this duty ; *as we have opportunity* (says the Apostle) *let us do good unto all men* ; which either signifies, as occasion is offered, or as we have ability of doing, or both ; as I shall shew afterwards.

So that it being impossible to exercise this charity to all men that stand in need of it, 'tis necessary to make a difference, and to use prudence and discretion in the choice of the most fit and proper objects. We do not know the wants of all men, and therefore the bounds of our knowledge do of necessity limit our charity within a certain compass ; and of those whom we do know, we can relieve but a small part for want of ability ; from whence it follows, that tho' a man were never so charitably disposed, yet he must of necessity set some rules to himself, for the management of his charity to the best advantage. What those rules are, cannot minutely and nicely be determined : when all is done, much must be left to every man's prudence and discretion, upon a full view and consideration of the case before him, and all the circumstances of it ; but yet such general rules may be given, as may serve for the direction of our practice in most cases ; and for the rest, every man's prudence, as well as it can, must determine the matter. And the rules which I shall give, shall be these :

First, Cases of extremity ought to take the first place, and do for that time challenge precedence of all other considerations. If a person be in great and present distress, and his necessity so urgent, that if he be not immediately relieved he must perish ; this is so violent a case, and calls so loud for present help, that there is no resisting of it, whatever the person be ; though a perfect stranger to us, though most unworthy, though the greatest enemy we have in the world,

world, yet the greatness of his distress does so strongly plead for him, as to silence all considerations to the contrary; for after all, he is a *man*, and is of the same nature with our selves, and the consideration of *humanity* ought, for that time, to prevail over all objections against the man, and to prefer him to our charity, before the nearest relation and friend, who is not in the like extremity. In other cases, we not only may, but ought to relieve our friends, and those that have deserved well of us in the first place: But if our enemy be in extremity, then that divine precept takes place, *If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.*

Secondly, In the next place, I think, that the obligation of nature, and the nearness of relation, does challenge a preference; for there is all the reason in the world, if other things be equal, that we should consider and supply the necessity of those, who are of our blood and kindred, and members of our family, before the necessity of strangers, and those who have no relation to us. There is a special duty incumbent upon us, and another obligation beside that of charity, to have a particular care and regard for them. In this case not only christianity, but nature ties this duty upon us, 1 *Tim.* v. 8. *If any man provide not for his own, especially for his domesticks, for them that are of his family, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel;* that is, he doth not only offend against the law of christianity, but against the very dictates of nature, which prevail even amongst infidels. And our Saviour hath told us, that when our parents stand in need of relief, it is more acceptable to God, to employ our estates that way, than to devote them to him, and his immediate service; and that it is a kind of sacrilege to consecrate that to God, whereby our parents may be profited, and provided for in their necessity.

Thirdly, The obligation of kindness, and benefits, lays the next claim to our charity. If they fall into want, who have obliged us by their former kindness and charity, both justice and charity do challenge from us a particular consideration of their case; and proportionably, if we our selves have been obliged to their family, or to any other that are nearly related to them.

Fourthly, Those who are of the household of faith, and of the same religion, and members of the same mystical body, and do partake of the same holy mysteries, the body and blood of our blessed Saviour, the strictest bond of love and charity; these fall under a very particular consideration in the exercise of our charity. And of this the Apostle puts us in mind, in the last words of my text; *let us do good unto all men, especially unto those that are of the household of faith.* God hath a special love and regard for such; and those whom God loves, ought to be very dear to us.

And this perhaps, was a consideration of the first rank in those times, when christians liv'd among heathens, and were exposed to continual wants and sufferings; but it signifies much less now, that christianity is the general profession of a nation, and is too often made use of to very uncharitable purposes; to confine men's bounty and benefits to their own sect and party, as if they, and none but they, were *the household of faith*; a principle, which I know not whether it hath more of *judaism* or of *popery* in it.

Fifthly, After these, the merit of the persons, who are the objects of our charity, and all the circumstances belonging to them, are to be valu'd and consider'd, and we accordingly to proportion our charity, and the degrees of it. I shall instance in some particulars, by which a prudent man may judge of the rest.

Those who labour in an honest calling, but yet are oppress'd with their charge, or disabled for a time by sickness, or some other casualty; these many a time need as much, and certainly deserve much better than common beggars; for these are usefull members of the common-wealth; and we cannot place our charity better, than upon these, who do what they can to support themselves.

Those likewise who are fallen from a rich and plentiful condition, without any fault or prodigality of their own, merely by the providence of God, or
some

some general calamity ; these are more especially objects of our charity, and liberal relief.

And those also, who have been charitable, and have liberally relieved others, when they were in condition to do it ; or the children, or near relations of those who were eminently charitable and beneficial to mankind, do deserve a particular regard in our charity. Mankind being (as I may say) bound in justice, and for the honour of God's providence, to make good his promise, to preserve such from extream necessity.

And *lastly*, those, whose visible wants, and great age and infirmities to plead for more than ordinary pity, and do, at first sight, convince every one that sees them, that they do not beg out of laziness, but of necessity, and because they are not able to do any thing towards their own support and subsistence.

There are innumerable circumstances more, which it would be endless to reckon up ; but these which I have mentioned are some of the chief, and by proportion to these, we may direct our selves in other cases.

Sixthly, Those whom we certainly know to be true objects of charity, are to be consider'd by us, before those who are strangers to us, and whose condition we do not know, yea, tho' in common charity we do not disbelieve them ; because in reason and prudence we are obliged to prefer those, who are certainly known to us, since we find by experience, that there are many cheats and counterfeit beggars, who can tell their story, and carry about testimonials of their own making ; and likewise because we run the hazard of misplacing our charity, when there are objects enough besides, where we are sure we shall place it right : And charity misplaced, as it is in truth and reality no charity in it self, so it is hardly any in us, when we squander it so imprudently, as to pass by a certain and real object, and give it those of whom we are not certain that they are true objects of charity. In this blind way a man *may give all his goods to the poor*, as he *thinks*, and yet do no real charity. And therefore, unless we be able to relieve *every one that asks*, we must of necessity make a difference, and use our best prudence in the choice of the most proper objects of our charity.

And yet we ought not to observe this rule so strictly, as to shut out all whom we do not know, without exception : because their case, if it be true, may sometimes be much more pitiable, and of greater extremity, than the case of many whom we do know ; and then it would be uncharitable to reject such, and to harden our hearts so far against them as utterly to disbelieve them ; because it is no fault of theirs, that we do not know them ; their wants may be real, notwithstanding that ; especially when their extremity seems great, we ought not to stand upon too rigorous a proof and evidence of it, but should accept of a fair probability.

Seventhly, Those who suffer for the cause of religion, and are stripp'd of all for the sake of it, ought to have a great precedence in our charity to most other cases. And this of late hath been, and still is, the case of many among us, who have fled hither for refuge, from the tyranny and cruelty of their persecutors, and have been by a most extraordinary charity of the whole nation, more than once extended to them, most seasonably reliev'd ; but especially by the bounty of this great city, whose liberality, upon these occasions, hath been beyond all example, and even all belief. And I have often thought, that this very thing, next to the mercy and goodness of Almighty God, hath had a particular influence upon our preservation and deliverance from the terrible calamities, which were just ready to break in upon us ; and, were we not so stupidly insensible of this great deliverance which God hath wrought for us, and so horribly unthankfull to him, and to the happy instruments of it, might still be a means to continue the favour of God to us. And what cause have we to thank God, who hath allotted to us this *more blessed*, and more mercifull part, *to give*, and not *to receive* ; to be free from persecution our selves, that we might give refuge and relief to those that are persecuted !

III. We must consider the measure of our charity, *ὡς κατὰ τὴν ἐξουσίαν*, which our translation renders, *as we have opportunity* ; others, *as we have ability* : So that this

this expression may refer, either to the occasions of our charity, or to the season of it, or to the proportion and degree of it.

1. It may refer to the occasions of our charity, *as we have opportunity, let us do good*, that is, according as the occasions of doing good shall present themselves to us, so often as an opportunity is offer'd. And this is an argument of a very good and charitable disposition, gladly to lay hold of the occasions of doing good, as it were to meet opportunities when they are coming towards us. This forwardness of mind in the work of charity, the Apostle commends in the *Corinthians*, 2 Cor. ix. 2. *I know the forwardness of your minds, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia*: And this he requires of all Christians, *Tit.* iii. 10. That they should *be ready to do every good work*; and 1 Tim. vi. 18. That we be *ready to distribute, willing to communicate*. Some are very ready to decline these opportunities, and to get out of the way of them; and when they thrust themselves upon them, and they cannot avoid them, they do what they do *grudgingly*, and not *with a willing mind*.

2. It may refer to the season of this duty, *ὡς καὶ ὥς ἔχομεν*, whilst we have time, *ὡς* for *ἔως*, whilst this life lasts; so *Grotius* does understand, and interpret this phrase; and then the Apostle does hereby intimate to them, the uncertainty of their lives, especially in those times of persecution. And this consideration holds in all times in some degree, that our lives are short and uncertain, that it is but a little while that we can serve God in this kind, namely, while we are in this world, in this vale of misery and wants. In the next world there will be no occasion, no opportunity for it; we shall then have nothing to do, but to reap the reward of the good we have done in this life, and to receive that blessed sentence from the mouth of the great judge of the world, *Come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat, &c. And euge bone serve! Well done, good and faithful servant! thou hast been faithful in a little, and I will make thee ruler over much.* God will then declare his bounty and goodness to us, and open those inexhaustible treasures of glory and happiness, which all good men shall partake of in proportion to the good which they have done in this world. Or else,

3. (Which I take to be the most probable meaning of this phrase) It may refer to the degree of this duty in proportion to our ability and estate; as we have ability, *let us do good unto all men*. And this the phrase will bear, as learned men have observ'd; and it is very reasonable to take it in this sense, at least as part of the meaning of it, either express'd or imply'd. For without this we cannot exercise charity, tho' there were never so many occasions for it; and then this precept will be of the same importance with that of the son of *Sirach*, *Eccl.* xxxv. 10. *Give unto the most high according as he hath enriched thee*; and with that counsel, *Tob.* iv. 7. *Give alms, ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, according to thy substance*, and ver. 8. *If thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly*. And this may be reasonably expected from us; for where-ever his providence gives a man an estate, it is but in trust for certain uses and purposes, among which charity and alms is the chief: And we must be accountable to him, whether we have disposed it faithfully to the ends for which it was committed to us. It is an easy thing with him to level mens estates, and to give every man a competency; but he does on purpose suffer things to be distributed so unequally, to try and exercise the virtues of men in several ways; the faith and patience of the poor, the contentedness of those in a middle condition, the charity and bounty of the rich. And in truth, wealth and riches, that is, an estate above what sufficeth our real occasions and necessities, is in no other sense *a blessing*, than as it is an opportunity put into our hands, by the providence of God, of doing more good; and if we do not faithfully employ it to this end, it is but a temptation and a snare; *and the rust of our silver and our gold will be a witness against us*; and we do but *heap up treasures together against the last day*.

But what proportion our charity ought to bear to our estates, I shall not undertake to determine. The circumstances of men have too much variety in
them

them to admit of any certain rule ; some may do well, and others may do better ; every man as God hath put into his heart, and according to his belief of *the recompense which shall be made at the resurrection of the just*. I shall only say in general, that *if there be first a free and willing mind*, that will make a man charitable to his power ; for *the liberal man will devise liberal things*. And we cannot propose a better pattern to our selves in this kind, than the King and Queen, who are, as they ought to be (but as it very seldom happens) the most bright and shining examples of this greatest of all graces and virtues, charity and compassion to the poor and persecuted. I proceed to the

IV. Thing considerable in the text, *viz.* Our unwearied perseverance in this work of doing good, *let us not be weary in well-doing*. After we have done some few acts of charity, yea, tho' they should be very considerable, we must not sit down and say we have done enough. There will still be new objects, new occasions, new opportunities for the exercise of our charity, springing up and presenting themselves to us. Let us never think, that we can do enough in the way of doing good. The best and the happiest beings are most constant and unwearied in this work of doing good. The holy angels of God are continually employed in *ministring* for the good of *those, who shall be heirs of salvation* : And the son of God, when he appear'd in our nature, and *dwelt among us*, that he might be a perfect and familiar example to us of all holiness and virtue, *he went about doing good* to the bodies, and to the souls of men. How diligent and unwearied was he in this work ! It was his employment and his pleasure, his *meat and drink*, the joy and the life of his life. And God himself, tho' he is infinitely and perfectly good in himself, yet he still continues *to do good*, and is never weary of this blessed work. It is the nature, and the perfection, and the felicity of God himself ; and how can we be weary of that work, which is an imitation of the highest excellency and perfection, and the very essence of happiness ?

V. And lastly, here is the argument and encouragement to the chearful discharge of this duty, *because in due season we shall reap, if we faint not ; therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men. In due season we shall reap*, that is, sooner or later, in this world, or in the other, we shall receive the full reward of our well-doing.

And now I have explain'd this duty to you, as plainly and briefly as I could, the hardest part of my task is yet behind, to persuade men to the practice of it ; and to this purpose I shall only insist upon the promise in the text, *be not weary in well-doing, for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not* : We shall reap the pleasure and satisfaction of it in our own minds, and all the other mighty advantages of it in this world, and the vast and unspeakable reward of it in the other.

First, We shall reap the pleasure and satisfaction of it in our own minds ; and there is no sensual pleasure that is comparable to the delight of doing good. This *Cato* makes his boast of, as the great comfort and joy of his old age, *Conscientia bene actæ vitæ, multorumque benefactorum recordatio jucundissima*. The remembrance of a well spent life, and of many benefits and kindnesses done by us to others, is one of the most pleasant things in the world. Sensual pleasures soon die and vanish ; but that is not the worst of them, they leave a sting behind them, and when the pleasure is gone, nothing remains but guilt, and trouble, and repentance : Whereas the reflection upon any good we have done, is a perpetual spring of peace and pleasure to us, and no trouble and bitterness ensues upon it ; the thoughts of it lye even and easy in our minds, and so often as it comes to our remembrance, it ministers fresh comfort to us.

Secondly, We shall likewise reap other mighty advantages by it in this world. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing on our estates. What we give in alms and charity is consecrated to God, and is one of the chiefest and most acceptable sacrifices in the christian religion ; so the Apostle tells us, *Heb. xiii. 16. To do good, and to communicate, forget not ; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased*. It is like the first fruits under the law, which being dedicated and offered up to God, did derive a blessing upon their whole harvest.

And

And it procures for us also the blessing and prayers of those, to whom we extend our charity ; their blessing, I say, upon us and ours, and all that we have ; and is it a *small thing in our eye, to have* (as *Job* speaks) *the blessing of them, who are ready to perish, to come upon us ? The fervent prayer of the poor for us availeth much ; for God hath a special regard to the prayers of the destitute ; and his ear is open to their cry.*

Few men have faith to believe it, but certainly charity is a great security to us in the times of evil, and that not only from the special promise and providence of God, which is engaged to preserve those from want, who are ready to relieve the necessity of others. *Prov. xi. 25. The liberal soul shall be made fat ; and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself.* And *Prov. xxviii. 27. He that giveth to the poor shall not lack : He shall not be afraid in the evil time, and in the days of dearth he shall be satisfied,* says the Psalmist. But besides the promise and providence of God, our charity and alms are likewise a great security to us, from the nature and reason of the thing it self. Whosoever is charitable to others, does wisely bespeak the charity and kindness of others for himself, against the day of necessity ; for there is nothing that makes a man more, and surer friends than our bounty ; this will plead for us, and stand our friend in our greatest troubles and danger ; for a good man, saith the Apostle, that is, for one that is ready to oblige others by great kindnesses and benefits, *one would even dare to die.* It has sometimes happened, that the obligation which a man hath laid upon others by a chearfull and seasonable charity, hath in time of danger and extremity done him more kindness, than all his estate could do for him : *Alms,* saith the wise man, *hath delivered from death.*

And in times of public distress, and when we are beset with cruel and powerful enemies, who, *if God were not on our side, would swallow us up quick,* the publick charity of a nation does many times prove its best safeguard and shield. There is a most remarkable passage to this purpose, *Ecclef. xxix. 11, 12, 13. Lay up thy treasure according to the commandment of the most high, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold ; shut up thine alms in thy store-house, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction ; it shall fight for thee against thy enemies, more than a mighty shield and a strong spear.*

And of this I doubt not, but we of this nation, by the great mercy and goodness of Almighty God, have had happy experience in our late wonderfull deliverance, under the conduct and valour of one of the best and bravest of princes, and to whom by too many among us, the most unworthy and unthankfull returns have been made, for the unwearied pains he hath undergone, and for the desperate hazards he hath expos'd himself to for our sakes, that ever were made to so great and generous a benefactor ; so great a benefactor, I say, not only to these nations, but to all *Europe*, in asserting and vindicating their liberties against the insolent tyranny and pride of one of the greatest oppressors of mankind ; of whom I may say, as *Job* does of the Leviathan, *Job xli. 33, 34. Upon the earth is not his like ; he beholdeth all high things, and is the king of all the children of pride.*

And beyond all this, the blessing of God does descend upon the posterity of those, who are eminently charitable, and great benefactors to mankind. This *David* observes in his time ; *I have been young,* (says he) *and now am old ; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread ;* and what he means by the righteous man, he explains in the next words, *he is ever mercifull and lendeth.*

I shall only add upon this head, that the practice of this virtue will be one of our best comforts at the hour of death, and that we shall then look back upon all the good we have done in our life with the greatest contentment and joy imaginable. *Xenophon* in his *Cyrus*, which he design'd for the perfect idea of a good prince, represents him in the last minutes of his life, addressing himself to God to this purpose : *Thou knowest that I have been a lover of mankind ; and now that I am leaving this world, I hope to find that mercy from thee, which I have shewed to others.* These words that excellent heathen historian thought fit to come from the mouth

of so excellent a prince, as he had describ'd him just as he was leaving the world ; by which we may see, what the light of nature thought to be the best comfort of a dying man. This brings me to the

Third and last particular which I mentioned, the vast and unspeakable reward, which this grace and virtue of charity will meet in the other world. It will plead for us at the day of judgment, and procure for us a most glorious *recompense at the resurrection of the just*, and that proportionable to the degrees of our charity ; 2 Cor. ix. 6. *He which soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly : and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully :* and from this consideration, the Apostle encourageth our perseverance in well-doing, *let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not ;* that is, we shall certainly meet with the reward of it, if not in this world, yet in the other.

And now that I have declar'd this duty to you, together with the mighty pleasure, and advantages, and rewards of it, I crave leave to present you with some of the best occasions, and opportunities of the exercise and practice of it. And for your encouragement hereto, I shall read to you the present state of the chief hospitals belonging to this great city, and of the disposal of their charity for the last year.

And now I have laid before you these great objects of your charity, and the best arguments I could think of to incline and stir up your minds to the exercise of this excellent grace and virtue ; as there is no time left for it, I having, I am afraid already tir'd your patience, so I hope there is no need to press this duty any farther upon you, since you are so willing and forward of your selves, and so very ready to every good work. This great city hath a double honour due to it, of being both the greatest benefactors in this kind, and the most faithfull managers, and disposers of it ; and I am now in a place most proper for the mention of *Christ's Hospital*, a protestant foundation of that most pious and excellent prince *Edward VI.* which I believe is one of the best instances of so large and so well-manag'd a charity this day in the world.

And now to conclude all ; if any of you know any better employment than *to do good* ; any work that will give truer pleasure to our minds ; that hath greater and better promises made to it, the *promises of the life that now is, and that which is to come* ; that we shall reflect upon with more comfort, when we come to dye ; and that through the mercies and merits of our blessed Saviour, will stand us in more stead at the day of judgment, let us mind that work : but if we do not, let us apply our selves to this business of charity, with all our might, and *let us not be weary in well-doing, because in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

Now the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will through Jesus Christ : To whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever. Amen.

S E R M O N XC.

The Goodness of God.

P S A L. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

THE subject which I have now propos'd to treat of is certainly one of the greatest and noblest arguments in the world ; *the goodness of God ;* the highest and most glorious perfection of the best and most excellent of beings, than which nothing deserves more to be considered by us, nor ought

ought in reason to affect us more. *The goodness of God* is the cause, and the continuance of our beings, the foundation of our hopes, and the foundation of our happiness, our greatest comfort, and our fairest example, the chief object of our love and praise, and admiration, the joy and rejoycing of our hearts; and therefore the meditation and discourse of it must needs be pleasant and delightful to us; the great difficulty will be to confine our selves upon so copious an argument, and to set bounds to that which is of so vast an extent, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

Which words are an argument, which the divine Psalmist useth, to stir up himself and others to the praise of God: At the 3d verse he tells us, that *the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised*; and he gives the reason of this, verse 8, and 9, from those properties and perfections of the divine nature, which declare his goodness; *the Lord is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy; the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works*; where you have the goodness of God declared, together with the amplitude and extent of it, in respect of the objects of it; *the Lord is good to all.*

In the handling of this argument, I shall do these four things.

First, Consider what is the proper notion of *goodness*, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, Shew that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Consider the effects and the extent of it.

Fourthly, Answer some objections which may seem to contradict and bring in question the *goodness of God.*

First, What is the proper notion of *goodness*, as it is attributed to God.

There is a dry *metaphysical* notion of *goodness*, which only signifies the *being* and *essential properties* of a thing; but this is a good word ill bestowed; for in this sense, every thing that hath *being*, even the devil himself, is good.

And there is a *moral* notion of *goodness*; and that is twofold.

1. More general, in opposition to all moral evil and imperfection, which we call sin and vice; and so the *justice*, and *truth*, and *holiness* of God, are in this sense his *goodness*. But there is,

2. Another notion of *moral* goodness, which is more particular and restrained; and then it denotes a particular virtue in opposition to a particular vice; and this is the proper and usual acceptation of the word *goodness*; and the best description I can give of it is this; that it is *a certain propension and disposition of mind, whereby a person is inclined to desire and procure the happiness of others*; and it is best understood by its contrary, which is an envious disposition, a contracted and narrow spirit, which would confine happiness to it self, and grudgeth that others should partake of it, or share in it; or a malicious and mischievous temper, which delights in the harms of others, and to procure trouble and mischief to them. To communicate and lay out our selves for the good of others, is *goodness*; and so the Apostle explains *doing good*, by *communicating* to others, who are in misery, or in want, *Heb. xiii. 16. but to do good and to communicate forget not.* The Jews made a distinction between a *righteous* and a *good* man; to which the Apostle alludes, *Rom. v. 7. Scarcely for a righteous man, will one die; yet peradventure for a good man, one would even dare to die.* The *righteous* man was he, that did no wrong to others; and the *good* man he, who was not only not injurious to others, but kind and beneficial to them. So that *goodness* is a readiness and disposition to communicate the good and happiness which we enjoy, and to be willing others should partake of it.

This is the notion of *goodness* among men; and 'tis the same in God, only with this difference, that God is originally and transcendently good; but the creatures are the best of them, but imperfectly good, and by derivation from God, who is the fountain and original of *goodness*; which is the meaning of our Saviour, *Luke xviii. 19. when he says, there is none good save one, that is God.* But tho' the degrees of *goodness* in God, and the creatures, be infinitely unequal, and that *goodness* which is in us, be so small and inconsiderable, that compared

pared with the goodness of God, it does not deserve that name ; yet the essential notion of *goodness* in both, must be the same ; else when the scripture speaks of the goodness of God, we could not know the meaning of it, and if we do not at all understand what it is for God to be good, it is all one to us (for ought we know) whether he be good or not ; for he may be so, and we never the better for it, if we do not know what goodness in God is, and consequently when he is so, and when not.

Besides, that the goodness of God is very frequently in scripture propounded to our imitation ; but it is impossible for us to imitate that, which we do not understand what it is ; from whence it is certain, that the goodness which we are to endeavour after, is the same that is in God, because in this we are commanded to imitate the perfection of God, that is, to be good and mercifull as he is, according to the rate and condition of creatures, and so far as we, whose natures are imperfect, are capable of resembling the *divine goodness*.

Thus much for the notion of *goodness* in God, it is a *propension and disposition in the divine nature, to communicate being and happiness to his creatures*.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, in the next place, that this perfection of *goodness* belongs to God ; and that from these *three* heads.

I. From the acknowledgment of natural light.

II. From the testimony of scripture and divine revelation. And,

III. From the perfection of the divine nature.

I. From the acknowledgments of natural light. The generality of the heathens agree in it, and there is hardly any perfection of God more universally acknowledged by them. I always except the sect of the *Epicureans*, who attribute nothing but *eternity* and *happiness* to the divine nature ; and yet if they would have consider'd it, *happiness* without *goodness* is impossible. I do not find that they do expressly deny this perfection to God, or that they ascribe to him the contrary ; but they clearly take away all the evidence and arguments of the divine goodness ; for they supposed God to be an immortal and happy being, that enjoyed himself, and had no regard to any thing without himself, that neither gave being to other things, nor concerned himself in the happiness or misery of any of them ; so that their notion of a deity was in truth the proper notion of an idle being, that is called god ; and neither does good nor evil.

But setting aside this atheistical sect, the rest of the heathens did unanimously affirm and believe the goodness of God ; and this was the great foundation of their religion ; and all their prayers to God, and praises of him, did necessarily suppose a persuasion of the divine goodness. Whosoever prays to God, must have a persuasion, or good hopes of his readiness to do him good ; and to praise God, is to acknowledge that he hath received good from him. *Seneca* hath an excellent passage to this purpose, “ He (*says he*) that denies the goodness of God, “ does not surely consider the infinite number of prayers, that with hands lifted “ up to heaven are put up to God, both in private and public ; which certainly “ would not be, nor is it credible, that all mankind should conspire in this mad- “ ness of putting up their supplications to deaf and impotent deities, if they did “ not believe, that the Gods were so good, as to confer benefits upon those who “ prayed to them.

But we need not infer their belief of God's goodness from the acts of their devotion, nothing being more common among them, than expressly to attribute this perfection of goodness to him ; and among the divine titles, this always had the pre-eminence, both among the *Greeks* and *Romans* ; *εὖς τε μέγας τε*, *Deus optimus maximus*, was their constant stile ; and in our language, the name of God seems to have been given him from his *goodness*. I might produce innumerable passages out of the heathen authors to this purpose ; but I shall only mention that remarkable one out of *Seneca*, *primus deorum cultus est deos credere ; deinde reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas*, ‘The “ first act of worship is to believe the being of God ; and the next, to ascribe majesty or greatness to him ; and to ascribe goodness, without which there can be no greatness.

II. From

II. From the testimony of scripture and divine revelation. I shall mention but a few of those many texts of scripture, which declares to us the *goodness of God*. Exod. xxxiv. 6. where God makes his name known to *Moses, the Lord, the Lord God gracious and mercifull, long suffering, abundant in goodness and truth*. Psal. lxxxvi. 5. *Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive*. Pl. cxix. 68. *Thou art good, and doest good*. And that which is so often repeated in the book of Psalms, *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever*. Our blessed Saviour attributes this perfection to God, in so peculiar and transcendent a manner, as if it were incommunicable. Luke x. 19. *There is none good save one, that is God*. The meaning is, that no creature is capable of it, in that excellent and transcendent degree, in which the divine nature is possessed of it.

To the same purpose are those innumerable testimonies of scripture, which declare God to be gracious, and mercifull, and long-suffering; for these are but several branches of his goodness; his *grace* is the freeness of his goodness, to those who have not deserved it; his *mercy* is his goodness to those who are in misery; his *patience* is his goodness to those who are guilty, in deferring the punishment due to them.

III. The goodness of God may likewise be argued from the perfection of the divine nature these two ways;

1. Goodness is the chief of all perfections, and therefore it belongs to God.

2. There are some footsteps of it in the creatures, and therefore it is much more eminently in God.

1. Goodness is the highest perfection, and therefore it must needs belong to God, who is the most perfect of beings. Knowledge and power are great perfections, but separated from goodness, they would be great imperfections, nothing but craft and violence. An angel may have knowledge and power in a great degree, but yet for all that be a devil. Goodness is so great and necessary a perfection, that without it there can be no other, it gives perfection to all other excellencies; take away this, and the greatest excellencies in any other kind, would be but the greatest imperfections. And therefore our Saviour speaks of the goodness and mercy of God, as the sum of his perfections; what one Evangelist hath, *be ye mercifull, as your father which is in heaven is mercifull*, is render'd in another, *be ye therefore perfect, as your father which is in heaven is perfect*. Goodness is so essential to a perfect being, that if we once strip God of this property, we rob him of the glory of all his other perfections; and therefore when *Moses* desired to see God's glory, he said, *he would make all his goodness to pass before him*, Exod. xxxiii. 29. This is the most amiable perfection, and as it were the beauty of the divine nature, Zach. ix. 17. *How great is thy goodness, how great is thy beauty? sine bonitate nulla majestas, without goodness there can be no majesty*. Other excellencies may cause fear and amazement in us: but nothing but goodness can command sincere love and veneration.

2. There are some footsteps of this perfection in the creatures, and therefore it must be much more eminently in God. There is in every creature some representation of some divine perfection or other, but God doth not own any creature to be *after his image*, that is destitute of goodness. The creatures that want reason and understanding are incapable of this moral goodness we are speaking of; man is the first in the rank of creatures, that is endowed with it, and he is said to be *made after the image of God, and to have dominion given him over the creatures below him*, to signify to us, that if a man had not been made after God's image, in respect of goodness, he had been unfit to rule over other creatures; because without goodness, dominion would be tyranny and oppression, and the more any creature partakes of this perfection of goodness, the more it resembles God; as the blessed angels, who *behold the face of God continually*, and are thereby *transformed into his image from glory to glory*, their whole business and employment is, *to do good*; and the devil, tho' he resembles God in other Perfections of *knowledge and power*, yet because he is evil, and envious, and mischievous, and so contrary to God in this perfection, he is the most opposite and hateful to him of all creatures whatsoever.

And

And if this perfection be in some degree in the creature, it is much more in God; if it be derived from him, he is much more eminently possessed of it himself. All that goodness which is in the best natured of the sons of men, or in the most glorious angels of heaven, is but an imperfect and weak representation of the divine goodness.

The *third* thing I proposed to consider, was the effects of the divine goodness, together with the large extent of it, in respect of the objects of it, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; thou art good, and doest good*, says *David*, *Psal.* cxix. 68. The great evidence and demonstration of God's goodness, is from the effects of it. To the same purpose *St. Paul* speaks, *Acts* xiv. 17. *He hath not left himself without witness, in that he doth good, and sends us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons.*

I shall consider the effects of the divine goodness, under these *two* heads.

I. The universal extent of God's goodness to all his creatures.

II. I shall consider more particularly the goodness of God to men; which we are more especially concern'd to take notice of.

I. The universal extent of his goodness to the whole creation, *the Lord is good to all*. The whole creation furnisheth us with clear evidences and demonstrations of the divine goodness; which way soever we cast our eyes, we are encountered with undeniable instances of the goodness of God; and every thing that we behold is a sensible demonstration of it; *the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy-work*, says the *Psalmist*, *Psal.* xix. 1. And again, *Psal.* xxxiii. 5. *The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord*. The whole frame of this world, and every creature in it, and all the several degrees of being and perfection, which are in the creatures, and the providence of God towards them all, in the preservation of them, and providing for the happiness of all of them in such degrees as they are capable of it, are a plentiful demonstration of the divine goodness, which I shall endeavour to illustrate in these *four* particulars.

1. The universal goodness of God appears in giving being to so many creatures.

2. In making them all so very good, considering the variety, and order, and end of them.

3. In his continual preservation of them.

4. In providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable and sensible of it.

1. The extent of God's goodness appears in giving being to so many creatures. And this is a pure effect of goodness, to impart and communicate being to any thing. Had not God been good, but of an envious and narrow, and contracted nature, he would have confined all being to himself, and been unwilling, that any thing besides himself should have been; but his goodness prompted him to spread and diffuse himself, and set his power and wisdom on work, to give being to all that variety of creatures, which we see and know to be in the world, and probably to infinite more than we have the knowledge of. Now it is not imaginable, that God could have any other motive to do this, but purely the goodness of his nature. All the motives imaginable besides this, must either be indigency and want, or constraint and necessity; but neither of these can have any place in God; and therefore it was *meer goodness*, that moved him to give being to other things; and therefore all creatures have reason, with the four and twenty elders in the *Revelations*, *to cast their crowns before the throne of God, saying, thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure that is, of meer goodness) they are and were created.*

(1.) Indigency and want can have no place in God; because he that hath all possible perfection, hath all plenty in himself; from whence results all-sufficiency and compleat happiness. So that the divine nature need not look out of it self for happiness, being incapable of any addition to the happiness and perfection it is already possessed of, *ipsa suis pollens opibus nihil indiget nostri*. We make things for our use, houses to shelter us, and cloaths to keep us warm; and we propa-

gate

gate our kind, to perpetuate our selves in our posterity : But all this supposeth imperfection, and want, and mortality, to none of which the divine nature is liable and obnoxious.

Nay, it was not want of glory, which made God to make the world. 'Tis true indeed, the glory of God's goodness doth herein appear, and creatures endow'd with understanding have reason to take notice of it, with thankfulness, praise, and admiration : but there is no happiness redounds to God from it, nor does he feed himself with any imaginary content and satisfaction, such as vain-glorious persons have, from the fluttering applause of their creatures and beneficiaries. God is really *above all blessing and praise*. It is great condescension and goodness in him, to accept of our acknowledgments of his benefits, of our imperfect praises, and ignorant admiration of him ; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us to fally his great and glorious name, by taking it into our mouths ; and were it not for our advantage and happiness, to own and acknowledge his benefits ; for any real happiness and glory that comes to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and dispense with us for ever entertaining one thought of him ; and were it not for his goodness, might despise the praises of his creatures, with infinitely more reason than wise men do the applause of fools. There is indeed one text of scripture, which seems to intimate that God made all creatures for himself, as if he had some need of them, *Prov. xvi. 4. The Lord hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.* Now if by God's *making all things for himself*, be meant, that he aimed at and intended the manifestation of his wisdom and power, and goodness in the creation of the world, 'tis most true, that in this sense *he made all things for himself* : but if we understand it so, as if the goodness of his nature did not move him thereto, but he had some design to serve ends and necessities of his own upon his creatures, this is far from him. But it is very probable, that neither of these are the meaning of this text, which may be render'd with much better sense, and nearer to the *Hebrew* thus, *God hath ordained every thing to that which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordained for the day of evil*; that is, the wisdom of God hath fitted one thing to another, punishment to sin, the evil day to the evil doers.

(2.) Nor can necessity and constraint have any place in God. When there was no creature yet made, nothing in being but God himself, there could be nothing to compell him to make any thing, and to extort from him the effects of his bounty : Neither are the creatures necessary effects and emanations from the being of God, flowing from the divine essence, as water doth from a spring, and as light streams from the sun. If so, this indeed would have been an argument of the *fullness* of the divine nature, but not of the *bounty* and *goodness* of it ; and it would have been matter of *joy* to us that we are, but not a true ground of *thankfulness* from us to God ; as we rejoice and are glad that the sun shines, but we do not give it any thanks for shining, because it shines without any intention or design to do us good ; it doth not know that we are the better for its light, nor did intend we should be, and therefore we have no reason to acknowledge its goodness to us.

But God, who is a spirit endowed with knowledge and understanding, does not act as natural and material causes do, which act *necessarily* and *ignorantly*, whereas he acts *knowingly* and *voluntarily*, with particular *intention* and *design*, knowing that he does good, and intending to do so freely and out of choice, and when he hath no other constraint upon him but this, that his goodness inclines his will to communicate himself to do good : So that the divine nature is under no necessity, but such as is consistent with the most perfect liberty and freest choice.

Not but that goodness is essential to God, and a necessary perfection of his nature, and he cannot possibly be otherwise than good : but when he communicates his goodness, he knows what he does, and wills and chuseth to do so.

And this kind of necessity is so far from being any impeachment of the divine goodness, that it is the great perfection and praise of it. The *Stoic* philosophers mistaking this, do blasphemously advance *their wise and virtuous man* above God himself; for they reason thus, “A wise man is good out of *choice*, when he may be otherwise; but God out of *necessity of nature*, and when he cannot possibly be otherwise than good”. But if they had considered things aright, they might have known, that this is an imperfection in *their wise man*, that he can be otherwise than good; for a power to be evil is impotency and weakness. The highest character that ever was given of a man, is that which *Velleius Paterculus* gives of *Cato*, that he was *vir bonus, quia aliter esse non potuit, a good man, because he could not be otherwise*; this applied to a mortal man, is a very extravagant and undue commendation; but it signifies thus much, that it is the highest perfection, not to be able to be otherwise than good; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, that *goodness is essential to it*; but the expressions and communications of his goodness are spontaneous and free, designed and directed by infinite knowledge and wisdom.

This is the *first*; the *second* particular is, that God hath made all creatures very good, considering the variety, and order, and end of them. But this I shall reserve to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XCI.

The Goodness of God.

P S A L. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

IN the handling of this argument, I proposed to do these *four* things :
First, To consider what is the proper notion of goodness, as it is attributed to God.

Secondly, To shew that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, To consider the effects of the divine goodness together with the large extent of it, in respect of its objects. And,

Fourthly, To answer some objections which may seem to contradict, and bring in question the goodness of God.

I have considered the *two* first; and in speaking to the *third*, I proposed the considering these *two* things.

I. The universal extent of God's goodness to all his creatures.

II. More especially the goodness of God to man, which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and be affected with.

The *first* of these appears in these *four* particulars.

1. In his giving being to so many creatures.
2. In making them all so very good, considering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and design of all of them.
3. In his continual preservation of them.
4. In his providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable and sensible of it.

The *first* of these I spoke largely to; I proceed to shew in the

2. Place, That the universal goodness of God appears, in making all these creatures so very good, considering the number and variety, the rank and order,

der, the end and design of all of them. His goodness excited and set a-work his power to make this world, and all the creatures in it; and that they might be made in the best manner that could be, his wisdom directed his power, *he hath made all things in number, weight and measure*; so that they are admirably fitted and proportioned to one another: And that there is an excellent contrivance in all sorts of beings, and a wonderful beauty and harmony in the whole frame of things, is, I think, sufficiently visible to every discerning and unprejudiced mind. The lowest form of creatures, I mean those which are destitute of sense, do all of them contribute some way or other to the use, and conveniency, and comfort of the creatures above them, which being endowed with sense, are capable of enjoying the benefit and delight of them, which being so palpable in the greatest part of them, may reasonably be presumed, tho' it be not so discernible concerning all the rest; so that when we survey the whole creation of God, and the several parts, we may well cry out with *David*, Psal. civ. 24. *O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all!*

'Tis true indeed, there are degrees of perfection in the creatures, and God is not equally good to all of them. Those creatures which are of more noble and excellent natures, and to which he hath communicated more degrees of perfection, they partake more of his *goodness*, and are more glorious instances of it: But every creature partakes of the divine goodness in a certain degree, and according to the nature and capacity of it. God, if he pleased, could have made nothing but immortal spirits; and he could have made as many of these as there are individual creatures of all sorts in the world: but it seemed good to the wise Architect, to make several ranks and orders of beings, and to display his power, and goodness, and wisdom, in all imaginable variety of creatures; all which should be good in their kind, tho' far short of the perfection of angels and immortal spirits.

He that will build a house for all uses and purposes of which a house is capable, cannot make it all foundation, and great beams and pillars; must not so contrive it, as to make it all rooms of state and entertainment; but there must of necessity be in it meaner materials, rooms and offices for several uses and purposes, which however inferior to the rest in dignity and degree, do yet contribute to the beauty and advantage of the whole. So in this great frame of the world, it was fit there should be variety and different degrees of perfection in the several parts of it; and this is so far from being an impeachment of the wisdom or goodness of him that made it, that it is an evidence of both: For the meanest of all God's creatures is good, considering the nature and rank of it, and the end to which it was designed; and we cannot imagine how it could have been ordered and framed better, tho' we can easily tell how it might have been worse, and that if this or that had been wanting, or had been otherwise, it had not been so good; and those who have been most conversant in the contemplation of nature, and of the works of God, have been most ready to make this acknowledgment.

But then if we consider the creatures of God, with relation to one another, and with regard to the whole frame of things, they will all appear to be very good; and notwithstanding *this* or *that* kind of creatures be much less perfect than another, and there be a very great distance between the perfection of a *worm*, and of an *angel*; yet considering every thing in the rank and order which it hath in the creation, it is as good as could be, considering its nature and use, and the place allotted to it among the creatures.

And this difference in the works of God, between the goodness of the several parts of the creation, and the excellent and perfect goodness of the whole, the scripture is very careful to express to us in the history of the creation, where you find God represented, as first looking upon, and considering every day's work by it self, and approving it, and pronouncing it to be good, *Gen. i. 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 24.* at the end of every day's work, it is said that *God saw it, and it was good*: but then when all was finished, and he surveyed the whole together, it is said, *ver. 31.* that *God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good; very*

good, that is, *the best*; the *Hebrews* having no other superlative. Every creature of God by it self is *good*: but take the whole together, and they are *very good*, the best that could be.

3. The universal goodness of God farther appears, in the carefull and continual preservation of the things which he hath made; his upholding and maintaining the several creatures in being, in their natural state and order; those which have life, in life, to the period which he hath determined and appointed for them; in his preserving the whole world, his managing and governing this vast frame of things, in such sort, as to keep it from running into confusion and disorder. This is a clear demonstration, no less of the goodness than of the wisdom and power of God, that for so many ages all the parts of it have kept their places, and perform the offices and work for which nature designed them; that the world is not, in the course of so many thousand years, grown old and weak, and out of repair, and that the frame of things doth not dissolve and fall in pieces.

And the goodness of God doth not only take care of the main, and support the whole frame of things, and preserve the more noble and considerable creatures, but even the least and meanest of them. The providence of God doth not overlook any thing that he hath made, nor despise any of the works of his hands, so as to let them relapse, and fall back into nothing, thro' neglect and inadvertency; as many as there are, he takes care of them all, *Psal. civ. 27, 28.* where the Psalmist speaking of the innumerable multitude of creatures upon the earth, and in the sea, *These all* (saith he) *wait upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season; that thou givest them, they gather; thou openest thy hand, and they are filled with good.* And to the same purpose, *Psal. cxlv. 15, 16.* *The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season; thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.* The inanimate creatures, which are without sense; and the brute creatures, which tho' they have sense, are without understanding, and so can have no end and design of self-preservation, God preserves them, no less than men who are endowed with reason and foresight to provide for themselves; *Psal. xxxvi. 7.* *Thou preservest man and beast.* And *Psal. cxlvii. 9.* *He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens when they cry.* And so our Saviour declares to us the particular providence of God towards those creatures, *Mat. vi. 26.* *Behold the fowls of the air, for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them,* ver. 28, 29. *Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.*

And tho' all the creatures below man, being without understanding, can take no notice of this bounty of God to them, nor make any acknowledgments to him for it; yet *man*, who is the *priest* of the visible creation, and placed here in this great temple of the world, to offer up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, for his universal goodness to all his creatures, ought to bless God in their behalf, and to sing praises to him, in the name of all the inferior creatures, which are subjected to his dominion and use; because they are all as it were his family, his servants and utensils; and if God should neglect any of them, and suffer them to perish and miscarry, 'tis we that should find the inconvenience and want of them; and therefore we should on their behalf celebrate the praises of God; as we find *David* often does in the *Psalms*, calling upon the inanimate and the brute creatures to praise the Lord.

4. The universal goodness of God doth yet farther appear; in providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all his creatures, so far as they are capable and sensible of it. He doth not only support and preserve his creatures in being, but takes care that they should all enjoy that happiness and pleasure, which their natures are capable of. The creatures endowed with sense and reason, which only are capable of pleasure and happiness, God hath taken care to satisfy the several appetites and inclinations which he hath planted in them; and according as nature hath enlarged their desires and capacities, so he enlargeth his bounty towards them; *he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living*

living thing. God doth not immediately bring meat to the creatures, when they are hungry; but it is near to them, commonly in the elements wherein they are bred, or within their reach, and he hath planted inclinations in them to hunt after it, and to lead and direct them to it, and to encourage self-preservation, and to oblige and instigate them to it; and that they might not be melancholy and weary of life, he hath so ordered the nature of living creatures, that hunger and thirst are most implacable desires, exceeding painfull, and even intolerable; and likewise that the satisfaction of these appetites should be a mighty pleasure to them. And for those creatures that are young, and not able to provide for themselves, God hath planted in all creatures a *σφρη*, a natural affection towards their young ones, which will effectually put them upon seeking provisions for them, and cherishing them, with that care and tenderness which their weak and helpless condition doth require; and reason is not more powerfull and effectual in mankind to this purpose, than this *natural instinct* is in brute creatures; which shews what care God hath taken, and what provision he hath made in the natural frame of all his creatures, for the satisfaction of the inclinations and appetites which he hath planted in them; the satisfaction whereof is their pleasure and happiness. And thus I have done with the *first* head I proposed, the universal extent of God's goodness to his creatures; let us now proceed in the

II. Place, to consider more particularly the goodness of God to *men*; which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and to be affected with it. And we need go no farther than our own observation and experience, to prove the goodness of God; every day of our lives, *we see and taste that the Lord is good*, all that we are, and all the good that we enjoy, and all that we expect and hope for, is from the divine goodness, *every good and perfect gift descends from above, from the father of lights*, Jam. i. 17. And the best and most perfect of his gifts he bestows on the sons of men. What is said of the *wisdom* of God, *Prov. viii.* may be applied to his *goodness*; the goodness of God shines forth in all the works of the creation, in the heavens and clouds above, and in the fountains of the great deep, in the earth and the fields, but *its delight is with the sons of men*. Such is the goodness of God to *man*, that it is represented to us in scripture, under the notion of *love*. God is good to all his creatures, but he is only said to *love the sons of men*. More particularly the goodness of God to man appears,

I. That he hath given us such noble and excellent beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his creatures. We owe to him *that we are*, and *what we are*; we do not only partake of that effect of his goodness which is common to us with all other creatures, that we have received our being from him; but we are peculiarly obliged to him, for his more especial goodness, that he hath made us *reasonable* creatures, of that kind which we should have chosen to have been of, if we could suppose, that before we were, it had been referr'd to us, and put to our choice, what part we would be of this visible world. But we did not contrive and chuse this condition for our selves, we are no ways accessary to the dignity and excellency of our beings; but God chose this condition for us, and made us what we are; so that we may say with *David*, Psal. c. 3, 4, 5. *'Tis he that hath made us, and not we our selves. O enter then into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankfull unto him, and speak good of his name, for the Lord is good.* The goodness of God is the spring and fountain of our beings; but for *that* we had been nothing; and but for this farther goodness, we might have been any thing, of the lowest and meanest rank of his creatures. But the goodness of God hath been pleased to advance us to be the top and perfection of the visible creation; he hath been pleased to endow us with mind and understanding, and made us capable of happiness in the knowledge, and love, and enjoyment of himself. He hath curiously and wonderfully wrought the frame of our bodies, so as to make them fit habitations for reasonable souls, and immortal spirits; he hath made our very bodies vessels of honour, when of the very same clay he hath made innumerable other creatures, of a much lower rank and condition; so that tho' man in respect of his body be a-kin to the earth,

earth, yet in regard of his soul, he is allied to heaven, of a divine original, and descended from above. Of the creatures in this visible world, man is the chief; and what is said of *behemoth*, or the elephant, *Job* xlii. in respect of his great strength, and the vast bigness of his body, is only true absolutely of man, that he is, *divini opificii caput, the chief of the ways of God, and upon earth there is none like him.*

The Psalmist takes particular notice of the goodness of God to man, in this respect of the excellency and dignity of his being, *Psal.* viii. 5. *Thou hast made him little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.* And this advantage of our nature above other creatures, we ought thankfully to acknowledge; tho' most men are so stupid, as to overlook it, as *Elibu* complains, *Job* xxxv. 10, 11. *None saith, where is God my maker? who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven.*

2. The goodness of God to man appears, in that he hath made and ordained so many things chiefly for our use. The beauty and usefullness of the creatures below us, their plain subserviency to our necessity, and benefit, and delight, are so many clear evidences of the divine goodness to us, not only discernable to our reason, but even palpable to our senses, so that we may *see and taste that the Lord is gracious.*

This *David* particularly insists upon as a special ground of praise and thanksgiving to God, that he hath subjected so great a part of the creation to our dominion and use; *Psal.* viii. 6, 7, 8. speaking of man, *Thou hast made him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.* What an innumerable variety of creatures are there in this inferior world, which were either solely or principally made for the use and service, pleasure and delight of man! How many things are there, which serve for the necessity and support, for the contentment and comfort of our lives! How many things for the refreshment and delight of our senses, and the exercise and employment of our understandings! That God hath not made man for the service of other creatures, but other creatures for the service of man, *Epietus*, doth very ingeniously argue from this observation; that the creatures below man, the brute beasts, have all things in a readiness, nature having provided for them meat, and drink, and lodging, so that they have no absolute need that any should build houses, or make cloaths, or store up provision, or prepare and dress meat for them; for, says he, *being made for the service of another, they ought to be furnished with these things, that they may be always in a readiness to serve their lord and master; a plain evidence that they were made to serve man, and not man to serve them.*

And to raise our thoughts of God's goodness to us the sons of men yet higher, as he hath given us the creatures below us for our use and convenience; so hath he appointed the creatures above us for our guard and protection, not to say for our service. *Psal.* xxxiv. 7. *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and he delivereth them;* and then it follows, *O taste and see that the Lord is good.* And *Psal.* xci. 11, 12. *He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear up in their hands.* Nay, the Apostle speaks, as if their whole business and employment were to attend upon and be serviceable to good men, *Heb.* i. 14. *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them, who shall be heirs of salvation?*

The goodness of God to men appears, in his tender love and peculiar care of us, above the rest of the creatures, being ready to impart and dispense to us the good that is suitable to our capacity and condition; and concerned to exempt us from those manifold evils of want and pain, to which we are obnoxious. I do not mean an absolute exemption from all sorts and degrees of evil, and a perpetual tenor of temporal happiness, and enjoyment of all good things; this is not suitable to our present state, and the rank and order which we are in among the creatures; nor would it be best for us, all things consider'd. But the goodness of God to us above other creatures, is proportionable to the dignity and excellency

cellency of our natures above them ; for as the Apostle reasons in another case, *doth God take care for oxen*, and shall he not much more extend his care to man ? To this purpose our Saviour reasons, *Mat. vi. Behold the fowls of the air, they sow not, neither do they reap, and yet your heavenly father takes care of them ; are not ye much better than they ?* And v. 30. *Wherefore if God so cloath the grass of the field, shall he not much more cloath you ?* And chap. x. 29. *Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? And one of them shall not fall on the ground, without your father. But the very hairs of your head are all number'd. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.* 'Tis true, God hath a special care of his people and servants, above the rest of mankind ; but our Saviour useth these arguments to his disciples, to convince them of the providence of God towards them, as *men*, and of a more excellent nature than other creatures.

And indeed we are born into the world more destitute and helpless, than other creatures ; as if it were on purpose to shew, that God had reserved us for his more peculiar care and providence ; which is so great, that the scripture, by way of condescension, expresth it to us by the name of *love* ; so that what effects of care the greatest and tenderest affection in men is apt to produce towards one another, that and much more, is the effect of God's goodness to us ; and this affection of God is common to all men (tho' of all creatures we have least deserved it) and is ready to diffuse and shed abroad itself, where-ever men are qualified for it by duty and obedience, and do not obstruct and stop the emanations of it, by their sins and provocations.

And tho' the greatest part of mankind be evil, yet this doth not wholly put a stop to his goodness, tho' it cause many abatements of it, and hinder many good things from us ; but such is the goodness of God, notwithstanding the evil and undutifulness of men, that he is pleas'd still to concern himself, in the government of the world, and to preserve the societies of men from running into utter confusion and disorder ; notwithstanding the violence and irregularities of mens wills and passions, the communities of men subsist upon tolerable terms ; and notwithstanding the rage and craft of evil men, poor and unarmed innocence and virtue is usually protected, and sometimes rewarded in this world ; and domineering and outrageous wickedness is very often remarkably checked and chastised. All which instances of God's providence ; as they are greatly for the advantage and comfort of mankind, so are they an effectual declaration of that goodness which governs all things, and of God's kind care of the affairs and concernments of men ; so that if we look no farther than this world, we may say with *David, Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth the earth.*

I know this argument hath been perverted to a quite contrary purpose ; that if goodness govern'd the world, and administr'd the affairs of it, good and evil would not be so carelessly and promiscuously dispensed ; good men would not be so great sufferers, nor wicked men so prosperous as many times they are.

But this also, if rightly consider'd, is an effect of *God's goodness*, and infinite *patience* to mankind ; that *he causeth his sun to rise, and his rain to fall upon the just and unjust.* That upon the provocations of men, he does not give over his care of them, and throw all things into confusion and ruin ; this plainly shews, that he designs this life for the tryal of mens virtue and obedience, in order to the greater reward of it ; and therefore *he suffers men to walk in their own ways*, without any great check and controul, and reserves the main bulk of rewards and punishments for another world : So that all this is so far from being any objection against the *goodness of God*, that on the contrary, it is an argument of God's immense *goodness*, and infinite *patience*, that the world subsists and continues, and that he permits Men to take their course, for the fuller tryal of them, and the clearer and most effectual declaration of his justice, in the rewards and punishments of another life.

Fourthly, and lastly, The goodness of God to mankind most gloriously appears, in the provision he hath made for our *eternal happiness*. What the happiness of man should have been, had he continued in innocency, is not particularly

larly revealed to us; but this is certain, that by willfull transgressions, we have forfeited all that happiness which our natures are capable of. In this lapsed and ruinous condition of mankind, the goodness and mercy of God was pleased to employ his wisdom for our recovery, and to restore us, not only to a new, but a greater capacity of *glory* and *happiness*. And in order to this, the son of God assumes our nature, for the recovery and redemption of man; and the pardon of sin is purchased for us by his blood; *eternal life*, and the way to it, are clearly discover'd to us. God is pleased to enter into a new and better covenant with us, and to afford us inward grace and assistance, to enable us to perform the conditions of it; and graciously to accept of our *faith* and *repentance*, of our sincere resolutions and endeavours of holiness and obedience, for *perfect* and *complete righteousness*, for his sake who *fulfilled all righteousness*.

This is the great and amazing *goodness* of God to mankind, that when we were in open rebellion against him, he should entertain thoughts of peace and reconciliation; and when he past by the fallen angels, he should set his affection and love upon the sinfull and miserable sons of men. And *herein is the love of God to men perfected*, that as he hath made all creatures, both above us, and below us, subservient and instrumental to our subsistence and preservation; so, for the ransom of our souls from eternal ruin and misery, *he hath not spared his own son, but hath given him up to death for us*; him, whom *he hath commanded all the angels of God to worship*, and to whom he hath made subject all creatures in heaven and earth; him, *who made the world, and who upholds all things by the word of his power, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*.

And after such a stupendous instance as this, what may we not reasonably hope for, and promise our selves from the divine goodness! So the Apostle hath taught us to reason, *Rom. viii. 32. He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

S E R M O N XCII.

The Goodness of God.

P S A L. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

IN handling this argument, I proceed in this method.

First, To consider what is the proper notion of goodness.

Secondly, To shew that this perfection of goodness belongs to God.

Thirdly, I considered the effects of the divine goodness under these heads.

I. The universal extent of it, in the number, variety, order, end, and design of the things created by him, and his preservation and providing for the welfare and happiness of them.

II. I considered more particularly the goodness of God *to mankind*, of which I gave these four instances.

1. That he hath given us such noble beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his creatures.

2. In that he hath made and ordained so many things chiefly for us.

3. In that he exerciseth so peculiar a providence over us above the rest, that tho' he is said *to be good to all*, he is only said *to love the sons of men*.

4. In that he hath provided for us eternal life and happiness. There only now remains the

Fourth and last particular to be spoken to, which was to answer some objections

ctions which may seem to contradict and bring in question the goodness of God ; and they are many, and have (some of them especially) great difficulty in them, and therefore it will require great consideration and care, to give a clear and satisfactory answer to them, which undoubtedly they are capable of ; the goodness of God being one of the most certain and unquestionable truths in the world. I shall mention those which are most considerable and obvious, and do almost of themselves spring up in every man's mind, and they are these *four*, the *first* of them more general, the other *three* more particular.

First, If God be so exceeding good, whence comes it to pass, that there is so much evil in the world, of several kinds ; evil of imperfection, evil of affliction or suffering, and (which is the greatest of all others, and indeed the cause of them) evil of sin ?

Secondly, The doctrine of *absolute reprobation* ; by which is meant, the decreeing of the greatest part of mankind to eternal misery and torment, without any consideration or respect to their sin or fault ; this seems notoriously to contradict, not only the notion of infinite goodness, but any competent measure and degree of goodness.

Thirdly, The eternal misery and punishment of men for temporal faults, seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of goodness, which we suppose to be in God.

Fourthly, The instances of God's great severity to mankind upon occasion, in those great calamities, which by the providence of God hath in several ages either befall'n mankind in general, or particular nations ; and here I shall confine my self to scripture instances, as being the most certain and remarkable, or at least equal to any that are to be met with in history ; as the early and universal degeneracy of mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first parents ; the destruction of the world by a general deluge ; the sudden and terrible destruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, and the cities about them, by fire and brimstone from heaven ; the cruel extirpation of the *Canaanites*, by the express command of God, and lastly, the great calamities which befell the *Jewish* nation, and the final ruin and perdition of them at the destruction of *Jerusalem*.

These are the objections against the goodness of God, which I shall severally consider, and with all the brevity and clearness I can, endeavour to return a particular answer to them.

The *first* objection, which I told you is more general, is this, if God be so exceeding good, whence then comes it to pass, that there is so much evil in the world of several kinds ? 'Tis evident beyond denial, that evil abounds in the world. *The whole world lies in evil*, says *S. John*, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, *lies in the wickedness* (so our translation renders it) is involved in sin ; but by the article and opposition *St. John* seems to intend *the devil*. *We know*, says he, *that we are of God, and the whole world, ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται, is subject to the evil one*, and under his power and dominion. Which way soever we render it, it signifies, that evil of one kind or other reigns in the world. Now can evil come from a good God ? *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing ? Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter ? This cannot be*, as *St. James* speaks in another case. But all evils that are in the world, must either be directly *procured* by the divine providence, or *permitted* to happen ; and next to the *causing* and *procuring* of evil, it seems to be contrary to the goodness of God, to *permit* that there should be any such thing, when it is in his power to help and hinder it.

Answer. To give an account of this, it was an antient doctrine of some of the most antient nations, that there were two first causes or principles of all things, the one of good things, the other of bad ; which among the *Persians* were called *Oromasdes* and *Arimanius* ; among the *Egyptians*, *Osiris* and *Typhon* ; among the *Chaldeans*, good or bad planets ; among the *Greeks*, *Zōs* and *Adys* ; *Plutarch* expressly says, that the *good principle* was called *God*, and the *bad*, *Dæmon* or *the Devil* ; in conformity to which antient traditions, the *Manichees* (a sad sect of christians) set up two principles, the one infinitely good, which they supposed to be the original cause of all good that is in the

world; the other infinitely evil, to which they ascribed all the evils that are in the world.

But besides that the notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, it would be to no purpose to suppose two opposite principles of equal power and force. That the very notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, will be very clear, if we consider, that what is infinitely evil, must be infinitely imperfect, and consequently infinitely weak; and for that reason, tho' never so mischievous and malicious, yet being infinitely weak, and ignorant, and foolish, would neither be in a capacity to contrive mischief, nor to execute it. But admit, that a being infinitely mischievous, were infinitely cunning, and infinitely powerfull, yet it could do no evil; because the opposite principle of infinite goodness, being also infinitely wise and powerfull, they would tie up one anothers hands; so that upon this supposition, the notion of a deity would signify just nothing, and by virtue of the eternal opposition and equality of these two principles, they would keep one another at a perpetual bay, and being an equal match for one another, instead of being two deities, they would be two idols, able to do neither good nor evil.

But to return a more distinct and satisfactory answer to this objection; there are three sorts of evil in the world; the evil of imperfection; the evil of affliction and suffering; and the evil of sin.

And *1st*, For the evil of imperfection, I mean natural imperfections, these are not simply and absolutely, but only comparatively evil; now comparative evil is but a less degree of goodness; and it is not at all inconsistent with the goodness of God, that some creatures should be less good than others, that is, imperfect in comparison of them: nay, it is very agreeable both to the goodness and wisdom of God, that there should be this variety in the creatures, and that they should be of several degrees of perfection, being made for several uses and purposes, and to be subservient to one another, provided they all contribute to the harmony and beauty of the whole.

Some imperfection is necessarily involved in the very nature and condition of a creature, as that it derives its being from another, and necessarily depends upon it, and is beholden to it, and is likewise of necessity finite and limited in its nature and perfections; and as for those creatures which are less perfect than others, this also that there should be degrees of perfection, is necessary, upon supposition, that the wisdom of God thinks fit to display it self in variety of creatures of several kinds and ranks. For tho' comparing the creatures with one another, the angelical nature is best and most perfect; yet it is absolutely best, that there should be other creatures besides angels. There are many parts of the creation, which are rashly and inconsiderately by us concluded to be evil and imperfect, as some noxious and hurtfull creatures, which yet in other respects, and to some purposes, may be very usefull, and against the harm and mischief whereof we are sufficiently armed, by such means of defence, and such antidotes as reason and experience are able to find and furnish us withall; and those parts of the world, which we think of little or no use, as rocks and deserts, and that vast wilderness of the sea, if we consider things well, are of great use to several very considerable purposes; or if we can discern no other use of them, they serve at least to help our dullness, and to make us more attentively to consider, and to admire the perfection and usefullness of the rest; at the worst, they may serve for foils to set off the wise order and contrivance of other things, and (as one expresseth it very well) they may be like a blackmoor's head in a picture, which gives the greater beauty to the whole piece.

2^{dly}, For the evils of affliction and suffering; and these either befall brute creatures, or men endow'd with reason and consideration.

1st, For those which befall the brute creatures; those sufferings which nature inflicts upon them are very few; the greatest they meet withall are from men, or upon their account, for whose sake they were chiefly made, and to whose reasonable use and gentle dominion they are consigned.

It is necessary from the very nature of these creatures, that they should be passive and liable to pain : and yet it doth in no wise contradict either the wisdom or goodness of God to make such creatures, because all these pains are for the most part fully recompensed, by the pleasure these creatures find in life ; and that they have such a pleasure and happiness in life, is evident, in that all creatures, notwithstanding the miseries they endure, are still fond of life, and unwilling to part with it : no creature but man (who only hath perverted his nature) ever seeks the destruction of it self ; and since all brute creatures are so loath to go out of being, we may probably conclude, that if they would deliberate, whether they would be or not, they would chuse to come into being, even upon these hard conditions.

But however that be, this we are sure of, that they suffer chiefly from us, and upon our account ; we who are their natural lords, having depraved our selves first, are become cruel and tyrannical to them ; nay, the scripture tells us, that they suffer for our sakes, and *the whole creation groaneth, and is in bondage for the sin of man*. And this is not unreasonable, that being made principally for man, they should suffer upon his account, as a part of his goods and estate ; not as punishment to them (which under the notion of *punishment*, they are not capable of) but as a punishment to him who is the lord and owner of them, they being by this means become more weak and frail, and less usefull and serviceable to him for whom they were made ; so that the sufferings of the creatures below us, are in a great measure to be charged upon us, under whose dominion God hath put them.

2dly, As for the afflictions and sufferings which befall men, these are not natural and of God's making, but the result and fruit of our own doings, the effects and consequences of the ill use of our own liberty and free choice ; and God does not willingly send them upon us, but we willfully pull them down upon our selves ; for *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*, as the Prophet tells us, *Lam. iii. 33*. Or as it is in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, chap. i. 12, 13. *God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living ; but men pull destruction upon themselves, with the works of their own hands*. All the evils that are in the world, are either the effects of their own sin, as poverty, and disgrace, pains, diseases, and death, which are sometimes more immediately inflicted upon men, by a visible providence and hand of God, but are usually brought upon us by ourselves, in the natural course and order of things ; or they are the effects of other mens sins, brought upon us by the ambition and covetousness, by the malice and cruelty of others ; and these evils, tho' they are procured and caused by others, yet they are deserved by our selves ; and tho' they are immediately from the hand of men, yet we ought to look farther, and consider them, as directed and disposed by the providence of God ; as *David* did when *Shimei* cursed him ; *God* (saith he) *hath bid him curse David*, tho' it immediately proceeded from *Shimei's* insolence and ill-nature.

Now upon the supposition of sin, the evils of affliction and suffering are good, because they are of great use to us, and serve to very good ends and purposes.

1. As they are proper punishments of sin. Evil is good to them that do evil, that is, it is fit and proper, just and due, *Psal. cvii. 17*. *Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted*. And it is fit they should be so, crooked to crooked, is streight and right. *A rod for the back of fools*, saith *Solomon* ; and elsewhere, *God hath made every thing for that which is fit for it, and the evil day for the wicked man*.

2dly, As they are the preventions and remedies of greater evils. Evils of affliction and suffering are good for wicked men, to bring them to a sense of their sin, and to reclaim them from it, and thereby to prevent greater temporal evils, and preserve them from eternal misery ; and not only good to the person that suffers, but likewise to others, to deter and affright them from the like sins ; to prevent the contagion of sin, and to stop the progress of iniquity, upon which greater guilt, and worse mischiefs might ensue ; and they are good to

good men, to awaken and rouse them out of their security, to make them know God and themselves better; they are almost a necessary discipline for the best of men, much more for evil and depraved dispositions; and we might as reasonably expect, that there should be no rod in a school, as that there should be no suffering and afflictions in the world.

3dly, As they are the occasions and matter of many virtues. God teacheth men temperance by want, and patience by reproach and sufferings, charity by persecution, and pity and compassion to others by grievous pains upon our selves. The benefit of afflictions to them that make a wise use of them is unspeakable; they are *grievous* in themselves, *nevertheless* (saith the Apostle to the *Hebrews*) *they bring forth the peaceable fruits of righteousness, to them that are exercised therewith.* David gives a great testimony of the mighty benefit and advantage of them from his own experience, *Psal. cxix. 76. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.* And, ver. 71. *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.*

4thly, The evils of suffering, patiently submitted to, and decently born, do greatly contribute to the increase of our happiness. All the persecutions and sufferings of good men in this life, *do work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* And if they contribute to our greater good and happiness at last, they are good. The glorious reward of the sufferings which we have met with in this life, will in the next clear up the goodness and justice of the divine providence, from all those mists and clouds which are now upon it, and fully acquit it from those objections which are now raised against it, upon account of the afflictions and sufferings of good men in this life, which *are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in them.*

III. As for the evil of sin, which is the great difficulty of all. How is it consistent with the goodness of God, to permit so great an evil as this to come into the world? For answer to this, I desire these *two* things may be considered.

1. That it doth not at all contradict the wisdom or goodness of God, to make a creature of such a frame, as to be capable of having its obedience tryed in order to the reward of it; which could not be, unless such a creature were made mutable, and by the good or bad use of its liberty, capable of obeying or disobeying the laws of his creator; for where there is no possibility of sinning, there can be no tryal of our virtue and obedience, and nothing but virtue and obedience are capable of reward. The goodness of God towards us is sufficiently vindicated, in that he made us capable of happiness, and gave us sufficient direction and power for the attaining of that end; and it does in no wise contradict his goodness, that he does not by his omnipotency interpose to prevent our sin; for this had been to alter the nature of things, and not to let man be the creature he made him, capable of reward or punishment, according to the good or bad use of his own free choice. It is sufficient that God made man good at first, tho' mutable, and that he had a power to have continued so, tho' he willfully determined himself to evil; this acquits the goodness of God, that *he made man upright, but he found out to himself many inventions.*

2. If there had not been such an order and rank of creatures, as had been in their nature mutable, there had been no place for the manifestation of God's goodness in a way of mercy and patience; so that tho' God be not the author of the sins of men, yet in case of their willfull transgression and disobedience, the goodness of God hath a fair opportunity of discovering it self, in his patience and long-suffering to sinners, and in his mercifull care and provision for their recovery out of that miserable state. And this may suffice for answer to the *first* objection, if God be so good, whence then comes evil?

The *second* objection against the goodness of God, is from the doctrine of *absolute reprobation*; by which I mean the decreeing the greatest part of mankind to eternal misery and torment, without any consideration or respect to their sin and fault. This seems not only notoriously to contradict the notion of infinite goodness, but to be utterly inconsistent with the least measure and degree of goodness. Indeed, if by *reprobation* were only meant, that God in his own infinite

nite knowledge foresees the sins and wickedness of men, and hath from all eternity determined in himself, what in his word he hath so plainly declared, that he will punish impenitent sinners with everlasting destruction : or if by *reprobation* be meant, that God hath not elected all mankind, that is, absolutely decreed to bring them infallibly to salvation ; neither of these notions of *reprobation* is any ways inconsistent with the goodness of God ; for he may foresee the wickedness of men, and determine to punish it, without any impeachment of his goodness : He may be very good to all, and yet not equally and in the same degree : if God please to bring any *infallibly* to salvation, this is transcendent goodness ; but if he put all others into a *capacity* of it, and use *all necessary and fitting means* to make them happy, and after all this, any fall short of happiness through their own willful fault and obstinacy, these men are evil and cruel to themselves, but God hath been very *good* and merciful to them.

But if by *reprobation* be meant, either that God hath decreed, without respect to the sins of men, their absolute ruin and misery ; or that he hath decreed, that they shall inevitably sin and perish ; it cannot be denied, but that such a *reprobation* as this doth clearly overthrow all possible notion of goodness. I have told you, that the true and only notion of *goodness* in God is this, that it is a *propension and disposition of the divine nature, to communicate being and happiness to his creatures* : But surely nothing can be more plainly contrary to a *disposition to make them happy*, than an *absolute decree, and a peremptory resolution to make them miserable*. God is infinitely better than the best of men, and yet none can possibly think *that* man a good man, who should absolutely resolve to disinherit and destroy his children, without the foresight and consideration of any fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the goodness of God ; but it is not an easy matter, to devise to say any thing worse than this of the devil.

But it is said, *reprobation* is an act of *sovereignty* in God, and therefore not to be measured by the common rules of *goodness*. But it is *contrary* to goodness, and plainly *inconsistent* with it ; and we must not attribute such a *sovereignty* to God, as contradicts his *goodness* ; for if the *sovereignty* of God may break in at pleasure upon his other attributes, then it signifies nothing to say, that God is *good*, and *wise*, and *just*, if his *sovereignty* may at any time act contrary to these perfections.

Now if the doctrine of *absolute reprobation*, and the *goodness* of God cannot possibly stand together, the question is, which of them ought to give way to the other ? What St. Paul determines in another case, concerning the *truth* and *fidelity* of God, will equally hold concerning his *goodness* ; *let God be good, and every man a liar*. The doctrine of *absolute reprobation* is no part of the doctrine of the holy scriptures, that ever I could find ; and there's the rule of our faith. If some great divines have held this doctrine, not in opposition to the goodness of God, but hoping they might be reconciled together, let them do it if they can ; but if they cannot, rather let the schools of the greatest divines be call'd in question, than the *goodness* of God, which, next to his *being*, is the greatest and clearest truth in the world.

Thirdly, It is farther objected, that the eternal punishment of men, for temporal faults, seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of goodness, which we suppose to be in God.

This objection I have fully answer'd, in a discourse upon St. *Matth.* xxv. 46. and therefore shall proceed to the

Fourth and last objection, against the *goodness* of God, from sundry instances of God's severity to mankind, in those great calamities which by the providence of God have in several ages either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations.

And here I shall confine my self to scripture-instances, as being most known and most certain and remarkable, or at least equally remarkable with any that are to be met with in any other history ; such are the early and universal degeneracy of all mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first parents ; the destruction of the world by a general deluge ; the sudden and terrible destruction

of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*, and the cities about them, by fire and brimstone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the *Canaanites* by the express command of God; and lastly, the great calamities which befell the *Jewish* nation, especially the final ruin and dispersion of them at the destruction of *Jerusalem*. These, and the like instances of God's severity, seem to call in question his goodness.

Against these severe and dreadful instances of God's severity, it might be a sufficient vindication of his goodness, to say in general, that they were all upon great and high provocations; and most of them after long patience and forbearance, and with a great mixture of mercy, and a declared readiness in God to have prevented or removed them upon repentance; all which are great instances of the goodness of God. But yet for the clearer manifestation of the *divine goodness*, I shall consider them particularly, and as briefly as I can.

1. As for the transgression of our first parents, and the dismal consequences of it to all their posterity. This is a great depth, and tho' the scripture mentions it, yet it speaks but little of it; and in matters of mere revelation, we must not attempt *to be wise above what is written*. Thus much is plain, that it was an act of high and willfull disobedience, to a very plain and easy command, and that in the punishment of it, God mitigated the extremity of the sentence (which was present death) by granting our first parents the reprieve of almost a thousand years; and, as to the consequences of it to their posterity, God did not, upon this provocation, abandon his care of mankind; and tho' he removed them out of that happy state and place in which man was created, yet he gave them a tolerable condition and accommodations upon earth; and, which is certainly the most glorious instance of divine goodness that ever was, he was pleased to make the fall and misery of man the happy occasion of sending his son in our nature, for the recovery and advancement of it to a much happier and better condition than that from which we fell. So the Apostle tells us at large, *Rom. v.* That the grace of God, by Jesus Christ, hath redounded much more to our benefit and advantage, than the sin and disobedience of our first parents did to our prejudice.

2. For the general deluge, tho' it look very severe, yet if we consider it well, we may plainly discern much of goodness in it. It was upon great provocation, by the universal corruption and depravation of mankind. *The earth was filled with violence, and all flesh had corrupted its ways; the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*; which is not a description of original sin, but of the *actual* and *improved* wickedness of mankind: and yet when the wickedness of men was come to this height, God gave them fair warning, before he brought this calamity upon them, *when the patience of God waited in the days of Noah*, for the space of *an hundred and twenty years*; at last, when nothing would reclaim them, and almost the whole race of mankind were become so very bad, that it is said, *it repented the Lord that he had made man upon the earth, and it grieved him at his heart*; when things were thus extremely bad, and like to continue so, God in pity to mankind, and to put a stop to their growing wickedness and guilt, swept them away all at once from the face of the earth, except one family, which he had preserved from this contagion, to be a new seminary of mankind, and, as the heathen poet expresseth it, *Mundi melioris origo, the source and original of a better race*.

3. For that terrible destruction of *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* by fire and brimstone from heaven, it was not brought upon them till *the cry of their sin was great, and gone up to heaven*; till by their unnatural lusts they had provoked supernatural vengeance. And it is very remarkable, to what low terms God was pleased to condescend to *Abraham* for the sparing of them; if in those *five* cities there had been found *but ten righteous persons*, he would not have destroyed them for those *ten's* sake. So that we may say with the Apostle, *Behold the goodness and severity of God!* Here was wonderfull goodness mixed with this great severity.

4. For the extirpation of the *Canaanites*, by the express command of God, which hath such an appearance of severity, it is to be consider'd, that this vengeance

geance was not executed upon them, till they were grown ripe for it. God spared them for above four hundred years, for so long their growing impiety is taken notice of, *Gen. xviii. 28.* where it is said, that *the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full*; God did not proceed to cut them off, till their case was desperate, past all hopes of recovery, till *the land was defiled with abominations*, and furcharged with wickedness, to that degree, as to *spue out its inhabitants*, as is expressly said, *Levit. xviii. 28.* When they were arrived to this pitch, it was no mercy to them to spare them any longer, to heap up more guilt and misery to themselves.

Fifthly and Lastly, As for the great calamities which God brought upon the *Jews*, especially in their final ruin and dispersion, at the destruction of *Jerusalem*; not to insist upon the known history of their multiplied rebellions and provocations, of their despitefull usage of God's prophets, whom he sent to warn them of his judgments, and to call them to repentance, of their obstinate refusal to receive correction, and to be brought to amendment, by any means that God could use; for all which provocations, he at last delivered them into their enemies hands, to carry them away captive; not to insist upon this, I shall only consider their final destruction by the *Romans*, which tho' it be dreadfully severe, beyond any example of history; yet the provocation was proportionable; for this vengeance did not come upon them, till they had as it were extorted it, by the most obstinate impenitency and unbelief, in *rejecting the counsel of God against themselves*, and resisting such means as would have brought *Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah* to repentance; till they had despised the doctrine of life and salvation, delivered to them by the son of God, and confirmed from heaven by the clearest and greatest miracles; and by wicked hands had crucified and slain the son of God, and the Saviour of the world. Nay, even after this greatest of sins, that ever was committed, God waited for their repentance forty years, to see if in that time they would be brought to a sense of their sins, and to know the things which belonged to their peace. And no wonder if after such provocations, and so much patience, and so obstinate an impenitency, the goodness of God at last gave way to his justice, and wrath came upon them to the utmost.

So that all these instances rightly considered are rather commendations of the divine goodness, than just and reasonable objections against it; and notwithstanding the severity of them, it is evident that God is good, from the primary inclinations of his nature; and severe only upon necessity, and in case of just provocation. And to be otherwise, not to punish insolent impiety and incorrigible wickedness, in a severe and remarkable manner, would not be goodness, but a fond indulgence; not patience, but stupidity; not mercy to mankind, but cruelty; because it would be an encouragement to them to do more mischief, and to bring greater misery upon themselves.

So that if we suppose God to be holy and just, as well as good, there is nothing in any of these instances, but what is very consistent with all that goodness which we can suppose to be in a holy, and wise, and just governour, who is a declared enemy to sin, and is resolved to give all fitting discountenance to the breach and violation of his laws. It is necessary in kindness and compassion to the rest of mankind, that some should be made remarkable instances of God's severity, that the punishment of a few may be a warning to all, that they may hear and fear, and by avoiding the like sins, may prevent the like severity upon themselves.

And now I have, as briefly as I could, explained and vindicated the goodness of God; the consideration whereof is fruitfull of many excellent and usefull inferences, in relation both to our comfort and our duty. But these I shall refer to another opportunity.

S E R M O N XCIII.

The Goodness of God.

P S A L. CXLV. 9.

The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

I Have made severall discourses upon this argument, of the *goodness* of God ; shewing what it is ; on what accounts we ascribe it to God ; what are the effects and large extent of it to the whole creation, and more particularly to mankind ; and, in the last place, considered the severall objections which seem to lie against it. I proceed now to the application of this excellent argument, the consideration whereof is so fruitfull of usefull inferences in relation both to our comfort and duty. And,

I. This shews us the prodigious folly and unreasonableness of atheism. Most of the atheism that is in the world, doth not so much consist in a firm persuasion that there is no God, as in vain wishes and desires that there were none. Bad men think it would be a happiness to them, and that they should be in a much better condition, if there were no God, than if there be one. *Nemo Deum non esse credit, nisi cui Deum non esse expedit, No man is apt to disbelieve a God, but he whose interest it is that there should be none.* And if we could see into the hearts of wicked men, we should find this lying at the bottom, that if there be a God, he is just, and will punish sin ; that he is infinite in power, and not to be resisted, and therefore kills them with his terror so often as they think of him : hence they apprehend it their interest, that there should be no God, and wish there were none, and thence are apt to cherish in their minds a vain hope that there is none, and at last endeavour to impose upon themselves by vain reasonings, and to suppress the belief of a God, and to stifle their natural apprehensions and fears of him. So that it is not *primus in orbe Deos fecit timor, fear that first made Gods* ; but the fear which bad men have of divine power and justice, that first tempted them to the disbelief of him.

But were not these men as foolish as they are wicked, they would wish with all their hearts there were a God, and be glad to believe so. And the *Psalmist* gives them their true character, who can entertain any such thoughts or wishes, *Psalm. xiv. 1. The fool hath said in his heart there is no God* ; for they are *fools* who do not understand nor consult their true interest : And if this be true which I have said concerning the *goodness* of God, if this be his nature, to desire and procure the happiness of his creatures, whoever understands the true nature of God and his own true interest, cannot but wish there were a God, and be glad of any argument to prove it, and rejoyce to find it true, as children are glad of a kind and tender father, and as subjects rejoyce in a wise and good prince.

The *goodness* of God gives us a lovely character of him, makes him so good a father, so gracious a governour of men, that if there were no such being in the world, it were infinitely desirable to mankind, that there should be ; he is such an one, *qualem omnes cuperent, si deesset, as if he were wanting, all men ought to wish for* : The being of God is so comfortable, so convenient, so necessary to the felicity of mankind, that (as *Tully* admirably says) *Dii immortales ad usum hominum fabricati penè videantur, if God were not a necessary being of himself, he might almost seem to be made on purpose for the use and benefit of men* ; so that atheism is not only an instance of the most horrible impiety, but of the greatest stupidity ; and for men to glory in their disbelief of a God, is like the rejoycing and triumph of a furious and besotted multitude, in the murder of a wise and

and good prince, the greatest calamity and confusion that could possibly have befallen them.

If the evidence of God's being were not so clear as it is, yet the consideration of his *goodness* ought to check all inclination to atheism and infidelity; for if he be as *good* as he is represented to us, both by natural light and divine revelation, (and he is so, as sure as he is) if he tender our welfare, and desire our happiness, as much as we our selves can do, and use all wise ways and proper means to bring it about, then it is plainly every man's interest, even thine, O sinner! to whom after all thy provocations he is willing to be reconciled, that there should be such a being as God is; and whenever thou comest to thy self, thou wilt be sensible of thy want of him, and thy *soul will thirst for God, even the living God, and pant after him as the hart pants after the water-brooks*; in the day of thy affliction and calamity, *when distress and anguish cometh upon thee*, thou wilt flee to God for refuge, and shelter thy self under his protection, and wouldest not, for all the world, but there were such a being in it to help and deliver thee. *Deos nemo sanus timet* (says Seneca) *furor est metuere salutaria*; *No man in his wits is afraid there is a God: it is a madness to fear that, which is so much for our benefit and advantage*. Human nature is conscious to its self of its own weakness and insufficiency, and of its necessary dependance upon something without it self for its happiness; and therefore in great extremity and distress, the atheist himself hath naturally recourse to him, and he who denyed and rejected him in his prosperity, clings to him in adversity, as his *only support and present help in time of trouble*. And this is a sure indication, that these men, after all their endeavours to impose upon themselves, have not been able wholly to extinguish in their minds the belief of God, and his goodness; nay it is a sign, at the bottom of their hearts they have a firm persuasion of his *goodness*, when after all their insolent defiance of him, they have the confidence to apply themselves to him for *mercy, and help in time of need*; and therefore our hearts ought to rise with indignation against those who go about to persuade the belief of a thing so prejudicial to our interest, to take away *the light of our eyes, and the breath of our nostrills*, and to rob us of all the comfort and support, which the belief of an infinite power, conducted by infinite wisdom and goodness, is apt to afford to mankind.

II. We should take great care of preventing and abusing this great *goodness* by vain confidence and presumption. This is a provocation of an high nature, which the scripture calls, *turning the grace of God into wantonness*, making that an encouragement to sin, which is one of the strongest arguments in the world against it. God is infinitely *good* and *merciful*; but, we must not therefore think, that he is *fond* and *indulgent to our faults*; but on the contrary, because he is *good*, he cannot but *hate evil*. So the scripture every where tells us, that *He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*; that *the face of the Lord is against them that do evil*; *he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him*; *the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity*. He is ready to shew mercy to those who are qualified for it by repentance, and resolution of a better course; but as long as we continue impenitent, God is implacable, and will deal with us according to the tenor of his laws, and the desert of our doings. Despair is a great sin, but presumption is a greater; despair doubts of the goodness of God, but presumption abuseth it; despair disbelieves, but presumption perverts the best thing in the world to a quite contrary purpose from what it was intended.

III. The consideration of God's goodness is a mighty comfort and relief to our minds, under all our fears and troubles. Great are the fears and jealousies of many devout minds concerning God's love to them, and their everlasting condition; which are commonly founded in one of these two causes, a melancholy temper, or mistaken notions and apprehensions of God; and very often these two meet together, and hinder the cure and removal of one another.

Melancholy as it is an effect of bodily temper, is a disease not to be cured by reason and argument, but by physick and time; but the mistakes which

men have entertained concerning God, if they be not set on and heighten'd by melancholy (as many times they are) may be rectified by a true representation of the *goodness* of God, confirmed by reason and scripture. Many good men have had very hard and injurious thoughts of God instill'd into them, from doctrines too commonly taught and received; as if he did not sincerely desire the happiness of his creatures, but had from all eternity decreed to make the greatest part of mankind, with a secret purpose and design to make them miserable; and consequently were not serious and in good earnest in his invitations and exhortations of sinners to repentance; and it is no wonder if such jealousies as these concerning God, make men doubtfull whether God love them, and very scrupulous and anxious about their everlasting condition.

I have already told you that these harsh doctrines have no manner of foundation, either in reason or scripture; that God earnestly desires our happiness, and affords us sufficient means to that end; that he bears a more hearty good will to us, than any man does to his friend, or any father upon earth ever did to his dearest child; in comparison of which, the greatest affection of men to those whom they love best, is *but as the drop of the bucket, as the very small dust upon the ballance*. If we have right apprehensions of God's *goodness*, we can have no temptation to despair of his kind and mercifull intentions to us, provided we be but carefull of our duty to him, and do sincerely repent and forsake our sins. Plainer declarations no word can make, than those we meet with in the holy scriptures, that *God hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live; that he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth; that he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; that he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall have mercy; that if the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the Lord, he will have mercy, and will abundantly pardon*.

As for outward calamities and afflictions, the consideration of God's *goodness* is a firm ground of consolation to us, giving us assurance, that God will either prevent them by his providence, or support us under them, or rescue us out of them, or turn them to our greater good and happiness in this world or the next. St. Paul speaks of it as the firm belief and persuasion of all good men, that in the issue all their actions should prove to their advantage. *We know* (says he) *that all things shall work together for good to them that love God*; and one of the greatest evidences of our love to God, is a firm belief and persuasion of his *goodness*; if we believe his *goodness*, we cannot but love him, and if we *love him, all things shall work together for our good*.

And this is a great cordial to those who are under grievous persecutions and sufferings, which is the case of our brethren in a neighbour nation, and may come to be ours, God knows how soon. But tho' the malice of men be great, and back'd with a power not to be controll'd by any visible means, and therefore likely to continue; yet the *goodness* of God is greater than the malice of men, and of a longer duration and continuance. And thus David comforted himself when he was persecuted by Saul, Psal. lii. 1. *Why boastest thou thy self in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually*. The persecution which Saul raised against him was very powerfull, and lasted a long time; but he comforts himself with this, that *the goodness of God endures for ever*.

IV. The consideration of God's *goodness* is a powerfull motive and argument to several duties.

1. To the love of God. And this is the most proper and natural effect and operation of the goodness of God upon our minds. Several of the divine attributes are very awful, but *goodness* is amiable; and without this nothing else is so. Power and wisdom may command dread and admiration; but nothing but goodness can challenge our love and affection. Goodness is amiable for it self, tho' no benefit and advantage should from thence redound to us; but when we find the comfortable effects of it, when *the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering and forbearance*, are laid out upon us, when we live upon that goodness,

ness, and are indebted to it for all that we have and hope for, this is a much greater endearment to us of that excellency and perfection, which was amiable for it self. We cannot but love him who *is good, and does us good*; whose goodness extends to all his creatures, but is exercised in so peculiar a manner towards the sons of men, that it is called *love*; and if God vouchsafe to love us, well may this be the *first and great commandment, thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

2. The consideration of God's goodness is likewise an argument to us to fear him; not as a slave does his master, but as a child does his father, who the more he loves him, the more afraid he is to offend him. *There is forgiveness with thee* (saith the Psalmist) *that thou mayest be feared*; because God is ready to forgive, we should be afraid to offend. *Men shall fear the Lord, and his goodness,* (saith the Prophet) *Hosea iii. 5.* And indeed nothing is more to be dreaded, than despised goodness and abused patience, which turns into fury and vengeance; *despise thou the riches of his goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance,* (says the Apostle) *and treasurest up to thy self wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?*

3. The consideration of God's goodness, is a powerfull motive to obedience to his laws, and as the Apostle expresseth it, *to walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, being fruitfull in every good work.* This argument Samuel useth to the people of *Israel*, to persuade them to obedience, *1 Sam. xii. 24. Only fear the Lord and serve him in truth, with all your heart: for consider what great things he hath done for you.*

And indeed the laws which God hath given us, are none of the least instances of his goodness to us, since they all tend to our good, and are proper causes and means of our happiness; so that in challenging our obedience to his laws as acknowledgments of our obligation to him for his benefits, he lays a new obligation, and confers a greater benefit upon us. All that his laws require of us, is to do that which is best for our selves, and does most directly conduce to our own welfare and happiness. Considering our infinite obligations to God, he might have challenged our obedience to the severest and harshest laws he could have imposed upon us; so that as the servants said to *Naaman*, *Had the Prophet bid thee to do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much more when he hath only said, wash and be clean?* If God had required of us things very grievous and burthenfome, in love and gratitude to him we ought to have yielded a ready and chearfull obedience to such commands; how much more, when he hath only said, *do this and be happy?* In testimony of your love to me, do these things which are the greatest kindness and benefit to your selves.

4. *The goodness of God should lead men to repentance.* One of the greatest aggravations of our sins is, that we offend against so much goodness, and make so bad a requital for it; *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise!* The proper tendency of God's goodness and patience to sinners, is to bring them to a sense of their miscarriage, and to a resolution of a better course. When we reflect upon the blessings and favours of God and his continual goodness to us, can we chuse but be ashamed of our terrible ingratitude and disobedience? Nothing is more apt to make an ingenious nature to relent, than the sense of undeserved kindness; that God should be so good to us, who are *evil* and *unthankfull* to him; that tho' we be *enemies* to him, yet *when we hunger, he feeds us; when we thirst, he gives us to drink; heaping as it were coals of fire on our heads,* on purpose to melt us into repentance, and to overcome our evil by his goodness.

5. The consideration of God's goodness, is a firm ground of trust and confidence. What may we not hope and assuredly expect from immense and boundless goodness? If we have right apprehensions of the goodness of God, we cannot possibly distrust him, or doubt of the performance of those gracious promises which he hath made to us; the same goodness which inclined him to make such promises, will effectually engage him to make them good. If God be so good as he hath declared himself, why should we think that he will not help us in our need,

and relieve us in our distress, and comfort us in our afflictions and sorrows? If we may with confidence rely upon any thing to confer good upon us, and to preserve and deliver us from evil, we may trust infinite goodness.

6. The goodness of God is likewise an argument to us to patience and contentedness with every condition. If the hand of God be severe and heavy upon us in any affliction, we may be assured that it is not without great cause, that so much goodness is so highly offended and displeased with us; that he designs our good in all the evils he sends to us, and does not *chasten us for his pleasure, but for our profit*; that we are the cause of our own sufferings, and *our sins separate between God and us, and withhold good things from us*; that in the final issue and result of things, *all things shall work together for good to us*; and therefore we ought not to be discontented at any thing which will certainly end in our happiness.

7. Let us imitate the *goodness* of God. The highest perfection of the best and most perfect being is worthy to be our pattern. This the scripture frequently proposeth to us; *Matth. v. 48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.* How is that? in being good, and kind, and merciful, as God is: *But I say unto you* (says our Lord) *love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust.* And then it follows, *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.* The same pattern St. Paul proposeth to us, *Ephes. iv. 32. and Ch. v. 1. Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted; forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love.* We cannot in any thing resemble God more, than in goodness and kindness, and mercy, and in a readiness to forgive those who have been injurious to us, and to be reconciled to them.

Let us then often contemplate this perfection of God, and represent it to our minds, that by the frequent contemplation of it, we may *be transformed into the image of the divine goodness.* Is God so good to his creatures? With how much greater reason should we be so to our fellow-creatures? Is God good to us? Let us imitate his universal goodness, by endeavouring the good of mankind; and, as much as in us lies, of the whole creation of God. What God is to us, and what we would have him still be to us, that let us be to others. We are infinitely beholden to this perfection of God for all that we are, and for all that we enjoy, and for all that we expect; and therefore we have all the reason in the world to admire and imitate it. Let this pattern of the divine goodness be continually before us, that we may be still fashioning our selves in the temper of our minds, and in the actions of our lives, to a likeness and conformity to it.

Lastly, The consideration of the divine *goodness*, should excite our praise and thankfulness. This is a great duty, to the performance whereof we should summon all the powers and faculties of our souls, as the holy Psalmist does, *Psal. ciii. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.* And we should invite all others to the same work, as the same devout Psalmist frequently does, *Psal. cvi. O give thanks unto the Lord! for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever. And Psal. cvii. O that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderfull works to the children of men!*

And we had need to be often call'd upon to this duty, to which we have a peculiar backwardness. Necessity drives us to prayer, and sends us to God for the supply of our wants; but praise and thanksgiving is a duty which depends upon our gratitude and ingenuity; and nothing sooner wears off, than the sense of kindness and benefits. We are very apt to forget the blessings of God, not so much from a bad memory, as from a bad nature; to forget the greatest blessings, the continuance whereof should continually put us in mind of them; the blessings of our beings. So God complains of his people, *Deut. xxxii. Of the God that formed thee, thou hast been unmindfull*; the dignity and excellency of our being above all the creatures of this visible world; *Job xxxv. 10, 11. None saith, where is God my maker?*

maker? who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven; the daily comforts and blessings of our lives, which we can continually receive, without almost ever looking up to the hand that gives them. So God complains by the Prophet, *Hosea*, ii. 8, 9. *She knew not that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her gold and silver.* And is it not shameful to see how at the most plentiful tables, the giving of God thanks is almost grown out of fashion; as if men were ashamed to own from whence these blessings came. When thanks is all God expects from us, can we not afford to give him that? *Do ye thus requite the Lord, foolish people and unwise!* It is just with God to take away his blessings from us, if we deny him this easy tribute of praise and thanksgiving.

It is a sign men are unfit for heaven, when they are backward to that which is the proper work and employment of the blessed spirits above. Therefore, as ever we hope to come thither, let us begin this work here, and inure our selves to that which will be the great business of all eternity. Let us with *the four and twenty elders in the Revelation*, fall down before him that sits on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever, and ever, and cast our crowns before the throne, (that is, cast our selves) and ascribe all glory to God; *Saying, thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast made all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.*

To him therefore, the infinite and inexhaustible fountain of goodness, the father of mercies, and the God of all consolation, who gave us such excellent beings, having made us little lower than the angels, and crowned us with glory and honour; who hath been pleased to stamp upon us the image of his own goodness, and thereby made us partakers of a divine nature; communicating to us, not only of the effects of his goodness, but in some measure and degree, of the perfection it self; to him who gives us all things richly to enjoy, which pertain to life and godliness, and hath made such abundant provision, not only for our comfort and convenience in this present life, but for our unspeakable happiness to all eternity; to him who designed this happiness to us from all eternity, and whose mercy and goodness to us endures for ever; who when by willfull transgressions and disobedience, we had plunged our selves into a state of sin and misery, and had forfeited that happiness which we were designed to, was pleased to restore us to a new capacity of it, by sending his only son to take our nature with the miseries and infirmities of it, to live among us, and to die for us; in a word, to him who is infinitely good to us, not only contrary to our deserts, but beyond our hopes, who renews his mercy upon us every morning, and is patient tho' we provoke him every day, who preserves and provides for us, and spares us continually, who is always willing, always watchfull, and never weary to do us good; to him be all glory and honour, adoration and praise, love and obedience, now and for ever.

S E R M O N XCIV.

The Mercy of God.

NUMB. XIV. 18.

The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy.

I Have considered God's goodness in general. There are two eminent branches of it, his Patience and Mercy. The patience of God is his goodness to them that are guilty, in deferring or moderating their deserved punishment; the mercy of God is his goodness to them that are or may be miserable. 'Tis the last of these two I design to discourse of at this time; in doing which, I shall enquire,

First,

First, What we are to understand by the mercy of God.

Secondly, Shew you, that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, Consider the degree of it, that God is of *great mercy*.

First, What we are to understand by the mercy of God.

I told you it is his goodness to them that are in misery, or liable to it ; that is, that are in danger of it, or have deserved it. 'Tis mercy to prevent the misery that we are liable to, and which may befall us, tho' it be not actually upon us. 'Tis mercy to defer the misery that we deserve, or mitigate it ; and this is properly patience and forbearance. 'Tis mercy to relieve those that are in misery, to support or comfort them. 'Tis mercy to remit the misery we deserve, and by pardon and forgiveness to remove and take away the obligation to punishment.

Thus the mercy of God is usually in scripture set forth to us by the affection of pity and compassion, which is an affection that causeth a sensible commotion and disturbance in us upon the apprehension of some great evil that lies upon another, or hangs over him. Hence it is that God is said in scripture to be *grieved* and *afflicted* for the miseries of men ; *his bowels* are said to *sound*, and *his heart* to *turn within him*. But tho' God is pleased in this manner to set forth his mercy and tenderness towards us, yet we must take heed how we cloath the divine nature with the infirmities of human passions. We must not measure the perfection of God by the expressions of his condescension ; and because he stoops to our weakness, level him to our infirmities. When God is said to pity us, we must take away the imperfection of his passion, the commotion and disturbance of it, and not imagine any such thing in God ; but we are to conceive, that the mercy and compassion of God, without producing the disquiet, do produce the effects of the most sensible pity.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God.

All the arguments that I used to prove the *goodness* of God, from the acknowledgment of natural light, and from scripture and reason, serve to prove that he is *merciful* ; because the mercy of God is an eminent branch of his *goodness*. I will only produce some of those many texts of scripture which attribute this perfection to God. *Exod. xxxiv. 6. The Lord, the Lord God, gracious and merciful*. *Deut. iv. 31. The Lord thy God is a merciful God*. *2 Chron. xxxiv. 9. the Lord your God is gracious and merciful*. *Neh. ix. 17. Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful*. *Psal. xxv. 10. All the paths of the Lord are mercy*. *Psal. lxii. 12. Unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy*. *Psal. ciii. 8. Merciful and gracious*. *Psal. cxxx. 7. With the Lord there is mercy*. And so *Jer. iii. 12. Joel. ii. 13. Jonah iv. 2. Luke vi. 36. Be ye therefore merciful, as your father also is merciful*. The scripture speaks of this as most natural to him, *2 Cor. i. 3. he is called the father of mercies*. But when he punisheth, he doth as it were relinquish his nature, and do a *strange work*. *The Lord will wait that he may be gracious, Isa. xxx. 18. God passeth by opportunities of punishing, but his mercy takes opportunity to display it self ; he waits to be gracious*. To afflict or punish is a work that God is unwilling to, that he takes no pleasure in ; *Lam. iii. 33. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*. But mercy is a work that he delights in ; *Micah vii. 18. He delighteth in mercy*. When Gods shews mercy, he does it with pleasure and delight ; he is said to *rejoyce over his people to do them good*. Those attributes that declare God's goodness, as when he is said to be gracious, or merciful, and long-suffering, they shew what God is in himself, and delights to be : those which declare his wrath and severity, shew what he is upon provocation, and the occasion of sin ; not what he chuseth to be, but what we do as it were compell and necessitate him to be.

Thirdly, For the degree of it ; that God is a God of *great mercy*.

The scripture doth delight to advance the mercy of God, and does use great variety of expression to magnify it. It speaks of the greatness of his mercy. *Numb. xiv. 19. According to the greatness of his mercy*. *2 Sam. xxiv. 14. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercies are great*. 'Tis call'd an abundant mercy, *1 Pet. i. 3. According to his abundant mercy*. *Psal. ciii. 8. he is said to be plentiful in mercy ; and rich in mercy*. *Eph. ii. 4. Psal. v. 7. he speaks of the multitude*

titude of God's mercies; and of the variety of them, *Neb. ix. 18. In thy manifold mercies thou forsakest them not.* So many are they, that we are said to be surrounded and compassed about on every side with them; *Psal. ciii. 4. Who crowneth us with loving kindness and tender mercies.*

And yet farther to set forth the greatness of them, the scripture useth all dimensions. Height, *Psal. lvii. 10. Thy mercy is great unto the heavens.* Nay, higher yet; *Psal. cviii. 4. Thy mercy is great above the heavens.* For the latitude and extent of it, 'tis as large as the earth, and extends to all the creatures in it; *Psal. cix. 64. The earth is full of thy mercy. Psal. cxlv. 8. His tender mercies are over all his works.* For the length, or duration and continuance of it; *Exod. xxxiv. 7. Laying up mercy in store for thousands of generations, one after another.* Nay, it is of a longer continuance; *Psal. cxviii. 'tis several times repeated, That his mercy endureth for ever.*

And to shew the intense degree of this affection of mercy or pity, the scripture useth several emphatical expressions to set it forth to us. The scripture speaks of the tender mercies of God, *Psal. xxv. 6. Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies.* Yea, of the multitude of these, *Psal. li. 1. According to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.* *Jam. v. 11. The Lord is very pitifull, and of tender mercy.* They are called God's bowels, which are the tenderest parts, and apt to yern and stir in us when any affections of love and pity are excited, *Isa. lxiii. 15. Where is the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies, are they restrained?* *Luke i. 78. Through the tender mercy of our God.* So it is in our translation; but if we render it from the original, 'tis *through the bowels of the mercies of our God.* How doth God condescend in those patheticall expressions, which he useth concerning his people? *Hos. xi. 8. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together.* Nay, to express his tender sense of our miseries and sufferings, he is represented as being afflicted with us, and bearing a part in our sufferings; *Isa. lxiii. 9. In all their afflictions he was afflicted.*

The compassions of God are compared to the tenderest affections among men; to that of a father towards his children; *Psal. ciii. 13. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.* Nay, to the compassions of a mother towards her infant; *Isa. xlix. 50. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?* Yea, she may; 'tis possible, tho' most unlikely: but tho' a mother may turn unnatural, yet God cannot be unmercifull.

In short, the scripture doth every where magnify the mercy of God, and speak of it with all possible advantage; as if the divine nature, which doth in all perfections excell all others, did in this excell it self. The scripture speaks of it as if God was wholly taken up with it, as if it was his constant exercise and employment, so that in comparison of it, he doth hardly display any other excellency; *Psal. xxv. 10. All the paths of the Lord are mercy;* as if in this world, God had a design to advance his mercy above his other attributes. The mercy of God is now in the throne, this is the day of mercy; and God doth display it many times with a seeming dishonour to his other attributes, his justice, and holiness, and truth. *His justice;* this makes *Job* complain of the long life and prosperity of the wicked; *Job xli. 7. Wherefore do the wicked live, yea, become old? &c.* *His holiness;* this makes the Prophet expostulate with God, *Hab. i. 13. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue? &c.* And the truth of God; this makes *Jonah* complain, as if God's mercies were such as did make some reflection upon his truth, *Jon. iv. 2.*

But that we may have more distinct apprehensions of the greatness and number of God's mercies, I will distribute them into kinds, and rank them under several heads. 'Tis mercy to prevent those evils and miseries that we are liable to. 'Tis mercy to defer those evils that we have deserved, or to mitigate them. 'Tis mercy to support and comfort us when misery is upon us. 'Tis mercy to deliver us from them. But the greatest mercy of all is, to remit the evil and misery

mifery we have deferved, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away the obligation to punifhment ; fo that the mercy of God may be reduced to thefe five heads.

I. Preventing mercy. Many evils and miferies which we are liable to, God prevents them at a great diftance ; and when they are coming towards us, he ftops them or turns them another way. The mercifull providence of God, and thofe invifible guards which protect us, to divert many evils from us, which fall upon others. We feldom take notice of God's preventing mercy ; we are not apt to be fenfible how great a mercy it is to be freed from thofe ftraits and neceffities, thofe pains and difeafes of body, thofe inward racks and horrors, which others are preffed withall and labour under. When any evil or mifery is upon us, would we not reckon it a mercy to be refcued and delivered from it ? And is it not a greater mercy that we never felt it ? Does not that man owe more to his Phyfician, who prevents his ficknefs and diftemper, than he who after the weaknefs and languifhing, the pains and tortures of feveral months, is at length cured by him ?

II. Forbearing mercy. And this is the patience of God, which confifts in the deferring or moderating of our deferved punifhment. Hence it is that *flow to anger, and of great mercy*, do fo often go together. But this I fhall fpeak to hereafter in fome particular difcourfes.

III. Comforting mercy. 2 Cor. i. 3. *The father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.* The fcripture represents God as very mercifull, in comforting and fupporting thofe that are afflicted and caft down : Hence are thofe expreffions of *putting his arms under us, bearing us up, fpeaking comfortably, vifiting us with his loving-kindnefs*, which fignify God's mercifull regard to thofe who are in mifery and diftreff.

IV. His relieving mercy, in fupplying thofe that are in want, and delivering thofe that are in trouble. God doth many times exercife men with trouble and afflictions, with a very gracious and mercifull design, to prevent greater evils, which men would otherwife bring upon themfelves. Afflictions are a mercifull invention of heaven to do us that good, which nothing elfe can ; they awaken us to a fenfe of God, and of our felves, to a confideration of the evil of our ways ; they make us to take notice of God, to feek him, and to enquire after him. God doth as it were by afflictions throw men upon their backs, to make them look up to heaven. *Hof. v. 15. In their affliction they will feek me early.* *Pfal. lxxviii. 34. When he flew them, then they fought him, and they returned, and enquired early after God.* But God does not delight in this, *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.* When afflictions have accomplifhed their work, and obtained their end upon us, God is very ready to remove them, and command deliverance for us. *Ifa. liv. 7, 8. For a little wrath I hid my face from thee ; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a fmall moment have I forfaken thee ; but with everlafting kindnefs will I have mercy on thee, faith the Lord thy redeemer.*

V. Pardoning mercy. And here the greatnefs and fullnefs of God's mercy appears, becaufe our fins are great ; *Pfal. lxxviii. 38. Being full of compaffion, he forgave their iniquity.* And the multitude of God's mercies, becaufe our fins are many. *Pfal. li. 1. Have mercy on me, O Lord, according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgreffions.* *Exod. xxxiv. 9. He is faid to pardon iniquity, transgreffion, and fin.* How manifold are his mercies, to forgive all our fins, of what kind foever ! The mercy of God to us in pardoning our fins, is matter of aftonifhment and admiration. *Mic. vii. 18. Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity !* But efpecially if we confider by what means our pardon is procured ; by transferring our guilt upon the moft innocent perfon, the fon of God, and making him to bear our iniquities, and to fuffer the wrath of God which was due to us. The admirable contrivance of God's mercy appears in this difpenfation ; this fhews *the riches of his grace*, that he fhould be at fo much coft to purchafe our pardon, *Not with corruptible things, as filver and gold ; but with the precious blood of his own fon ; Eph. i. 6, 7. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved ; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of fins according to the riches of his grace.*

Having dispatch'd the *three* particulars I propos'd to be spoken to, I shall shew what use we ought to make of this divine attribute.

Use I. We ought with thankfulness to acknowledge and admire the great mercy of God to us. Let us view it in all its dimensions; the height, and length, and breadth of it: in all the variety and kinds of it; the preventing mercy of God to many of us. Those miseries that lie upon others, 'tis mercy to us that we escaped them. 'Tis mercy that spares us. *It is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.* 'Tis mercy that mitigates our punishment, and makes it fall below the desert of our sins. 'Tis mercy that comforts and supports us under any of those evils that lie upon us, and that rescues and delivers us from them; which way soever we look, we are encompassed with the mercies of God; they *compass us about on every side; we are crowned with loving kindness, and tender mercies.* 'Tis mercy that feeds us, and cloaths us, and that preserves us. But above all, we should thankfully acknowledge and admire the pardoning mercy of God; *Psal. ciii. 1, 2, 3.* where *David* does as it were muster up the mercies of God, and make a catalogue of them, he sets the pardoning mercy in the front, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me praise his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities.*

If we look into our selves, and consider our own temper and disposition, how void of pity and bowels we are, how cruel, and hard-hearted, and insolent, and revengefull; if we look abroad in the world, and see how *full the earth is of the habitations of cruelty*; we shall admire the mercy of God more, and think our selves more beholden to it. How many things must concur to make our hearts tender, and melt our spirits, and stir our bowels, to make us pitifull and compassionate? We seldom pity any, unless they be actually in misery; nor all such neither, unless the misery they lye under be very great; nor then neither, unless the person that suffers be nearly related, and we be someways concerned in his sufferings; yea, many times not then neither, upon a generous account, but as we are someways obliged by interest and self-love, and a dear regard to our selves, when we have suffered the like our selves, and we have learn'd to pity others by our own sufferings, or when in danger and probability to be in the like condition our selves; so many motives and obligations are necessary to awaken and stir up this affection in us. But God is mercifull and pitifull to us out of the mere goodness of his nature; for few of these motives and considerations can have any place in him. This affection of pity and tenderness is stirred up in God by the mere presence of the object, without any other inducement. The mercy of God many times doth not stay till we be actually miserable; but looks forward a great way, and pities us at a great distance, and prevents our misery. God doth not only pity us in great calamities, but considers those lesser evils that are upon us. God is mercifull to us, when we have deserved all the evils that are upon us, and far greater, when we are *less than the least of all his mercies*, when we deserved all the misery that is upon us, and have with violent hands pulled it upon our own heads, and have been the authors and procurers of it to our selves. Tho' God, in respect of his nature, be at an infinite distance from us, yet his mercy is near to us, and he cannot possibly have any self-interest in it. The divine nature is not liable to want, or injury, or suffering; he is secure of his own happiness and fullness, and can neither wish the enlargement, nor fear the impairment of his estate; he can never stand in need of pity or relief from us or any other; and yet he pities us.

Now if we consider the vast difference of this affection in God and us, how tender his mercies are, and how sensible his bowels; and yet we who have so many arguments to move us to pity, how hard our hearts are, and how unapt to relent, as if we were *born of the rock*, and were *the offspring of the nether millstone*; sure when we consider this, we cannot but admire the mercy of God.

How cruel are we to creatures below us! with how little remorse can we kill a flea, or tread upon a worm? partly because we are secure that they can-

not hurt us, nor revenge themselves upon us; and partly because they are so despicable in our eyes, and so far below us, that they do not fall under the consideration of our pity. Look upward, proud man! and take notice of him who is above thee; thou didst not make the creatures below thee, as God did; there's but a finite distance between thee and the meanest creatures; but there's an infinite distance between thee and God. Man is a name of dignity, when we compare our selves with other creatures; but compared to God, we are *worms and not men*; yea, we are *nothing, yea, less than nothing and vanity*. How great then is the mercy of God, which regards us, who are so far below him, which takes into consideration such inconsiderable nothings as we are! We may say with *David*, Psal. viii. 4. *Lord! what is man, that thou art so mindfull of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him!* and with *Job* vii. 17. *What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him, and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him!*

And then how hard do we find it to forgive those who have injured us? If any one have offended, or provoked us, how hard are we to be reconciled? how mindfull of an injury? How do anger and revenge boyl within us? How do we upbraid men with their faults? What vile and low submission do we require of them, before we will receive them into favour, and grant them peace? And if we forgive once, we think that is much; but if an offense and provocation be renewed often, we are inexorable. Even the disciples of our Saviour, after he had so emphatically taught them forgiveness, in the petition in the Lord's prayer, yet they had very narrow spirits as to this; *Matth. xviii. 21. Peter comes to him, and asks him, How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him; till seven times?* He thought that was much; And yet we have great obligation to pardoning and forgiving others, because we are obnoxious to God and one another; we shall many times stand in need of pardon from God and men; and it may be our own case, and when it is, we are too apt to be very indulgent to our selves, and conceive good hopes of the mercy of our's; we would have our ignorance, and inadvertencies, and mistakes, and all occasions, and temptations, and provocations considered; and when we have done amiss, upon submission and acknowledgment of our fault, we would be received into favour: but God, who is not at all liable to us, how ready he is to forgive! if we confess our sins to him, he is mercifull to forgive; he pardons freely; and such are the condescensions of his mercy, tho' he be the party offended, yet he offers pardon to us, and beseeches us to be reconciled; if we do but come towards him, he runs to meet us, as in the parable of the prodigal, *Luke xv. 20*. What reason have we then thankfully to acknowledge and admire the mercy of God to us?

Use 2. The great mercy of God to us, should stir up in us shame and sorrow for sin. The judgments of God may break us; but the consideration of God's mercy should rather melt and dissolve us into tears, *Luke vii. 47*. The woman that washed Christ's feet with her hair, the account that our Saviour gives of the great affection that she expressed to him, was, *she loved much, because much was forgiven her*; and she grieved much, because much was forgiven her.

Especially we should sorrow for those sins, which have been committed by us after God's mercies received. Mercies after sins should touch our hearts, and make us relent. It should grieve us that we should offend and provoke a God so gracious and mercifull, slow to anger, and so ready to forgive: But sin against mercies, and after we have received them, is attended with one of the greatest aggravations of sin. And as mercy raises the guilt of our sins, so it should raise our sorrow for them. No consideration is more apt to work upon human nature, than that of kindness, and the greater mercy has been shewed to us, the greater our sins, and the greater cause of sorrow for them; contraries do illustrate, and set off one another; in the great goodness and mercy of God to us, we see the great evil of our sins against him.

Every sin has the nature of rebellion and disobedience; but sins against mercy, have ingratitude in them. Whenever we break the laws of God, we rebell against

gainst our sovereign ; but as we sin against the mercies of God, we injure our benefactor. This makes our sin to be horrid, and astonishing, *Isa. i. 2. Hear, O heavens ! and give ear, O earth ! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.* All the mercies of God are aggravations of our sins, *2 Sam. xii. 7, 8, 9. And Nathan said to David, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and delivered thee out of the hands of Saul, and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel, and of Judah, and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in his sight ?* God reckons up all his mercies, and from them aggravates David's sin ; *1 Kings xi. 9.* He takes notice of all the unkind returns that we make to his mercy ; and 'tis the worst temper in the world not to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted by mercy ; no greater evidence of a wicked heart, than that the mercies of God have no effects upon it ; *Isa. xxvi. 10. Let favour be shewn to the wicked ; yet will he not learn righteousness.*

Use 3. Let us imitate the mercifull nature of God. This branch of God's goodness is very proper for our imitation. The general exhortation of our Saviour, *Matt. v. 48. Be ye therefore perfect as your father which is in heaven is perfect,* is more particularly expressed by St. Luke, *Luke vi. 30. Be ye therefore mercifull, as your father which is in heaven is mercifull.* Men affect to make images, and impossible representations of God ; but as *Seneca* saith, *Crede Deos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse.* We may draw this image and likeness of God ; we may be gracious and mercifull as he is. Christ, who was *the express image of his father*, his whole life and undertaking was a continued work of mercy ; he went about doing good to the souls of men, by preaching the gospel to them ; and to the bodies of men, in healing all manner of diseases. There is nothing that he recommends more to us in his gospel than this spirit and temper ; *Mat. v. 7. Blessed are the mercifull, for they shall obtain mercy.* How many parables doth he use to set forth the mercy of God to us, with a design to draw us to the imitation of it ? The parable of the prodigal ; of the good Samaritan ; of the servant to whom he forgave 10000 talents. We should imitate God in this ; in being tender and compassionate to those that are in misery.

This is a piece of natural, indispensable religion, to which positive and instituted religion must give way ; *Amos vi. 6. I desired mercy, and not sacrifice,* which is twice cited and used by our Saviour. *Micah. vi. 9. He hath shewed thee, O man, what it is that the Lord thy God requires of thee, to do justice, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.*

This is allways one part of the description of a good man, that he is apt to pity the miseries and necessities of others. *Psal. xxxvii. 26. He is ever mercifull and lendeth.* He is far from cruelty, not only to men, but even to the brute creatures ; *Prov. xii. 10. A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.* There is nothing more contrary to the nature of God, than a cruel and savage disposition, not to be affected with the miseries and sufferings of others ; how unlike is this to *the father of mercies, and the God of consolation !* When we can see cruelty exercised, and our bowels not be stirred within us, nor our hearts be pricked ; how unlike is this to God, who is *very pitifull, and of tender mercies !* But to rejoyce at the miseries of others, this is inhuman and barbarous. Hear how God threatens *Edom* for rejoycing at the miseries of his brother *Jacob* ; *Obadiah x. 11, 12, 13, 14.* But to delight to make others miserable, and to aggravate their sufferings, this is devilish ; this is the temper of hell, and the verit spirit of the destroyer.

It becomes man above all other creatures to be mercifull, who hath had such ample and happy experience of God's mercy to him, and doth still continually stand in need of mercy from God. God hath been very mercifull to us. Had it not been for the tender mercies of God to us, we had all of us long since been miserable. Now as we have received mercy from God, we should shew it to others. The Apostle useth this as an argument why we should relieve those that are in misery and want, because we have had such experience of the mercy and love of God to us ; *1 John iii. 16, 17. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because*

he laid down his life for us. But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, &c. how dwelleth the love of God in him? That man hath no sense of the mercy of God abiding upon his heart, that is not mercifull to his brother. And 'tis an argument why we should forgive one another; *Eph. iv. 32. Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* Chap. v. 1. *Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.* Col. iii. 12, 13. *Put on therefore (as the elect of God holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

And we continually stand in need of mercy both from God and man. We are liable one to another, and in the change of human affairs; we may be all subject to one another by turns, and stand in need of one another's pity and compassion; and we must expect, that *with what measure we mete to others, with the same it shall be measured to us again.* To restrain the cruelties, and check the insolencies of men, God has so order'd in his providence, that very often in this world men's cruelties return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates. *Bajazet meets with a Tamerlane.*

But if men were not thus liable to one another, we all stand in need of mercy from God. If we be mercifull to others in suffering, and forgive them that have injured us, God will be so to us, he will pardon our sins to us. *Prov. xvi. 5. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged.* 2 Sam. xxii. 26. *With the mercifull thou wilt shew thyself mercifull.* Prov. xiv. 21. *He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.* Prov. xxi. 21. *He that followeth after mercy, findeth life.* Matth. vi. 14. *If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you.* But on the other hand, if we be malicious and revengefull, and implacable to those that have offended us, and inexorable to those who desire to be received to favour, and cruel to those who lye at our mercy, hard-hearted to them that are in necessity; what can we expect, but that the mercy of God will leave us, that he will forget to be gracious, and shut up in anger his tender mercy. Mat. vi. 15. *If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly father forgive your trespasses.* That is a dreadful passage, *S. James ii. 13. He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.* How angry is the Lord with the servant who was so inexorable to his fellow-servant, after he had forgiven him so great a debt, as you find in the parable, *Mat. xviii. 24. He owed him ten thousand talents, and upon his submission and intreaty to have patience with him, he was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him all: but no sooner had this favour been done to him by his Lord, but going forth he meets his fellow-servant, who owed him a small inconsiderable debt, an hundred pence; he lays hands on him, and takes him by the throat, and roundly demands payment of him: he falls down at his feet, and useth the same form of supplication that he had used to his Lord, but he rejects his request, and puts him in prison.* Now what saith the Lord to him? *ver. 32, 33, 34. O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And the Lord was wroth, and deliver'd him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.* Now what application doth our Saviour make of this? *ver. 35. So likewise shall my heavenly father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

God's readiness to forgive us should be a powerfull motive and argument to us to forgive others. The greatest injuries that we can suffer from men, if we compare them to the sins that we commit against God, they bear no proportion to them, neither in weight nor number; they are but as *an hundred pence to ten thousand talents.* If we would be like God, we should forgive the greatest injuries; he pardoneth our sins, tho' they be exceeding great; many injuries, tho' offences be renewed, and provocations multiplied; for so God doth to us, *He pardoneth iniquity, transgression, and sin, Ex. xxxiv. 7. Isa. lv. 7. He will have mercy, he will abundantly pardon.* We would not have God only to forgive us *seven times,* but

but *seventy times seven*, as often as we offend him; so should we forgive our brother.

And we should not be backward to this work; God is *ready to forgive us*, *Neb. ix. 17*. And we should do it heartily, not only in word, when we retain malice in our hearts, and while we say we forgive, carry on a secret design in our hearts of revenging our selves when we have opportunity; but we should *from our hearts forgive every one*; for so God doth to us, who when he forgives us, *casts our iniquities behind his back, and throws them into the bottom of the sea, and blots out our transgression, so as to remember our iniquity no more*.

If we do not thus, every time we put up the petition to God, *Forgive us our trespasses*, as we forgive them that trespass against us, we do not pray for mercy, but for judgment; we invoke his wrath, and do not put up a prayer, but a dreadful imprecation against our selves; we pronounce the sentence of our own condemnation, and importune God not to forgive us.

Use 4. If the mercy of God be so great, this may comfort us against despair. Sinners are apt to be dejected, when they consider their unworthiness, the nature and number of their sins, and the many heavy aggravations of them; they are apt to say with *Cain*, that *their sin is greater than can be forgiven*. But do not look only upon thy sins, but upon the mercies of God. Thou canst not be too sensible of the evil of sin, and of the desert of it; but whilst we aggravate our sins, we must not lessen the mercies of God. When we consider the multitude of our sins, we must consider also the multitude of God's tender mercies; we have been great sinners, and God is of great mercy; we have multiplied our provocations, and he multiplies to pardon.

Do but thou put thy self in a capacity of mercy, by repenting of thy sins, and forsaking of them, and thou hast no reason to doubt but the mercy of God will receive thee; *If we confess our sins, he is merciful and faithful to forgive them*. If we had offended man, as we have done God, we might despair of pardon; but it is God and not man that we have to deal with; and *his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts*.

We cannot be more injurious to God, than by hard thoughts of him, as if fury were in him, and when we have provoked him, he were not to be appeased and reconciled to us. We disparage the goodness and truth of God, when we distrust those gracious declarations which he has made of his mercy and goodness; if we do not think that he doth heartily pity and compassionate sinners, and really desire their happiness. Doth not he condescend so low as to represent himself afflicted for the miseries of men, and to rejoice in the conversion of a sinner? and shall not we believe that he is in good earnest? Doth Christ weep over impenitent sinners, because *they will not know the things of their peace*? And canst thou think he will not pardon thee upon thy repentance? Is he grieved that men will undo themselves, and will not be saved? and canst thou think that he is unwilling to forgive? We cannot honour and glorify God more than by entertaining great thoughts of his mercy. As we are said to glorify God by our repentance, because thereby we acknowledge God's holiness and justice; so we glorify him by believing his mercy, because we conceive a right opinion of his goodness and truth; we set to our seal that God is merciful and true; *Psal. cxlvii. 11*. 'tis said, *That God takes pleasure in them that hope in his mercy*. As he delights in mercy, so in our acknowledgements of it; that sinners should conceive great hopes of it, and believe him to be what he is. Provided thou dost submit to the terms of God's mercy, thou hast no reason to despair of it; and he that thinks that his sins are more or greater than the mercy of God can pardon, must think that there may be more evil in the creature than there is goodness in God.

Use 5. By way of caution against the presumptuous sinner. If there be any that trespass upon the goodness of God, and presume to encourage themselves in sin upon the hopes of his mercy, let such know, that God is just as well as merciful. A God all of mercy is an idol, such a God as men set up in their

own imaginations; but not the true God, whom the scriptures describe. To such persons the scripture describes him after another manner; *Nab. i. 2. God is jealous, the Lord revengeth and is furious, the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies.* If any man abuse the mercy of God to the strengthening of himself in his own wickedness, and bless himself in his heart, saying, *I shall have peace, tho' I walk in the imagination of my own heart, and add drunkenness to thirst: The Lord will not spare him, but the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smite against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lye upon him, and he will blot out his name from under heaven, Deut. xxix. 19, 20.*

Though it be the nature of God to be mercifull, yet the exercise of his mercy is regulated by his wisdom; he will not be mercifull to those that despise his mercy, to those that abuse it, to those that are resolved to go on in their sins to tempt his mercy, and make bold to say, *Let us sin that grace may abound.* God designs his mercy for those that are prepared to receive it; *Isa. lv. 7. Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.* The mercy of God is an enemy to sin, as well as his justice; and 'tis no where offered to countenance sin, but to convert the sinner; and is not intended to encourage our impenitency, but our repentance. God hath no where said that he will be mercifull to those, who upon the score of his mercy are bold with him, and presume to offend him; *but the mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him, and keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them. There is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared; but not that he may be despised and affronted.* This is to contradict the very end of God's mercy, which is *to lead us to repentance*, to engage us to leave our sins, not to encourage us to continue in them.

Take heed then of abusing the mercy of God, we cannot provoke the justice of God more than by presuming upon his mercy. This is the time of God's mercy, use this opportunity; if thou neglectest it, a day of justice and vengeance is coming; *Rom. ii. 4, 5. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance? And treasurest up to thy self wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God?* Now is the manifestation of God's mercy; but there is a time coming, when the righteous judgment of God will be revealed against those who abuse his mercy, *not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth to repentance.* To think that the goodness of God was intended for any other end than to take us off from sin, is a gross and affected ignorance that will ruin us; and they who draw any conclusion from the mercy of God, which may harden them in their sins, they are such as the Prophet speaks of, *Isa. xxvii. 11. A people of no understanding; therefore he that made them will not save them, and he that formed them will have no mercy on them.* Mercy it self will rejoyce in the ruin of those that abuse it, and it will aggravate their condemnation. There is no person towards whom God will be more severely just, than towards such. The justice of God exasperated, and set on by his injured and abused mercy, like a razor set in oil, will have the keener edge, and be the sharper for its smoothness. Those that have made the mercy of God their enemy, must expect the worst his justice can do unto them.

S E R M O N XCV.

The Patience of God.

2 P E T. III. 9.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

IN the beginning of this chapter, the Apostle puts the christians, to whom he writes, in mind of the predictions of the antient Prophets, and of the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour, concerning the general judgment of the world, which by many (and perhaps by the Apostles themselves) had been thought to be very near, and that it would presently follow the destruction of *Jerusalem*; but he tells them, that before *that*, there would arise a certain sect, or sort of men, that would deride the expectation of a future judgment, designing probably the *Carpocratians* (a branch of that large sect of the *Gnosticks*) of whom *St. Austin* expressly says, "That they denied the resurrection, and consequently a future judgment". These *St. Peter* calls *scoffers*, ver. 3, 4. *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, where is the promise of his coming?* The word is *επαγγελία*, which signifies a declaration in general, whether it be by way of promise or threatening. What is become of that declaration of Christ so frequently repeated in the gospel, concerning his coming to judgment? For since the fathers fell asleep, or, saving that the fathers are fallen asleep, except only that men die, and one generation succeeds another, all things continue as they were from the creation of the world; that is, the world continues still as it was from the beginning; and there is no sign of any such change and alteration as is foretold. To this he answers two things.

1. That these scoffers, tho' they took themselves to be wits, did betray great ignorance, both of the condition of the world, and of the nature of God. They talk'd very ignorantly concerning the world, when they said, *All things continued as they were from the creation of it*, when so remarkable a change had already happened, as the destruction of it by water; and therefore the prediction concerning the destruction of it by fire, before the great and terrible day of judgment, was no ways incredible. And they shewed themselves likewise very ignorant of the perfection of the divine nature, to which, being eternally the same, a thousand years, and one day, are all one; and if God make good his word some thousands of years hence, it will make no sensible difference, considering his eternal duration, it being no matter when a duration begins, which is never to have an end; ver. 8. *Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years; and a thousand years, as one day.* This, it seems, was a common saying among the *Jews*, to signify, that to the eternity of God, no finite duration bears any proportion; and therefore with regard to eternity, it is all one whether it be a thousand years or one day. The Psalmist hath an expression much to the same purpose, *Psal. xc. 4. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past; and as a watch in the night.* And the son of *Sirach* likewise, *Ecclus. xviii. 10. As a drop of water to the sea, and as a grain of sand to the sea shore, so are a thousand years to the days of eternity.*

The like expression we meet with in heathen writers; *To the gods no time is long*, saith *Pythagoras*: And *Plutarch*, the whole space of a mans life to the gods is

as nothing. And in his excellent discourse of the slowness of the divine vengeance, (the very argument St. Peter is here upon) he hath this passage, *That a thousand, or ten thousand years, are but as an individual point to an infinite duration.* And therefore when the judgment is to be eternal, the delay of it, though it were for a thousand years, is an objection of no force, against either the certainty, or the terror of it; for to eternity, all time is equally short; and it matters not when the punishment of sinners begins, if it shall never have an end.

2. But because the distance between the declaration of a future judgment, and the coming of it, tho' it be nothing to God, yet it seemed long to them; therefore he gives such an account of it, as doth not in the least impeach the truth and faithfulness of God, but is a clear argument and demonstration of his goodness. Admitting what they said to be true, that God delays judgment for a great while, yet this gives no ground to conclude that judgment will never be; but it shews the great goodness of God to sinners, that he gives them so long a space of repentance, that so they may prevent the terror of that day whenever it comes, and escape that dreadful ruin, which will certainly overtake, sooner or later, all impenitent sinners; *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise*; that is, as to the declaration which he hath made of a future judgment, *as some men count slackness*; that is, as if the delay of judgment were an argument it would never come. This is a false inference from the delay of punishment, and an ill interpretation of the goodness of God to sinners, who bears long with them, and delays judgment, on purpose to give men time to repent, and by repentance to prevent their own eternal ruin; *God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* In the handling of these words, I shall do these three things.

First, I shall consider the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; *God is long-suffering to us-ward.*

Secondly, I shall shew, that the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity, as the scoffers, here foretold by the Apostle, argued, that because our Lord delayeth his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come; *God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.*

Thirdly, I will consider the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering towards mankind, which the Apostle here gives; *He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

First, I will consider the patience and long-suffering of God towards mankind, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; *God is long-suffering to us-ward* In the handling of this, I shall do these three things.

I. I shall shew what is meant by the patience and long-suffering of God.

II. That this is a perfection of the divine nature.

III. I shall give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind.

I. what is meant by the patience and long-suffering of God.

The *Hebrew* word signifies one that keeps his anger long, or that is long before he is angry. In the New Testament it is some times express'd by the word *καρμνη*, which signifies God's forbearance and patient waiting for our repentance; sometimes by the word *αυχη*, which signifies God's holding in his wrath, and restraining himself from punishing; and sometimes by *μακροθυμα*, which signifies the extent of his patience, his long-suffering, and forbearing for a long time the punishment due to sinners.

So that the patience of God in his goodness to sinners, in deferring or moderating the punishment due to them for their sins; the deferring of deserved punishment in whole or in part, which if it be extended to a long time, it is properly his *long-suffering*; and the moderating, as well as the deferring of the punishment due to sin, is an instance likewise of God's patience; and not only the deferring

deferring and moderating of temporal punishment, but the adjourning of the eternal misery of sinners, is a principal instance of God's patience; so that the patience of God takes in all that space of repentance, which God affords to sinners in this life; nay, all temporal judgments and afflictions which befall sinners in this life, and are short of cutting them off, and turning them into hell, are comprehended in the patience of God. Whoever God punisheth, *it is of his great mercy and patience that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.* I proceed to the

II. Thing I proposed, which was to shew, that patience is a perfection of the divine nature.

It is not necessarily due to us, but it is due to the perfection of the divine nature, and essentially belongs to it. It is a principal branch of God's goodness, which is the highest and most glorious perfection of all other; and therefore we allways find it in scripture, in the company of God's milder and sweeter attributes. When God would give the most perfect description of himself, and as he says to *Moses, make all his glory to pass before us*, he usually does it by those attributes which declare his goodness; and patience is allways one of them. *Exod. xxxiv. 6. The Lord passed by before Moses, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, mercifull and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth. Psal. lxxxvi. 15. But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Psal. ciii. 8. The Lord is mercifull and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.* And the same you find, *Psal. cxlv. 8. Jonah iv. 2. Joel iii. 13.*

Sometimes indeed you find a severer attribute added to these, as that *he will by no means clear the guilty*, *Ex. xxxiv. 7.* But 'tis allways put in the last place, to declare to us, that God's goodness, and mercy, and patience, are his first and primary perfections; and it is only when these fail, and have no effect upon us, but are abused by us to the encouragement of our selves in an impenitent course, that his justice takes place.

Nay, even among men it is esteemed a perfection to be able to forbear and to restrain our anger; passion is impotency and folly, but patience is power and wisdom; *Prov. xiv. 29. He that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly; but he that is slow to wrath, is of great understanding. Prov. xvi. 32. He that is slow to wrath, is better than the mighty: and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that conquereth a city. Rom. xii. 21. Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.* To be impatient, is *to be overcome*; but to forbear anger and revenge, is *victory*. Patience is an argument of great power and command of our selves, and therefore God himself, who is the most powerfull being, is slow to anger, and of infinite patience; and nothing doth more declare the power of God, than his patience, that when he is provoked by such vile and despicable creatures as we are, he can withhold his hand from destroying us. This is the argument which *Moses* useth, *Numb. xiv. 17, 18. that the power of God doth so eminently appear in his patience; and now, I pray thee, let the power of my Lord be great, as he hath spoken, saying, the Lord is gracious and long-suffering.* And yet power, where it is not restrained by wisdom and goodness, is a great temptation to anger; because where there is power, there is something to back it and make it good. And therefore the *Psalmist* doth recommend and set off the patience of God, from the consideration of his power; *Psal. vii. 11. God is strong and patient; God is provoked every day; God is strong, and therefore patient; or he is infinitely patient, notwithstanding his almighty power to revenge the daily provocations of his creatures.*

Among men, anger and weakness commonly go together; but they are ill matched, as is excellently observed by the son of *Sirach*, *Ecclus. x. 18. Pride was not made for man, nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman.* So that anger and impatience is every where unreasonable; where there is power, impatience is below it, and a thing too mean for omnipotency; and where there wants power, anger is above it; it is too much for a weak and impotent creature to be angry. Where there is power, anger is needless and of no use; and

where there is no power, it is vain and to no purpose. So that patience is every where a perfection, both in God and man. I proceed to the

III. Thing I proposed, which was to give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind. And this will evidently appear, if we consider these *two* things.

1. How men deal with God.

2. How notwithstanding this, God deals with them.

1. How men deal with God. Every day we highly offend and provoke him, we grieve and weary him with our iniquities, as the expression is in the Prophet, *Isa. xliii. 24. Thou hast made me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities.* Every sin that we commit, is an affront to the divine majesty, and a contempt of his authority. By denying submission to his laws; we question his omnipresence, and say, *Doth God see? and is there knowledge in the most high?* Or if we acknowledge his omnipresence, and that he regards what we do, the provocation is still the greater, because then we affront him to his face; we dare his justice, and challenge his omnipotency, and *provoke the Lord to jealousy, as if we were stronger than he.*

Is not God patient, when *the whole world lies in wickedness, and the earth is overspread with violence, and is full of the habitations of cruelty?* when he who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and is so highly offended at the sins of men, hath yet the patience to look upon *them that deal treacherously, and to hold his peace?* when the wicked persecutes and devours the man that is more righteous than he? when even that part of the world which professeth the name of God and Christ, do by their vile and abominable lives, *blaspheme that holy and glorious name whereby they are called?*

Every moment God hath greater injuries done to him, and more affronts put upon him, than were ever offered to all the sons of men; and surely provocations are tryals of patience, especially when they are so numerous and so heinous; for if offenses rise according to the dignity of the person injured, and the meanness of him that doth the injury, then no offences are so great as those that are committed by *men against God*, no affronts like to those which are offered to *the divine majesty* by the continual provocations of *his creatures.* And is not this an argument of God's patience, that the glorious majesty of heaven should bear such multiplied indignities from such vile worms? that he who is the former of all things, should endure his own creatures to rebell against him, and the work of his hands to strike at him? that he who is our great benefactor, should put up such affronts from those who depend upon his bounty, and are maintained at his charge? that he, *in whose hands our breath is,* should suffer men to breathe out oaths, and curses, and blasphemies against him? Surely these prove the patience of God to purpose, and are equally tryals and arguments of it.

2. The patience of God will farther appear, if we consider how, notwithstanding all this, God deals with us. He is patient to the whole world, in that he doth not turn us out of being, and *turn the wicked together into hell, with all the nations that forget God.* He is patient to the greatest part of mankind, in that he makes but a few terrible examples of his justice, *that others may hear and fear,* and take warning by them. He is patient to particular persons, in that, notwithstanding our daily provocations, he *prevents us daily with the blessing* of his goodness, prolonging our lives, and vouchsafing so many favours to us, that *by this great goodness we may be led to repentance.*

But the patience of God will more illustriously appear, if we consider these following particulars, which are so many evidences and instances of it.

1. That God is not obliged to spare and forbear us at all. It is patience that he doth not surprize us in the very act of sin, and let fly at us with a thunderbolt so soon as ever we have offended; that the wrath of God doth not fall upon the intemperate person, as it did upon the *Israelites, while the meat and drink is yet in their mouths;* that a man is not struck dead or mad whilst he is telling a lye; that the soul of the prophane and false swearer does not expire with his oaths and perjuries.

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2. That God spares us when it is his power so easily to ruin us ; when he can with one word command us out of being, and by cutting asunder one little thread, let us drop into hell. If God were disposed to severity, he could deal with us after another manner ; and as the expression is in the Prophet, *ease himself of his adversaries, and be avenged of his enemies.*

3. That God exerciseth this patience to sinners, *flagrante bello*, while they are up in arms against him, and committing hostilities upon him ; he bears with us even when we are challenging his justice to punish us, and provoking his power to destroy us.

4. That he is so very slow and unwilling to punish, and to inflict his judgments upon us. As for eternal punishments, God defers them a long while ; and by all proper ways and means endeavours to prevent them, and to bring us to repentance. And as for those temporal judgments which God inflicts upon sinners, he carries himself so, that we may plainly see all the signs of unwillingness that can be ; he tries to prevent them, he is loath to set about this work ; and when he does, it is with much reluctance ; and then he is easily persuaded and prevail'd withall not to do it ; and when he does, he does it not rigorously, and to extremity ; and he is soon taken off after he is engaged in it. All which are great instances and evidences of his wonderfull patience to sinners.

(1.) God's unwillingness to punish appears, in that he labours to prevent punishment ; and that he may effectually do this, he endeavours to prevent sin, the meritorious cause of God's judgments. To this end, he hath threaten'd it with severe punishments, that the dread of them may make us afraid to offend ; and if this will not do, he does not yet give us over, but gives us *a space of repentance*, and invites us earnestly to turn to him, and thereby to prevent his judgments ; he expostulates with sinners, and reasons the case with them, as if he were more concerned not to punish than they are not to be punished ; and thus by his earnest desire of our repentance, he shows how little he desires our ruin.

(2.) He is long before he goes about this work. *Judgment* is in scripture call'd *his strange work* ; as if he were not acquainted with it, and hardly knew how to go about it on the sudden. He is represented as not prepared for such a work, *Deut. xxxii. 41. If I whet my glittering sword* ; as if the instruments of punishment were not ready for us. Nay, by a strange kind of condescension to our capacities, and to set forth to us the patience of God, and his slowness to wrath, after the manner of men, he is represented as keeping out of the way, that he may not be tempted to destroy us ; *Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3.* where he tells *Moses*, that *he would send an angel before them ; but I will not go up in the midst of thee, lest I consume thee in the way.*

At works of mercy he is very ready and forward. When *Daniel* prayed for the deliverance of the people of *Israel* out of captivity, the angel tells him, that *at the beginning of his supplication, the commandment came forth*, to bring him a promise of their deliverance. The mercy of God many times prevents our prayers, and out-runs our wishes and desires : but when he comes to affliction, he takes time to do it ; he passeth by many provocations, and waits long in expectation, that by our repentance we will prevent his judgments ; *he hearken'd and heard* (saith God in the Prophet *Jeremiah*) *but they spake not right, no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done ?* He is represented as waiting and listening, to hear if any penitent word would drop from them ; he gives the sinner time to repent and reflect upon his actions, and to consider what he hath done, and space to reason himself into repentance. For this reason the judgments of God do often follow the sins of men at a great distance, otherwise he could easily make them mend their pace, and *consume us in a moment.*

(3.) When he goes about this work, he does it with much reluctance. *Amos xi. 8, 9. How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee, Israel ? Mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together.* He is represented as making many essays and offers before he came to it. *Psal. cvi. 26. Many a time lifted he up his hand in the wilderness to destroy them.* He made as if he

would do it, and let fall his hand again, as if he could not find in his heart to be so severe. God with-holds his judgments till he is weary of holding in, as the expression is, *Jer. vi. 11.* till he can forbear no longer. *Jer. xlv. 22.* *So that the Lord could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed.*

(4.) God is easily prevailed upon not to punish. When he seemed resolved upon it, to destroy the murmuring *Israelites*, yet how often, at the intercession of *Moses*, did he turn away his wrath? That he will accept of very low terms to spare a very wicked people, appears by the instance of *Sodom*, where if there had been *but ten righteous persons*, he would not have destroyed them for *the ten's sake*. Yea, when his truth seemed to have been pawn'd, (at least in the apprehension of his Prophet) yet even then repentance took him off, as in the case of *Nineveh*. Nay, how glad is he to be thus prevented! with what joy does he tell the Prophet the news of *Ahab's* humiliation! *Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself? Because he humbleth himself, I will not bring the evil in his days.*

(5.) When he punisheth, he does it very seldom rigorously, and to extremity, not so much as we deserve; *Psal. ciii. 10.* *He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities;* nor so much as he can. He doth not let loose the fierceness of his anger, nor pour forth all his wrath; *Psal. lxxviii. 38.* *Being full of compassion, he forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.*

(6.) After he hath begun to punish, and is engaged in the work, he is not hard to be taken off. There is a famous instance of this, *2 Sam. xxiv.* when God had sent three days pestilence upon *Israel* for *David's* sin, in numbering the people, and at the end of the third day, the angel of the Lord had stretched forth his hand over *Jerusalem* to destroy it, upon the prayer of *David*, it is said, that *the Lord repented of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, it is enough, stay now thine hand.* Nay, so ready is God to be taken off from this work, that he sets a high value upon those who stand in the gap to turn away his wrath; *Numb. xxv. 11, 12, 13.* *Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, that I consumed them not in my jealousy; wherefore, behold I give unto him my covenant of peace, and to his seed after him, because he was jealous for his God, and made an attonement for the children of Israel.* That which God values in this action of *Phinehas*, next to his zeal for him, is that *he turned away his wrath, and made an attonement for the children of Israel.*

5. And lastly, The patience of God will yet appear with farther advantage, if we consider some eminent and remarkable instances of it; which are so much the more considerable, because they are instances, not only of God's patience extended to a long time, but to a great many persons. *The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah* upon the whole world, as is probably conjectured, for the space of *an hundred and twenty years.* God bore with the people of *Israel* in the wilderness, after they had tempted him ten times, for the space of forty years; *Acts xiii. 18.* *And about the space of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.* And this instance of God's patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it with the great impatience of that people; if they did but want flesh or water, they were out of patience with God; when *Moses* was in the mount with God but forty days, they presently fall to make new Gods; they had not the patience of *forty days*, and yet God bore their manners *forty years.* God had spared *Nineveh* for some ages, and when his patience was even expired, and he seems to have past a final sentence upon it, yet he grants a reprieve for *forty days*, that they might sue out their pardon in that time, and they did so; *they turned from their evil ways, and God turned from the evil he said he would do to them, and he did it not.*

But the most remarkable instance of God's long-suffering is to the *Jews*, if we consider it with all the circumstances of it; after they had rejected the son of God, notwithstanding the purity of his doctrine, and the power of his miracles; after they had unjustly condemned, and cruelly murdered the Lord of life, yet the patience of God respite the ruin of that people forty years.

Besides

Besides all these, there are many instances of God's patience to particular persons; but it were endless to enumerate these; every one of us may be an instance to our selves of God's long-suffering.

I shall only add, as a farther advantage to set off the patience of God to sinners, that his forbearance is so great, that he hath been complained of for it by his own servants. *Job*, who was so patient a man himself, thought much at it; *Job* xxi. 7, 8. *Wherefore doth the wicked live, yea, become old? Their seed is established in their sight, and their posterity before their eyes.* *Jonah* challengeth God for it, *Ch.* iv. 2. *Was not this that which I said when I was yet in my own country? and therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, because I knew thou art a gracious God, and mercifull, slow to anger, &c.* *Jonah* had observed God to be so prone to this, that he was loath to be sent upon his message, lest God should discredit his Prophet, in not being so good (shall I say) so severe as his word.

I have done with the first thing I propos'd to speak to, *viz.* The great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind.

S E R M O N XCVI.

The Patience of God.

2 P E T. III. 9.

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

I Have made entrance into these words: in the handling of which, I propos'd to do these three things.

First, To consider the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; *God is long-suffering to us-ward.*

Secondly, To shew that the patience of God, and the delay of his judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity: *God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.*

Thirdly, To consider the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering towards mankind; *He is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* I have already spoken to the

First of these, namely the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature. I proceed now to the

Second thing I propos'd, namely, to shew, that the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity: *God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness*; that is, as the *scoffers* here mentioned by the Apostle, did ignorantly and maliciously reason, that because our Lord delayed his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come.

There was indeed some pretense for this objection, because the christians did generally apprehend, that the day of judgment was very near, and that it would immediately follow the destruction of *Jerusalem*; and it seems, the disciples themselves were of that persuasion before our Saviour's death; when our Saviour discoursing to them of the destruction of the temple, they put these two questions to him, *Mat.* xxiv. 3. *And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him, privately, saying, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? When shall these things be?* that is, the things he had been speaking of immediately before, *viz.* the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the dissolution

dissolution of the temple ; that is plainly the meaning of the first question ; to which they subjoined another, *And what shall be the sign of thy coming ?* that is, to judgment, *and of the end of the world ?* which, in all probability, was added to the former, because they supposed that the one was presently to follow the other, and therefore the same answer would serve them both : and it appears by our Saviour's answer, that he was not concerned to rectify them in this mistake, which might be of good use to them, both to make them more zealous to propagate the gospel, since there was like to be so little time for it ; and likewise to wean their affections from this world, which they thought to be so near an end.

One thing indeed our Saviour says, which (had they not been prepossessed with another opinion) does sufficiently intimate, that there might be a considerable space of time, betwixt the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the day of judgment ; and this we find only in *St. Luke*, Ch. xxi. 24. where speaking of the miseries and calamities that should come upon the *Jews*, he says, *They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be carried into captivity into all nations ; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* So that here were a great many events foretold, betwixt the destruction of *Jerusalem* and the end of the world, the accomplishment whereof might take up a great deal of time, as appears by the event of things, *Jerusalem* being at this day still *trodden down by the Gentiles*, and the *Jews* still continuing *dispersed over the world* : but the disciples it seems did not much mind this, being carried away with a prejudicate conceit, that the end of the world would happen before the end of that age ; in which they were much confirmed by what our Saviour, after his resurrection, said of *St. John*, upon occasion of *Peter's* question concerning him ; *John* xxi. 21, 22. *Lord, what shall this man do ? Jesus saith unto him, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee :* Upon which words of our Saviour concerning him, *St. John* himself adds, ver. 23. *Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that Disciple should not die ;* that is, that he should live till the coming of our Lord, and then be taken up with him into heaven ; from all which they probably (as they thought) concluded that the day of judgment would happen before the end of that age, whilst *St. John* was alive ; but *St. John*, who writ last of the Evangelists (as *Eusebius* tells us) and lived till after the destruction of *Jerusalem*, as he acquaints us with this mistake, which was current among the christians, so he takes care to rectify it, telling us, that *Jesus* said not, *he should not die*, but *if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ?* He tells us, that our Saviour did not affirm that *he should not die* ; but to express *St. Peter's* curiosity, he says, *If it were my pleasure that he should not die at all, but live till I come to judgment, what is that to thee ?* And *St. Peter* likewise (or whoever was the author of this second Epistle, or at least of this third chapter, which seems to be a new Epistle by it self) takes notice of this mistake, about the nearness of the day of judgment, as that which gave occasion to these *scoffers* to deride the expectation of a future judgment among the christians, because they had been already deceived about the time of it ; and this the *scoffers* twitted them with in that question, *Where is the promise of his coming ?* therefore the learned *Grotius* conjectures very probably, that this last Epistle (contained in the third chapter) was written after the destruction of *Jerusalem*, which was the time fix'd for Christ's coming to judgment, and therefore there could be no ground for this scoff till after that time. *St. Peter* indeed did not live so long, and therefore *Grotius* thinks, that this Epistle was writ by *Siméon* or *Simon*, who was successor of *St. James*, in the Bishoprick of *Jerusalem*, and lived to the time of *Trajan*.

I have been the longer in giving an account of this, that we might understand where the ground and force of this scoff lay ; namely in this, that because the christians had generally been very confident, that the coming of Christ to judgment would be presently after the destruction of *Jerusalem*, and were now found to be deceived in that, therefore there was no regard to be had at all to their expectation of a future judgment ; because they might be deceived in that, as well as in the other.

But herein they argued very falsely, because our Saviour had positively and peremptorily foretold his coming to judgment, but had never fixed and determined the

the time of it : nay, so far was he from that, that he had plainly told his disciples; that the precise time of the day of judgment God had reserved as a secret to himself, which he had not imparted to any, no, not to the angels in heaven, nor to the son himself; *Mark xiii. 32, 33. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the son, but the father. Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is.* So that if they presumed to make any conjectures about the time when the day of judgment would be, they did it without any warrant from our Lord; it was great presumption in them to determine the time of it, when our Saviour had so expressly told them, that the father had reserved this as a secret, which he had never communicated to any; and therefore if they were mistaken about it, it was no wonder. But their mistake in this, was no prejudice to the truth of our Saviour's clear prediction of a future judgment, without any determination of the time of it, for that might be at some thousands of years distance, and yet be certain for all that; and the delay of it was no sign of the uncertainty of our Saviour's prediction concerning it, but only of God's great patience and long-suffering to sinners, in expectation of their repentance; *God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward.* And this brings me to the

Third, and last particular in the text, namely, the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering to mankind; *He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* And for this St. Peter cites St. Paul, ver. 15th of this chapter; *And account that the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation*, that is, that the great end and design of God's goodness and long-suffering to sinners, is that they may repent and be saved: *Account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you.* Now the words are not expressly found in St. Paul's writings; but the sense and effect of them is, viz. in *Rom. ii. 4. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* God hath a very gracious and mercifull design in his patience to sinners; he is good, that he may make us so, and that *his goodness may lead us to repentance?* he defers punishment on purpose, that he may give men time to be-think themselves, and to return to a better mind; *He winks at the sins of men, that they may repent*, says the son of Sirach. The patience of God aims at the cure and recovery of those who are not desperately and resolutely wicked.

This is the primary end and intention of God's patience to sinners; and if he fail of this end through our hardness and impenitency, he hath other ends which he will infallibly attain. He will hereby glorify the riches of his mercy, and vindicate the righteousness of his justice; the damned in hell shall acknowledge, that the patience of God was great mercy and goodness to them, tho' they abused it; for God does not lose the glory of his patience, tho' we lose the benefit of it, and he will make it subservient to his justice one way or other. Those great offenders whom he spares, after there are no hopes of their amendment, he many times makes use of, as instruments for the punishing of others, as *rods of his wrath for the discipline of the world*; and he often reserves those who are incorrigibly bad, for a more remarkable ruin. But however, they are reserved to the judgment of the great day; and if after God hath exercised much patience towards sinners in this world, he inflicts punishment on them in the next, it must be acknowledg'd to be most just; for what can he do less, than to condemn those who would not be saved, and to make them miserable, who so obstinately refused to be happy?

Before I come to apply this discourse concerning the patience and long-suffering of God to sinners, I must remove an objection or two.

I. The severity of God to some sinners in this life, and to all impenitent sinners in the next, seems to contradict what hath been said concerning God's patience and long-suffering.

As for the severity of God towards impenitent sinners in the next life, this doth not at all contradict the patience of God, because the very nature of patience, and forbearance, and long-suffering, does suppose a determinate time, and that they will not last allways; this life is the day of God's patience, and in the next world his justice and severity will take place. And therefore the punishment of sinners in another world, after God hath tried them in this, and expected their repentance, is no ways contrary to his patience and goodness, and very agreeable to his wisdom and justice; for it is no part of goodness, to see it self perpetually abused; it is not patience, but stupidity and insensibleness, to endure to be allways trampled upon, and to bear to have his holy and just laws for ever despised and contemned.

And as for his severity to some sinners in this life; as to *Lot's* wife, to the *Israelite* that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day, to *Nadab* and *Abihu*, to *Uzzah*, to *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, and to *Herod Agrippa*; in all which instances God seems to have made quick work, and to have executed judgment speedily; to these I answer, that this severity of God to some few, doth rather magnify his patience to the rest of mankind; he may be severe to some few, for example and warning to many, that they may learn to make better use of his patience, and not to trespass so boldly upon it; and perhaps he hath exercised much patience already towards those, to whom at last he is so severe; as is plain in the case of *Herod*, and it may well be supposed in most of the other instances; or else the sin so suddenly and severely punished, was very heinous and presumptuous, of a contagious and spreading nature, and of dangerous example. *Lot's* wife sinned very presumptuously against an express and an easy command, and whilst God was taking care of her deliverance in a very extraordinary manner. That of *Nadab* and *Abihu*, and of the man that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day, were presently after the giving of the law; in which case great severity is necessary; and that of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*, at the first publishing of the gospel, that the majesty of the divine spirit, and the authority of the first publishers of it might not be contemned. That of *Uzzah* was upon the return of the ark of God from among the *Philistines*, that the people might not lose their reverence for it after it had been taken captive; so that these necessary severities to a few, in comparison of those many that are warned by them, are rather arguments of God's patience, than objections against it.

II. It is objected, that if God do not desire the ruin of sinners, but their repentance, whence comes it to pass, that all are not brought to repentance? for who hath resisted his will? To this I answer,

1. That there is no doubt but God is able to do this. He can, if he pleaseth, conquer and reclaim the most obstinate spirits; he is able out of *stones to raise up children unto Abraham*. And sometimes he exerts his omnipotence herein, as in the conversion of *St. Paul*, in a kind of violent and irresistible manner: but he hath nowhere declared, that he will do this to all; and we see plainly in experience, that he does not do it.

2. God may very well be said, *not to be willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*, when he does on his part what is sufficient to that end; and upon this ground the scripture every where represents God as desiring the repentance of sinners, and their obedience to his laws, *Deut. v. 29. O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments allways, that it might be well with them!* So *Jer. xiii. 27. O Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?* *Isa. v. 3, 4.* we find God there solemnly appealing to the people of *Israel*, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done; *And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? wherefore when I looked it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* God may justly look for the fruits of repentance and obedience from those, to whom he affords a sufficiency of means to that end. And if so, then,

3. The true reason why men do not repent, but perish, is because they are obstinate, and will not repent; and this account the scripture every where gives of the impenitency of men, and the ruin consequent upon it. *Psal. lxxxi. 13. O that my people had hearken'd unto me, and Israel had walked in my statutes! But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me. Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Why will ye dye, O house of Israel? Prov. ii. 29, 31. That they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord. They would none of my counsels, they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.* The ruin of sinners doth not proceed from the counsel of God, but from their own choice. And so likewise our Saviour every where chargeth the ruin and destruction of the *Jews* upon their own willfull obstinacy.

The inferences from this discourse concerning the patience and long-suffering of God towards mankind, shall be these three.

I. To stir us up to a thankfull acknowledgment of the great patience of God towards us, notwithstanding our manifold and heinous provocations. We may every one of us take to our selves those words, *Lam. iii. 22. It is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are renewed every morning.* Whenever we sin (and we provoke God every day) it is of his patience that we are not destroyed; and when we sin again, this is a new and greater instance of God's patience. The mercies of God's patience are no more to be number'd than our sins; we may say with *David, How great is the sum of them?* The goodness of God in sparing us, is in some respect greater than his goodness in creating us: because he had no provocation not to make us, but we provoke him daily to destroy us.

II. Let us propound the patience of God for a pattern to our selves. *Plutarch* says, "That God sets forth himself in the midst of the world for our imitation," and propounds to us the example of his patience, to teach us not to revenge injuries hastily upon one another.

III. Let us comply with the design of God's patience and long-suffering towards us, which is to bring us to repentance. Men are very apt to abuse it to a quite contrary purpose, to the encouraging themselves in their evil ways. So *Solomon* observes, *Eccl. viii. 11. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil:* But this is very false reasoning, for the patience of God is an enemy to sin, as well as his justice, and the design of it is not to countenance sin; but to convert the sinner; *Rom. ii. 4. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance;* patience in God should produce repentance in us; and we should look upon it as an opportunity given us by God to repent and be saved; *2 Pet. iii. 15. Account that the long-suffering of God is salvation.* They that do not improve the patience of God to their own salvation, mistake the true meaning and intent of it. But many are so far from making this use of it, that they presume upon it, and sin with more courage and confidence because of it; but that we may be sensible of the danger of this, I will offer these two or three considerations.

1. That nothing is more provoking to God, than the abuse of his patience. God's patience waits for our repentance, and all long attendance, even of inferiors upon their superiors, hath something in it that is grievous; how much more grievous and provoking must it be to the great God, after he hath laid out upon us all the riches of his goodness and long-suffering, to have that despised! after his patience hath waited a long time upon us, not only to be thrust away with contempt, but to have that which should be an argument to us to leave our sins, abused into an encouragement to continue in them! God takes an account of all the days of his patience and forbearance; *Luke xiii. 7. Behold these three years I come seeking fruit, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*

2. Consider that the patience of God will have an end. Tho' God suffers long, he will not suffer allways; we may provoke God so long, till he can forbear no longer without injury and dishonour to his wisdom, and justice, and holiness; and God will not suffer one attribute to wrong the rest; his wisdom will deter-

mine the length of his patience ; and when his patience is to no purpose, when there is no hopes of our amendment, his wisdom will then put a period to it ; then the patience of his mercy will determine. *How often would I have gathered you, and you would not ? therefore your house is left unto you desolate.* And the patience of God's judgments will then determine. *Why should they be smitten any more : they will revolt more and more.* Yea, patience it self, after a long and fruitless expectation, will expire. A sinner may continue so long impenitent, till the patience of God, as I may say, grows impatient, and then our ruin will make haste, and destruction *will come upon us in a moment.* If men will not come to repentance, *the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,* as it follows in the next verse after the text ; the judgment of God will suddenly surprize those who will not be gained by his patience.

3. Consider that nothing will more hasten and aggravate our ruin, than the abuse of God's patience. All this time of God's patience, his wrath is coming towards us ; and the more we presume upon it, the sooner it will overtake us ; Luke xii. 45, 46. *The wicked servant, who said his Lord delayed his coming, and fell to rioting and drunkenness ; our Saviour tells us, That the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him.*

And it will aggravate our ruin ; the longer punishment is a coming, the heavier it will be ; those things which are long in preparation, are terrible in execution ; the weight of God's wrath will make amends for the slowness of it, and the delay of judgment will be fully recompensed in the dreadfulness of it when it comes.

Let all those consider this who go on in their sin, and are dead to the voice of God's patience, which calls upon them every moment of their lives. There is a day of vengeance a coming upon those who trifle away this day of God's patience ; nothing will sooner and more inflame the wrath and displeasure of God against us, than his abused patience, and the despised riches of his goodness. As oil, tho' it be soft and smooth, yet when it is once inflamed, burns most fiercely ; so the patience of God, when it is abused, turns into fury, and his mildest attributes into the greatest severities.

And if the patience of God do not bring us to repentance, it will but prepare us for a more intolerable ruin. After God hath kept a long indignation in his breast, it will at length break forth with the greater violence. The patience of God increaseth his judgments by an incredible kind of proportion ; *Levit. xxvi. 18. And if you will still (says God to the people of Israel) walk contrary to me ; and if ye will not be reformed by all these things, I will punish you yet seven times more.* And ver. 27. *I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, according to your sins.* At first God's justice accused sinners ; but after a long time of patience, his mercy comes in against us, and instead of staying his hand, adds weight to his blows ; *Rom. ix. 22. What if God willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction ?* They upon whom the patience of God hath no good effect, are *vessels of wrath, prepared and fitted for destruction.* If ever God display his wrath, and make his anger known, he will do it in the most severe manner upon those who have despised and abused his patience ; for these, in a more peculiar manner, do *treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*

To conclude ; Let us all take a review of our lives, and consider how long the patience of God hath waited upon us, and born with us ; with some twenty, forty, perhaps sixty years, and longer. Do we not remember how God spared us in such a danger, when we gave our selves for lost ? and how he recovered us in such a sickness, when the physician gave us up for gone ? And what use have we made of this patience and long-suffering of God towards us ? It is the worst temper in the world, not to be melted by kindness, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle usage. He that is not wrought upon, neither by the patience of his mercy, nor by the patience of his judgments, his case is desperate and past remedy. *Consider this all ye that forget God, lest his patience turn into fury ; for God is not slack, as some men count slackness ; but long-suffering to sinners, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

S E R M O N XCVII.

The Long-suffering of God.

ECCLES. VIII. II.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Nothing is more evident, than that *the world lies in wickedness, and that iniquity every where abounds*; and yet nothing is more certain, than that *God will not acquit the guilty, and let sin go unpunished*. All men, excepting those who have offer'd notorious violence to the light of their own minds, and *have put the candle of the Lord, which is in them, under a bushel*, do believe, that there is a God in the world, to whose holy nature and will sin is perfectly contrary, *who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, that his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings, that there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves*. All men except those whose consciences are seared, as it were with a hot iron, are convinc'd of the difference of good and evil, and that it is not all one whether *men serve God, or serve him not*, do well, or live wickedly. Every man from his inward sense and experience is satisfied of his own liberty, and that God lays upon men no necessity of sinning, but that whenever we do amiss, it is our own act, and we chuse to do so; and so far is he from giving the least countenance to sin, that he hath given all imaginable discouragement to it, by the most severe and terrible threatenings, such as one would think sufficient to deter men for ever from it, and to drive it out of the world; and to make his threatenings the more awfull and effectual, his providence hath not been wanting to give remarkable instances of his justice and severity upon notorious offenders, even in this life; and yet for all this, men do and will sin; nay, they are zealously set and bent upon it.

Now here is the wonder; what it is that gives finners such heart, and makes them so resolute and undaunted in so dangerous a course. *Solomon gives us this account of it, because the punishments and judgments of God follow the sins of men so slowly, and are long before they overtake the sinner. Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.*

The scope of the wise man's discourse is this, that by reason of God's forbearance and long-suffering towards finners in this life, 'tis not so easy to discern the difference between them and other men; this life is the day of God's patience, but the next will be a day of retribution and recompense. Now because God doth defer and moderate the punishment of finners in this world, and reserve the weight of his judgments to the next, because through the long-suffering of God many great finners live and dye without any remarkable testimony of God's wrath and displeasure against them, *therefore the heart of the children of men are fully set in them to do evil.*

If we render the text word for word from the original, it runs thus, *Because nothing is done as a recompense to an evil work, therefore the heart of the sons of men are full in them to do evil*; that is, because men are not opposed, and contradicted in their evil ways, because divine justice doth not presently check and controul finners, because *sentence is not immediately past upon them, and judgment executed, therefore the heart of the sons of men is full in them to do evil*, that is, therefore men grow bold and presumptuous in sin; for the *Hebrew* word which we render, *is fully set in them*, we find *Esth. vii. 5.* where *Ahasuerus* says concerning *Haman*, *who is he? and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? Whose heart*

was full to do so, *Fervet in iis cor filiorum hominum*; so some render it, *the hearts of men boil with wickedness*, are so full of it, that it works over. Men are resolute in an evil course, *their hearts are strengthened and hardened in them to do evil*, so others translate the words. The translation of the LXX is very emphatical, *ἐπληρορρήθη καρδία*, *the heart of the sons of men is fully persuaded and assured to do evil*. All these translations agree in the main scope and sense, viz. That sinners are very apt to presume upon the long-suffering of God, and to abuse it, to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in their evil ways. In the handling of this, I shall

First, Briefly shew that it is so.

Secondly, Whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretences and colours of reason, men encourage themselves in sin, from the patience of God.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to answer an objection about this matter.

First, That men are very apt to abuse the long-suffering of God to the encouraging and hardening of themselves in an evil course, the experience of the world in all ages does give abundant testimony. Thus it was with the old world, *when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while he was preparing an ark, for the space of a hundred and twenty years*, 1 Pet. iii. 20. For the wickedness of man, which was great upon the earth, a general deluge was threaten'd, but God was patient, and delayed his judgment a great while; hereupon they grew secure in their impenitency, and went on in their course, as if they had no apprehension of danger, no fear of the judgment threaten'd. So our Saviour tells us, *Matth. xxiv. 38, 39. As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah enter'd into the Ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away*. And so it was with *Sodom*, Luke xvii. 28. And likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, *they eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built*. And so our Saviour tells us it will be in the end of the world; *Even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed*. So likewise the Apostle St. Paul, Rom. ii. 4, 5. *Despise thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. The goodness and long-suffering of God, which ought in all reason to lead men to repentance, is to many an occasion of greater hardness and impenitency. So also St. Peter foretells, 2 Pet. iii. 3. *that in the last days there should come scoffers, who should walk after their own hearts lusts, saying, where is the promise of his coming?* And we see in daily experience, that the greatest part of sinners grow more obstinate and confirmed in their wicked ways, upon account of God's patience, and because he delays the punishment due to them for their sins. Let us consider in the

Second place, whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretense and colour of reason, men encourage themselves in sin, from the long-suffering of God. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconsiderateness, and from *an evil heart of unbelief*, from the temptation and suggestion of the devil, one of whose great arts it is, to make men question the threatenings of God, and to insinuate, as he did to our first parents, either that he hath not denounced such threatenings, or that he will not execute them so severely. All these causes do concur to the producing this monstrous effect; but that which I design to enquire into, is from what pretense of reason, grounded upon the long-suffering of God, sinners argue themselves into this confidence and presumption. For when the wise man saith, *that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil*, he does not intend to insinuate, that God's long-suffering fills the hearts of men with wicked designs and resolutions, and does by a proper and direct efficacy, harden sinners in their course; but that wicked men upon some account or other, do take occasion from the long-suffering of God, to harden themselves in sin, they draw false conclusions from it to impose upon themselves, as if it were really a ground of encouragement; they think they see something in the forbearance of

God

God and his delay of punishment, which makes them hope for impunity in an evil course, notwithstanding the threatenings of God.

And therefore I shall endeavour to shew, what those false conclusions are, which wicked men draw from the delay of punishment, and to discover the sophistry and fallacy of them; and I shall rank them under *two* heads; those which are more gross and atheistical, and those which are not so gross, but yet more common and frequent.

I. Those conclusions which are more gross and atheistical, which bad men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, from the delay of punishment (which we who believe a God, call the patience or long-suffering of God) are these *three*; either that there is no God; or if there be, that there is no providence; or that there is no difference between good and evil.

I shall speak more briefly of these, because I hope there are but few in the world of such irregular and besotted understandings, as to make such inferences as these from the delay of punishment.

1st, From hence some would fain conclude, that there is no God. That some are so absurd as to reason in this manner, the scripture tells us, *Psal. xiv. i. The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God: they are corrupt, and have done abominable works.* Now the argument that these men frame to themselves, is this; God doth not take a speedy course with sinners, and revenge himself immediately upon the workers of iniquity, therefore there is no God; for if there were, he would shew himself, and not bear the affronts of sinners, when it is so easy for him to vindicate himself by a swift and speedy vengeance. Thus the poet represents the atheist arguing, *Nullos esse deos, inane cælum, affirmat Selius, probâtque, quod se factum, dum negat hoc, videt beatum.* “*Selius* affirms there are no Gods, and “that heaven is an empty place, and proves it, because whilst he denies God, he “fees himself in a very happy and prosperous condition.

And here it is worthy our notice, at what a contradictory rate these men reason. *First*, they would have no God, lest he would be just and punish them as they deserved; and then in another mood, they would have him to be nothing but justice and severity, lest there should be a God; as if no other notion could be framed of the divine nature, but of a rash fury, and impetuous revenge, and an impotent passion, which when it is offended and provoked, cannot contain it self, and forbear punishment for a moment. Justice is not such a perfection as doth necessarily exclude wisdom, and goodness, and patience; it doth in no wise contradict the perfection of the divine nature, to bear with sinners in expectation of their repentance and amendment; or if God foresees their final impenitency, to respite their punishment to the most fit and convenient season. God may suffer long, and yet be resolved if sinners persist in the abuse of his goodness and patience, to execute vengeance upon them in due time. It is a pitifull ground of Atheism, that because God is so much better than wicked men deserve, they will not allow him to be at all.

2^{dly}, Others infer from the delay of punishment, that there is no providence that administers the affairs of the world, and regards the good and bad actions of men. For tho’ the being of God be acknowledged, yet if he do not regard what is done here below, nor concern himself in human affairs, sinners are as safe and free to do what they please, as if there were no God; and upon this ground, the scripture tells us, many encourage themselves in their wickedness; *Psal. lxiv. 5. They encourage themselves in an evil matter, they commune laying snares privately; for they say, who shall see them?* And more expressly, *Psal. xciv. 4, 5, 6, 7. How long shall the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy People, O Lord, and afflict thine heritage, and slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless; and yet they say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.* And if this were so, well might they encourage themselves. If it were true which *Epicurus* saith, “that God takes no knowledge of the actions of men, that he is far removed from us, and contented with himself, and “not at all concerned in what we do;” if this were true, the inference which *Lucretius* makes, were very just; *Quare religio pedibus subjecta vicissim obteritur;*

men

“ men might trample religion under their feet, and live without any regard to the
“ Laws of it.

But let us see how they infer this from the long-suffering of God, that he neglects the affairs of the world, and hath no consideration of the actions of men, because they see the ungodly to prosper in the world, equally with others that are strictly devout and virtuous, yea, many times to be in a more prosperous and flourishing condition; *they are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men.* So that if there be a God, it seems (say they) that he connives at the crimes of men, and *looks on upon them that deal treacherously, and holds his peace, whilst the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than himself;* as the Prophet expresseth it, *Heb. i. 13.*

For answer to this, I shall only give this reasonable and credible account of the long-suffering of God, and the impunity of wicked men in this life, which not only the scripture gives us, but the heathen were able to give from the light of nature, and is agreeable to the common sense of mankind; namely, that this life is a state of probation and trial, wherein God *suffers men to walk in their own ways* without any visible check and restraint, and does not usually inflict present and remarkable punishments upon them for their evil deeds; because this being a state of tryal of the dispositions and manners of men, is rather the proper season of patience, than of punishments and rewards; and therefore it is very reasonable to suppose, that God reserves sinners for a solemn and public tryal, at the great assizes of the world, when he will openly vindicate the honour of his justice, upon the despisers of his patience and long-suffering, when he will make *his judgment to break forth as the light, and his righteousness as the noon-day.* In the mean time, the providence of God, when he sees it fit, gives some remarkable instances of his justice upon great and notorious offenders in this life, as a pledge and earnest of a future judgment; and these sometimes more general, as in the destruction of the old world, by an universal deluge; when *he saw the wickedness of men to be great upon the earth.* And such was that terrible vengeance which was poured down upon *Sodom and Gomorrah*, and the cities about them; which as *St. Jude* tells us, *are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire,* that is, of a perpetual destruction by fire.

3dly, Another gross and atheistical inference, which men are apt to make from the delay of punishment, is, that there is no such difference of *good* and *evil* as is pretended; because they do not see the good and bad actions of men differenced in their rewards, because divine justice doth not presently manifest it self, and *every transgression and disobedience* doth not immediately receive a *just recompense of reward*, therefore they cannot believe, that the difference between *good* and *evil* is so great and evident.

For answer to this. Not to insist upon the difference which the providence of God sometimes makes between them in this life, I appeal to the consciences of men, whether they do not secretly and inwardly acknowledge a clear difference between *good* and *evil*. Are not the worst of men apt to conceive better hopes of success, when they are about a just and honest undertaking, than when they are engaged in a wicked design? Do not bad men feel a secret shame and horror, when no eye sees them, and the wickedness they are about to commit doth not fall under the cognisance and censure of any human court or tribunal? Have they not many checks and rebukes in their own spirits, much disturbance and confusion of mind, when they are enterprizing a wicked thing? And does not this plainly argue, that they are guilty to themselves, that they are about something which they ought not to do?

'Tis very true that most men are more sensible of the evil of an action, when they feel the ill effects and consequences of it, and suffer the punishment that is due to it: but yet the sense of *good* and *evil* is so deeply impress'd upon human nature, that I think no man, remaining *a man*, can quite deface and blot out the difference of *good* and *evil*. So that if men will but attend to the natural dictates and suggestions of their own minds, they cannot possibly infer from the delay of punishment, that there is no difference of *good* and *evil*.

But

But because those who are thus, are but few in comparison, there being not many in the world arrived to that degree of blindness and height of impiety, as to disbelieve a *God* and a *providence*, and I think none have attained to that perfect conquest of conscience, as to have lost all sense of *good* and *evil*; therefore I shall rather insist.

II. Upon those kind of reasonings which are more ordinary and common among bad men, and whereby they cheat themselves into everlasting perdition; and they are such as these.

1. *Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed*, therefore sin is not so great an evil.

2. Therefore God is not so highly offended and provoked by it. Or,

3. God is not so severe in his own nature, as he is commonly represented.

4. Therefore the punishment of sin is not so certain.

5. Or however, it is at a distance, and may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance, in our old age, or at the hour of death: By some such false reasonings as these, which men think may probably be collected from the patience and long-suffering of God, they harden and encourage themselves in an evil course.

1. Because the punishment of sin is deferr'd, therefore they conclude it is not so great an evil; they do not feel the ill effects of it at present; all things go well and prosperously with them, no less than with those who are so strict and conscientious; and therefore they hope there is no such great evil in sin, as melancholy people are apt to fancy to themselves. For answer to this,

(1.) Consider seriously what sin is; and then thou wilt see reason enough to call it a great evil. To sin against God, is to condemn the greatest authority in the world, to contradict the greatest holiness and purity, to abuse the greatest goodness, and to provoke almighty justice to take vengeance upon thee, and to make thee as miserable as thou art capable of being. To sin against God, is to be disobedient to thy sovereign, and unthankfull to thy best benefactor, and to act contrary to the greatest obligations, against thy best reason and truest interest: to disoblige thy kindest friend, and to gratify thy worst and bitterest enemy; it is to disorder thy self, to create perpetual disquiet to thy own mind, and to do the greatest mischief possible to thy self; to deprive thy self of the greatest happiness, and to draw down upon thy self extream and eternal misery. And what do we call a great evil, if this be not, which contains in it all the kinds, and all the aggravations of evil that can be, and hath all the circumstances of ugliness and deformity in it that can be imagin'd?

(2.) Whatever sin be in it self, yet from hence we can in no wise conclude, that it is not a great evil, because the punishment of it is deferr'd for a while; from hence indeed it follows, that God is very good in deferring the punishment which is due to thee for thy sins, but by no means that sin is not very evil. The reprieve of a traitor does indeed argue the goodness and clemency of the prince, but doth not at all abate of the heinousness of the crime for which he is sentenced. The great evil of sin is evident, because the holy and just God hath forbidden it, and declared his hatred and detestation of it, and threaten'd it with most severe and direfull punishment; but that God respites the punishment which is due to sin, and does not immediately take vengeance upon sinners, but affords them a space, and means, and opportunity of repentance, this doth not at all lessen the evil of sin, but is rather an aggravation of it; that we should offend and provoke that God, who is so patient and long-suffering towards us, so very loath to bring those evils upon us, which we are so rash and forward to pull down upon our selves.

2. If God doth not immediately punish sin upon the commission of it, and instantly let fly at the sinner, this they would construe to be a sign that he is not so highly offended and provok'd by it; if he were, he would manifest his displeasure against it, by the sudden and violent effusions of his wrath. For answer to this, I desire these *two* things may be considered.

(1.) That God himself in his word every where plainly declares to us his great displeasure against sin; *Psal. v. 4, 5. Thou art not a God, that hast pleasure in wick-*

wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity. Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness. The words are a *μείωνσις*, and less is spoken than is meant and intended, *viz.* That God is so far from taking pleasure in the sins of men, that he is highly displeased at them, and bears an implacable hatred against them.

And do not the terrible threatenings of God against sin declare him to be highly offended at it? when he says, *That he will come in flaming fire to render vengeance to all them that know not the gospel of his son, and that they shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.* Can we think that all the threatenings of God's word, and all those direfull *curses* which are *written in his book, shall return empty*, without doing any execution; thou that now flatterest thy self in vain and groundless hopes, that none of these evils shall come upon thee, when thou comest to stand before the great judge of the world, and to behold the killing frowns of his countenance, and to hear those bitter words of eternal displeasure from the mouth of God himself, *Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*, thou wilt then believe that God is heartily angry and offended with thee for thy sins. We shall find in that day, that the threatenings of God's word, which we now hear securely, and without terror, had a full signification, or rather, that no words could convey to us the terror of them. What the scripture says of the happiness and glory of the next life, is true also of the misery and punishments of the other world; *That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, those terrible things, which God hath reserved for the workers of iniquity.*

But above all, the direfull sufferings of the son of God, when sin was but imputed to him, are a demonstration of God's implacable hatred of sin; for that rather than sin should go unpunish'd, God was pleased to subject his own son to the sufferings due to it; this plainly shews, that he hated sin as much as he loved his own son.

But (*2dly.*) God may conceive a very great displeasure against sin, and be highly incensed and provoked by it, and yet suspend the effects of his displeasure, and defer the punishment of it for a great while; and to imagine otherwise, argues a gross mistake of the nature of God, arising from our not considering the attributes and perfections of God in conjunction and consistency with one another. When we consider one attribute of God singly, and separate it from the rest, and frame such wide and large apprehensions of it, as to exclude his other perfections, we have a false notion of God; and the reason of this mistake is, because among men, an eminent degree of any one excellency, doth commonly shut out others; because in our narrow and finite nature, many perfections cannot stand together; but 'tis quite otherwise in the divine nature. In infinite perfection, all perfections do meet and consist together, one perfection doth not hinder and exclude another, and therefore in our conceptions of God, we are to take great heed, that we do not raise any one attribute or perfection of God upon the ruin of the rest.

So that it is a false imagination of God, when we so attribute *justice* or *anger* to him, as to exclude his *patience* and *long-suffering*; for God is not impotent in his anger, as we are; every thing that provokes him, doth not presently put him out of patience, so that he cannot contain his wrath, and forbear immediately to revenge himself upon sinners. In this sense God says of himself, *Isa. xxvii. 4. Fury is not in me.* There is nothing of a rash and ungoverned passion in the wise and just God. Every sin indeed kindles his anger, and provokes his displeasure against us, and by our repeated and continued offenses, we still add fuel to his wrath; but it doth not of necessity instantly break forth like *a consuming fire, and a devouring flame.* The holy and righteous nature of God makes him necessarily offended and displeased with the sins of men; but as to the manifestation of his wrath, and the effects of his anger, his wisdom and goodness do regulate and determine the proper time and circumstances of punishment.

3. From the patience of God and the delay of punishment, men are apt to conclude, that God is not so severe in his nature as he is commonly represented. 'Tis true, he hath declared his displeasure against sin, and threaten'd it with dreadful punishments, which he may do, in great wisdom, to keep the world in awe and order; but great things are likewise spoken of his mercy, and of the wonderful delight he takes in the exercise of his mercy; so that notwithstanding all the threatenings which are denounced against sin, it is to be hoped, that when *sentence comes to be past, and judgment to be executed*, God will *remember mercy in the midst of judgment*, and that *mercy will triumph over judgment*; and that as now his patience stays his hand, and turns away his wrath, so at the last, the milder attributes of his goodness and mercy will interpose and moderate the rigor and severity of his justice; and of this, his great patience and long-suffering towards sinners for the present, seems to be some kind of pledge and earnest; he that is so *slow to anger*, and so loath to execute punishment, may probably be prevail'd upon by his own pity and goodness to remit it at the last; and this is the more credible, because it is granted on all hands, that no person is obliged to execute his threatenings, as he is to make good his promises; he that promiseth passeth a right to another, but he that threateneth keeps the right and power of doing what he pleaseth in his own hands.

I shall speak a little more fully to this, because it is almost incredible how much men bear up themselves upon vain and groundless hopes of the boundless mercy of God, and *blest themselves in their hearts, saying, they shall have peace, tho' they walk in the imagination of their hearts, to add drunkenness to thirst*, that is, tho' they still persist in their vices, and add one degree of sin to another.

Now for answer to this;

(1.) Let it be granted, that a bare threatening does not necessarily infer the certainty of the event, and that the thing threaten'd shall infallibly come to pass; no person is obliged to perform his threatenings, as he is his promises; the threatenings of God declare what sin deserves, and what the sinner may justly expect if he continue impenitent and incorrigible. But then we are to take notice, that repentance is the only condition that is implied in the threatenings of God, and will effectually hinder the execution of them, *Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. At what instant I speak* (says God) *concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, and obey not my voice, then will I repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.* Now if when God hath promised to do good to a people, sin will hinder the blessing promised, and bring down judgments upon them, much more when it is particularly threaten'd.

But as to the case of final impenitency and unbelief, God, that he might strengthen his threatenings, hath added a sign of *immortality* to them, having confirmed them with an oath, *I have sworn* (saith the Lord) *that they shall not enter into my rest*; which tho' it was spoken to the unbelieving Jews, the Apostle to the *Hebrews* applies it to a final unbelief and impenitency under the gospel, of which the infidelity of the *Israelites* was a type and figure. Now tho' God may remit of his threatenings; yet his oath is a plain declaration that he will not; because it signifies the firm and immutable determination of his will, and thereby *puts an end to all doubts and controversies* concerning the fulfilling of his threatenings.

(2.) It is certainly much the wisest and safest way, to believe the threatenings of God in the strictness and rigor of them, unless there be some tacit condition evidently implied in them; because if we do not believe them, and the thing prove otherwise, the consequence of our mistake is fatal and dreadful. 'Tis true indeed, that God by his threatenings did intend to keep sinners in awe, and to deter them from sin; but if he had any where revealed, that he would not be rigorous in the execution of these threatenings, such a revelation would quite take off the edge and terror of them, and contradict the end and design of them; for threatenings signify very little, but upon this supposition that in all probabi-

lity they will be executed; and if this be true, it is the greatest madness and folly in the world to run the hazard of it.

(3.) As for those large declarations which the scripture makes of the boundless mercy of God to sinners, we are to limit them, as the scripture hath done, to the time and season of mercy, which is this life, and while we are in the way. This is the day of mercy and salvation, and when this life is ended, the opportunities of Grace and mercy are past, and *the day of recompense and vengeance* will begin. Now God tries us, and offers mercy to us; but if we obstinately refuse it, judgment will take hold of us.

And then we must limit the mercy of God to the conditions upon which he offers it, which are repentance for sins past, and sincere obedience for the future: but if men continue obstinate and impenitent, and encourage themselves in sin from the mercy and patience of God, this is not a case that admits of mercy; but, on the contrary, his justice will triumph in the ruin and destruction of those, who instead of embracing the offers of his mercy, do despise and abuse them. *He will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes; when their fear comes as desolation, and their destruction as a whirl-wind; when distress and anguish cometh upon them; then they may call upon him, but he will not answer; they may seek him early, but they shall not find him.* If we despise the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance, he knows how to handle us, and will do it to purpose; *with the froward he will shew himself froward*, and will be in a more especial manner severe towards those, who take encouragement from his mercy, to disbelieve and despise his threatenings. And this God hath as plainly told us, as words can express any thing, *Deut. xxix. 19, 20.* *And if it come to pass, that when he heareth the words of this curse, he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, tho' I walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord, and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book, shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.* Whatever right and power God hath reserved to himself about the execution of his threatenings, he hath plainly declared that of all others, those who encourage themselves in a sinful course from the hopes of God's mercy, notwithstanding his threatenings, shall find no favour and mercy at his hand: whatever he may remit of his threatenings to others, he will certainly not spare those, who believe so largely concerning the mercy of God, not with a mind to submit to the terms of it, but to presume so much the more upon it.

(4.) God hath not been wanting to shew some remarkable instances of his severity towards sinners in this world. As he is pleased sometimes to give good men some fore-tastes of heaven, and earnest of their future happiness; so likewise by some present stroke to let sinners feel what they are to expect hereafter, some sparks of hell do now and then fall upon the consciences of sinners. That fear which is sometimes kindled in men's consciences in this life, that horrible anguish and those unspeakable terrors which some sinners have had experience of in this world, may serve to forewarn us of *the wrath which is to come*, and to convince us of the reality of those expressions of the torments of hell, by *the worm that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched.* That miraculous deluge which swallowed up the old world, that hell which was rained down from heaven, in those terrible showers of fire and brimstone, to consume *Sodom and Gomorrah*; the earth opening her mouth upon *Corah* and his seditious company, to let them down, as it were, quick into hell; these and many other remarkable judgments of God in several ages upon particular persons, and upon cities and nations, may satisfy us in some measure of the severity of God against sin, and be as it were pledges to assure sinners of the insupportable misery and torments of the next life.

(5.) The argument is much stronger the other way, that because the punishment of sinners is delayed so long, therefore it will be much heavier and severer when it comes; that the wrath of God is growing all this while, and as we *fill up the measures of our sins*, he fills the *vial of his wrath*; *Rom. ii. 5.* *And according*

according to thy hard and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thy self wrath, against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. God now keeps in his displeasure; but all the while we go on in an impenitent course, the wrath of God is continually increasing, and will at last be manifested by the righteous judgment of God upon sinners. God now exerciseth and displayeth his milder attributes, his goodness, and mercy, and patience; but these will not always hold out; there is a dreadful day a coming, wherein (as the Apostle speaks) God will *shew his wrath, and make his power known*, after he hath endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. All this long time of God's patience and forbearance *his wrath is kindled, and he is whetting his glittering sword, and making sharp his arrows*; and this long preparation doth portend a much more dreadful execution; so that we should reason thus from the long-suffering of God; God bears with us, and spares us at present, and keeps in his anger; therefore if we go on to provoke him, time will come when he will not spare, but his anger will flame forth, and *his jealousy smokes against us*. This is but reasonable to expect, that they who in this world *forfake their own mercies*, the mercy of God in the next should forfake them.

4. Another false conclusion which men draw from the delay of punishment is, that because it is delayed, therefore it is not so certain; the sinner escapes for the present, and tho' he have some misgivings and fearfull apprehensions of the future, yet he hopes his fears may be greater than his danger.

'Tis true indeed, we are not so certain of the misery of wicked men in another world, as if it were present, and we lay groaning under the weight of it; such a certainty as this, would not only leave no place for doubting, but even for that which we properly and strictly call *faith*; for *faith is the evidence of things not seen*. But sure we have other faculties besides sense to judge of things by; we may be sufficiently certain of many things which are neither present nor sensible, of many things past and future, upon good ground and testimony; we are sure that we were born, and yet we have no remembrance of it; we are certain that we shall die, tho' we never had the experience of it. Things may be certain in their causes, as well as in their present existence, if the causes be certain. The truth of God, who hath declared these things to us, is an abundant ground of assurance to us, tho' they be at a great distance. The certainty of things is not shaken by our wavering belief concerning them.

Besides, the very light of nature, and the common reason of mankind, hath always made a contrary inference from the long-suffering of God, and the delay of present punishment. Tho' men are apt to think, that because judgment is defer'd, therefore it is not certain; yet the very light of nature hath taught men to reason otherwise; that because God is so patient to sinners in this life, therefore there will a time come when they shall be punish'd; that because this life is a time of trial and forbearance, therefore there shall be another state after this life, which shall be a season of recompense. And by this argument chiefly it was that the wisest of the heathen satisfied themselves concerning another state after this life, and answer'd the troublesome objection against the providence of God, from the unequal administration of things in this world, so visible in the afflictions and sufferings of good men, and the prosperity of the wicked; *viz.* That there would be another state that would adjust all these matters, and set them streight, when good and bad men should receive the full recompense of their deeds.

The 5th and last false conclusion, which men draw from the long-suffering of God and the delay of punishment is this, that it is however probably at some distance, and therefore they may sin yet a while longer, and all this danger may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death; and they are confirmed very much in this hope, because they see men much worse than themselves, great criminals and malefactors, upon two or three days warning, to perform this work of repentance very substantially, and to dye with great comfort and assurance of their salvation. This is the most common delusion of all the rest, and hath been, I am afraid, the

ruin of more souls than all the other which I have mentioned; they may have *slain their thousands*, but this *its ten thousands*.

For answer to this, be pleased seriously to lay to heart these following considerations, most of which I shall speak but briefly to, because I have, upon other occasions, spoken largely to them.

(1.) If there be a future judgment, then it is certain, at how great a distance soever it may be. That which shall be a thousand years hence will certainly be; and 'tis but very small comfort and encouragement, considering the vast disproportion between time and eternity, to think that after twenty or forty years shall be past and gone, then must I enter upon eternal misery; then will those intolerable torments begin which shall never have an end.

(2.) But it is not certain that it is at such a distance; when we *put from us the evil day*, it is many times nearer to us than we are aware; and when we think the judgment of God is at a great distance, *the judge may be near, even at the door*. Our times are not in our own hands, but we are perfectly at the disposal of another, who when he pleaseth can put a period to them, and cause our breath to cease from our nostrils, and we shall not be; *There is no man hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit, neither hath he power in the day of death*, saith the wise man a little before the text. Thou dreamest perhaps of many years continuance in this world, and perhaps in the height of this vain imagination, *the decree is sealed, and the commandment come forth* to summon thee out of this world, and thou art just dropping into that misery which thou fanciest to be at such a distance; whilst thou art vainly promising thy self *the ease of many years*, God may say to thee, *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee*, and then, where are all thy hopes?

(3.) Supposing the evil day were at a considerable distance, yet men run an infinite hazard in venturing all the hopes of their salvation upon a future repentance; for what knowest thou, O man! but thou may'st be surpriz'd by a sudden stroke, which may give thee no warning, leave thee no space of repentance? A violent disease may seize upon thee, which may disorder thy understanding, and so weaken all thy faculties, as to render thee unfit for all reasonable operations. At the best, how unfit are we for the most serious work of our lives, when we are hardly fit to do any thing? Old age is a very unseasonable time for repentance, when we are full of weakness and infirmity, and our minds are crooked and bowed down by vice, as our bodies are by age, and as hard to be recovered to their first straightness; much more is it an improper time for this work, when sickness and old age meet together. There are two things in which men, in other things wise enough, do usually miscarry; in putting off the making of their wills, and their repentance, till it be too late. Men had need then be of sound understanding and perfect memory, when they set about matters of so great consequence in respect of their temporal and eternal concernments; especially when men have the happiness of all eternity to take care of and provide for, they had need have their understandings about them, and all the advantages of leisure and consideration, to make a sober reflection upon their past lives, and make up their accounts with God, and to set all things right between him and them; and 'tis well if after all a repentance willfully defer'd so long, so short and imperfect, so confused and huddled up, will at last be accepted as a tolerable atonement for the crimes and miscarriages of a long life.

(4.) Suppose thou wer't sure to repent before thou leavest the world, and to do this work thoroughly, which no man can promise to himself that deliberately delays it; yet this can be no reasonable encouragement to go on in an evil course, because we do but hereby aggravate our own trouble, and treasure up so much more sorrow and affliction to our selves against the day of repentance, and consequently sin on, in hopes of being hereafter so much the more troubled and grieved for what we have done; as if a man should go on to break the laws, in hopes of a more severe and exemplary punishment; sure this can be no encouragement or ground of hope to any reasonable and considerate man.

Lastly,

Lastly, As to the encouragement which men take from the sudden repentance of great criminals and malefactors, and their dying with so much comfort and assurance; if this be well considered, there is little comfort to be fetched from such examples. For;

1st, Tho' a sincere repentance in such circumstances be possible; yet it is almost impossible for the party himself concerned, much more for others; upon any good ground, to judge when it is sincere. God who knows the hearts of men, and whether, if they had lived longer, they would in the future course of their lives have justified and made good their repentance and good resolutions; only knows the sincerity of it.

But, 2^{dly}, no certain judgment is to be made from the comfort and confidence of the party concerned; for the business is not what comfort and confidence men have, but what ground they have for it; and whereas men are apt piously to suppose, that so extraordinary a comfort and assurance is wrought in them by the spirit of God, nothing is more uncertain; because we sometimes see those who give no such testimony of their repentance, to dye with every whit as much courage, and comfort, and confident persuasion of their salvation, as those that do. But this certainly is not from the spirit of God; a natural obstinacy and courage may carry men a great way; and false and mistaken principles may fill men for the present with as much comfort and confidence, as well-grounded hopes. In the church of *Rome*, great numbers of those who have led very wicked lives, after a formal confession and absolution, and some good words of encouragement from the Priest, dye as full of peace and comfort to all appearance, as the best of men.

Indeed it is very natural to men, who find themselves in a desperate condition, to be strangely elevated and raised, upon any hopes given of escaping so great a danger as they apprehend themselves to be in; especially if these hopes be given them by a grave man, of whose piety and judgment they have a venerable opinion. When men have the sentence of death in themselves, as all wicked liars must have, they are naturally apt to be overjoy'd at the unexpected news of a pardon.

To speak my mind freely in this matter, I have no great opinion of that extraordinary comfort and confidence which some have, upon a sudden repentance for great and flagrant crimes, because I cannot discern any sufficient ground for it. I think great humility and dejection of mind, and a doubtful apprehension of their condition, next almost to despair of it, would much better become them; because their case is really so very doubtful in it self. There is great reason for the repentance of such persons, and it becomes them well; but I see very little reason for their great comfort and confidence, nor does it become their circumstances and condition. Let them exercise as deep a repentance as is possible, and *bring forth all the fruits meet for it* that are possible in so short a time; let them humble themselves before God, and pray incessantly to him day and night for mercy; make all the reparation they can for the injuries they have done, by confession and acknowledgment, and by making satisfaction to the parties injured, if it be in their power, by giving alms to the poor, by warning others, and endeavouring to reclaim them to a better mind and course of life; and for the rest humbly commit themselves to the mercy of God in Jesus Christ; let them imitate, as near as they can, the behaviour of the penitent thief, the only example the scripture has left us of a late repentance that proved effectual, who gave the greatest testimony that could be of a penitent sorrow for his sins, and of his faith in the Saviour of the world, by a generous and courageous owning of him in the midst of his disgrace and suffering, when even his own disciples had denyed and forsaken him; but we do not find in him any signs of extraordinary comfort, much less of confidence; but he humbly commended himself to the mercy of goodness of his Saviour, saying, *Lord remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom.*

S E R M O N XCVIII.

The Long-suffering of God.

ECCLES. VIII. II.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

I Have considered how apt men are to abuse the long-suffering of God, to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, and when this comes to pass; where I considered the several false conclusions which sinners draw from the delay of punishment, as if there were no God, or providence, or difference of good and evil; or else as is more commonly pretended, that sin is not so great an evil, and that God is not so highly offended at it, or that God is not so severe as he is represented; that the punishment of sin is not so certain, or, however, it is at a distance, and may be prevented by a future repentance; all which I have spoken fully to, and endeavoured to shew the fallacy and unreasonableness of them. I shall now proceed to the

Third and last thing I propounded, which was to answer an objection to which this discourse may seem liable; and that is this: If the long-suffering of God be the occasion of men's hardness and impenitency, then why is God so patient to sinners, when they are so prone to abuse his goodness and patience? and how is it goodness in God to forbear sinners so long, when this forbearance of his is so apt to minister to them an occasion of their farther mischief and greater ruin? It should seem according to this, that it would be much greater mercy to the greatest part of sinners, not to be patient toward them at all; but instantly, upon the first occasion and provocation, to cut them off, and so to put a stop to their wickedness, and to hinder them from making themselves more miserable, by increasing their guilt, and *treasuring up wrath to themselves against the day of wrath.*

This is the objection; and because it seems to be of some weight, I shall endeavour to return a satisfactory answer to it in these following particulars. And, *Q. I.* I ask the sinner, if he will stand to this? Art thou serious, and wouldest thou in good earnest have God to deal thus with thee, to take the very first advantage to destroy thee, or turn thee into hell, and to make thee miserable beyond all hopes of recovery? Consider of it again. Dost thou think it desirable, that God shall deal thus with thee, and let fly his judgments upon thee so soon as ever thou hast sinned? If not, why do men trifle, and make an objection against the long-suffering of God, which they would be very loath should be made good upon them.

Q. II. It is likewise to be considered, that the long-suffering of God toward sinners is not a total forbearance: it is usually so mixt with afflictions and judgments of one kind or other, upon our selves or others, as to be a sufficient warning to us, if we would consider and lay it to heart, to *sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon us*; lest that judgment which we saw inflicted upon others come home to us. And is not this great goodness, to warn us when he might destroy us; to leave room for a retreat, when he might put our case past remedy?

All this time of God's patience, he threatens sinners to awaken them out of their security, he punisheth them gently, that we may have no ground to hope for impunity; he makes examples of some in a more severe and remarkable manner, that others *may hear, and fear*, and be afraid to commit the like sins, lest the like punishment overtake them; he whips some offenders before our eyes, to shew us what sin deserves, and what we also may justly expect, if we do the same thing; and will nothing be a warning to us but our own sufferings?

Nay,

Nay, God doth usually send some judgment or other upon every sinner in this life; he lets him feel the rod, that he may know that it is *an evil and bitter thing to sin against him*. He exerciseth men with many afflictions and crosses, and disappointments, which their own consciences tell them are the just recompenses of their deeds; and by these lighter strokes, he gives us a mercifull warning to avoid his heavier blows; when mercy alone will not work upon us and win us, but being *fed to the full, we grow wanton and foolish*, he administers physick to us by affliction, and by adversity endeavours to bring us to consideration and a sober mind; and many have been cured this way, and the judgments of God have done them that good, which his mercies and blessings could not; for God would save us any way, by his mercy or by his judgment, by sickness or by health, by plenty or by want, by what we desire, or by what we dread; so desirous is he of our repentance and happiness, that he leaves no method unattempted that may probably do us good; he strikes upon every passion in the heart of man; he works upon our love by his goodness, upon our hopes by his promises, and upon our fears, first by his threatenings, and if they be not effectual, then by his judgments; he tries every affection and takes hold of it, if by any means he may draw us to himself; and will nothing warn us, but what will ruin us, and render our case desperate and past hope?

And if any sinner be free from outward afflictions and sufferings, yet sin never fails to carry its own punishment along with it; there is a secret sting and worm, a divine *Nemesis* and revenge that is bred in the bowels of every sin, and makes it a heavy punishment to it self; the conscience of a sinner doth frequently torment him, and his guilt haunts and dogs him where-ever he goes; for whenever a man commits a known and willfull sin he drinks down poison, which tho' it may work slowly, yet it will give him many a gripe, and if no means be used to expell it, will destroy him at last.

So that the long-suffering of God is wisely ordered, and there is such a mixture of judgments in it, as is sufficient to awaken sinners, and much more apt to deter them from sin, than to encourage them to go on and continue in it.

III. Nothing is farther from the intention of God than to harden men by his long-suffering. This the scripture most expressly declares, *2 Pet. iii. 9. He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.* He hath a very gracious and mercifull design in his patience towards sinners, and is therefore good, that he may make us so, and that we may cease to do evil. The event of God's long-suffering may, by our own fault and abuse of it, prove our ruin; but the design and intention of it, is our repentance. *He winks at the sins of men* (saith the son of Syrach) *that they may repent.* He passeth them by, and does not take speedy vengeance upon sinners for them, that they may have time to repent of them, and *to make their peace with him, while they are yet in the way.*

Nay, his long-suffering doth not only give space for repentance, but is a great argument and encouragement to it. That he is so loath to surprize sinners, that he gives them the liberty of second thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, to consider what they have done, and to retract it by repentance, is a sufficient intimation that he hath no mind to ruin us, that *he desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.* And should not this goodness of his make us sorry that we have offended him? Doth it not naturally lead and invite us to repentance? What other interpretation can we make of his patience, what other use in reason should we make of it, but to repent and return, that we may be saved?

IV. There is nothing in the long-suffering of God, that is in truth any ground of encouragement to men in an evil course; the proper and natural tendency of *God's goodness is to lead men to repentance*, and by repentance to bring them to happiness; *Rom. ii. 4. Despisest thou the riches of his goodness, and patience, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?* This St. Peter, with relation to these very words of St. Paul, interprets, *leading to salvation*; *2 Pet. iii. 15. And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation,*

as our beloved brother Paul also hath written unto you. Now where did St. Paul write so, unless in this text; *Not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance*? 'Tis not only great ignorance, and a very gross mistake, to think that it is the design and intention of God's patience and long-suffering to encourage men in sin; but likewise to think, that in the nature of the thing, goodness can have any tendency to make men evil; *not knowing that the goodness of God leads to repentance*.

V. That through the long-suffering of God sinners are harden'd in their evil ways, is wholly to be ascribed to their abuse of God's goodness; 'tis neither the end and intention, nor the proper and natural effect of the thing, but the accidental event of it through our own fault. And is this any real objection against the long-suffering of God? May not God be patient, tho' sinners be impenitent? May not he be good, tho' we be so foolish as to make an ill use of his goodness? Because men are apt to abuse the mercies and favours of God, it is therefore a fault in him to bestow them upon us? Is it not enough for us to abuse them, but will we challenge God also of unkindness in giving them? May not God use wise and fitting means for our recovery, because we are so foolish as not to make a wise use of them? And must he be charged with our ruin, because he seeks by all means to prevent it? Is it not enough to be injurious to our selves, but will we be unthankfull to God also? When God hath laid out *the riches of his goodness and patience* upon sinners, will they challenge him as accessary to their ruin? As if a foolish heir that hath prodigally wasted the fair estate that was left him, should be so far from blaming himself as to charge his father with undoing him. Are these the best returns which the infinite mercy and patience of God hath deserved from us? *Do we thus requite the Lord, foolish people and unwise!*

God's patience would save sinners, but they ruin themselves by their abuse of it; let the blame then lie where it is due, and let God have the glory of his goodness, tho' men refuse the benefit and advantage of it.

VI. And Lastly, But because this objection pincheth hardest in one point, *viz.* that God certainly fore-sees that a great many will abuse his long-suffering, to the increasing of their guilt, and the aggravating of their condemnation; and how is long-suffering any mercy and goodness to those, who he certainly fore-knows will in the event be so much the more miserable, for having had so much patience extended to them? Therefore for a full answer, I desire these *six* things may be considered.

1. That God designs this life for the tryal of our obedience, that according as we behave our selves he may reward or punish us in another world.

2. That there could be no tryal of obedience, nor any capacity of rewards and punishments, but upon the supposition of freedom and liberty; that is, that we do not do what we do upon force and necessity, but upon free choice.

3. That God by virtue of the infinite perfection of his knowledge, does clearly and certainly foresee all future events, even those which are most contingent, such as are the arbitrary actions of free and voluntary agents. This I know hath been deny'd, but without reason; since it is not only contrary to the common apprehensions of mankind from the very light of nature, that God should not fore-know future events, but to clear and expresse scripture; and that in such instances, for the sake of which they deny God's foreknowledge, in general of the future actions of free and voluntary agents, I mean, that the scripture expressly declares God's determinate fore-knowledge of the most wicked actions; as the crucifying of Christ, who is said, *according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, to have been *by wicked hands crucified and slain*.

4. That the bare fore-knowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the sight and knowledge of things present hath upon them to make them to be present. I may see or know that the sun is risen, without seeing the cause of its rising; and no more is bare knowledge of future events the cause that they are, when they are. And if any man ask, how God can certainly fore-know things, which depend upon free and arbitrary causes, unless he do some way decree and determine them; I answer, that this is not a fair

fair and reasonable to demand to ask of Men, who have but finite Understandings, to make out and declare all the Ways that infinite Knowledge hath of knowing and of foreseeing the Actions of Free Creatures, without prejudice to their Liberty and Freedom of acting. However, it is of the two much more credible to Reason, that infinite Knowledge should certainly fore-know Things, which our Understandings cannot imagine how they should be fore-known, than that God should any ways be the Author of Sin, by determining and decreeing the wicked Actions of Men. The first only argues the Imperfection of our Understandings; but the other lays the greatest Blemish and Imperfection that can be upon the Divine Nature.

So that this difficult Controversy about the Fore-knowledge of God is brought to this Point, whether a Man had better believe, that infinite Knowledge may be able to fore-know Things in a way which our finite Understanding cannot comprehend; or to ascribe something to God, from whence it would unavoidably follow, that he is the Author of Sin. The first is only a modest and just Acknowledgment of our own Ignorance, the last is the utmost and greatest Absurdity that a Man can be brought to; and to say that we cannot believe the Fore-knowledge of God, unless we can make out the particular Manner of it, is more unreasonable, than if an ignorant Man should deny a difficult Proposition in *Euclid* or *Archimedes* to be demonstrated, because he knows not how to demonstrate it.

5. And consequently Fore-knowledge and Liberty may very well consist; and notwithstanding God's Fore-knowledge of what Men will do, they may be as free as if he did not fore-know it. And,

Lastly, That God doth not deal with Men according to his Fore-knowledge of the good or bad use of their Liberty, but according to the nature and reason of Things; and therefore if he be long-suffering toward Sinners, and do not cut them off upon the first Provocation, but give them a space and opportunity of Repentance, and use all proper Means and Arguments to bring them to Repentance, and be ready to afford his Grace to excite good Resolutions in them, and to second and assist them, and they refuse and resist all this; their willfull Obstinacy and Impenitency is as culpable, and God's Goodness and Patience as much to be acknowledged, as if God did not foresee the Abuse of it; because his Fore-sight and Knowledge of what they would do, laid no necessity upon them to do what they did.

If a Prince had the Privilege of Fore-knowledge as God hath, and did certainly foresee, that a great many of his Subjects would certainly incur the Penalty of his Laws, and that others would abuse his Goodness and Clemency to them; yet if he would govern them like free and reasonable Creatures, he ought to make the same wise Laws to restrain their Exorbitancy, and to use the same Clemency in all Cases that did fairly admit of it, as if he did not at all foresee what they would do, nor how they would abuse his Clemency; for it is nevertheless fit to make wise and reasonable Laws, and to govern with Equity and Clemency, tho' it were certainly foreseen that they that are governed would act very foolishly and unreasonably in the use of their Liberty. It is great Goodness in God to give Men the Means and Opportunity of being saved, tho' they abuse this Goodness to their farther Ruin; and he may be heartily grieved for that Folly and Obstinacy in Men, which he certainly foresees will end in their Ruin; and may with great Seriousness and Sincerity wish they would do otherwise, and were as *wise to do good*, as they are *willfull to do evil*. And thus he is represented in Scripture, as regretting the Mischief which Men willfully bring upon themselves; *O that they were wise, O that they would understand, and consider their latter end!*

And this is sufficient to vindicate the Goodness of God in his Patience and Long-suffering to Sinners, and to make them wholly guilty of all that befalls them for their willfull Contempt and Abuse of it.

I shall draw some Inferences from this whole Discourse upon this Argument.

I. This shews the Unreasonableness and perverse Disingenuity of Men, who take occasion to harden and encourage themselves in Sin from the Long-suffering of God, which above all things in the World should melt and soften them. Thou

hast sinned, and art liable to the Justice of God, Sentence is gone forth, but God respites the Execution of it, and hath granted thee a Reprieve, and Time and Opportunity to sue out thy Pardon. Now what use ought we in reason to make of this Patience of God towards us? We ought certainly *to break off our Sins by a speedy Repentance, lest Iniquity be our ruin*; immediately to sue out our Pardon, and to *make our Peace with God, while we are yet in the way*, and to resolve, never any more willingly to offend that God who is so gracious and mercifull, so long-suffering and full of compassion. But what use do Men commonly make of it? They take occasion to confirm and strengthen themselves in their Wickedness, and to reason themselves into vain and groundless hopes of Impunity. Now what a Folly is this, because Punishment doth not come, therefore to hasten it, and to draw it down upon our selves? Because it hath not yet overtaken us, therefore to go forth and meet it? Because there is yet a possibility of escaping it, therefore to take a certain course to make it unavoidable? Because there is yet hope concerning us, therefore to make our Case desperate and past remedy? See how unreasonably Men bring Ruin upon themselves; so that well might the Psalmist ask that Question, *Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?*

But their Folly and Unreasonableness is not so great, but their Perverseness and Disingenuity is greater. To sin, because God is Long-suffering, is *to be evil, because he is good*, and to provoke him, because he spares us; it is *to strive with God*, and to contend with his Goodness, as if we were resolved to try the utmost length of his Patience; and because God is loath to punish, therefore to urge and importune him to that which is so contrary to his Inclination.

II. This may serve to convince Men of the great Evil and Danger of thus abusing the Long-suffering of God. It is a Provocation of the highest Nature, because it is to trample upon his dearest Attributes, those which he most delights and glories in, his Goodness and Mercy; for the Long-suffering of God is his Goodness to the Guilty, and his Mercy to those who deserve to be Miserable.

Nothing makes our Ruin more certain, more speedy, and more intolerable, than the abuse of God's Goodness and Patience. After God had born long with that rebellious People, the Children of Israel, and notwithstanding all their Murmurings, all their Infidelity and Impenitency, had spared them *ten times*, at last he sets his Seal to their Ruin, *Heb. 3. 8, 9. Harden not your Hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your Fathers proved me, and saw my Works forty Years.* This was a high Provocation indeed, to harden their Hearts under the Patience and Long-suffering of God, after forty Years Trial and Experience of it; *Verse 10. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They are a People that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways.* And what was the Issue of all this? Upon this God takes up a fix'd Resolution to bear no longer with them, but to cut them off from the Blessings he had promised to bestow upon them; *He swears in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest. To whom swears he, that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?* or as the Word may be rendred, *to them that were disobedient?* That is to them who went on in their Rebellion against him, after he had suffered their manners forty years.

And as the Abuse of God's Patience renders our Destruction more certain, so more speedy and more intolerable. We think that because God suffers long, he will suffer always; and because Punishment is delayed, therefore it will never come; but it will come the sooner for this: So our Lord tells us, *Luke 12. When the servant said, His Lord delayed his coming, the Lord of that servant shall come in a day that he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites.* None so like to be surprized by the Judgment of God, as those who trespass so boldly upon his Patience.

III. To persuade us to make a right Use of the Patience and Long-suffering of God, and to comply with the merciful End and Design of God therein.

I. It is the Design of God's Long-suffering, to give us a space of Repentance. Were it not that God had this Design and reasonable Expectation from us, he would

would not reprove a Sinner for one Moment, but would execute his Judgments upon him, so soon as ever he had offended: This our Saviour declares to us by the Parable of the Figtree, *Luke 13. 6.* Were it not that God expects from us the Fruit of Repentance, he would *cut us down*, and not suffer us to *cumber the ground*: after he had *waited three years, seeking fruit and finding none, he spares it one year more, to see if it would bear fruit.*

2. The Long-suffering of God is a great Encouragement to Repentance. We see by his Patience that he is not ready to take Advantage against us; that he spares us when we offend, is a very good Sign that he will forgive us if we repent. Thus Natural Light would reason; and so the King of *Niniveh*, a Heathen, reasons, *Who can tell if God will turn and repent?* But we are fully assured of this by the gracious Declarations of the Gospel, and the Way of Pardon and Forgiveness which is therein establish'd *through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, who was made a propitiation for the sins of the whole world.*

Therefore the Long-suffering of God should be a powerfull Argument to us to *break off our sins by repentance*: For this is the end of God's Patience; *He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live.* God every where expresseth a vehement Desire and earnest Expectation of our Repentance and Conversion; *Jer. 4. 14. O Jerusalem! wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. And Chap. 13. 27. Wo unto thee Jerusalem! wilt thou be made clean? when shall it once be? He who is so patient as to the punishment of our Sins, is almost impatient of our Repentance for them; Wilt thou be made clean? when shall it once be? And can we stand out against his earnest Desire of our Happiness, whom we have so often and so long provoked to make us miserable?*

Let us then return into our selves, and think seriously what our Case and Condition is; how we have lived, and how long the Patience of God hath *suffered our manners*, and waited for our Repentance, and how inevitable and intolerable the Misery of those must be who live and die in the Contempt and Abuse of it; let us heartily repent of our wicked Lives, and say, *What have we done?* How careless have we been of our own Happiness, and what pains have we taken to undo our selves!

Let us speedily set about this Work, because we do not know how long the Patience of God may last, and the Opportunities of our Salvation be continued to us. This day of God's Grace and Patience will have an end, therefore as the Prophet exhorts, *Isa. 55. 6. Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.* Now God graciously invites Sinners to come to him, and is ready to receive them; nay, if they do but move towards him, he is ready to go forth and meet them half way; but the time will come, when he will bid them *depart from him*; when they shall cry, *Lord, Lord, open unto us, and the door of Mercy shall be shut against them.*

All the while thou delayest this necessary Work, thou ventur'est thy immortal Soul, and puttest thy eternal Salvation upon a desperate Hazard; and should God snatch thee suddenly away in an impenitent State, what would become of thee? Thou art yet in the way, and God is yet reconcileable, but Death is not far off, and perhaps much nearer to thee than thou art aware; at the best thy Life is uncertain, and Death will infallibly put a period to this Day of God's Grace and Patience.

Repentance is a Work so necessary, that methinks no Man should lose so much Time as to deliberate, whether he should set about it or not; *de necessariis nulla est deliberatio*; no Man deliberates about what he must do, or be undone if he do it not. 'Tis a Work of so great Consequence and Concernment, and the Delay of it so infinitely dangerous, that no wise Man could entertain a Thought of deferring it. What greater Folly and Stupidity can there be, than for Men to venture their immortal Souls, and to run an apparent Hazard in Matters of everlasting Consequence?

This Day of God's Patience is the great Opportunity of our Salvation, and if we let it slip, it is never to be recovered: If we mis-improve this Time of our

Life, we shall not be permitted to live it over again to improve it better. Our State of Trial ends with this Life, after that God will prove us no more; then we shall wish, *O that I had known in that my day, the Things which belonged to my peace, but now they are hid from mine eyes; therefore to day, whilst it is called to day, harden not your hearts, make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the Wrath of the Lord break forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed; exercise repentance in the time of Health, and defer not till death to be justified.*

S E R M O N XCIX.

The Power of G O D.

P S A L. LXII. II.

God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that Power belongeth unto God.

IN treating of the Attributes of God, I have consider'd those which relate to the Divine *Understanding*, to which I refer'd his *Knowledge* and *Wisdom*; those also which relate to the Divine *Will*; viz. God's Justice, Truth, Holiness, and Goodness: I come now to consider his *Power of Acting*, which is his *Omnipotency*; this I shall speak from these words.

In the beginning of this *Psalms*, David declares that God was the great Object of his Trust and Confidence, and that all his Hopes and Expectation of Safety and Deliverance were from him, v. 1, 2. And this makes him challenge his Enemies for all their mischievous Qualities and Devices against him, as vain Attempts, v. 3, 4. Hereupon he chargeth himself to continue his Trust and Confidence in God, from whom was all his Expectation, and who was able to Save and deliver him? v. 5, 6, 7. And from his Example and Experience, he encourageth and exhorts all others to trust in God, v. 8. and that from two Arguments.

1. Because all other Objects of our Trust and Confidence are vain and insufficient, and will fail those that rely upon them. If we rely upon any thing in this World, it must either be *Persons* or *Things*; but we cannot safely repose our trust in either of these. Not in *Persons*: They may be reduced to one of these two Heads, either high or low: Those that are of a mean Condition, it would be in vain to trust them; they that cannot secure themselves from meanness, cannot secure others from mischief, *Men of low degree are vanity*: But the great ones of the World, they'd seem to promise something of Assistance and Security to us; but if we depend upon them, they will frustrate us, *Men of high degree are a Lie*. As for the *Things* of the World; that which Men usually place their confidence in, is Riches; these are either got by unlawfull, or lawfull means; if they be ill gotten, by Oppression or Robbery, they will be so far from securing us from Evil, that they will bring it upon us; if they be well gotten, they are of an uncertain nature, that we have little reason to place our hopes in them; *If Riches increase, set not your hearts upon them*, that is your hope; for heart in Scripture signifies any of the Affections.

2. Because God is the proper Object of our Trust and Confidence. We may safely rely upon any one, in whom these Two Things concur, a Power to help us, and Goodness to incline him so to do. Now David tells us, that both these are eminently in God, and do in a peculiar manner belong to him; *Power*, v. 11. and *Goodness*, v. 12.

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I shall speak to that which *David* makes the first Ground of our Confidence, *the Power of God*; *Power belongs to God*: For which he brings the Testimony of God himself, *once hath God spoken, yea, twice have I heard this*. Some Interpreters trouble themselves about the Meaning of this Expression, as if it did refer to some particular Revelation of God; and then again, they are troubled how to reconcile *God's* speaking this but once, with *David's* hearing it twice: But I do not love to spy Mysteries in those Expressions, which are capable of a plain Sense; for I understand no more by it but this, that God hath several times revealed this; he frequently declared himself by this Attribute, *once, yea, twice*, that is, he hath *spoken it often*, and *David* had *heard it often*. This is answerable to that Phrase of the *Latins*, *Semel atque iterum*; and it is usual in all Writers, to use a certain Number for an uncertain, and particularly among Poets, *Felices ter & amplius*, Hor. And so in the Poetical Writers of Scripture, *Job* 5. 19. he hath *delivered thee in six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee*; that is, in several and various troubles. *Eccles.* 11. 2. *Give a Portion to seven and also to eight*, that is, distribute thy Charity to many; and which is nearest to this, *Job* 40. 5. *Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther*: that is, I have had several Discourses with my Friends; and 33. 14. *God speaketh once, yea, twice*, that is, God hath often declared this. And if I would be so curious to refer to a particular Declaration of God, I should think, that it related either to the Preface to the Law, *I am the Lord thy God*, that is, the great and powerfull God, *that brought thee out of the Land of Egypt*; or rather to the Declaration which God made of himself to *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, by the Name of *the Almighty God*, *Gen.* 17. 1. Concerning which Revelation of God, it is said expressly, *Ex.* 6. 3. *I appeared unto Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, by the Name of God Almighty, but by my Name Jehovah, was I not known to them*.

But that which I design to speak to is the Proposition it self, that *Power belongs to God*; that is, that the Excellency of Power, Power in its highest Degree and Perfection; *all Power belongs to God*, that is, that *Omnipotence* is a Property or Perfection of the Divine Nature.

In the handling of this I shall shew,

First, What we are to understand by the *Omnipotence* of God.

Secondly, That this Perfection belongs to God.

First, What we are to understand by the *Omnipotence* of God. And this I shall consider.

I. As to the *Principle*. And,

II. As to the *Exercise* of it.

I. As to the Principle, it is an Ability to do all things, the doing of which speaks Power and Perfection; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the Nature of things, or of God: whatever does not imply a Contradiction in the Thing, or an Imperfection in the Doer; an Ability to do all things, which are consistent with it self and with the Divine Nature and Perfection; by which we must mean an executive Power, the Effect whereof is without himself; for what he is said to do within himself, the Acts of his Understanding and Will, as we conceive his Will to be distinct from his Power, are not to be refer'd to his *Omnipotence*. To have a right Conception of *Omnipotence*, we must imagine the most perfect active Principle that we can, and 'tis still something more perfect than that, or any thing we can imagine. To help our Conception,

1. Let us imagine a Principle from which all other Power is derived, and upon which it depends, and to which it is perfectly subject and subordinate.

2. A perfect active Principle, which can do, not only what any finite Being or Creature can do, but what all Beings joyned together can do; nay, more and greater things than they all can do.

3. A perfect active Principle, to which nothing can make any considerable, much less effectual Resistance, which can check and countermand at Pleasure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other Powers that we can imagine besides this; because we cannot imagine any other Power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active Principle, which can do all things in a most perfect Manner, and can do all things at once and in an instant, and that with ease. We can but do one thing at once, and the greater and more considerable it is, the more time it will ask us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done; but God, to whose Knowledge all things are present at once, and together, and the Acts of whose Will are as quick and perfect as of his Understanding, hath a Power answerable to the Perfection of both; and therefore 'tis as easy to him to do all things, as one thing; at once, as successively, and in time. For this is the Privilege of an Infinite Spirit, that it does not only act without Hands and material Engines or Instruments, as every Spirit doth, but without Motion from one place to another, because he is every where, and fills all places; he acts *per modum voluntatis*, as if his actings were nothing else but a *willing* that such a Thing be done, and *ipso facto* every thing is so, as he wills it should be, and when he wills it should be; as if things did start up into being, or vanish out of being, as if they did break forth into being, and sculk again into nothing, and undergo such and such changes, *ad nutum voluntatis, at the Beck of his will*. And this is the most perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the Scripture seems to express to us, when it represents God as *making things by his word, upholding all things by the word of his Power*; as if he did but *speak the Word*, and say, *Let such a thing be, and it was so*; as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an *express Act* of the Divine Will, which is all we can understand by God's *speaking*, by his *word*, and *voice*, and *saying*, *Let things be*; but the least that it can signify, is the quick and speedy manner of working, whereby God is able to do things in an instant, as soon as a Word can be spoken.

And as he can do all things at once, and in an instant; so with ease, without any pain or laborious endeavour; for what is it that can object any difficulty to him? At the first Creation of things there was nothing to resist him; and since the Creation, there is nothing but what was made by him, and consequently all whose Power is derived from him, and depends upon him, and is subject to him, and being finite and limited, is infinitely unequal to the Infinite Power of God; so that we may imagine the Divine Power would pass through all the Resistance that all created Power can make, and all the Difficulties it can object to it, with more ease than a Bullet passeth through the thin Air; or a Man would pass through a Net of Cobweb.

5. The most perfect active Principle we can imagine, the utmost bounds and limits of whose Perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the Perfection of it; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. This is the *Omnipotence* of God as to the *Principle*, which hath no bounds and limits. And

II. As to the *Exercise* of it, it is only limited by the Divine Will and Wisdom. The Divine Will determines it to its Exercise, the Divine Wisdom directs, and regulates the Exercise of it; that is, God exerciseth his Power willingly, and not by necessity, and in such manner, for the producing such Effects, and in order to such ends and purposes, as seem best to his Wisdom. Hence he is said to *act all things according to his good pleasure, and according to the Counsel of his will; that is, freely and wisely*.

As to the *Extent* of this Power, I said it was an Ability to do all things that are consistent with it self, and with the Nature and Perfection of God.

First, That are consistent with it self, that is, with a Power to do all things. It is a Contradiction to imagine, that *Omnipotence* can do that, which if it could be done, would render all Power insignificant. Upon this account, the Divine Power is not said to extend to the working of any thing which implies a Contradiction, and the terms whereof speak a Repugnancy to one another, and mutually destroy one another, and the doing whereof is contrary to the Nature of the Thing which is supposed to be done, that is, is Nonsense, and cannot be imagined to be. For example, that a Thing should be, and not be at the same time. For a Power

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to make a Thing to be, so as it should not be while it is, signifies nothing; because such a Being as is not, is nothing; and to make such a Being, would be to do nothing, and consequently such a Power would signify nothing. So likewise we cannot say, That the Divine Power can cause, that the same Thing should be made and not be made; that that which hath been, should not have been; for the Power which makes a Thing, so as that it was not made, and causeth a Thing to have been, so as that it hath not been, does nothing; and consequently is no Power. Nor can we say, That the Divine Power can effect that any Thing should be made by it self; that is, be the Cause of its own Being; for that would be to cause that a Thing should be before it is, that is, be when it is not, which signifies nothing. We cannot say, That the Divine Power can effect, that twice two should not make four; for that would be to cause that Things should not be what they are, if they be at all, which is to cause that Things should be and not be at all, when they are, which amounts to nothing.

We cannot say, The Divine Power can make a Sound to be seen, and Colour to be heard; for that would be to make Colour and Sound all one; that is, Things that differ, to be the same while they differ, which is to make Colour and Sound not to be Colour and Sound while they are so; which is to do nothing, and consequently argues no Power.

We cannot say, The Divine Power can make that which is intrinsically and essentially Good to be Evil; and on the contrary: Or that which is necessarily True to be False; and on the contrary. For to make that which is intrinsically and essentially Good to be Evil, is to make that which is always Good to be sometimes Evil; that is, to be Evil whilst it is Good, that is to make Good and Evil all one; which is to bring two Things together, which so soon as they do exist, destroy one another, which is to no purpose, because it is to do just nothing; and there is the same reason of True and False.

We cannot say, That the Power of God can cause that the same Thing should be Hot and Cold, Dead and Alive at the same Time, because these destroy one another; and if they were both, neither of them would be, and so the Effect attribute to this Power would be nothing.

We cannot say, That the Divine Power can effect, that the same Impression should give a Thing two contrary Motions, upward and downward at the same Time; that the same Body should be in two contrary Postures, in Motion and at Rest, and in several Places, which are the *Contradictions* of *Transubstantiation*; for, for the same Body to be at the same Time in two several Places, is to be limited and circumscribed by each of these; that is, so to be in each of them, as not to be in the other, or in any other; so that if it be in this Place, it is not in that, nor in any other besides this; if it be in this Place, it is not in this, nor any other besides that; but if it be in two, it is both in this and in that, and therefore in neither of them, nor any where else; so that a Power to make a Body to be in two Places at once, is a Power to make it to be no where; that is, not to be at all, which is no Power; and there's the same Reason of the same Body's being in contrary Motion, or in Motion and at Rest, or in two contrary Postures at the same Time.

So that by all these Instances it appears, That a Power to do any Thing which implies a Contradiction, and is repugnant to the nature of Things, signifies nothing; and the supposed Effect of it is only to bring Terms together, which if they could be brought together, so soon as they meet, will mutually take away and destroy one another, which would be vain, and to no purpose.

I have the more explicitly laid open these Contradictions, with Relation to the gross Doctrine of *Transubstantiation*, in which all, or most of the Contradictions which I have mentioned, are involved. I know they stiffly deny, That these Contradictions follow from that Doctrine, and use pitifull Shifts to avoid them; but being not able to satisfy themselves that way, if the worst should come to the worst, they can grant these Contradictions, but then they flie to *the Power of God*, which can do Things which we call Contradictions; or else they say, there are as many Contradictions in the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, which all Christians believe.

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And thus they reproach *Christianity*, to defend *Papery*; and if they cannot persuade Men to be *Papists*, do what they can to make them *Atheists*, or at least, to hinder them from being *Christians*; but there is not so much Malice in this Objection, but there is as little Strength. Is it any Contradiction, that the same Thing should be *three* and *one* in *several respects*? which is all that the Scripture teacheth concerning the *Trinity*: But if Men will undertake to explain this more particularly than God thought fit to do, and do it in such a Manner as that they cannot free themselves from Contradiction, let them look to it, the Christian Religion is not at all concerned in this, farther than to censure such Men's Boldness and Curiosity.

But against this Exemption of Things that imply a Contradiction from the compass and extent of the Divine Power, there are *two* Objections which are more considerable, and deserve to be taken notice of.

I. We grant God's Fore-knowledge of future Events, which seem to us to be impossible to be fore-known; now why may we not as well grant that God can do Things which seem to us impossible to be done by any other Power, as fore-know Things which it is impossible for any Understanding to know? For why should we pretend to know the utmost of what infinite Power can do, any more than the utmost of what infinite Understanding can know?

Ans. I know no reason but that the Argument should be granted, if there were an equal necessity of granting the possibility of those Things, which seem to us impossible to be done, that there is of granting the possibility of fore-knowing future Contingencies, tho' they seem to us impossible to be known. We must grant the possibility of fore-knowing future Contingencies, because the Scripture which we believe to be a Divine Revelation, expressly tells us, That God doth fore-know them, and gives us Instances of it in several Prophecies and Predictions. Now if any Man can shew me as express Texts which say, that God can make a Body to be in two Places at once, I would believe it, tho' I do not see how it is possible; because it is reasonable I should believe that infinite Power can do many Things, the possibility of which my finite Understanding cannot reach. Now whereas the Papists say, the Scripture hath said, that from which this necessarily follows, *viz. This my Body*; this is not enough, unless they could either prove, That it is necessary to understand all Texts of Scripture in a rigorous and strict Propriety of the Letter, without admitting of any Trope or Figure in the Words; which they do not pretend; or else shew a clear Reason, why this should be understood so, more than a Thousand others; which they have not done, and I think never can do.

But if it be farther argued; If we grant in one Case, that those Things which seem to be Contradictions to us may be possible, why not in all Cases? Unless we had some certain way of distinguishing between seeming Contradictions and real ones. And if we grant all Contradictions possible, then there is no reason to exempt these from the extent of the Divine Power; but we may safely say, that the Divine Power can make a Thing to be, and not to be at the same Time. To this I answer,

I. I do not grant, That any thing which seems to me to be a Contradiction, ought to be granted by me to be possible, unless I have higher Assurance and greater Reason to believe it to be possible, than I have to believe it to be a Contradiction; for Example, suppose it were clearly revealed in Scripture, that two Bodies may be in the same Place, and at the same Time (which is not, nor any thing like it) then having a Revelation for this, and no Revelation that it is not a Contradiction, I have higher Assurance and greater Reason to believe it possible, than that it is a Contradiction; and consequently I have reason to believe it is no Contradiction, and that from thence it would not follow, that the same Thing may be, and not be at the same Time: But tho' in case of Divine Revelation, I may believe that to be no Contradiction, which seems to me to be a Contradiction; yet I am not without great Necessity and clear Evidence, to offer violence to Reason, and affront the Faculty of Understanding which God hath endowed me withall, by entertaining any thing which seems to me to be a Contradiction; which the Papists do in the

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Business of *Transubstantiation*, without any evidence of Revelation, and consequently without necessity.

2. But if *this* were revealed in Scripture, that the same Thing may be, and not be at the same time, I could have no reason to believe that, because I could have no assurance, if that were true, that the Scriptures were a Divine Revelation, or that it were to be believed if it were; for if it were true, that the same Thing may be and not be, then a Divine Revelation may be no Divine Revelation, and when I am bound to believe a Thing, I may be bound at the same Time not to believe it, and so all Things would fall into Uncertainty, and the Foundation of all assurance, and of all Duty and Obedience, both of Faith and Practice, would be taken away.

The II. Objection is from the Power of Creation, which is generally acknowledged to be a making of something out of nothing, now say the Objectors, this seems as palpable a Contradiction as any Thing else.

Ans. To us indeed, who converse with material Things, and never saw any Thing made, but out of præ-existent Matter, it is very hard to conceive, how any Thing should be created, that is, produced out of nothing: but every Thing that is strange is not a Contradiction. It is strange to us, and hard to conceive, that there should be such a Thing as a Spirit, who never saw, nor can see any Thing but Matter; and yet we grant there are Spirits. It is hard to us to conceive how any Thing should be made, but out of Matter; and yet Spirit, if it were made of any Thing præ-existent, cannot be made of Matter: But if we will attend to those common Dictates of Reason, which every Man, whether he will or no, must assent to, we may easily understand Creation to be possible, and free from Contradiction: For the clearing of this, I will proceed by these Steps.

1. The true Notion of Creation, is the bringing of something into Being, which before had no Being at all; for the Phrase of making something out of nothing, or out of no præ-existent Matter, does mislead our Understanding into odd Conceits, as if nothing could be the material Cause of something, or as if nothing could be what is material.

2. Every one must grant, that something is; for we see that Things are, however they came to be.

3. Every one must grant, that something is of it self, whether *Matter*, or *that Being* which we call *God*.

4. Every one must grant, that that which was of it self was allways; for nothing can begin of it self.

5. It is much more easy to conceive how a Thing that once was not, might sometime be brought into Being by another, than how a Thing should be allways of it self; for that which once was not, is supposed to have something before it, *by which* it might be made, though not *out of which it was made*; but that which was always, neither had nor could have any Thing *by which* or *out of which* it could be made. And why cannot a Thing come into Being, when there was nothing before it, out of which it was made, as well as a Thing be allways, when there could not be any Thing before it, out of which it should be?

Secondly, I exempt those Things from the extent of Omnipotence, which imply Imperfection, which are contrary to the Nature and Perfection of God, both natural and moral Imperfections; for these also destroy Power, because they are not Arguments of Power, but of Impotence. Natural Imperfections; as to dye, to be sick, to be in want, to eat, to sleep, to forget, &c. Moral Imperfections, those which contradict the Holiness of God, as Sin and Vice, or to compell any to Sin; which contradict his Goodness, as to be cruel; which contradict his Truth, as to lie, to deceive, to break his Promise, to deny himself; *Tit. 1. 2. 2 Tim. 2. 13. Jam. 1. 13.* He is said to be ἀπεροστος καὶ ἀνύψ. Contrary to the Constancy and Immutability of his Nature, as to change his Decree, to repent; contrary to Justice and Equity, as for ever to spare and to pardon obstinate Sinners, eternally to punish innocent and good Men; for these are Moral Imperfections, and contradict the Holiness, and Truth, and Goodness, and Justice, and Immutability of the Divine Nature; and that Distinction between God's *absolute* and *ordinate* Power, that

is, that God hath an *absolute* Power of doing some things, which yet upon *Supposition* of his Decree, or Promise, or Goodness, or Justice he cannot do, is vain and frivolous, unless Men mean by it only this, that some things which argue an Imperfection, do not imply a Contradiction, which is most true, but both these are absolutely and equally impossible to God. I proceed to the

Second Thing I proposed, That this Perfection belongs to God; and this I shall shew.

I. From the Dictates of Natural Light.

II. From the Scripture, or Divine Revelation.

I. From the Dictates of Natural Light. This was one of the most usual Titles which the Heathens gave to their supreme Deity, *Optimus Maximus*; next to his Goodness they placed his Greatness, which does chiefly appear in his Power; and they did not only attribute a great Power to him, but an *Omnipotence*. *Nihil est quod Deus efficere non potest*, saith *Tully de Div.* Now their Natural Reason did convince them, that this Perfection did belong to God by these *three* Arguments.

1. From those two great Instances and Expressions of his Power, *Creation* and *Providence*; for the Heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the World, and the Preservation and Government of it, to be the effects of Power, determined by Goodness, and regulated by Wisdom. Hence they gave those Titles to God of *Opifex rerum*, and *Reſtor mundi*. I say generally, I except *Aristotle*, who supposed the World not to have been made, but to have been from Eternity; and *Epicurus* with his Followers, who ascribed the regular and orderly Frame of Nature to a happy casualty and fortunate concurrence of Atoms: But generally the Wiser did look upon the vast Frame of Nature, this stately Fabric of the World, and the upholding and preserving of it, as an Argument of a divine and invisible Power. And so the Apostle tells us, *Rom. 1. 20.* that by the Light of Nature, *the invisible things of God were clearly seen by the Things that were made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.*

2. Because all other Perfections without this would be insignificant and ineffectual, or else could not be at all. Without this Goodness would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any Demonstration of it self; Knowledge would be an idle Speculation; and Wisdom to contrive things, without Power to effect them, would be an useless thing. There would be no such thing as Justice, if the Divine Nature were without a Power to reward and punish; no such thing as Faithfulness, if he had not a Power to perform what he promises; no Providence, for it would be in vain for him that hath no Power to take upon him to govern and to intermeddle in the Affairs of the World.

3. Without this there could be no Religion. Take away the Power of God, and there can be no Foundation of Faith and Trust, no Reason for fear; all Arguments from hope and fear would be taken away; we could not expect any good, nor fear any harm from an impotent Being that could do nothing. The Sanction of God's Laws would be taken away. To give Authority to Laws, there must not only be a Right to Command, but Power to back those Commands; the grand Security and last Resort of all Government and Authority is Power; *James 4. 12.* *There is one Law-giver, who is able to save, and to destroy. None can be a Law-giver,* but he that hath this Power, to reward and punish, to make Men happy or miserable, *to save, or to destroy.* Men would not pray to God, nor make any Address to him, if they did not believe he were able to supply their Wants, and relieve them in their Straits; *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales consensissent alloquendi surda numina & inefficaes deos*, Sen. There would be no Encouragement for Men to serve God, if they did not believe that he were able to reward them and bring them to Happiness, and to defend them against all the Enemies of their Welfare, so that it should not be in the Power of the most malicious Spirits to hinder them of their Happiness.

II. From Scripture or Divine Revelation. In producing Texts to this purpose, I will proceed by these Steps.

1. Take notice of those which in general ascribe Power, and Might, and Strength,

Strength to God. *Psal. 24. 8. The Lord strong and mighty. So girt with Power; the mighty God; thine is the greatness and the power; thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.* Of the same nature are those places which call upon all Creatures to ascribe this to God; *Give unto the Lord, ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength.*

2. Those which ascribe this to God in an eminent degree. *Job 9. 4. He is mighty in strength; excellent in power; who is like unto him? The Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

3. Those Texts which ascribe such a Power as transcends any Human or created Power. Such as those which express all the power which Men have to be derived from God; *John 19. 11. Thou couldest have no power at all, except it were given thee from above.* And those which advance the Power of God above the Power of Men; *Luke 18. 27. The things which are impossible with Men, are possible with God; He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.* *Eph. 3. 20. 2 Chron. 20. 6. Job. 9. 4. According to his mighty power, whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself, Phil. 3. 21. Dan. 4. 35.* Those which declare all things to be equally easy to them, and nothing difficult; *There is nothing too hard for thee, Jer. 32. 17. 2 Chron. 14. 11. 1 Sam. 14. 6.*

4. Those which ascribe all Power to him, by the Titles of *Almighty, All-sufficient, Gen. 17. 1. Rev. 4. 8, 11. 15. 3. 16. 7. 19. 26. Job 42. 2. Thou canst do all things. Matth. 19. 6. Mark 20. 27. Luke 1. 37.*

I have dispatch'd what I propos'd upon this Argument, give me leave to apply all in the following particulars.

Use; *First,* The consideration of God's Omnipotence may cause terror to wicked Men. All this power which I have described, or rather, which is so great that I cannot describe it, is engaged against Sinners; *His power and his wrath is against all that forsake him, Ezra 8. 22.* And who knows what those words signify, *Psal. 90. 11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? as is thy fear, so is thy wrath.* There is no Passion in the Heart of Man more infinite than our Fear, it troubles us with jealousy and suspicion of the utmost that may happen; but when we have extended our Fears to the utmost, the power of God's wrath reacheth farther. Whenever we sin, we challenge the Almighty, and dare infinite Power to do its worst to us; *Job 15. 25. speaking of the wicked Man, He stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty.* Whom wilt thou fear, if not him who can make thee extremely happy or miserable for ever? *Will ye provoke the Lord to jealousy? are ye stronger than he? Because he doth nothing against thee for the present, thinkest thou he can do nothing? Nah. 1. 3. He is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not acquit the wicked.* There is a day coming, when the Son of Man shall come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

Secondly, The consideration of God's Omnipotence should check the Pride and vain Confidence of Men. What have we to be proud of? *What have we that we have not received? Where then is cause of boasting? Who may glory in his sight?* Those that have the greatest Power should remember whence it is derived, and render back the Glory of it to the Fountain of it. *Psal. 29. 1. Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength.* So likewise it should take Men off from relying upon their own strength, which at the best is but *an arm of flesh*, as the Scripture calls it, for the weakness of it. Do we not see, that many times the battle is not to the strong? That things are not done by might and by power, but by the spirit of the Lord. When he appears against the most potent, *their hearts melt within them, and there is no more spirit left in them*, as 'tis said of the mighty Inhabitants of Canaan, *Josh. 5. 1.*

Thirdly, We should make this Omnipotence of God the Object of our trust and confidence. This is the most proper use we can make of this Doctrine, as David does in this Psalm; and this was used for a form of blessing the People in the Name of God; *Psal. 136. 3. The Lord that made heaven and earth, blest thee.* And David, when he magnifies God's deliverance of his People from the multitude of their Enemies, resolves it into this, *Our help standeth in the Name of the*

Lord, who made heaven and earth. Thus did the great Pattern and Example of Faith encourage and support his confidence in God in a very difficult tryal; he staggered not at it, because *he believed God who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things that be not, as tho' they were; therefore against hope he believed in hope, &c. Rom. 4. 17. &c.* This gives life to all our Devotion, to be persuaded that *God is able to do for us exceedingly above what we can ask or think, and that his is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory.*

I shall only caution two things, as to our reliance on the Power of God.

I. Labour to be such Persons to whom God hath promised that he will engage and employ his Omnipotence for their good. If we hope for any good from the *Almighty*, we must *walk before him, and be perfect*, as he said to *Abraham*. Good Men have a peculiar Interest in God's Power; hence he is called *the strength of Israel*, and *the mighty one of Israel*. If we do what God requires of us, we may expect that he will put forth his Power, and exert his Arm for us; but if we disobey, we must expect he will manifest his Power against us, *Ez. 8. 22.* When we *do well*, we may *commit the keeping of our Souls to him*, *1 Pet. 4. 19.*

II. Our expectations from the Omnipotence of God must be with submission to his Pleasure, and Goodness, and Wisdom; we must not expect that God will manifest his Power, when we think there is occasion for it, but when it seems best to him he will so employ his Omnipotence, as to manifest his Goodness and Wisdom.

And with these two Cautions, we may rely upon him in all our Wants, both Spiritual and Temporal; for his Divine Power can *give us all things that pertain to life and goodness*, *2 Pet. 1. 3.* We may trust him at all times, for the Omnipotent God *neither slumbereth nor sleepeth, the Almighty fainteth not, neither is he weary; trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

S E R M O N C.

The Spirituality of the Divine Nature.

JOHN IV. 24.

God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.

TH E S E are the Words of our Saviour to the Woman of *Samaria*, who was speaking to him of the difference between the *Samaritans* and the *Jews* concerning Religion; *Verse 20.* *Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, but ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.* Christ tells her, *The time was coming, when the worshippers of God should neither be confined to that mountain, nor to Jerusalem: but men should worship the Father in spirit and in truth;* when this carnal and ceremonial, and typical Worship of God should be exalted into a more spiritual, a more real, and true, and substantial Religion, which should not be confined to one Temple, but should be universally diffused through the World. Now such a Worship as this is most agreeable to the Nature of God; *for he is a Spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* In the Words we have,

First, A Proposition laid down, God is a Spirit.

Secondly, A Corollary or Inference deduced from it, they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. I shall speak of the Proposition, as that which concerns my present Design; and afterward speak something to the Corollary or Inference deduced from it, together with some other Inferences drawn from this Truth, by way of Application.

First,

First, That God is a Spirit. This Expression is singular, and not to be parallel'd again in the Scripture; indeed we have often mention made in the Scripture of *the Spirit of God*, and *the Spirit of the Lord*, which signifies a Divine Power and Energy; and of *the holy Spirit*, signifying the third Person in the *Trinity*; God is call'd *the God of the Spirits of all Flesh*, Numb. 16. 22. 27. 16. much in the same Sense, as he is call'd *the Father of Spirits*, Heb. 12. 9. that is, the Creator of the Souls of Men; but we no where meet with this Expression, or any other equivalent to it, that *God is a Spirit*, but only in this place; nor had it been us'd here, but to prove, that the best Worship of God, that which is most proper to him, is *spiritual*; so that the thing which our Saviour here intends, is not to prove the Spiritual Nature of God, but that his Worship ought to be Spiritual; nor indeed is there any necessity that it should have been any where said in Scripture, that *God is a Spirit*, it being the natural Notion of a God; no more than it is necessary that it should be told us, that God is Good, or that he is Infinite, and Eternal, and the like; or that the Scripture should prove to us the Being of a God. All these are manifest by the Light of Nature, and if the Scripture mentions them, it is *ex abundanti*, and it is usually in order to some farther Purpose.

For we are to know, That the Scripture supposeth us to be Men, and to partake of the common Notions of Human Nature, and therefore doth not teach us Philosophy, nor solicitously instruct us in those Things which are Born with us, but supposeth the knowledge of these, and makes use of these common Principles and Notions which are in us concerning God, and the Immortality of our Souls, and the Life to come, to excite us to our Duty, and quicken our Endeavours after Happiness. For I do not find that the Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul is any where expressly delivered in Scripture, but taken for granted; in like manner that the Scripture doth not solicitously instruct us in the natural Notions which we have of God, but supposeth them known to us; and if it mention them, it is not so much in order to Knowledge as to Practice; and therefore we need not wonder that this Expression, which doth set forth to us the Nature of God, is but once used in Scripture, and that brought in upon occasion, and for another purpose, because it is a thing naturally known. Plato says, that God is *ἀσώματος*, *without Body*. In like manner Tully, *Nec enim Deus ipse qui intelligitur à nobis alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens quadam soluta & libera; segregata ab omni concretionem mortali; we cannot conceive of God, but as of a pure Mind, entirely free from all mortal Composition or Mixture.* And Plutarch after him, *ὅς ἐστιν ἁπλοῦς καὶ ἀσώματος καὶ ἀμετέωρος πάντων ὧν ἐστιν, καὶ ἀπὸ πάντων ἀντιθέτων ἀντιπαραστήτων, God is a Mind, an abstract Being, pure from all matter, and disintangled from whatever is possible or capable of suffering.*

So that Natural Light informing us that *God is a Spirit*, there was no need why the Scripture should inculcate this; it is an excellent Medium or Argument to prove that the Worship of God should chiefly be Spiritual, and altho' it was not necessary that it should have been mentioned for it self, that is, to inform us of a thing which we could not otherwise know, yet the Wisdom of God, by the express mention of this, seems to have provided against an Error, which some weaker and grosser Spirits might be subject to. You know God is pleased, by way of condescension and accommodation of himself to our Capacity, to represent himself to us in Scripture by Human Imperfections, and gives such descriptions of himself, as if he had a Body, and bodily Members; now to prevent any Error or Mistake that might be occasion'd hereby, it seems very becoming the Wisdom of God, somewhere in Scripture expressly to declare the spiritual Nature of God, that none through weakness or willfulness might entertain gross Apprehensions of him. In speaking to this Proposition, I shall,

- I. Explain what is meant by *a Spirit*.
- II. Endeavour to prove to you, that *God is a Spirit*.
- III. Answer an Objection or two.
- IV. Draw some Inferences or Corollaries from the whole.

I. For the explication of the Notion of a Spirit. I shall not trouble you with the strict Philosophical Notion of it, as that it is such a substance as is penetrable, that is, may be in the same place with a Body, and neither keep out the Body, nor be kept out of it; and that the parts which we imagine in it cannot be divided, that is, really separated and torn from one another, as the parts of a Body; but I will give you a negative description of it. A Spirit is not Matter, it doth not fall under any of our Senses, it is that which we cannot see nor touch; it is not a Body, not Flesh, and Blood, and Bones; for so we find Spirit in Scripture opposed to Flesh and Body; Isa. 31. 3. *Their horses are flesh, and not spirit.* So Luke 24. when Christ appeared to his Disciples after his Resurrection, they were terrified, and supposed it had been a spirit, v. 39. But he said, *Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I my self; handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.* The most usual description of a spirit is by these Negatives, it is not a Body, hath not Flesh and Bones, doth not consist of Matter, or of any thing that falls under our Senses, that we can see or touch.

II. For the proof of this Proposition, that *God is a spirit.* This is not to be proved by way of demonstration, for there is nothing before God, or which can be a cause of him; but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most natural Notion that we have of God, is, That he is a Being every way perfect, and from this Notion we must argue concerning the properties which are attributed to God, and govern all our Reasonings concerning God by this; so that when any thing is said of God, the best way to know whether it be to be attributed to him, is to enquire whether it be a Perfection or not; if it be, it belongs to him; if it be not, it is to be removed from him; and if any Man ask, why I say God is so, or so, a Spirit, or Good, or Just; the best reason that can be given, is because these are Perfections, and the contrary to these are Imperfections. So that if I shew that it would be an Imperfection, for God to be imagined to be a Body or Matter, I prove that he is a Spirit, because it is an imperfection, that is an absurdity to imagine him any thing else. To imagine God to be a Body, or Matter, doth evidently contradict four great Perfections of God.

1. His Infiniteness, or the Immensity of his Being. Grant me but these two things, that there is something in the World besides God, some other Matter, as the Heavens, the Air, the Earth, and all those things which we see; and, grant me that two Bodies cannot be in the same place at once, and then it will evidently follow, that where-ever these are, God is shut out; and consequently God should not be infinite, nor in all places; and so much as there is of another Matter in the World besides God, so many branches there would be in the Divine Nature, so many *Hiatus's*.

2. The Knowledge and Wisdom of God. It cannot be imagined how mere Matter can understand, how it can distinctly comprehend such variety of Objects, and at one view take in past, present, and to come. Tully, speaking of Spirits, saith, *Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest; their original cannot be found upon Earth; for, saith he, there is no material or bodily thing, Quod vim memoriae, mentis, cogitationis habeat, quod & prae terita teneat, & futura provideat, & complecti possit praesentia; quae sola divina sunt; which hath the power of Memory, of Understanding, of Thought; which can retain things past, foresee things future, and comprehend things present; all which Powers are purely Divine.*

3. Freedom and Liberty. For the Laws of matter are necessary, nor can we imagine any *αὐτεξέλιον*, any arbitrary Principle in it. This puzzled the Epicureans, as we see in Lucretius, *For if (saith he) all things move by certain and necessary Laws, and there be a connexion of the parts of matter unto each other, so that if you move this, that must necessarily be moved; whence, saith he, is Liberty? Unde est hac inquam fatis avulsa voluntas; Whence is this Principle of Will, whose motions are not under any law of necessity?*

4. Goodness. This follows from the former; for he is not good who does not know what he does, nor does it freely; so that take away Understanding and Liberty, and you take away Goodness; now take away from God Infiniteness and,

and Knowledge, and Liberty, and Goodness, and you divest him of his Glory; you take away his most essential Perfections. So that these great Absurdities following from the supposing of God to be meer *Matter* or *Body*, we are to conceive of him as another kind of Substance, that is a Spirit. So that I wonder that the Author of the *Leviathan*, who doth more than once expressly affirm, that there can be nothing in the World, but what is material and corporeal, did not see that the necessary Consequence of this Position, is to banish God out of the World. I would not be uncharitable, but I doubt, he did see it, and was content with the Consequence, and willing the World should entertain it? for it is so evident, that by supposing the Divine Essence to consist of Matter, the Imensity of the Divine Nature is taken away; and it is also so utterly unimaginable how meer Matter should understand, and be endowed with Liberty, and consequently with Goodness, that I cannot but vehemently suspect the Man who denies God to be a Spirit, either to have a gross and faulty Understanding, or a very ill Will against God, and an evil Design to root out of the Minds of Men the Belief of a God. I come in the

III. Place, to consider the Objections.

1. *Obj.* Why then is God represented to us so often in Scripture by the Parts and Members of Men's Bodies? *Ans.* I shall only say at present, that all these Descriptions and Representations of God, are plainly made to comply with our weakness, by way of condescension and accommodation to our Capacities.

2. *Obj.* How is it said that *Man was made after the Image of God*, if God be a Spirit, of which there can be no Likeness nor Resemblance? *Ans.* Man is not said to be made after the Image of God, in respect of the outward Shape and Features of his Body; but in respect of the Qualities of his Mind, as Holiness and Righteousness; or of his Faculties, as Understanding and Will; or which the Text seems most to favour, in respect of his Dominion and Sovereignty over the Creatures; for in the two former Respects the Angels are made after the Image of God. Now this seems to be spoken peculiarly of Men; *Gen. 1. 24. Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air, &c.*

IV. I come now to draw some Inferences or Corollaries from hence, and they shall be partly *speculative*, partly *practical*.

First, Speculative Inferences.

1. That God is invisible. The proper Object of Sight is Colour, and that ariseth from the various Disposition of the Parts of Matter which cause several Reflections of Light; now a Spirit hath no Parts nor Matter, and therefore is invisible; *1 Tim. 1. 17. Unto the eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God. Heb. 11. 27. He endured, as seeing him who is invisible; as seeing him by an Eye of Faith, who is invisible by an Eye of Sense. 1 Tim. 6. 16. Whom no man hath seen, nor can see.*

When *Moses* and the Elders of *Israel* are said to have seen God, and *Jacob* to have seen him face to face, *Exod. 2. 9. Gen. 32. 30.* it is meant of an Angel covered with Divine Glory and Majesty, as we shall see if we compare these with other Texts. When *Moses* is said to have spoken to him face to face, that is familiarly; and so *Micaiah*, *1 Kings 22. 19.* is said to have seen God upon his throne, and all *Israel* scattered up and down; this was in a Vision. And it is promised, that in Heaven we shall see God, that is, have a more perfect knowledge of him and full enjoyment; as to see good days, is to enjoy them. Those Texts where it is said, *No man can see God and live, Exod. 33. 20. and John 1. 18. No man hath seen God at any time,* do not intimate that God is visible, tho' we cannot see him; but seeing is metaphorically used for knowing, and the meaning is, that in this Life we are not capable of a perfect knowledge of God. A clear Discovery of God to our understanding would let in Joys into our Souls, and create Desires in us too great for frail Mortality to bear.

2. That he is the living God, Spirit and Life are often put together in Scripture,

3. That

3. That God is immortal. This the Scripture attributes to him, 1 Tim. i. 17. *To the King immortal, invisible.* 1 Tim. 6. 16. *Who only hath immortality.* This also flows from God's Spirituality; a spiritual Nature hath no Principles of Corruption in it, nothing that is liable to perish, or decay, or dye. Now this doth so eminently agree to God, either because he is purely spiritual, and immaterial, as possibly no Creature is; or else because he is not only immortal in his own Nature, but is not liable to be reduced to nothing by any other, because he hath an original and independant Immortality, and therefore the Apostle doth attribute it to him in such a singular and peculiar manner; *Who only hath Immortality.*

Secondly, Practical Inferences.

1. We are not to conceive of God as having a Body, or any corporeal Shape or Members. This was the gross Conceit of the *Anthropomorphites* of old, and of some *Socinians* of late, which they ground upon the gross and literal Interpretation of many figurative Speeches in Scripture concerning God, as where it speaks of his Face, and Hand, and Arm, &c. But we are very unthankfull to God, who condescends to represent himself to us according to our Capacities, if we abuse this Condescension to the blemish and reproach of the Divine Nature. If God be pleased to stoop to our Weakness, we must not therefore level him to our Infirmities.

2. If God be a Spirit, we are not to worship God by any Image or sensible Representation. Because *God is a Spirit*, we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to represent him by the likeness of any thing that is in *Heaven above*, that is, of any Birds; or in the *Earth beneath*, that is of any Beast; or in the *waters under the earth*, that is, of any Fish; as it is in the second Commandment. For, as the Prophet tells us, there is nothing that we can liken God to; *Isa. 40. 18. To whom will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare to him?* We debase his Spiritual and incorruptible Nature, when we compare him to corruptible Creatures; *Rom. 1. 22, 23.* Speaking of the Heathen Idolatry, *Who professing themselves wise, became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed Beasts, and creeping things. They became Fools;* this is the folly of Idolatry, to liken a Spirit, which hath no bodily shape, to things that are corporeal and corruptible. So that however some are pleased to mince the matter, I cannot see how the Church of Rome, which worships God by or towards some Image or sensible Representation, can be excused from Idolatry; and the Church of England doth not without very just cause challenge the Romish Church with it, and make it a ground of Separation from her.

3. If God be a Spirit, then we should worship him in spirit and in truth, This is the Inference of the Text, and therefore I shall speak a little more largely of it; only I must explain what is meant by *worshipping in spirit and in truth*, and shew you the force of this Consequence, how it follows, that because *God is a spirit*, therefore he must be *worshipped in spirit and in truth*.

1. For the Explication of it. This word *Spirit* is sometimes apply'd to the Doctrine of the Gospel, and so it is opposed to *Letter*, by which Name the Doctrine of Moses is called; *2 Cor. 3. 6. Who hath made us able Ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit;* not of the Law which was written in Tables of Stone, but which Christ by his Spirit writes in the Hearts of Believers. Sometimes to the worship of the Gospel; and so it is opposed to the *Flesh*, *Gal. 3. 3. Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?* that is, by the works of the ceremonial Law, which is therefore call'd *Flesh*, because the principal Ceremony of it, *Circumcision*, was made in the *Flesh*, and because their Sacrifices, a chief Part of their Worship, were of the *Flesh* of Beasts; and because the greatest Part of their Ordinances, as Washing and the like, related to the *Body*. Hence it is the Apostle calls the Worship of the Jews, *the Law of a carnal commandment*, *Heb. 7. 16.* and *Heb. 9. 10. Carnal Ordinances*, speaking of the Service of the Law, which, saith he, *stood in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances.* Now in opposition to this carnal and ceremonial Worship, we are to worship God in the Spirit. The Worship of the Jews was most a Bodily service; but

we are to give God *a reasonable service*, to serve him with the *spirit of our Minds*, as the Apostle speaks; instead of *offering the flesh of bulls and goats*, we are to *consecrate our selves* to the service of God: *this is a holy and acceptable sacrifice, or reasonable service.*

And in Truth. Either in opposition to the false Worship of the *Samaritans* (as *in spirit* is opposed to the Worship of the *Jews*) as our Saviour tells the Woman, that *they worship'd they knew not what*; or (which I rather think) in opposition to the *shadows* of the Law; and so it is opposed, *John 1. 17. The Law was given by Moses: but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

Not that the external Service of God is here excluded, not that we are to shew no outward reverence to him; but that as under the Law, the Service of God was chiefly external and corporeal, so now it should chiefly be inward and spiritual; the Worship of God under the Gospel should chiefly be spiritual and substantial, not a carnal, and bodily, and ceremonious Devotion.

2dly, For the force of the Consequence, it doth no lie in this, that just such as God is, such must our Worship of him be; for this would exclude all bodily and outward Worship; our Worship of God must therefore be invisible, eternal, &c. for so is he; and besides, the *Will* of God seems rather to be the rule of his Worship, than his *Nature*: But the force of it is this, God is of a spiritual Nature, and this is to be supposed to be his Will, that our Worship should be as agreeable to the Object of it, as the Nature of the Creature, who is to give it, will bear; now saith Christ to the Woman, the *Jews* and the *Samaritans* limit their Worship to a certain place, and it consists chiefly in certain carnal Rites and Ordinances; but, saith he, tho' God have permitted this for a time, because of the carnality and *hardness of their hearts*, yet the time is coming, when a more spiritual, and solid, and substantial Worship of God is to be introduced, which will be free from all particular Places and Rites, not tyed to the Temple, or to such external Ceremonies, but consisting in the Devotion of our Spirits, even the inward Frame and Temper of our Hearts; all outward Circumstances (excepting those of the two Sacraments which are positive) being left by the Gospel to as great a Liberty, as natural Necessity and Decency will permit.

We must Worship God, and therefore it is naturally necessary that we should do it somewhere, in some place; now seeing some body must determine this, it is most convenient that Authority should determine it according to the conveniency of cohabitation. We must not be rude, nor do any thing that is naturally undecent in the Worship of God; this Authority should restrain; but farther than this, I doubt not but the Gospel hath left us free; and to this end, that the less we are tyed to external Observances, the more intent we should be upon the spiritual and substantial Parts of Religion, the conforming of our selves to the Mind and Will of God, endeavouring to be like unto God, and to have our Souls and Spirits engaged in those Duties we perform to him. So that our Saviour's Argument is this; *God is a Spirit, that is, the most excellent Nature and Being*, and therefore must be served with *the best*. We consist of Body and Soul, 'tis true, and we must serve him with our *whole Man*; but principally with our *Souls*, which are the most excellent Part of our selves; the Service of our Mind and Spirit is the best we can perform, and therefore most agreeable to God who is a Spirit, and the best and most perfect Being.

So that the Inference is this, that if *God be a Spirit, we must worship him in spirit and in truth*; our Religion must be real, and inward, and sincere, and substantial; we must not think to put off God with external Observances, and with bodily Reverence and Attendance; this we must give him, but we must *principally* regard that our Service of him be reasonable, that is, directed by our Understandings, and accompanied with our Affections. Our Religion must consist principally in a sincere love and affection to God, which expresseth itself in a real Conformity of our Lives and Actions to his Will; and when we make our solemn approaches to him, in the Duties of his Worship and Service, we must perform all Acts of outward Worship to God with a pure and sincere Mind; whatever we do in the Service of God, we must *do it heartily as to the Lord*. God is a pure

Spirit, present to our Spirits, intimate to our Souls, and conscious to the most secret and retired Motions of our Hearts; now because we serve the Searcher of Hearts, we must serve him with our Hearts.

Indeed if we did worship God only to be seen of Men, a pompous and external Worship would be very suitable to such an end; but Religion is not intended to please Men, but God; and therefore it must be spiritual, and inward, and real.

And where-ever the external Part of Religion is principally regarded, and Men are more careful to worship God with outward Pomp and Ceremony, than *in Spirit and in Truth*, Religion degenerates into Superstition, and Men embrace the Shadow of Religion, and let go the Substance. And this the Church of Rome hath done almost to the utter Ruin of Christianity; she hath clogged Religion, and the Worship of God, with so many Rites and Ceremonies, under one Pretense or other that the Yoke of Christ is become *heavier than that of Moses*; and they have made the Gospel a more carnal Commandment than the Law; and whatever Christians or Churches are intent upon external Rites and Observances, to the neglect of the weightier Parts of Religion, regarding *meats and drinks*, &c. to the prejudice of *righteousness and peace*, wherein the kingdom of God consists, they advance a Religion as contrary to the Nature of God, and as unsuitable to the Genius and Temper of the Gospel, as can be imagined.

It is an Observation of Sir Edwin Sands, that as Children are pleas'd with Toys, so, saith he, it is a pitifull and childish Spirit that is predominant in the Contrivers and Zealots of a ceremonious Religion. I deny not but that very honest and devout Men may be this way addicted; but the wiser any Man is, the better he understands the Nature of God and of Religion, the farther he will be from this Temper.

A Religion that consists in external and little Things, doth most easily gain upon and possess the weakest Minds, and whoever entertain it, it will enfeeble their Spirits, and unfit them for the more generous and excellent Duties of Christianity. We have but a finite heat, and zeal, and activity, and if we let out much of it upon small Things, there will be too little left for those Parts of Religion which are of greatest Moment and Concernment; if our heat evaporate in externals, the Heart and Vitals of Religion will insensibly cool and decline.

How should we blush, who are *Christians*, that we have not learnt this easy truth from the Gospel, which even the Light of Nature taught the Heathen? *Cultus autem deorum est optimus itemque sanctissimus atque castissimus, plenissimisque pietatis, ut eos semper pura integra & incorrupti mente & voce veneremur*, Tully. *The best, the surest, the most chaste, and most devout worship of the Gods, is that which is paid them with a pure, sincere, and uncorrupt Mind, and words truly representing the thoughts of the Heart. Compositum jus fasque animi*, &c. *Serve God with a pure, honest, holy frame of Spirit, bring a heart that is but generously honest, and he will accept of the plainest Sacrifice.*

And let me tell you, that the ceremonious Worship of the *Jews* was never a thing in it self acceptable to God, or which he did delight in; and tho' God was pleased with their obedience to the ceremonial Law after it was commanded, yet antecedently he did not desire it; but that which our Saviour saith concerning the Law of Divorce, is true likewise of the Ceremonial, that it was permitted to the *Jews for the hardness of their Hearts*, and for their proneness to Idolatry. God did not command it so much by way of Approbation; as by way of Condescension to their Weakness; it was because of *the hardness of their carnal hearts* that God brought them under the Law of a carnal Commandment, as the Apostle calls it. See *Psal. 51. 16, 17. Jer. 7. 21.*

The reason why I have insisted so long upon this, is, to let you understand what is the true Nature of Christ's Religion, and to abate the intemperate heat and zeal which Men are apt to have for external indifferent things in Religion. The Sacrifices and Rites of the *Jews* were very unagreeable and unsuitable to the Nature of God; *Psal. 50. 13. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?* Spirits neither eat nor drink; it was a very unsuitable way of Service to
kill

kill Oxen and Sheep for God; and there's the same reason of all other Rites, which either natural Necessity or Decency doth not require. Can any Man in earnest think, that God who is a Spirit is pleased with the pompous Bravery and Pageantry which affects our Senses? So little doth God value indifferent Rites, that even the necessary external Service of God, and outward Reverence, where they are separated from *spirit and truth*, from real Holiness and Obedience to the indispensable Laws of Christ, are so far from being acceptable to God, that they are abominable; nay, if they be used for a Cloak of Sin, or in Opposition to real Religion, and with a design to undermine it, God accounts such Service in the number of the most heinous Sins.

You who spend the strength and vigour of your Spirits about external things, whose zeal for or against Ceremonies is ready to eat you up; you who hate and persecute one another because of these things, and break the necessary and indispensable Commands of love, as an indifferent and unnecessary Ceremony, go and learn what that means, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*, which our Saviour doth so often inculcate, and that Rom. 14. 17. *The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, &c.* And study the meaning of this, *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in Truth.*

S E R M O N C I.

The Immensity of the Divine Nature.

P S A L. CXXXIX. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

THAT Attribute of God which I last discours'd of is most absolute, and declares his Essence most immediately; *the Spirituality of the Divine Nature.* I shall in the next place speak of those which relate to the manner of his Being, *Immensity and Eternity*, that is, the *Infiniteness* of his Essence, both in respect of *space and duration*; that the Divine Nature hath no limits of its Being, nor bounds of its Duration. I shall at the present speak to the *first* of these, his *Immensity*, and that from these words which I here read to you, *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, &c.* The meaning of which is this, That God is a Spirit, infinitely diffusing himself, present in all places, so that wherever I go, God is there; we cannot flee from his Presence. *If I ascend into heaven, he is there; if I go down into the grave, the Place of silence and obscurity, he is there;* (for that is the meaning of the Expression,) *If I make my bed in hell, if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me;* that is, if my Motion should be as swift as that of the Light, which when the Sun riseth, darts it self in an instant from one part of the World to another, over the Earth and the Sea; the remotest Parts of the World which are unknown to us, yet would God be present to me in the Motion, and all along as I go must I be led and upholden by him; so that all these Expressions do but signify to us the *Immensity* of God's Essence, that his Being is infinitely diffused and present in all Places.

In speaking to this Attribute of God's *Immensity*, I shall *First* explain it to you a little.

Secondly, Prove that it doth belong to him.

Thirdly, Answer an Objection or two that may be made against it.

Fourthly, Draw some Doctrinal Inferences from it.

Fifthly, Make some Use and Improvement of it.

First, For the Explication of it. By the *Immensity* of God, I mean, that his Being hath no bounds or limits, but doth every way spread and diffuse it self beyond what we can imagine; so that you cannot define the Presence of God by any certain place; so as to say, here he is, but not there; nor by any limits, so as to say, thus far his Being reacheth, and no farther; but he is every where present after a most infinite manner, in the darkest Corners and most private Recesses; the most secret Closet that is in the whole World, the Heart of Man, Darkness and Privacy cannot keep him out; the presence of another Being, even of a Body, which is the grossest Substance, doth not exclude him; the whole World doth not confine him; but he fills all the space which we can imagine beyond this visible World, and infinitely more than we can imagine.

Secondly, For the Proof of it, I shall attempt it,

I. From the natural Notions and Dictates of our Minds.

II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation.

III. From the Inconvenience of the contrary.

I. From the natural Notions and Dictates of our Minds. We find that the Heathen, by the Light of Nature, did attribute this Perfection to God. *Fully* tells us, *De Nat. deor.* That Pythagoras thought, *Deum esse animum per naturam rerum omnem intentum & comeantem*, That God is as it were a Soul passing through and inspiring all Nature. And in *L. 2. de leg.* that this was *Thales* his Opinion which he commends, *Homines existimare oportere deos omnia cernere, deorum omnia esse plena.* That Men ought to believe, that the Gods see all things, that all things are full of them. So *Sen. Epist. 95.* *Ubique & omnibus praesto est.* He is every where present and at hand, & *de Benef. L. 4.* *Quocunque te flexeris ibi illum videbis occurrentem tibi, nihil ab illo vacat, opus suum ipse implet;* Which way soever thou turnest thy self, thou shalt find him meeting thee, nothing is without him, he fills his own work. Not much differing from the Expression of the Psalmist here.

II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation. I shall instance in some remarkable places; *1 Kings 8. 27.* Behold, the heaven, and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee. *Job 11. 7, 8, 9.* Can'st thou by searching find out God? can'st thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? *Isa. 66. 1.* Thus saith the Lord, behold, heaven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-stool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? *Jer. 23. 23, 24.* Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord? *Amos 9. 2, 3.* Tho' they dig into hell, thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down. And though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out thence: and tho' they be hid from my sight in the bottom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent and he shall bite them. *Acts 17. 27, 28.* Tho' he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also some of your own Poets have said, for we are also his off-spring.

III. From the Inconveniencies of the contrary. And this is the most proper way of proving any of God's Perfections; for as I have told you formerly, there being nothing before God, nor any cause of his Being, his Perfections cannot be proved by way of demonstration but of conviction, by shewing the Absurdity of the contrary. The first and most easy Notion that we have of God, is, that he is a Being that hath all Perfection, and is free from all Imperfections; now if I prove that the *Immensity* of God's Essence is a Perfection, or which is the same, that the contrary is an Imperfection, I do sufficiently prove the thing intended.

Now to suppose the divine Essence to be limited, or confined, and his Presence to be any where excluded, doth contradict both this necessary Perfection of God, his universal Providence; and the necessary Duty of Creatures, to worship and trust in him; and the voluntary Manifestation and Appearance of God, in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

1. It contradicts the universal Providence of God. The universal Providence of God supposeth many Perfections, *viz.* infinite Knowledge, and infinite Power, his Omniscience and Omnipotence, neither of which can be imagined without Omniscience. We find that all finite Beings have a finite Knowledge, and a finite Power; and it cannot be conceived how infinite Understanding and Power can be founded any where else, than in an infinite Essence. To have an infinite Knowledge of all things, even those things, which are most secret and hidden, to be able to do all things, to steer and govern the Actions of all Creatures, and to have a perfect care of them, seems to all the Reason of Mankind to require immediate Presence.

2. It contradicts the necessary Duty of the Creature, which is to worship God, to depend upon him for every thing, and in every thing to acknowledge him. Now all Worship of God is render'd vain, or at least uncertain, if God be not present to us to hear our Prayers, to take notice of our Wants, and receive our Acknowledgments: It will much abate our Confidence in God, and our Fear to offend him, if we be uncertain whether he be present to us or not, whether he sees our Actions or not.

3. It contradicts a voluntary Manifestation and Appearance of God in the Incarnation of Christ. He that supposeth God not to be every where present by his Essence, must in all reason confine his Presence to Heaven, and suppose him to be present elsewhere only by his Virtue and Power: But if this were so, how could the Divinity be essentially united to the Human Nature of Christ, which was here upon Earth? how is *God with us*? How does *he pitch his Tabernacle amongst Men*; if his essential Presence be confin'd to Heaven?

Thirdly, I come to answer Objections against this Doctrine.

There are *two* Objections against this.

1. From Reason.

2. From Scripture.

1. *Obj.* Reason will be ready to suggest, that this is a Disparagement to the Divine Nature, to tie his Presence to this vile Dunghil of the Earth, and sordid Sink of Hell. This is a gross Apprehension of God, and a measuring of him by our selves. Indeed if we look upon God as capable of Injury, and Suffering, and Offense from the Contagion of any thing here below, as we are, then indeed, there were some strength in this Objection: But he is a blessed and pure Being; *Mens segregata ab omni concretionem mortali.* A mind free from all mortal Composition or Mixture. Tully; *μὴ δὲ ἐν παντί συμπλεκόμενον*, disentangled from every thing passible, as Plut. Those things that are nauseous to our Senses, do not affect him: Darkness is uncomfortable to us, but *the Darkness and the Light are all one to him*: Wickedness may hurt a man, or the son of man; but if we multiply our transgressions, we do nothing to God, as Elibu speaks, *Job 35. 6.* Nothing can disquiet or discompose his happy and blessed Nature, but he converseth here in this dark and troubled World with less Danger or Disturbance, or any impure Contagion, than the Sun-beams.

2. *Objct.* Does not the Scripture tell us, that *God sits in the heavens*, and *dwells on high*, that *heaven is his throne*, and that *it is the City of the great God*? Doth not the Lord's Prayer teach us to say, *Our Father which art in heaven*? Is he not said to *look down from heaven* and to *hear in heaven his dwelling place*? Is it not said that *he doth not dwell in temples made with hands*? And does not Solomon, *1 Kings 8. 27.* put it as a strange question, *will God indeed dwell on the earth*? Is he not said to *come down* and *draw near* to us, and to be *afar off from us*? Now how does this agree with *Immensity* and *Omnipresence*?

For answer to this, I must distinguish the Presence of God. There is, 1st his *glorious Presence*, that is, such a Presence of God as is accompanied with an extraordinary Manifestation of his Glory, and that is especially and chiefly confined to Heaven, in respect of which it is called his *Seat*, and *Throne*, and *the Habitation of his Glory*. Some degree of this was in the Temple, which is the reason of Solomon's Admiration, *will God dwell on Earth?*

2^{dly}, There is his *gracious Presence*, which discovers it self by miraculous effects of his Favour, and Goodness, and Assistance, and thereby he is said to *dwell in the hearts* of good Men, and *with them that are of an humble and contrite Spirit*, Isa. 57. 15. and in respect of this he is said to *draw near to us*, to *look down upon us*; and in respect of the Absence of this, to be *far from us*.

3^{dly}, There is his *essential Presence*, which is equally and alike in all Places; and this is not excluded by those former Expressions, which the Scripture useth to denote to us the *glorious* and *gracious* Presence of God.

Fourthly, To make some Inferences. I will mention only such as the Scripture here takes notice of, speaking of God's *Immensity*.

I. *Inf.* That God is a Spirit. This necessarily flows from his *Immensity*; for if the Essence of God be every where diffused, the Divine Nature must be spiritual; otherwise it could not be in the same Place where Body and Matter is, but must be shut out of the World. But this I spoke more largely to, in my Discourse of God's being a Spirit. This the Psalmist observes here, *Where shall I go from thy Spirit?* If he were not a Spirit, we might go from him, and hide our selves from his Presence.

II. *Inf.* That God is incomprehensible. That which is infinite cannot be measured and comprehended by that which is finite; and this also the Psalmist takes notice of, in the Verse before my Text, *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high, I cannot attain it.*

III. *Inf.* That God is Omniscient. If God be every where, then he knows all things, yea even the hidden things of Darkness, the Secrets of our hearts; nothing can be hidden from an infinite Eye; he is present to our Thoughts, intimate to our Hearts and Reins; this the Psalmist takes notice of, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 12 Verses.

IV. *Inf.* That God is Omnipotent. *He can do all things.* Distance limits the Power of Creatures, and makes *their hands short*; but God is every where, nothing is out of his reach; and this also the Psalmist intimates in the Text, v. 10. *Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand hold me.*

Fifthly, The Use and Improvement I shall make of this, shall be,

1. To awaken our Fear of him.

2. To encourage our Faith and Confidence in him.

1. To awaken our Fear of him. The Consideration of God's Presence should awaken in us a Fear of Reverence. The Presence of an earthly Majesty will awe our Spirits, and compose us to Reverence; yea the Presence of a wise and good Man; how much more should the Presence of the Great, Glorious, the Wise, and the Holy, and the Just God strike an awe upon our Spirits? Wherever we are, God is with us; we always converse with him, and live continually in his Presence: Now a Heathen could say, *cum Diis verecundè agendum*, *We must behave our selves modestly, because we are in the Presence of God.*

And it should awaken in us a Fear to offend God, and a Fear of the Divine Displeasure for having offended him. Fear is the most wakefull Passion in the Soul of Man, and is the first Principle that is wrought upon in us from the Apprehensions of a Deity, it flows immediately from the Principle of Self-preservation which God hath planted in every Man's Nature; we have a natural Dread and Horror for every thing that can hurt us, and endanger our Being or Happiness; now the greatest Danger is from the greatest Power, for where we are clearly over-match'd, we cannot hope to make Opposition nor Resistance with security and success, to rebell with safety: now he that apprehends God to be near him, and present to him, believes such a Being to stand by him as is possessor of an infinite and

and irresistible Power, and will vindicate all Contempt of the Divine Majesty, and Violation of his Laws. If we believe God to be allways present with us, *Fear will continually take hold of us*, and we shall say of every Place, as *Jacob* did of *Bethel*, *Surely God is in this Place, how dreadfull is this Place!* When we have at any time provoked God, if we believe the just God is at hand to revenge himself, and if we believe the Power of his Anger, we shall say with *David*, *Psal. 76. 7. Thou even thou art to be feared, and whom may stand before thee when thou art angry?* *Psal. 119. 120. My flesh trembleth because of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments.*

Sinners, consider this, *It is a fearfull Thing to fall into the Hands of the living God*, and every time you sin, you are within his reach. Let then the consideration of God's Presence deter us from Sin, and quicken us to our Duty. The Eye and Presence of a Superior will lay a great Restraint upon Men; the Eye of our Prince, or our Master, or our Father, will make us afraid or ashamed to do any Thing that is foolish or unseemly: And will we do that under the Eye of God, which we should blush to do before a grave or wise Person, yea before a Child or a Fool? Did but Men live under this Apprehension, that God is present to them, that an holy and all-seeing Eye beholds them, they would be afraid to do any Thing that is vile and wicked, to profane and pollute God's glorious Name, by a trifling Use of it in Customary swearing and cursing. Whenever you sin, you affront God to his Face, and provoke omnipotent Justice which is at the Door, and ready to break in upon you.

And the Consideration of this should especially deter us from secret Sins. This is the Use the *Psalmist* here makes of it. If we believe that God *searcheth us, and knows us, that he knows our down-sitting, and our up-rising, and understands our Thoughts afar off, that he compasseth our Path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our Ways, that there is not a Word in our Tongue, but he knows it altogether, that he hath beset us behind and before, that the Darknes hideth not from him, but the Night shineth as the Day, and the Darknes and Light are both alike*; I say, if we believe this, how should we live in an awfull Sense of the Majesty which is always above us, and before us, and about us, and within us, and is as inseparable from us, as we are from our selves, whose Eye is upon us from the beginning of our Lives to the end of our Days! Did Men believe that God is always with them, that his Eye pierceth the Darknes, and sees through all those Clouds with which they hide and muffle themselves, and pries into the most secret Recesses of their Hearts, how would this check and restrain them from *devising mischief in their Hearts, or in their Bed-Chamber!* The holy Presence, and the pure Eye of God would be to us a thousand times more than to have our Father, or our Master, or our Prince, or him whom we most revere, to stand by us. Did but Men *representare sibi Deum, make God present to them*, by living under a continual Sense of his Presence, they would, as the Expression of the Wise Man is, *be in the fear of the Lord all Day. Magna spes peccatorum tollitur, si peccatoris testis adsistat: aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cujus auctoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius facit*; The main hope of Sinners is to remain undiscover'd, let but somebody be privy to their Designs, and they are utterly disappointed; 'Tis fit for the Mind of a Man to have an awe of some Being, whose Authority may render even its privacy more solemn. This is the Character of wicked Men, *Psal. 86. 14. That they have not God before their Eyes*. One great Cause of all the Wickedness, and Violence, and Looseness that is upon the Earth, is, they do not believe that God is near them, and stands by them.

And as the Consideration of God's Presence should deter us from Sin, so it should quicken and animate us to our Duty. It is ordinarily a great Encouragement to Men to acquit themselves handsomely, to have the Eyes of Men upon them, especially of those whose Applause and Approbation they value. God alone is *amplum Theatrum*, he's a greater Theatre than the World; and it should be more to us that he stands by us, than if the Eyes of all the World were fix'd upon us. *Seneca* adviseth it as an excellent Means to promote Virtue, to propound to our selves, and set before our Eyes some eminently virtuous Person, as *Cato* or *Laelius*, *Ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus, & omnia tanquam illo vidente faciamus*:

amus : That we may live just as if he were looking upon us, and do all Things just as if he beheld us. How much greater Incitement will it be to us, to think that God looks upon us, and sees us, and really stands by us, than faintly to imagine the Presence of *Lælius* or *Cato*?

This should have an Influence upon all the Duties we perform, and the manner of performing them, that we do it to him who stands by us, and is familiarly acquainted with us, and is more intimate to us than we are to our selves. This *Cic.* in l. 2. *de leg.* looks upon as a great Principle of Religion; *Sit, igitur hoc persuasum civibus, & qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, qua mente, qua pietate religiones colat, deos intueri, & piorum impiorumque rationem habere* : Let Men be thoroughly persuaded of this, that the Gods observe both the Disposition and the Actions of every particular Man, what he consents to, what he allows himself in, particularly with what meaning, with what Degree of inward Devotion he performs his religious Worship; and that they distinguish between the pious and the impious.

2. To encourage our Faith and Confidence in him. When we are in Straits, and Difficulties and Dangers, God is with us; when Trouble is near to us, God is not far from us; wherever we are, how remote soever from Friends and Companions, we cannot be banish'd from God's Presence; if we dwell beyond the utmost parts of the Sea, there his hand leads us, and his right hand holds us. *Psal.* 16. 8. *I have set the Lord allways before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.* The Consideration of God's Presence is the great stay and support of our Faith, *Psal.* 46. 1, 2. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the Sea.* In the greatest Commotions, and the most imminent and threatening Dangers, this should charm and allay our Fears, that *God is a present help.*

This was the support of *Moses* his Faith in his Sufferings, as the Apostle tells us, *Heb.* 11. 27. *He endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*

To conclude all, whenever we are under any Pressure or Trouble, we should rebuke our own Fears, and challenge our anxious Thoughts with *David*, *Psal.* 42. 11 *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou so disquieted within me? trust still in God;* believe that God is with thee, and that Omnipotent Goodness stands by thee, who can and will support thee, and relieve thee, and deliver thee when it seems best to his Wisdom.

S E R M O N CII.

The Eternity of God.

P S A L M XC. 2.

Before the Mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the Earth and the World, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

THE Immensity, and Eternity of God, are those Attributes which relate to his Nature, or manner of Being. Having spoken of the former, I proceed to consider the latter, from these Words.

The Title of this Psalm is, *The Prayer of Moses, the Man of God.* He begins his Prayer with the Acknowledgement of God's Providence to his People from the beginning of the World; *Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place from all generations; in generation and generation;* so the Hebrew; he was well acquainted with the History of the World, and the Providence of God from the beginning of it, and

and as if he had spoken too little of God, in saying, that his Providence had been exercised in all the Ages of the World, he tells us here in the Text, that he was before the World, and he made it; he was from all Eternity, and should continue to all Eternity the same. *Before the mountains were brought forth; the most firm and durable Parts of the World, the most eminent and conspicuous; Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world; before any thing was created; from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.* In speaking of this Attribute, I shall

First, Give you the Explication of it.

Secondly, Endeavour to prove that it doth belong to God, and ought to be attributed to the Divine Nature.

Thirdly, Draw some Corollaries from the whole.

First, for the Explication of it. Eternity is a duration without bounds or limits: Now there are two Limits of Duration, *beginning* and *ending*; that which hath allways been is without beginning; that which allways shall be is without ending. Now we may conceive of a thing allways to have been, and the continuance of its Being now to cease, tho' there be no such thing in the World: And there are some things which have had a beginning of their Being, but shall have no End, shall allways continue, as the Angels and Spirits of Men. The first of these the School-men call Eternity, *à parte ante*, that is, *Duration without Beginning*; this latter Eternity *à parte post*, a *Duration without Ending*; But Eternity, absolutely taken, comprehends both these, and signifies *an infinite Duration, which had no Beginning, nor shall have any End*; so that when we say God is eternal, we mean that he allways was, and shall be for ever; that he had no beginning of Life, nor shall have any End of Days; but that, *he is from everlasting to everlasting*, as it is here in the Text.

'Tis true indeed, that as to God's Eternity, *à parte ante*, as to his *having allways been*, the Scripture doth not give us any solicitous account of it; it only tells us in general, that God was *before the World was*, and that *he created it*: It doth not descend to gratify our curiosity in giving us any account of what God did before he made the World, or how he entertain'd himself from all Eternity: It doth not give us any distinct account of his *infinite duration*; for that had been impossible for our finite understandings to comprehend; if we should have ascended upward millions of Ages, yet we should never have ascended to the top, never have arrived at the beginning of Infinity; therefore the Scripture, which was wrote to instruct us in what was necessary, and not to satisfy our curiosity, tells us this, that God was *from everlasting, before the world was made*, and *that he laid the Foundations of it*.

So that by the Eternity of God, you are to understand *the perpetual continuance of his Being, without beginning or ending*.

I shall not trouble you with the inconsistent and unintelligible Notions of the School-men; that it is *duratio tota simul*, in which we are not to conceive any succession, but to imagine it an instant. We may as well conceive the *Immensity* of God to be *a point*, as his Eternity to be an *instant*: And as according to our manner of conceiving, we must necessarily suppose the Immensity of God to be an infinite Expansion of his Essence, a presence of it to all Places, and imaginable Space; so must we suppose the Eternity of God to be a perpetual continuance, coexistent to all imaginable succession of Ages. Now how can that be together, which must necessarily be imagined to be coexistent to Successions, let them that can conceive.

Secondly, For the Proof of this, I shall attempt it *two Ways*.

I. From the Dictates of Natural Light and Reason.

II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation.

I. From the Dictates of Natural Reason. This Attribute of God is of all other least disputed among the Philosophers: Indeed all agree that God is a perfect and happy Being, but wherein that Happiness and Perfection consists, they differ exceedingly; but all agree that God is *Eternal*, and are agreed what Eternity is, *viz. a boundless duration*: And however they did attribute a beginning

to their *Héroes* and *Dæmons*, whence come the Genealogies of their Gods; yet the Supreme God they look'd upon as without beginning; and it is a good Evidence, that this Perfection doth clearly belong to God, that *Epicurus*, who had the lowest and meanest Conceptions of God, and robbed him of as many Perfections, as his imperfect Reason would let him, yet is forced to attribute this to him. *Tull. de Nat. Deor. lib. 1.* saith to the *Epicureans*, *Ubi igitur vestrum beatum & æternum quibus duobus verbis significatis deum? Where then is your happy and eternal Being, by which two Epithets you express God?* And *Lucretius*, who hath undertaken to represent to the World the Doctrine of *Epicurus*, gives this account of the Divine Nature:

*Omnis enim per se divinum natura necesse est
Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruiatur.*

'Tis absolutely necessary to the nature of the Gods, to pass an Eternity in profound peace and quiet.

The Poets, who had the wildest Notions of God, yet they constantly give them the title of *ἀθάνατοι*; the Heathen never mention the Name of God without this Attribute, *Dii Immortales! Immortal Gods!* was their ordinary Exclamation; and they swear constantly by this Attribute, *deos testor immortales*; and to mention no more, *Tully* saith expressly, *Nos deum nisi sempiternum intelligere qui possumus? How can we conceive of God, but as an eternal Being.*

Now the Reason of this is evident, because it would be the greatest imperfection we could attribute to his Being; and the more perfect his Being were otherwise, the greater Imperfection would it be for such a Being to die; so excellent a Nature to cease to be; it would be an infinite Abasement to all his other Perfections; his Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, that these should all be perishing: Nay, it would hinder several of his Perfections, and contradict their very Being: His *Self-existence*; had he not *always* been, he had not been *of himself*; his *necessary existence*; for that is not *necessarily*, which may at any time not be, or cease to be what it is; and it would much abate the Duty of the Creature; we could not have that assurance of his Promise, and that security of the Recompense of the next Life, if the continuance of his Being, who should be the Dispenser of them, were uncertain.

Now these Absurdities and Inconveniencies following from the Denial of this Perfection to God, is sufficient evidence that it belongs to him; for I told you the Perfections of God cannot be prov'd by way of *Demonstration*, but only by way of *Conviction*, by shewing the Absurdity of the contrary.

II. From Scripture and Divine Revelation. There are innumerable places to this purpose, which speak of the *Eternity* of God *Directly*, and *by Consequence*: *By Consequence* those words, *2 Pet. 3. 8.* *One day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*; which words, however Interpreters have troubled themselves about them, being afraid of a contradiction in them, yet the plain meaning of them is this, That such is the infinite Duration of God, that all measures of Time bear no proportion to it; for that this is the plain meaning, appears by *Psal. 90.* out of which they are cited, *For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night*; that is, as the time past, as a few Hours slept away, for that is the meaning of *a watch in the night*, that is as nothing. Now *St. Peter's* Conversion of the words, *one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*, only signifies this, that the longest duration of time is so inconsiderable to God, that it is as the shortest, that is, bears no proportion to the Eternity of God.

But *Directly*, the Scripture frequently mentions this Attribute: He's called the *Everlasting God*, *Gen. 21. 33.* *The Eternal God*, *Deut. 33. 27.* and which is to the same purpose, *he that inhabiteth Eternity*, *Isa. 57. 5.* And this, as it is attributed to him in respect of his *Being*, so in respect of all his *other Perfections*, *Psal. 103. 17.* *The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.* *Rom. 1. 20.* *his eternal Power.* *1 Tim. 1. 17.* *the King eternal.* Those Doxologies which
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the Scripture useth, are but acknowledgments of this Attribute, *Blessed be the Lord for ever and ever.* Neh. 9. 5. *To whom be glory, and honour, and dominion for ever and ever,* Gal. 1. 5. and in many other Places.

Hither we may refer all those Places which speak of him as *without beginning*; Psal. 93. 2. *Thou art from everlasting.* Micah 5. 2. *Whose goings forth have been from everlasting.* Hab. 1. 12. *Art not thou from everlasting! O Lord!* And those which speak of the perpetual Continuance of his Duration; Psal. 102. 24, 25, 26, 27. *Thy years are throughout all generations; of old thou hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea all of them shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.*

And those which speak of him as *the first and the last*; Isa. 43. 10. *Before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be any after me. I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God.* And to mention no more, those which speak of his Being, as co-existent to all Difference of Time, past, present, and to come, Rev. 1. 8. *I am Alpha, and Omega, the beginning, and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come.*

Thirdly, I shall from hence draw,

I. Some Doctrinal Corollaries.

II. Some Practical Inferences.

I. Doctrinal Corollaries, that you may see how the Perfections of God depend one upon another, and may be deduced one from another.

1. Corol. From the Eternity of God we may infer, that he is *of himself*. That which always is, can have nothing before it to be a Cause of its Being.

2. Corol. We may hence infer the *necessity* of his Being. 'Tis necessary every thing should be, when it is; now that which is allways, is absolutely necessary, because allways so.

3. Corol. The *Immutability* of the Divine Nature; for being allways, he is necessarily, and being necessarily, he cannot but be what he is; a change of his Being is as impossible as a cessation. Therefore the Psalmist puts his *Immutability* and *Eternity* together. Psal. 102. 27. *But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.*

II. By way of Practical Inference or Application.

1. The consideration of God's Eternity may serve for the Support of our Faith. This Moses here useth as a Ground of his Faith; *Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place, in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, &c.* Psal. 62. 8. *Trust in him at all times, ye people.* His *Immensity* is an Argument why all should trust in him, he is a *present help* to all; and why they should trust in him at all Times, his *Eternity* is an Argument, Deut. 33. 27. *The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.* There are two Attributes which are the proper Objects of our Faith and Confidence, God's *Goodness*, and his *Power* both these are Eternal; *The goodness of the Lord endureth for ever*, as it is frequently in the Psalms: And his *Power* is Eternal; the Apostle speaks of his *eternal Power*, as well as *Godhead*; Rom. 1. 20. Isa. 26. 4. *Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.* Isa. 40. 28. *The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the Earth fainteth not, neither is weary.*

We cannot trust in Men, because there is nothing in Man to be a Foundation of our Confidence; his good Will towards us may change, his Power may faint, and he may grow weary; or if these continue, yet they that have a Mind and a Power to help us, themselves may fail: Therefore the Psalmist useth this consideration of Men's Mortality, to take us off from confidence in Man, Psal. 146. 3, 4. *Put not your trust in Princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help; his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish.* Isa. 2. 22. *Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for wherein is he to be accounted of?* The greatest of the Sons of Men are but *lying refuges to the everlasting God*; they are but *broken reeds to the rock of Ages.*

And this may support our Faith, not only in reference to our own condition for the future, but in reference to our posterity, and the Condition of God's Church to the End of the World. When we die, we may leave ours and the Church in his Hands, who *lives for ever*, and *reigns for ever*. The Enemies of God's Church, and those who have the most malicious designs against it, whatever share they may have in the Affairs of the World, they can but domineer for a while, they must die, and that very day their thoughts perish: But thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.

2. For the Encouragement of our Obedience. We serve the God who can give us an everlasting Reward. The Reward of the next Life is called *Eternal Life*, and *Eternal weight of glory*, 2 Cor. 4. 17. *Eternal Salvation*, Heb. 5. 9. *an Eternal Inheritance*, Heb. 9. 15. That place where good Men shall be rewarded is called, *Everlasting Habitations*, Luke 16. 9. *a House Eternal in the Heavens*, 2 Cor. 5. 1. As the Promise of our future Reward is founded in the Goodness of God, and the greatness of it in his Power, so the Duration of it in his *Eternity*. Now what an encouragement is this to us, that we serve him, and suffer for him, who *lives for ever*, and will make us happy for ever? When we serve the great Men of this World, tho' we be secure of their Affection, yet we are uncertain of their Lives; and this discourageth many, and makes Men worship the Rising Sun, and many times takes off Men's Eyes from the King, to his Successor; but he that serves God, serves *the King everlasting*, as the Apostle calls him, who will live to dispense rewards to all those who are faithful to him.

3. For the Terror of wicked Men. The sentence which shall be past upon Men at the Day of Judgement, is called *Eternal Judgment*, Heb. 6. 2. because it decides Men's Eternal State; the punishment that shall follow this Sentence which shall pass upon the wicked is called, *Everlasting Punishment*, Matth. 25. 36. *Everlasting fire*, Matth. 25. 41. *Everlasting destruction*, 2 Thess. 2. 9. *The vengeance of Eternal fire*, Jude 7. *The smoke of the bottomless pit*, is said to ascend for ever and ever, Rev. 14. 11. and the wicked to be tormented day and night, for ever and ever, Rev. 20. 10. Now as the Punishment of Wicked Men is founded in the Justice of God; and the greatness of it in his Power; so the perpetuity and continuance of it in his *Eternity*. The Apostle saith, Heb. 10. 31. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; because he that *lives for ever*, can punish for ever; as the eternal Demerit of Sin feeds, and animates, and keeps alive the never-dying Worm, so the Wrath of the Eternal God blows up the Eternal Flame.

How should this awaken in us a Fear of the *Eternal God*! Sinners, what a folly is it, for the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, to incense that Justice which will punish and torment you for ever! As good Men shall have the everlasting God for their Reward, and their Happiness, so wicked Men shall have him for their Judge and Avenger.

We fear the Wrath of Men, whose power is short, and whose breath is in their nostrils, who can afflict but a little, and for a little while. Dost thou fear Man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be made as grass? and is not the wrath of the *Eternal God* much more terrible? Luke 12. 4, 5. And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea I say unto you, fear him. The Wrath of Man is despicable, because it hath bounds and limits; the Fury of Man can but reach to the body, it can go no farther; it expires with this Life, it cannot follow us beyond the Grave: But the Wrath of the *Eternal God* doth not only reach the Body, but the Soul; it is not confin'd to this Life, but pursues us to the other World, and extends it self to all Eternity.

Fear him, who after he hath kill'd, hath power to cast into hell, that is to inflict eternal Torments; Yea, I say unto you, fear him.

S E R M O N CIII.

The Incomprehensibleness of God.

JOB XI. 7.

Can'st thou by searching find out God? Can'st thou find out the Almighty unto Perfection?

IN treating of the Properties and Perfections of God, I shall at present consider that which results from the infinite Excellency of his Nature and Perfection, compared with the Imperfection of our Understandings, which is commonly call'd the *Incomprehensibleness* of God. This you have expressed here in the Words of Zophar, *Can'st thou by searching find out God? &c.*

There is no great difficulty in the Words; *Can'st thou by searching find out God*, *potesne pervestigare intima Dei*, so Castalio translates it. Dost thou know God intimately, and throughly within and without? Can'st thou pierce into the center of his Perfections, and dive into the bottom of them? and, *Can'st thou find out the Almighty to perfection?* Can'st thou find out the Almighty, *usque ad ultima*, to the very last and utmost of him? so as thou can'st say, after a thorough Search and Enquiry, "There is no Perfection in God beyond this; there is nothing of him now that remains to be known; *this* he is, and no other; *that* he is, and no other; *this* he can do, and no more; *hither* doth his Knowledge, and Power, and Wisdom reach, and no farther.

Can'st thou do this? These Interrogations have the force of a vehement negation; as if he had said, *No, thou can'st not; God is Unsearchable, he is Incomprehensible.*

The two Questions in the Text seem to be only two several Expressions of the same thing. The first Question is undoubtedly general, concerning the Nature and Perfections of God in general; *Can'st thou by searching find out God?* Can'st thou by the most diligent search and enquiry come to a perfect Knowledge and Understanding of him?

The second Question may seem to be a particular Instance to the general Truth implied in the first Question; he seems to instance in his Power, as if he had said, *God is unsearchable*, and then had instanced in a particular Perfection, *the Power of God*, *Can'st thou by searching find out God?* Thou can'st not comprehend the Divine Nature and Perfections in general; *Can'st thou find out the Almighty unto Perfection?* Consider particularly his *Power*, and see if thou can'st know the utmost of that. But I rather think, that the latter Question is altogether the same in sense with the former; and that the Attribute of *Almighty*, which is here given to God, is used by way of Description, and not intended by way of Instance. *Can'st thou find out the Almighty*, that is, *God, unto Perfection?* Which way soever we take the Words, it is not much material, we may ground this *Observation* upon them:

That God is Incomprehensible.

This Term or Attribute is a relative Term, and speaks a relation between an Object and a Faculty, between God and a created Understanding; so that the meaning of it is plainly this, That no created Understanding can comprehend God, that is, have a perfect and exact Knowledge of him, such a Knowledge as is adequate to the Perfection of the Object. Or thus, the Nature and Perfections of God are above the Understanding of any of his Creatures; it is only his own infinite Understanding that can frame a perfect Idea of his own Perfection. God knows himself, his own Understanding comprehends his own Perfections. But he is *Incomprehensible to his Creatures.*

Indeed, there is nothing more obvious than God ; for *he is not far from every one of us ; in him we live, and move, and have our Being ;* there needs no great search to find out there is a God : *An eternal Power and Deity are clearly seen in the things which are made,* as the Apostle tells us ; but the *manner of the Being, and Properties, and Perfections of this God,* these cannot be comprehended by a finite Understanding. I shall prove the Doctrine, and then apply it.

First, for the Proof of it. I will attempt it these three ways.

I. By way of Instance, or Induction of Particulars.

II. By way of Conviction.

III. By giving the clear Reason of it.

1. By way of Instance. And I shall give you Instances both on the part of the *Object*, and of the *Subject* ; or the Persons who are capable of knowing God in any degree.

1. On the part of the *Object*. The Nature of God, the Excellency and Perfection of God, the Works and Ways of God are above our thoughts and apprehensions, The Nature of God ; it is vast and infinite, *Joh 36. 26. God is great, and we know him not,* Job 37. 23. *Touching the Almighty we cannot find him out.* Psal. 145. 3. *His greatness is unsearchable.*

The Excellencies and Perfections of God ; his Immenfity, 2 Chron. 2. 6. *The heaven of heavens cannot contain him : The Eternity of his duration, from everlasting to everlasting he is God.* We cannot imagine any limits of his presence, nor bounds of his duration : The infiniteness of his knowledge, Psal. 147. 5. *his understanding is infinite.* When we think of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God, our best way is to fall into admiration, Rom. 11. 35. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God !*

Whereas the Scripture speaks of those Perfections of God, which the Creatures do in some measure and degree partake of, as his Goodness, and Power, and Wisdom, and Holiness, and Immortality, it attributes them in such a peculiar and divine manner to God, as doth exclude and shut out the Creature from any claim, or share, or title to them, Matt. 19. 16, 17. *Why callest thou me good ? there's none good but one, that is God.* 1 Tim. 6. 15, 16. *Who is the blessed and only Potentate, who only hath Immortality.* 1 Tim. 1. 17. *The only wise God.* Rev. 15. 4. *For thou only art holy.* In so inconceivable a manner doth God possess these Perfections which he communicates, and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesses them ; so that when we consider any of these Divine Perfections, we must not frame Notions of them contrary to what they are in the Creature, nor must we limit them by what they are in the Creature ; but say, the Goodness and the Wisdom of God are all this which is in the Creature, and much more which I am not able to comprehend ; the transcendent degree, and the singularity of these Divine Perfections, which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive.

The Works of God, they are likewise unsearchable ; the Works of Creation and of Redemption, Job 5. 9. *Which doth great things, and unsearchable, marvellous things, past finding out :* And then he instanceth in the Works of God, Job 26. 14. *Lo, these are part of his ways : But how little a portion is heard of him ? and the thunder of his voice who can understand ?* So that he tells us expressly, we cannot find out the Works of God, we do but know part of them. The Question which he puts, Job 37. 16. *Dost thou know the wondrous Works of him that is perfect in knowledge ?* can only be answered by the words of the Psalmist, Psal. 104. 24. *O Lord, how wonderful are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all.* The Work of Redemption : In this there shines forth such Wisdom, Mercy, and Love, as our Understandings cannot reach ; this Work is call'd the Wisdom of God in a mystery, *hidden wisdom*, *Cop' a Saxonogup'n*, 1 Cor. 2. 7. The Mercy, and Grace, and Love of it is called, *The riches of God's mercy, the exceeding riches of his grace*, Eph. 2. 4. 7. Now Riches is when you cannot tell the utmost of them, *pauperis est numerare*, Eph. 3. 18, 19. *That ye may be able to comprehend with all Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.* When we have the largest Apprehensions of this

this Love, so that we think we comprehend it and know it, *it passeth knowledge*, yea, the Effects of God's Power and Love, which he manifests in Believers, are unspeakable; for *he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us*, Eph. 3. 20. The peace which guards their Souls *passeth all understanding*, Phil. 4. 7. Those Joys which fill their hearts *are not to be expressed*, 1 Pet. 1. 8. We read of Joy *unspeakable and full of glory*. The happiness which they hope for is inconceivable; 'tis that which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath enter'd into the heart of man, which God hath laid up for us*.

The Ways of God's Providence, they are not to be traced, Psal. 77. 19. *Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known*. Ecclef. 3. 11. *No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end*. We are but of yesterday, and know nothing. When we look upon God's Providence, we take a part from the whole, and consider it by it self, without relation to the whole series of his Dispensation; we cannot see the whole of God's Providence at one view, and never see from the beginning of the Works of God to the end; therefore our knowledge of them must needs be very imperfect, and full of Mistakes, and false Judgments of Things; we cannot by our petty and short-sighted designs, judge of the Works of God, and the Designs of Providence; for *our ways are not as his ways, nor our thoughts as his thoughts; but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts*, Isa. 55. 8, 9. The Ways of God's Mercy, Psal. 103. *As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God's mercy*. Psal. 139. 17, 18. *How pretious are thy thoughts unto me? how great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand*. And the ways of God's Judgments; the severity and greatness of his Judgment is not known, Psal. 90. *Who knoweth the power of thine anger? And who may stand before thee when thou art angry?* And the Reasons of his Judgments are unsearchable, Psal. 36. 6. *Thy Judgments are a great deep*. Rom. 11. 35. *How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his ways past finding out!* These are the Instances on the part of the Object.

2. On the part of the Subject, or the Persons capable of knowing God in any measure. The perfect Knowledge of God is above a finite Creature's Understanding. Wicked men are ignorant of God, and full of false apprehensions of him; the Scripture gives this description of them; they are those that *know not God*, 2 Theff. 1. Wicked men are so far from knowing God to Perfection, that they have hardly any true Knowledge of him; for as the man himself is, so will God seem to be to him; the Idea and Notions which men have of God, is but the Picture of their own Complexion. To a true knowledge there is required Likeness; a Man's Mind must be like the thing he would understand; therefore the Apostle tells us, *the natural, or animal man, doth not receive the things of God*, he is not capable of them, because his Mind is unsuitable to them, he is *σάρκης ἡ ζωῆς*, full of body, and he cannot relish spiritual things, even those natural Notions which wicked men have of God, are strangely tinctur'd and obscur'd by the temper of the Man; they are *lux sepulta in opaca materia*, light buried and hid in matter and darkness, in the blackness of a foul and impure heart; so that there is no question of them, whether they comprehend God, or not,

But good Men cannot find out God, they have some false Apprehensions of him; all their Apprehensions are dark, have much of obscurity in them; they know God to Salvation; but not to Perfection: In this life we do but know God in part, that is, in comparison of the Knowledge which our Natures are capable of.

But I will instance yet higher; the Angels and the Spirits of just Men made perfect, tho' they have true Apprehensions of God, yet they do not arrive to perfect Knowledge of him, they cannot *pervestigare ultima*, know the utmost of God; the Cherubims themselves are continually looking at the Mercy-Seat. To which the Apostle alludes, 1 Pet. 1. 12. when he tells us, the Mystery of God's Mer-

cy in the Gospel as a thing *which the Angels desired to pry into*. In Heaven, *that which is in part shall be done away*, that is, our Knowledge shall be perfect as our Natures are capable; but it shall be *finite*. When we shall *see God face to face*, that is, have an immediate vision of him, *and see him as he is*, that is, not having our Understandings tinctur'd by any lust or passion that may darken our Mind, or misrepresent the *Object*; for the Apostle tells us, *we shall see him, because we shall be like him*; yet then we shall have short and unadequate Apprehensions of him, we shall still retain our limited Natures and finite Understandings.

II. By way of Conviction. Dost thou know perfectly the Nature of a finite Spirit, the Perfection and the Power of an Angel, how, being immaterial, they can act upon matter, and move that which can make no resistance to a Spirit? Dost thou know how they can move themselves to a great distance in a moment; and dart themselves from one part of the World to another? Dost thou know how man is *formed in the lowest parts of the earth*, as the Psalmist expresseth it; and the curious Frame of our Bodies is wrought from such rude Principles in so dark a Shop? Can'st thou give an account how the Soul is united to the Body, by what bands or holds a Spirit is so closely and intimately conjoined to Matter? Dost thou know how thy self understandest any thing, and can'st retain the distinct Ideas and Notions of so many Objects without Confusion? Dost thou know the least parts of Matter, how they are knit together; and by what Cement they cleave so fast to one another, that they can hardly be separated?

Now if the Creatures be so unsearchable, and the Knowledge of these be too hard for thee, is not the Creator of them much more Incomprehensible, who possesseth all these Perfections which he communicates, and many which cannot be communicated to a Creature? If in natural and sensible things, *maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus*; how much more is it true of God, that *our ignorance is more than our knowledge*; when the whole Earth and all the Creatures bear no proportion to him? Isa. 40. 15. 17. *Behold all the Nations of the Earth are as the drop of the bucket, and as the small dust of the balance; all nations before him are nothing, and are accounted to him less than nothing*.

III. By shewing you the clear Reason of it, which is this, the Disproportion between the Faculty and the Object, the Finiteness of our Understandings, and the Infiniteness of the Divine Nature and Perfections. *God is greater than our hearts*, and therefore as he knows more than we do, as the Apostle reasons, 1 John 3. 20. so he is more than can be known by us; he is too vast an Object for our Understanding to entertain, for our Minds to receive. Thou may'st as well mete out the Heaven with a span, and measure the Waters in the hollow of thy hand, and comprehend the dust of the Earth in a little Urn, and weigh the Mountains in Scales, and the Hills in a little Balance, as think to circumscribe God in the narrow limits of thy thoughts, or to bring that which is infinite within the compass of that which is finite.

And there is not only the vastness and greatness of the Object; but the Glory and Resplendency of it does so dazzle our sight, that we cannot perfectly see it, 2 Tim. 6. 16. *He dwelleth in light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see*. As God is too big, so he is too bright an Object for our Understandings; the Presence of his Glory overpowers our Minds, and bears down our Faculties, and conquers our Understandings.

I come now to apply this Doctrine of the Incomprehensibleness of the Divine Nature. If the Nature, and Perfections, and Ways, and Works of God be Incomprehensible, and past finding out;

I. It calls for our Admiration, and Veneration, and Reverence. These are the best Apprehensions of him that is Incomprehensible; a silent Veneration of his Excellencies, is the best Acknowledgment of them. We must admire what we cannot apprehend or express, Zach. 9. 17. *How great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty*? The best way to celebrate the Praises of God, is that which *Nebemiah* useth, *Nebem. 9. 5. And blessed be thy glorious name which is exalted above all blessing,*

blessing and praise. Whenever we speak or think of God, we necessarily detract from his Perfections; but even this necessity is glorious to him, and this speaks his Perfection, that the highest finite Understanding must have imperfect thoughts of him.

We should make up in Reverence and Veneration what we fall short of in Knowledge. Reverence is an acknowledgment of distance; by our Reverence of the Divine Majesty, we should best awe our Hearts, in a sense of the Distance which is between his Infinite Nature and Perfection, and our finite apprehensions. Worldly greatness will cause wonder, the thoughts of earthly Majesty will compose us to Reverence; how much more should those Excellencies which are beyond what we can imagine! *Isa. 6.* you have there God represented *sitting upon his throne*, and the *Seraphims about him*, which are described to us as *having each six wings, and with twain they cover their faces*. Creatures of the brightest Understanding, and the most exalted Purity and Holiness, *cover their faces* in the presence of God's Glory, they chuse rather to venerate God, than look upon him.

II. This calls for Humility and Modesty. The consideration of God's unsearchable Perfections should make *the haughtiness of man to stoop, and bring down his proud looks, and God alone should be exalted*. The thought of God's Excellency should abase us, and make us *vile in our own Eyes*; it should make all those petty Excellencies that we pride our selves in, to vanish and disappear. *Those treasures of wisdom and knowledge* which are in God, should *hide pride from Man*. It should hide those little Parts and Gifts which we are so apt to glory in, as the Sun hides the Stars. When we consider God, we should be so far from admiring our selves, that we should with an humble thankfulness wonder that God should regard such inconsiderable nothings as we are, *Psal. 8. 1, 3, 4. O Lord our God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens! When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the Moon and the Stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?* He that considers the Glory of God, and the greatness of his Works, will think so meanly of himself, that he will be astonished that God should mind him or visit him. This is a noble strain of humility in *David*, by which he acknowledgeth that the greatest King of the earth, how considerable soever he may be, in respect of Men, is but a pitifull thing to God.

When we speak to God, we should do it with great humility, *Eccles. 5. 2, 3. Let thy words be few, for God is in Heaven, and thou upon earth.* We should say to God, *Job 37. 19. Teach us what we shall say unto thee, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness.* And when we think or speak of him, we should do it with great Modesty, we should not rashly pronounce or determine any thing concerning God. *Simonides* being ask'd, What God was? desired one day's time to consider, then he desired two, and then four. The more we think of God, the less peremptory shall we be in defining him. He that considers that God is Incomprehensible, will not pretend to know all the ways of infinite knowledge, and the utmost of infinite Power, and all the Reasons of God's Ways and Providences. He that rightly values his own short Understanding, and the unlimited Perfections of God, will not be apt to say, this God cannot do, this he cannot know, such Ways are not agreeable to his Wisdom. He that knows God and himself, will be modest in these cases, he will ~~in~~ abstain from all peremptory pronouncing in these matters; he considers that one Man many times differs so much from another in knowledge and skill of working, that he can do those things which another believes impossible: but we have pitifull thoughts of God, if we think the difference between one man and another, is any thing to the vast distance that is between the Divine Understanding and our Ignorance, the Divine Power and our Weakness, the Wisdom of God and the Folly of Men.

III. The Incomprehensibleness of God's Perfections calls for the highest degree of our affection. How should we fear this great glorious God! *Psal. 90. 11. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.* Fear is the most infinite of all our Passions, and fills us with the most endless jea-

lousy and suspicions; God's wrath is greater than our fear, *according to thy fear, so is thy wrath.*

How should we love him, when we are astonish'd with admiration of God's goodness, and say, *how great is thy goodness, and how great is thy beauty? Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us! How great should our love be to him! what manner of love should we return to him!*

This calls for the highest degree of our Faith. With what confidence should we rely upon him, *who is able to do for us exceeding above what we can ask or think!*

To conclude, This requires the highest degree of our service: How should our hearts be *enlarged to run the way of his commandments, who hath laid up for us such things, that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have enter'd into the heart of Man?*

S E R M O N CIV.

God the first Cause, and last End.

R o m. XI. 36.

For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be Glory for ever. Amen.

HA V I N G consider'd the more Eminent and Absolute Perfections of the Divine Nature, as also that which results from the infinite Excellency and Perfection of God, compar'd with the Imperfection of our Understandings, I come in the last place to treat of such as are merely and purely *Relative*; as that He is *the first Cause, and the last End* of all things; to which purpose I have chosen these Words of the Apostle for the Subject of my present Discourse, *For of him, and through him, &c.*

The dependence of these Words upon the former is briefly this. The Apostle had been speaking before in this Chapter, several things that might tend to raise us to an admiration of the Wisdom, and Goodness, and Mercy of God in the Dispensation of his Grace for the Salvation of Men, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and therefore would have us ascribe this Work wholly to God; the contrivance of it to his Wisdom, and not to our own counsels, v. 34. *For who hath known the mind of the Lord: and hath been his counsellor?* and the bestowing this Grace, to his free Goodness and Mercy, and not to any desert of ours, v. 35. *Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?* Yea, and not only in the dispensation of Grace, but of all good things; not only in this work of Redemption, but also of Creation, God is the Fountain and Original, and *first Cause*, from whence every thing proceeds; and *the last End*, to which every thing is to be referr'd. *For of him, &c.* *ἐξ αὐτοῦ*, from him, the efficient Cause producing all things, *δι' αὐτοῦ*, by or through him, as the efficient conserving Cause of all things; *εἰς αὐτόν*, and to him, as the final Cause of all things, and the End for which they were made.

The Proposition I shall speak to is, that God is *the first Cause, and last End.*

First, I shall a little explain the Terms.

Secondly, Confirm the Proposition.

Thirdly, Apply it.

First, For the Explication of the Terms.

I. That God is the *first Cause* signifies,

1. Negatively, that he had no Cause, did not derive his Being from any other, or does depend upon any other Being; but that he was always, and eternally of himself.

2. Po-

2. Positively, that he is *the Cause* of all things besides himself, the Fountain and Original of all Created Beings, from whom all things proceed, and upon whom all things depend; or that I may use the expression of *St. John*, John 1. 3. which I know is appropriated to the Second Person in the Trinity, *By him all things were made, and without him was nothing made, that was made.* So that when we attribute to God, that he is the *first*, we mean, that there was nothing before him, and that he was before all things, and that all things are by him.

II. *The last End*, that is, that all things refer to him; that is, the design and aim of all things that are made, is the Illustration of God's Glory some way or other, and the manifestation of his Perfections.

Secondly, For the Confirmation. I shall briefly, according to my usual Method, attempt it these *two* ways.

I. By Natural Light. The Notion of a God contains in it all possible Perfection. Now the utmost Perfection we can imagine, is, for a Being to be always of it self, before all other Beings; and not only so, but to be the Cause of all other Beings; that is, that there should be nothing, but what derives its Being from him, and continually depends upon him; from whence follows, that all things must refer to him as their *last End*. For every wise Agent acts with design, and in order to an End. Now the End is that which is best, which is most worthy the attaining, and that is God himself. Now his Being and Perfections are already; and the best, next to the *existence* of his Being and Perfections, is the *manifestation* of them, which is called God's *Glory*; and this is the highest End that we can imagine, to which all the Effects of the Divine Power, and Goodness, and Wisdom, do refer.

And that these Titles are to be attributed to God, is not only reasonable, when it is revealed and discovered, but was discovered by the Natural light of the heathens. Hence it was that *Aristotle* gave God those Titles of *the first Being, the first Cause, and the first Mover*; and his Master *Plato* calls God *the Author and Parent of all things, the Maker and Architect of the World, and of all Creatures; the Fountain and Original of all things.* *Porphyry* calls him τὸ πρῶτον, *the first*, from whence he reasons to this sense, that *he is the ultimate end, and that all things move towards God, that all motions center in him, because, saith he, it is most proper and natural for things to refer to their Original, and to refer all to him, from whom they receive all.* *Antoninus*, the Emperor and Philosopher, speaking of *Nature* (which with the *Stoicks* signifies God) had these words, which are so very like these of the Apostle, that they may seem to be taken from him; ἐκ οὗ πάντα, ἐν σοὶ πάντα, εἰς σὲ πάντα, *Of thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee are all things.*

II. From Scripture. Hither belong all those places where he declares himself to be *the first, and the last*, Isa. 41. 4. *Who hath wrought and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I the Lord, the first, and with the last, I am he.* Isa. 43. 10. *Before me there was no God formed, (or as it is in the Margin) there was nothing formed of God, neither shall there be after me,* Isa. 44. 6. *I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God,* Isa. 48. 12, 13. *I am the first, I am also the last, my hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, my right hand hath spread the heavens;* which is as much as to say, he hath made the World, and was the *first Cause* of all things. Rev. 1. 8. *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come.*

But more expressly, 1 Cor. 8. 6. *But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we by him,* καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐς αὐτόν, *and we to him, and for him.* Acts 17. 24. *God that made the World, and all things therein.* v. 25. *He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things,* v. 28. *In him we live and move, and have our Being.* v. 29. *Forasmuch then as we are the off-spring of God.*

Hither we may refer those Texts which attribute the same to the Second Person in the Trinity, as the Eternal Wisdom and Word of God, whereby all things were made, Job. 1. 3. *All things were made by him, and without him was nothing made, that was made,* v. 10. *And the World was made by him,* 1 Cor. 8. 6. *And one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him,* Eph. 3. 9. *God who Created all things by Jesus Christ,* Col. 1. 16. *By him were all things created that are in*

heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers, all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. Heb. 1. 2. By whom also he made the Worlds. And v. 3. Upholding all things by the word of his Power.

Thirdly, and lastly, to apply this Doctrine.

Use. First, If God be the first Cause of all things, who did at first produce all Creatures, and does since preserve them, and govern them, and disposeth of all their concernments, and orders all things that befall them. From hence let us learn,

1. With Humility and Thankfulness to own and acknowledge, and admire and bless God as the Author and Original of our Being, as the Spring and Fountain of all the Blessings and good things that we enjoy. If we do but consider what these words signify, that God is the first Cause of all things, we shall see great Reason to own and acknowledge, to adore and praise him, and that with the greatest Humility; because we have not given him any thing, but have received all from him; he is the Cause of all things, who did freely, and of his own good will and pleasure communicate Being to us, without any restraint or necessity, but what his own goodness laid upon him, Rev. 4. 11. *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.* We could not, before we were, deserve any thing from him, or move him by any Argument, or importune him by intreaties to make us; but he freely gave us Being; and ever since we depend upon him, and have been preserved by him, and cannot subsist one moment without the continued influence of the Power and Goodness which first called us out of nothing. He is the Author of all the Good, and the Fountain of all those Blessings, which for the present we enjoy, and for the future hope for.

When he made us at first, he designed us for Happiness; and when we by our Sin and willfull Miscarriage, fell short of the Happiness which he design'd us for, he sent his Son into the World for our recovery, and gave his Life for the Ransom of our Souls. He hath not only admitted us into a new Covenant, wherein he hath promised pardon and eternal Life to us; but he hath also purchased these Blessings for us, by the most endearing Price, the Blood of his own Son, and hath saved us in such a manner as may justly astonish us. Upon these Considerations we should awaken our selves to the Praise of God, and with the holy Psalmist, call up our Spirits, and summon all the Powers and Faculties of our Souls to assist us in this Work, Psal. 103. 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. *Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy Name; bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thy iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy Life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies; 'tis he that satisfies our Souls with good things, that hath promised Eternal Life and Happiness to us, and must confer and bestow this upon us; Therefore our Souls, and all that is within us, should bless his holy Name.*

2. If God be the first Cause, that is, orders all things that befall us, and by his Providence disposeth of all our concernments, this should teach us with Patience and Quietness, to submit to all Events, to all Evils and Afflictions, that come upon us, as being dispos'd by his wise Providence, and coming from him; we are apt to attribute all things to the next and immediate Agent, and to look no higher than Second Causes, not considering that all the motions of Natural Causes are directly subordinate to the first Cause; and all the Actions of free Creatures are under the Government of God's wise Providence, so that nothing happens to us besides the designs and intention of God.

And methinks this is one particular Excellency of the Style of the Scripture above all other Books, that the constant Phrase of the Sacred Dialect is to attribute all Events (excepting Sins only) to God, so that every one that reads it, cannot but take notice, that it is wrote with a more attentive Consideration of God than any other Book, as appears by those frequent and express acknowledgments of God as the Cause of all Events; so that what in other Writers would be said to be done by this or that Person, is ascribed to God. Therefore it is so often said, that

that *the Lord did* this and that, stirr'd up such an Enemy, brought such a Judgment. And we shall find that holy Men in Scripture make excellent use of this consideration, to argue themselves into patience and contentedness in every condition. So *Eli*, 1 Sam. 3. 18. *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.* So *Job*, he did not so consider the *Sabeans* and *Chaldeans*, who had carried away his Oxen and his Camels, and slain his Servants; nor the Wind which had thrown down his House, and kill'd his Sons and his Daughters; but he looks up to God, the great Governour and Disposer of all these Events; *The Lord giveth, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* So *David*, Psal. 36. 9. *I was dumb, and spake not a word, because thou Lord didst it.* So our blessed Saviour, when he was ready to suffer, he did not consider the malice of the *Jews*, which was the cause of his death, but looks to a higher hand; *the cup which my Father gives me to drink, shall not I drink it?*

He that looks upon all things as coming from second Causes, and does not eye the first Cause, the good and wise Governour, will be apt to take offense at every cross and unwelcome accident. Men are apt to be angry, when one flings Water upon them as they pass in the Streets; but no Man is offended if he is wet by Rain from Heaven. When we look upon Evils as coming only from Men, we are apt to be impatient, and know not how to bear them; but we should look upon all things as under the Government and Disposal of the first Cause, and the Circumstances of every condition as allotted to us by the wise Providence of God; this Consideration, that it is the hand of God, and that he hath done it, would still all the murmurings of our Spirits. As when a seditious Multitude is in an uproar, the Presence of a grave and venerable Person will hush the noise, and quell the tumult; so if we would but represent God as present to all Actions, and governing and disposing all Events, this would still and appease our Spirits, when they are ready to riot and mutiny against any of his Dispensations.

Use the Second. If God be *the last End* of all, let us make him our last End, and refer all our actions to his glory. This is that which is due to him, as he is *the first Cause*, and therefore he does most reasonably require it of us.

And herein likewise the Scripture doth excell all other Books, that is, doth more frequently and expressly mind us of this End, and calls upon us to propose it to ourselves as our ultimate aim and design. We should love him as our chief End, *Matth. 22. 37. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.* Thus to love God, is that which, in the Language of the Schools, is loving God as our *chief End*. So likewise the Apostle requires, that we should refer all the Actions of our Lives to this End, 1 Cor. 10. 31. *Whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God; that we should glorify him in our souls, and in our bodies, which are his.* He is the Author of all the Powers that we have, and therefore we should use them for him; we do all *by him*, and therefore we should do all *to him*.

And that we may the better understand our selves as to this Duty, I shall endeavour to give satisfaction to a Question or two which may arise about it.

First, Whether an actual intention of God's glory be necessary to make every action that we do good and acceptable to God?

Ans. 1. It is necessary that the glory of God, either *Formally* or *Virtually*, should be the ultimate end and scope of our Lives, and all our Actions; otherwise they will be defective in that which in moral Actions is most considerable, and that is *the End*. If a man should keep all the Commandments of the Gospel, this excepted of making God's glory his supreme End, only with a design to gain Reputation, or some other Advantage in the World, this very thing would vitiate all, and render him unacceptable to God.

2. It is very requisite and convenient as a good Sign, that we should very frequently, actually think upon, and intend this End; for if it be very much out of our thoughts, we have reason to be jealous of our selves, that we do not intend it at all.

3. It is so far from being necessary, that we should in every Action have this intention of God's glory, that it is not morally possible that we should; no more than

than it is possible, that a Man that goes a Journey of a thousand Miles, should every step he takes have actual thoughts of his Journey's end, nor is it more necessary; for consideration of the end is only so far necessary, as it is necessary to guide and quicken us in the use of Means; as it is not necessary for a Man to think of his Journey's end, farther than to direct and excite him to go thither. And this appears farther by the contrary; it is not necessary to make a sinful Action, that a Man should *Formally*, much less *Actually* intend God's dishonour; it is enough to constitute a Man a wicked Man, if he willingly transgresses God's Law, the doing whereof does by consequence reflect a dishonour upon him; so on the other hand, it is sufficient to make an Action good and acceptable, if it be conformable to God's Law, and such as by consequence redounds to God's Glory.

Second Question. Whether the Glory of God may, or ought to be considered, as an End separate and distinct from our own Happiness?

Answer. I shall speak but briefly to this, because I have elsewhere spoken to it; but in that little which I have to say for satisfaction to this Question, I will proceed by these Steps.

I. By the Glory of God, we mean the Demonstration, or Illustration, or Manifestation of some or of all his Perfections, more especially his Goodness, and Mercy, and Justice, and Wisdom, and Power, and Holiness.

II. It is plain, that the Manifestation of some of these Perfections is a thing that may be separated from the Happiness of a Creature; for his Holiness, and Justice and Power, may, and shall be manifested in the final and eternal Ruin of impenitent Sinners.

III. The Manifestation of any of God's Perfections, ought many times to be propounded by us as an End distinct and separate from our respective Happiness; such a Happiness, as respects only some particulars, and some particular Duration, in opposition to absolute and Eternal Happiness. In this sense our Saviour says, that he *sought not his own Glory, but the Glory of him that sent him*; by which he does not mean, that he quitted everlasting Glory and Happiness; but that in order to the Glory of God, he did for a time lay aside his own Glory, and divest himself of it while he was in this World; for the Apostle tells us, that he was encouraged to do this out of a respect to a greater Glory, *Heb. 12. 2. Who for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* And in this sense, we are to understand the command of self-denial in the Gospel, with reference to our particular or temporal, not our eternal Interest; and that it is no more, is plain from the Argument our Saviour uses to encourage this self-denial, the Promise of a far greater Happiness than that we deny; no Man that *forakes father and mother for my sake, but shall have eternal life*: And proportionably we are to understand those Commands of loving Christ more than our selves, that is, more than any temporal Interest.

IV. The Manifestations of any of God's Perfections, neither ought nor can reasonably be propounded by us, as an End separated from, or opposite to our Eternal Blessedness; that is, we cannot *naturally or reasonably* desire the Glory of God should be advanced, tho' it were to our final Ruin, either by *annihilation or eternal misery*.

I. We cannot either *naturally, or reasonably* desire God should be glorified by our *annihilation*.

(1.) Not *naturally*. Because such a desire would be directly contrary to the natural desire of self-preservation, which God himself hath planted in us, and is most intimate and essential to our Nature.

(2.) Not *reasonably*. Because it is utterly unimaginable, how God can be glorified by the annihilation of a Creature. All the Attributes that we can imagine can be manifested herein, are Power and Sovereignty; his Power hath already been as much manifested in creating and making the Creature out of nothing, as it can be by reducing it into nothing; for to create is the very same Demonstration of Power, as to annihilate. And as for his Sovereignty, God will never manifest that in contradiction to his Goodness, or Wisdom, or any other Perfection of the

the Divine Nature. To unmake a Creature, and take away the Being which he had given, would argue either a failure of his Goodness toward the Creature, or that he did repent he had made it, which would reflect upon his Wisdom and Constancy. I do not say, that in Justice God cannot annihilate a Creature; far be it from me; for what we have was his own, and he might without any wrong to the Creature take it again.

2. Much less can we *naturally* desire that God should be glorified in our *Eternal Misery*. The Reasons which I gave about *annihilation* are stronger here; therefore we cannot *naturally* desire it; nor *reasonably*, for the Demonstration of his Power, or Sovereignty, or Justice, or Holiness, which I think are all the Attributes which we can imagine to be glorified hereby. Not as the Manifestation of his Power, for that would be as much manifested in the Happiness, as Misery of the Creature: Not of his Sovereignty; for God will not manifest that in contradiction to his Goodness, upon which nothing can reflect more, than *merely, pro arbitrio, for his pleasure*, to make an innocent Creature for ever miserable: Not his Justice, and Holiness; for these presuppose sin and demerit in the Creature, out of hatred to which he makes it miserable; but God hath declared that he esteems himself more glorified by the Obedience and Happiness of his Creatures, than by their Sin and Destruction; and if it were reasonable to desire the Justice and Holiness of God might be justified in my eternal Ruin, which I have deserved by Sin, this would plainly follow from it, that it were reasonable *to sin, that Justice might abound*, which of the two is a greater Absurdity, than that which the Apostle condemns, of *sinning that Grace may abound*.

V. There is a strict and inviolable Connexion between the greatest Glory of God, and our Obedience and Happiness; I say between his greatest Glory; because he esteems himself more glorified by the Obedience and Happiness of his Creatures, than by their Ruin and Misery; and that we may believe it, we have his Oath for it; *As I live, saith the Lord, I delight not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn, and live*. And it is observable that the Apostle, in 1 Cor. 10. 31, 32, 33. *Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God, giving none offense, neither to the Jews nor to the Gentiles, nor to the Church of God, even as I please all Men, in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved*; explains the glorifying of God, by *edifying and promoting the Salvation of others*.

VI. We may consider the glory of God, as some ways distinct from our Happiness; that is, we may consider the manifestation of his Goodness, and Mercy, and Wisdom, in our happiness, as that which results from it; but this is not enough to make it a distinct end, but the same diversly considered; as the public good is that which results from the general good of particular Persons, but cannot reasonably be propounded by any Man, as an End distinct from the general Happiness of particular Persons, without ruining and destroying the Notion of public good.

VII. Tho' considered as we are particular Beings, we can have no greater End than our own Happiness, in which God is eminently glorified; yet as we are part of the whole Creation and Workmanship of God, which is the noblest consideration of our selves, the glory of God which results from the manifestations of all his Perfections in and about his Creatures, is precisely our ultimate End, and yet not an End really distinct from our own Happiness; and therefore it is most proper, and becoming, and agreeable to the wise style of Scripture, to give our End its denomination, not from the more particular and narrow, but the more noble consideration of ourselves, as we are parts of the whole Creation and Workmanship of God; as it is more generous and becoming for the Members of a Civil Society to mention the Public Good as their End, than their Private Happiness and Advantage, tho' that be so really and effectually promoted by the publick Good.

Thus I have finish'd what I propos'd on this Argument, and concerning the Attributes of God in general; *Of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things. To him be glory for ever, Amen.*

