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THEOLOGICAL SERIES

A BRIEF
A C C O U N T
O F

P R A Y E R,
A N D T H E

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper;

A N D O T H E R

R E L I G I O U S D U T I E S

Appertaining to the

C H R I S T I A N W O R S H I P.

For the USE of common CHRISTIANS.

To which is added,

A D I S C O U R S E O N S P E E C H,
A n d t h e A B U S E S o f i t:

Delivered on several *Sundays* at *Gray's-Inn* Chapel,
and published at the Request of the MASTERS OF
THE BENCH.

By HENRY STEBBING, D. D.
Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY; and
Preacher to that Honourable SOCIETY.

L O N D O N,

Printed for FLETCHER GYLES, over-against
Grays-Inn, in *Holborn*. M D C C X X X I X.

To the WORSHIPFUL the
MASTERS of the BENCH
OF THE
HONOURABLE SOCIETY
OF
GRAY'S-INN,
THESE
DISCOURSES

Are INSCRIBED by

their most obedient

humble Servant,

HENRY STEBBING.



T H E
P R E F A C E.


 Publish this Discourse, not for the Information or Entertainment of the Learned, but (as the Title speaks) for the Instruction of common Christians; those more especially with whom I am concerned as a Parish Minister, for whose Use the greatest Part of it was originally drawn up. Its Design is to shew the true Grounds of our Salvation by *Christ*; and what is that pure, spiritual Service, which, as Christians, we are bound to pay. The great Neglect of God's publick Worship, which has been growing for some Years

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past, no doubt is very much owing to Unbelief and Corruption of Manners; and where this is the Case, little Help (I fear) is to be expected from Reason and Argument. But there may be an Indifference to the Gospel Institutions, arising from low, disadvantageous Notions of them, in those in whom the Principles of Faith and Moral Virtue are not lost; which I apprehend to be a very common Case. They who rest every thing upon Moral Virtue, and consider outward Appointments as naked Signs or Professions only (and these Notions have with great Industry been propagated of late) will be very apt to fall into the Opinion, that, Virtue supposed, the rest is of little Use or Consequence. But if we consider Salvation as the Purchase of *Christ's* Blood; and the Institutions of *Christ*, as the Channels through which

which (by his Appointment) the Grace of the Gospel is conveyed to us; this cuts off all Pretence: For, upon this Foot, a Refusal to join in the Use of these Institutions, will, in Effect, be a Renunciation of our INTEREST in *Christ*, and a cutting ourselves off from all UNION and COMMUNION with him.

It is in this View that I have placed the Christian Worship; and therefore I lay my Foundation in the Doctrine of our Redemption by *Christ*; which I have delivered as it lyes in the Scripture, without attending to the laboured Artifices, by which the *Socinian* Writers have endeavoured to obscure and deface it. To enter into these Niceties was not agreeable to the Purpose of this Discourse: For how much would common Readers have been the better for it? They who have

considered the *Socinian* Interpretations, know their Worth; and they who know nothing of them, I may venture to say, will never feel the Want of them. Subtil Heads may perplex the clearest Points; but if any one comes to the reading of the New Testament, only with his plain natural Sense about him; whatever Difficulties he may find in accounting for the Reasons of God's Providence in saving us by the Blood of his Son, offered as a *Sacrifice* and *Propitiation* for Sin (which is a Point that we are not at all qualified to judge of) I verily think it will be impossible for him to doubt whether this be a Scripture Doctrine or not.

The principal Parts of the Christian Worship are *Prayer*, and the partaking of the *Sacrament* of *Christ's* Body and Blood; which
have

have of late been made the Subject of much learned Dispute. And as Disputes, howsoever useful on some Accounts, are apt to unsettle those who may not have Leisure or Capacities to trace Things backward and forward through a long Series of Argumentation; I thought it might give Help to well-meaning Persons to place the whole before them, in an easy and familiar Light. And though, in Conformity with this Design, I have avoided the Formality of *Objections* and *Answers*, and pursued my own Thoughts in a plain and natural Way; yet I have paid such Regard to the material Points under each Question, that, in so much as is necessary for common Information, I hope no one will find Cause to complain for want of reasonable Satisfaction. In the Account I have given of the Nature of the Sacra-

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ment, I have followed Dr. *Cudworth*, who seems to me to have hit upon the true Notion of it.

There are two Extreams chiefly to be guarded against, in respect of the Gospel Institutions. One is a superstitious Shyness; the other, a presumptuous Familiarity. The first is incident only to the best Dispositions, whose Concern to do every Thing in the most acceptable Manner, leads them sometimes into unreasonable Jealousies, which either keep them back from God's Ordinances, or take away much of that Comfort which they might otherwise reap from the Use of them. I have endeavoured to cut off the Occasions of such Scruples, as the Sources from whence they are wont to arise have fallen in my Way; which I thought so much the more necessary, as *Enthusiasm* now begins to
lift

lift up her Head, and many are running after new Inventions. But I think that our greatest Danger, at present, lyes on the other Side. To be over-scrupulous is not the general Temper of the Age; and therefore I have been large in shewing the Necessity of a good moral Life to sanctify our Devotions, and make them an Offering acceptable in the Sight of God. To give Encouragement to Persons to join in our publick Worship, who bring not with them the due Qualifications, is doing the worst kind of Disservice to Religion; and could I believe that the Institutions of *Christ* may be complied with in a Manner agreeable to the End and Design of them, by those who have not one Grain of true Virtue in them; I should certainly have left the Defence of them to other Hands. They *would*, upon this Supposition, be
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the useleſs insignificant Things that Unbelievers would gladly have them thought. But if by the Engagements they lay us under, and the Helps they adminiſter, they are Inſtruments ſerving to a good Life; as this will be a proper Encouragement to all ſerious Chriſtians to be diligent in the Obſervance of them, ſo it *ſhould* cure Unbelievers of ſome of their Prejudices, when they ſee this friendly Alliance between the Goſpel and Natural Religion; if they are in Earneſt in their Boaſtings about Natural Religion, and do not mean all this Talk as a Cover for Licentiouſneſs.

The Diſcourſe on SPEECH hath this Affinity with the foregoing Subject, that it contains an Account of one Act of Religious Worſhip, not leſs material than any of the reſt, and with reſpect to which, Caution is equally neceſſary, if
Argu-

Arguments could do any thing to hinder the many Profanations of it. I am not vain enough to think that I shall be able to reform Mankind: But any seasonable Attempt will not be thought, I hope, unbecoming my Profession. And if in but a few Instances I may be successful; or if what is here offered, may help to keep Religion and common Honesty in some Countenance, in a bad World, I shall think my Pains well bestowed.





T H E
C O N T E N T S.

O F R E D E M P T I O N B Y C H R I S T.



THE Christian Worship relative to the Christian Doctrine. Natural Religion not the whole of Christianity. Remission of Sin by the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ, the proper End of the Gospel. All Mankind lost in Adam. And restored in Christ. This was effected by his Death and Sufferings, whereby he became a Sacrifice and Propitiation for the Sins of the World. This Doctrine proved at large from Scripture. Reconciliation with God by the Sacrifice of Christ, not an absolute Act of Grace, but a Declaration of Pardon, under the Qualifications of Faith and Repentance. Salvation attainable by those who lived before the coming of Christ in the Flesh; and how.

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O F P R A Y E R.

Prayer, a Recognition of God as the Creator and Governour of the World; and therefore a very useful Means to keep up a general Sense of Religion. Christian Prayer a Recognition of God, not only as our Creator, but as our Redeemer. Prayer, why made a publick Duty. The Efficacy of Prayer, what. It is efficacious only upon Supposition that our Prayers are rightly qualified. What ought to be the Matter of our Prayers. Cautions under this Head. With what Disposition of Mind we ought to pray. Cautions under this Head. All Things to be asked in the Name of Christ.

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A
DISCOURSE
ON THE
CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.



INTRODUCTION.



BEFORE I enter upon the Particulars of the Christian Worship, it will be necessary that I give a short Account of the Christian Doctrine. For the Christian Worship being founded upon the Christian Doctrine; without the one, the other cannot be sufficiently understood.

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stood. By the Christian Doctrine I mean that Doctrine, or those Points of Faith, by which Christianity is distinguished from all other Religions; for in Virtue of this it is, that the Christian Worship stands distinguished from all other Ways of Worship. With the *Jewish* Religion, strictly so called, the Religion of *Christ* hath nothing in common: For the Law of *Moses* (which is properly *Judaism*) had its Completion by the coming of *Christ*: But the *natural* Law, being the eternal Law of God, hath never ceased, nor can ever cease, but must make an essential Part of every Religion that is truly so. We have therefore only to see in what respect Christianity stands distinguished from mere Natural Religion; for that mere Natural Religion is not the Whole of Christianity, is most evident. When *Jesus* was preaching in *Judea*, we read, that *there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked, Good Master, What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal Life?* Here is, in the first Place, a Profession of his Belief in God, and his Expectations of a future State, which are the two grand
Points

Points of Natural Religion; and if you will attend to what follows, you will find he wanted nothing of a common Virtue. For when *Jesus* said — *Thou knowest the Commandments, do not commit Adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false Witness, defraud not, honour thy Father and Mother*; he readily answered; *All these Things have I observed from my Youth.* Our Saviour disputes not this Matter with him, but replies, *ONE Thing thou LACKEST, go thy Way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the Poor, and thou shalt have Treasure in Heaven, and come take up the Cross, and FOLLOW ME.* Mark x. 17, &c. The Intention of our Saviour in this Answer, was to tell him, that allowing him to be the righteous Man he supposed himself to be, he could not be saved without becoming his Disciple. This was the *one* Thing he *lacked*. What was he to get by it? If nothing, it was a most unreasonable Demand upon him, to purchase *nothing* at so great an Expence: For he was to *sell all he had* (even *great Possessions*) *and give to the Poor*; he was to *take up the Cross*, and

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follow *Christ*. Some Advantage therefore, *some* Interest in God, to secure to him the Hopes of a better Life, *must* be supposed to be held forth to him, in his being called upon to *follow* Christ. There is another Passage in Scripture which comes to the same Point. *Cornelius, a Centurion, a devout Man, and one that feared God with all his House — saw in a Vision — an Angel of God coming to him, and saying — Thy Prayers and thine Alms are come up for a Memorial before God; and now send Men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose Surname is Peter — He shall tell thee what thou OUGHTEST TO DO, ACT. x. 1, &c.* Here again Natural Religion is described as subsisting in all human Perfection, and yet SOMETHING was still to be done. Go but to the next Chapter, where *St. Peter* rehearses this Transaction to the Apostles and Brethren, and you will see what this *something* was, for thus the Message by the Angel to *Cornelius* is repeated; *Call for one Simon, whose Surname is Peter, who shall tell thee Words, whereby thou and all thy House shall be SAVED.* *Cornelius* then,
it

it seems, was not already saved by his Natural Religion, but was to be saved by his attending to the Doctrine in which St. *Peter* had Commission to instruct him. And what this Doctrine was, we are told, *Ÿ* 42, 43. of the tenth Chapter; *He commanded us to preach unto the People, and to testify, that it is he which was ordain'd of God to be the Judge of Quick and Dead — and that through his Name who-soever believeth in him, shall receive REMISSION OF SINS.* Righteous as these Men were, they were not perfect. Salvation there could not therefore be, without Remission of Sin; and this they were to obtain by Faith in *Christ*; by following him, and becoming his Disciple. What was their Case, was, and is the Case of all the World besides. *For ALL have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God, being justified freely by his Grace, through the Redemption that is in Jesus Christ, as St. Paul speaks, Rom. iii. 23, 24.*

This is the general Advantage we gain by coming to *Christ*, and which we cannot have by mere Natural Religion, *viz.* Remission of Sin, and the Assurance of

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Eternal Life by the Redemption that is in *Jesus Christ*. It will be necessary that I enter particularly into the Explanation of this great and leading Article of our Faith.

To take this Matter from
Of REDEM-
PTION. the Beginning, we must go up as high as the Fall of *Adam*, who being created to a Life of immortal Happiness, by Transgression lost it to himself, and to all his Posterity after him. Now *Christ* came to restore what *Adam* lost, as will appear from the following Passages.

Matt. xviii. 11. *The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost.*

Rom. v. 19. *As by one Man's Disobedience many were made Sinners; so by the Obedience of one shall many be made righteous — That as Sin hath reigned unto Death, even so might Grace reign through Righteousness unto Eternal Life by Jesus Christ our Lord.*

I Cor. xv. 21, 22. *By Man came Death, by Man came also the Resurrection from the Dead; for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

Rom.

Rom. vi. 23. *The Wages of Sin is Death; but the Gift of God is Eternal Life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Here, 1. Grace is said to reign unto Eternal Life, even as Sin reigned unto Death. But Sin reigned unto Death, as, in Consequence of Sin, *Death passed upon all Men.* Therefore Grace reigneth unto Eternal Life, as through the Mercies of God *Eternal Life is restored unto all Men.* Grace (*χάρις*) in this Place signifies the Favour of God accepting us to Eternal Life; which is styled the Gift of God, as it stands distinguished from Debt, or what we may demand or challenge as our Due *. 2. The Obedience of *Christ* is expressly set forth as the Cause of this Grace, or Acceptance to Eternal Life, just as the Disobedience of *Adam* was the Reason why the Sentence of Death passed upon us. *By one Man's Disobedience many were made Sinners. — By the Obedience of one shall many be made righteous, &c.* What now was this Obedi-

* *To him that worketh* (i. e. doth what the Law requires) is the Reward not reckoned of Grace, but of Debt. Rom. iv. 4.

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ence? It was his Obedience in suffering, and in dying upon the Cross, by which he made an Attonement and Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World.

Heb. v. 8. *Though he were a Son, yet learned he Obedience, by the Things which he suffered.*

9. *And being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal Salvation to all them that obey him.*

Τελειωθείς, being made perfect signifies being made perfect through Sufferings, which was effected by *Christ's* Death, and not before; as appears from Chap. ii. v. 10. where the Apostle having said, that *Christ* was crowned with Glory for the suffering of Death, subjoins; *For it became him, for whom are all Things, and by whom are all Things, in bringing many Sons unto Glory (τελειῶσαι) to make perfect the Captain of their Salvation through Sufferings.* *Christ* therefore was (τελειωθείς) made perfect by suffering Death, in Consequence of which it is here said, that he became the Author of eternal Salvation. For being made perfect (i. e. by being made perfect) he became, &c. This will

will be farther supported by what follows.

Mat. xx. 28. *The Son of Man came — to give his Life (λύτρον) a Ransom for many.*

1 Tim. ii. 5. *There is one Mediator between God and Man, the Man Christ Jesus.*

6. *Who gave himself a Ransom for all.*

Λύτρον, a Ransom is properly the Price or Purchase of a Man's Redemption. The Money, or other valuable Consideration, upon Payment of which the Captive is set at Liberty. The Blood of Christ, therefore, is the Price of our Redemption from Sin and Death, and so it is expressly stiled by St. Paul; *Ye are bought with a Price,* 1 Cor. vi. 20. And by St. Peter; *Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed (ὅτι ἄκ ἐλυτρώθητε) with corruptible Things, as Silver and Gold — but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without Blemish, and without Spot (1 Pet. i. 18.) i. e. by Christ offering himself up as a Sacrifice or Propitiation.**

* Some Writers affect to call the Blood of Christ the Seal of the Covenant. This is new Language in Divi-

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Propitiatory Sacrifices were in the Nature of them (λύτρα) *Ransoms*; the Life of the Animal being accepted instead of the Punishment due to the Offender; and that *Christ* was a propitiatory Sacrifice, the following Passages will shew.

John vi. 51. *I am the living Bread which came down from Heaven; if any Man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever; and the Bread that I will give is MY FLESH, which I will give FOR THE LIFE of the World.*

Chap. x. v 14. — *I lay down MY LIFE for the Sheep.*

Act. xx. 28. — *The Church of God, which he hath PURCHASED with his own Blood.*

nity, of which the Scriptures know nothing. Often is *Christ* set forth as a *Sacrifice*, *Attonement*, or *Propitiation* for Sin; but no where is the Death or the Blood of *Christ* called the *Seal* of the Covenant, which, in the Nature of it, it cannot be. The *Seal* of the Covenant is the Evidence of the Covenant; and *Christ's* Death was not the Evidence of the Covenant, nor, properly speaking, any Evidence of it. Had *Christ* died, and only died, he would have given no Proof of the Truth of his Mission; but that which is the Evidence of *Christ's* Mission, that, and that only, is the Evidence of the Covenant. Such are all the mighty Works which he wrought; but especially, and above all, such was his Resurrection from the Dead, by which, (as the Apostle speaks) he was DECLARED to be the Son of God with Power, Rom. i. 4.

Rom.

Rom. iii. 24, 25. — *Jesus Christ; whom God hath set forth to be a PROPITIATION, — for the Remission of Sins that are past.*

Eph. v. 2. *Christ hath — given himself for us an OFFERING and a SACRIFICE to God.*

Rom. v. 11. *By whom we have received the ATTONEMENT.*

Coloff. i. 14. *In whom we have REDEMPTION through his Blood, even the Forgiveness of our Sins.*

19. *For it pleased the Father — having made Peace BY THE BLOOD of his Cross, BY HIM to reconcile all Things to himself.*

These Passages want no Comment. You have seen before, that *Christ* was to restore what *Adam* lost; that he was to do it by his Sufferings and Death, which was to be a Ransom for all. And here *Christ* himself says, that he would give his *Flesh* (*i. e.* his Body) for the *Life of the World*; and his Apostles say of him, that he is a *Propitiation*, an *Offering*, a *Sacrifice*, an *Attonement*, our *Redemption*, and our *Reconciliation* with God. They who understand these Expressions

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as *Allusions* only, and not as denoting any *real* and *proper Efficacy* in the Blood of *Christ* to put away our Sins, are very unreasonable. For if they are *Allusions*, they must be Allusions to *something*; and to what can they allude, but to the Sacrifices under the Law? Suppose this to be the Case, you must then grant that the Sacrifices under the Law were real and proper Sacrifices; for an Allusion is an Allusion to something *real*. But if the Sacrifices under the Law had a real Effect (as it is certain they had) the Blood of *Christ* had a real and more noble Effect; and so far is it from Truth, that *Christ* was a Sacrifice for Sin *allusively* only to the Sacrifices under the Law, that the legal Sacrifices themselves were but Shadows and Representations of the Sacrifice of *Christ*; as saith the Author to the *Hebrews*, *The Law was the Shadow of good Things to come*, Heb. x. 1. Let us attend to the Particulars of the Comparison between the two Dispensations (the Legal and the Evangelical) as stated at large in this Epistle, and we shall see very plainly how the Case stands. Was *Aaron* an
 High

High Priest? so was *Christ*. Every High Priest taken from among Men is ordained for Men in Things pertaining unto God — And no Man taketh this Honour to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also *Christ* glorified not himself to be made an High Priest, but he that said unto him, *Thou art my Son, to Day have I begotten thee*, Chap. v. *ÿ* 1. — 5. Did Aaron, as an High Priest, offer both Gifts and Sacrifices for Sin? so did *Christ*. But the Sacrifice differed. The High Priest under the Law offered the Blood of Beasts: But *Christ* being come an High Priest — neither by the Blood of Goats and Calves, but by his own Blood, entered into the Holy Place. And as the Sacrifice differed, so were the Effects different. The legal Sacrifices were a Remedy against legal Impurities; the Sacrifice of *Christ* washed away the Defilements of Sin. For if the Blood of Bulls and Goats, and the Ashes of an Heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the Flesh; how much more shall the Blood of *Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without Spot

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to God, purge your Consciencs from dead Works, to serve the living God? Chap. ix. *Y* 11. — 15. The Blood of *Christ* cannot make that not to have been done which was once done; nor that not to be an Offence, which in the Nature of it is an Offence; much less could the Blood of a Calf or a Goat. But as, in the one Case, the Offence notwithstanding, the Offender, in virtue of the Sacrifice, was, in View and Construction of Law, or as to all Purposes of legal Privilege, considered and treated as guiltless; so in the other, we, though Sinners, are, through the Blood of *Christ*, accounted as righteous, and as such accepted to the Privilege of eternal Life. To the same Purpose a little after. *Almost all Things are by the Law purged with Blood, and without shedding of Blood is no Remission. It was therefore necessary, that the Patterns of the Things in the Heavens should be purified with these, but the Heavenly Things themselves with better Sacrifices than these,* *Y* 22, 23. The Patterns of the Things in the Heavens, or of the Heavenly Things, signify the legal Oeconomy, as shadowing
out

out the Evangelical, which is the Dispensation of Things pertaining to a better Life, as the Law was a Dispensation of Things pertaining to this. And what the Apostle here says is to this Effect, that the Sacrifices appointed under the one must needs be inferior in Nature and Efficacy to those appointed under the other, inasmuch as the *Substance* is more worthy than the *Shadow*. It is to this Purpose he speaks a little below, Chap. x. *ŷ* 1. — 4. *For the Law having a Shadow of good Things to come — can never with those Sacrifices which they offered up Year by Year continually make the Comers thereunto perfect. — It is not possible that the Blood of Bulls and Goats should take away Sin.* To this the Law itself gave ample Confession, by the frequent Repetition of its Sacrifices, which the Apostle also notes, *ŷ* 2, 3. *Then (says he) i. e. if the Law had made the Comers thereunto perfect, would they have ceased to be offered, because that the Worshippers once purged should have had no more Conscience of Sins; but in those Sacrifices there is a Remembrance of Sins made again every Year.*

Year. But what the Apostle denies of the legal Sacrifices, that he affirms of the Sacrifice of *Christ*, as it follows Ψ 11. *And every High Priest standeth daily ministring and offering oftimes the same Sacrifice, which can never take away Sins. But this Man (Christ) after he had offered one Sacrifice for Sins, forever sat down at the Right Hand of God, from thenceforth expecting till his Enemies be made his Footstool. For by one Offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.* Again, Chap. ix. Ψ 24 — 28. *Christ is not entered into the holy Places made with Hands, which are the Figures of the true, but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the Presence of God for us. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the High Priest entreteth every Year into the Holy Place with the Blood of others: But now once in the End of the World hath he appeared to put away Sin by the Sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto Men once to die, but after this the Judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the Sins of many, and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second Time, without Sin*

Sin unto Salvation. God hath left this Testimony of his Displeasure against Sin, that all the Sons of *Adam* are subject to the Law of Mortality (for otherwise the Threatning, *in the Day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*, would have been absolutely without Effect.) But this is but for once, and for a Time; for *Christ* is to appear a second Time, in order to judge the World, when *all Enemies shall be put under his Feet*; and as Sin is done away by his Sacrifice, so Death shall be destroyed by the Resurrection from the Dead.

This is the plain Scripture Doctrine; and without it, it will be impossible to give a consistent Account of many Passages in Scripture relating to *Christ* and his Ministry. There are those who consider *Jesus Christ* simply under the Notion of a Prophet, sent to declare the Will of God, and to leave us an Example of Humility and Patience. But consistently with the Scripture Accounts of him this cannot be. For, 1. The Apostle plainly distinguishes *Christ* from the Prophets, *God, who at sundry Times, and in diverse*

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Manners, spake in Time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, bath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son, Heb. i. 1. Christ therefore was not a Prophet, but more than a Prophet; and yet if he came only to declare the Will of God to Mankind, in what Respect did he differ from the Prophets that went before him?

2. With respect to his Nature and Dignity, he was *the Son of God, the Heir of all Things, the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person; HE by whom the Worlds were made and who upholdeth all Things by the Word of his Power.* This great, this divine Person, *far above all Angels and every Name that is named,* condescended to take upon himself Flesh and Blood — For what? Merely to be a Preacher of Righteousness? An Office which the lowest of the Sons of Men, instructed with Power and Authority from God, might and did execute as successfully as he! The Apostles were the Preachers of the Gospel, and more eminently were they so than *Christ*, who if he came for nothing else but to preach, you will not easily reconcile

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cile his Office to his high Original, nor account for the short Period of his Ministry; for within the Compass of about three Years preaching, not to all the World (which by one Man, in such a Space of Time, could not be) but to his Countrymen only, all was finished by his Death. And here arises a new Difficulty; for, 3. Why, it may reasonably be asked, was *Christ* crucified? Why did God lay this Burden upon him? Why did it *behave* *Christ* to suffer? Say what you please,— That it was to confirm his Doctrine,— That it was to give an Example of Patience to his Followers; or whatever else you can think of, *but* one; you will never be able to distinguish him in this Respect from the least of his Apostles, who were *all delivered unto Death* for the Gospel sake. Yet St. *Paul* asks, *Was Paul crucified for you?* * No; *Paul* was not crucified. But *Paul* suffered as much, and was at last a Martyr to his Religion; and his Blood had as much the Virtue of a *Testimony*, and an *Example*, as the Blood of *Christ*. But *Paul's* Blood had not the

* 1 Cor. i. 13.

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Virtue of a PROPITIATION. This is the true specific Difference which makes Sense of the Question, and solves all Difficulties. For it will not be hard to suppose, that when the Sins of all the World were to be laid upon one, the Eternal Son of God, both God and Man, might, in the Wisdom of God, appear to be the only Person qualified to bear them; nor that, when the chief, or rather sole, End of his coming in the Flesh was to die for us, he should, after a very short Stay on Earth, through Death, return again to God, and leave the Ministry of the Word to other Hands. — To proceed:

The Declaration of this gracious Purpose of God to restore Life and Immortality by or through the Sacrifice of *Christ*, is strictly and properly τὸ Ἐυαγγέλιον THE GOSPEL. The Gospel is good News or glad Tidings; as *Luke ii. 10. Behold I bring you GOOD TIDINGS of great Joy, which shall be to all People.* What these good Tidings were, the following Words shew; — *For unto you is born this Day, in the City of David, a SAVIOUR, which is Christ the Lord.* So *Act. xiii. 32. And*
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we declare unto you GLAD TIDINGS, *that the Promise which was made unto the Fathers God hath fulfilled unto us their Children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again.*— *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.* The Greek Word in both these Places is *Ἐυαγγελίζομαι*, which signifies (literally) to *preach the Gospel*, or to bring *glad Tidings*, which glad Tidings were the declaring *Christ* to be the Saviour and Redeemer of the World; the Person in whom and by whom the Promise was fulfilled which was made to the Fathers, *i. e.* the Promise of the Forgiveness of Sins, and Justification unto Eternal Life. But it is carefully to be observed, that the Offer of Reconciliation by the Gospel is not an absolute Act of Grace, but a Declaration of Pardon and Acceptance to those only who believe, under the Qualification of Repentance and good Works. The Scriptures suppose a general Defection in Mankind from the Law of God, to which

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they are called back by the preaching of the Gospel, and all who, qualified by Repentance, shall accept the Gospel, and rely upon the Mercies of God in *Christ* for Salvation, are, *actually*, in a State of Reconciliation with God, *i. e.* their past Sins are freely forgiven, and they stand intitled to Eternal Life, on Condition of future Obedience. But as without the Gospel all Men were Sinners, so Faith in *Christ* notwithstanding, all are still Sinners; for the Gospel doth not qualify us for Perfection. The Gospel requires Repentance; and Repentance is nothing less than a returning back to the Obedience of the Law from which we have swerved. But perfect Obedience is nowhere to be found; nowhere to be expected, either without the Gospel, or with the Gospel: The Consequence of which is, that as it is by the Grace of God in *Christ* that our past Sins are forgiven when we come to the Gospel, so it is by the same Grace that our imperfect Obedience is accepted whilst we live under the Gospel; and to both must be applied what St. *Paul* says, *Rom. iii. 23, 24. We are*

are justified freely by his Grace through the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus. For all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God. And this is what he means when he says, (ϣ 28.) *A Man is justified by Faith* (χωρὶς ἔργων νόμος) *without the Deeds of the Law*: The Apostle's Meaning, I say, is not that Obedience contributes nothing to our Salvation, or that we may be saved by *Christ*, whether we are obedient or not; but that we cannot *claim* upon our Obedience, because our Works are not perfect before God. By Faith we may claim the Promises of God, to which our Faith intitles us, supposing us duly qualified by Repentance: But he that claims upon God's Promises, flees to his Grace, and must be understood as renouncing all Claim from his own Righteousness. This is being justified (χωρὶς ἔργων) *without Works*, i. e. separately from, or exclusive of Works, considered as the *Ground* or *Cause* of our Justification. For Justification is that Act of God by which we are accounted or accepted as righteous; and this is not at all founded in our Works (which considered, we are none

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of us righteous) but in the free Grace of God, for the Sake of *Jesus Christ*.

But if this be so, it will naturally be asked, What was the Condition of those who lived and died before *Christ* came in the Flesh? Was there no Salvation for them, or are there more Ways of Salvation than one? To these Questions the Scripture will answer, That Salvation was to be had before the coming of *Christ*, as well as after; and that all who were then saved, were saved, as we are saved, by Faith in God's Promises through *Christ* the Redeemer; with this Difference only, that their Faith looked forward to the Redeemer as yet to come, whilst ours looks backward upon the same Redeemer as come already. Of *Noah* it is said, that he was *Heir of the Righteousness which is by Faith*, Heb. xi. 7. And of *Abraham*, that he *believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for Righteousness*, Gen. xv. 6, Rom. iv. 3. And this must needs have been the Case, if so be they were at all justified. The Righteousness which is of Works they could not plead, for their Works were not perfect before God.

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Furthermore, it is evident that the Faith of the Patriarchs, by which they were justified, had for its Object the Redeemer to come. *Your Father Abraham (says Christ to the Jews) rejoiced to see my Day, and he saw it, and was glad,* Joh. viii. 56. *Christ then was foreshewed to Abraham,* and so says St. Paul, *To Abraham and his Seed were the Promises made — and this Seed is Christ,* Gal. iii. 16. God's Method of saving Sinners, therefore, hath in all Ages been one and the same. *Christ* set forth as the Author of Salvation, and Faith in God's Promises through him (which always implies a suitable Obedience) as the Condition of our Acceptance to the Benefits purchased by him. The outward Appointments in Religion were indeed different in different Ages. The earliest of these was Sacrifices, which were coeval with the Fall, and are rightly understood to have been appointed of God to shadow out that great Sacrifice which was once to be offered up for the Sins of the World. When *Abraham's* Seed was to be separated from the rest of the World, Circumcision was appointed

appointed as a Mark of Distinction; and in After-Times, the Ritual Law came in, which was intended as a Hedge about that People, to keep them from all Intercourse and Communion with the Idolatrous Nations, that they might cleave stedfastly unto the Lord their God, who had brought them out of the Land of *Egypt*, and by whose mighty Arm they were now to be put in Possession of the promised Land. But such Appointments, though they altered the Rule of Obedience for the Time that they were given, were properly no *Parts* of the Covenant of Salvation, which subsisted in full Perfection before these Appointments were made, and would do so again, when, the Reasons for such Appointments ceasing, the Appointments themselves should be at an End. This is the very Argument made Use of by *St. Paul*, to prove that the *Gentiles* who believed in *Christ* were intitled to the Benefits of the Covenant, though they did not submit to be circumcised, and keep the Law of *Moses*. The Foundation of his Reasoning (I say) is this, That Circumcision and the Law of

Moses

Moses were no Parts of the original Covenant, but added afterwards, for special Reasons which concerned the Times in which they were appointed, and those only. *Abraham* believed in God, and it was counted to him for Righteousness. — How was it reckoned? When he was in Circumcision, or in Uncircumcision? Not in Circumcision, but in Uncircumcision. And he received the Sign of Circumcision, a Seal of the Righteousness of the Faith which he had being yet uncircumcised, Rom. iv. 3. — 11. This is a State of the Fact, as it is recorded in the Old Testament. Now if *Abraham's* Faith was counted to him for Righteousness whilst he was uncircumcised, *i. e.* if he was within the Covenant before Circumcision, and Circumcision was added afterwards, only as a Sign or Token of the Covenant; it is clear that Circumcision could be no Part of the Covenant: And the Inference which the Apostle draws from hence is, That *Abraham* was the Father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised, that Righteousness may be imputed to them also. The Inference is
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just and necessary; for if *Abraham* himself was justified by Faith without Circumcision, why may not the *Gentiles* inherit the Blessing of *Abraham* by Faith, without Circumcision? The like must be said of the Law of *Moses*; for, as the Apostle goes on to argue, *The Promise that he should be the Heir of the World, was not to Abraham, or to his Seed through the Law, but through the Righteousness of Faith — to the End the Promise might be sure to all the Seed; not to that only which is of the Law, but to that also which is of the Faith of Abraham, who is the Father of us all, (v̄ 13. — 16.)* The same Point is again pursued, *Gal. iii. 16 — 18. To Abraham and his Seed were the Promises made — And this I say, that the Covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the Law, which was four Hundred and thirty Years after, cannot disannul that it should make the Promise of none Effect. For if the Inheritance be of the Law, it is no more of Promise; but God gave it to Abraham by Promise. That is; to suppose that the Inheritance depends upon the Law, is to shut out the Promise:*

mise: And if you allow (what the Scripture shews) that God gave the Inheritance to *Abraham* by Promise, it will follow, that the Law hath essentially no Relation to the Inheritance. For why? The Law was given above four Hundred Years after the Promise was made; and how then could the Blessing of *Abraham* so hang upon the Law that there should be no Salvation without it? If the Covenant originally did subsist without the Law, it might again subsist without the Law, and naturally would do so, when those Reasons ceased for which the Law was given. And this the Apostle tells us was then the Case. *The Law* (says he) *was added because of Transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the Promise was made.* (Ÿ 19.) And again; *The Law was our School-master to bring us unto Christ.* (Ÿ 24.) The Consequence of which is, that *Christ* the promised Seed, being come, the Law of Course expired, and Circumcision with it, which being intended as a Mark of Separation, could be of no farther Use, when by the calling in of all Nations to one and the same common Faith,

Faith, the *Jews* ceased to be distinguished from other People.

The Conclusion is, that under the Law Men were saved not *by* the Law, but by a Covenant of Mercy, clearly distinct from and antecedent to it; which Covenant is that very Gospel we now profess to be accomplished in *Christ*, and by which we hope to be saved. Well therefore might the Apostle say, that *the Gospel was preached to Abraham*; and our Saviour, that *Abraham rejoiced to see his Day, and he saw it, and was glad*. The Day he saw afar off, but the Blessing was present to him, and so it was to all who *walked in the Steps of his Faith and Piety*; the Efficacy of *Christ's* Attonement anticipating the Time of his coming. This was true Religion from the Beginning; and this will be true Religion to the End; not the Religion of Nature, but the Religion of Grace. Nature could shew a Law; but Nature provided no Help for Sinners, who were to be purged no otherwise than by the Blood of *Christ* once to be offered up to God *as a Lamb without Blemish, and without Spot*, 1 Pet. i. 19. How

How much the Patriarchs understood either of the Nature of that Salvation which was to be brought about by the promised Seed, or of the particular Way and Manner by which it was to be effected, it is neither easy to say, nor is it necessary to the present Argument. For it is very consistent to suppose that the Faithful in all Ages were saved by the promised Seed; though it be admitted that all Ages had not the same Degrees of Light and Knowledge communicated to them concerning these Matters, that we now have. But a Covenant of Reconciliation there must have been so far known and understood as to afford Ground for a firm and certain Assurance, that on Condition of new Obedience, and Trust in God's Promises, Mankind should be accepted to Mercy and Favour in a better Life. Those who would see this clearly made out, and the great Charter of our Salvation traced down from *Adam* to the Seed of *David*, may consult the learned Bishop *Sherlock's Use and Intent of Prophecy*, to which I refer them.

This

PRAYER. This Foundation laid, I now proceed to my principal Intention, which is to explain the several Parts of the Christian Worship, which rests upon and refers itself to it. We find in the *Acts of the Apostles*, Chap. ii. § 42. that as soon as ever the Gospel begun to be published, and a sufficient Number of Converts came in, a publick Worship was set up. For, speaking of the first Believers, the Historian says, that *they continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine, and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in Prayers.* Which Words, perhaps, would better have been translated thus. *And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine, and in the Communion, and breaking of Bread, and in Prayers.* The Doctrine, no doubt, means the Gospel Doctrine, the Forgiveness of Sins by the Redemption through *Jesus Christ*; and the Worship here mentioned is Prayer, and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper signified by *the Communion and breaking of Bread.* These two Appointments make up the whole of what may, in Strictness of Speech, be termed the Christian Worship;

ship; and I hope to give such an Account of both, as will convince all, who judge without Partiality, that God hath not commanded these Things merely for commanding sake, but to carry on the great Ends of his Providence, in sending his Son, and calling us to Repentance, and that they are a *reasonable Service*. The general Method which I shall observe, will be to set forth the Nature, Use, and Efficacy of these Appointments. By the First I shall shew what the Institution means; by the Second, the Reasons why it was appointed; by the Third, the Encouragement we have to a diligent Observance of it. And because a mere external Compliance with these Institutions will neither answer the End of their Appointment, nor procure to us the Benefits intended by them, it will therefore be necessary, in the last Place, that I shew, what are those Qualifications which are previously requisite to fit and prepare us to perform them in a worthy and acceptable Manner. I shall treat first of Prayer, because that is virtually contained un-

der the other, and, in the Order of Nature, antecedent to it.

The End of Prayer is to recognize God as the Creator and Governor of the World. It is not to make known to him our Wants, which he understandeth better than we do ourselves; but it is to acknowledge, and make solemn Profession, that he is the Author of all Good to us, and that as we are indebted to him for what we have, so what we want must come from him. This shews, that God's Knowledge of our Wants is no Reason why we ought not to pray, supposing that any good Account can be given why God hath commanded us to recognize him as the Author of all Good; and there is this natural Reason to be given for it, that this constant Acknowledgement of God's sovereign Dominion, which Prayer implies, is a constant Call to Duty. For we can never reflect that God is our Creator, without considering, at the same Time, that we owe him Obedience. It is this Sense of God prevailing in our Minds, that is the Foundation of all Religion.

ligion. For what other Reason have we to yield Obedience to God than this, that to him we owe ourselves, and all that is dear and valuable to us, the Blessings of this Life, and the Glories of the next? If we were ourselves the Authors of our own Good, we should owe Obedience to none. Or if there were any other Being which could claim a Partnership with God in the Benefits which we receive, he also would have a Right to be a Sharer with him in the Homage that we pay. But if we are God's, and not our own; if he is our Benefactor, and none else independent of him; the Inference is easy and natural, that he has eminently, and above all, a Right to our Obedience; and that therefore we are not to displease him in pleasing ourselves; no, not in pleasing the whole World; for his is the whole World, and he is the Lord of all, because he is the Maker and Preserver of all.

This is a Conclusion which naturally arises in every Man's Mind, upon the Consideration of the Being and governing Providence of God. But if we grow unmindful of these Things, Religion will

be lost; and this may easily be; for God does not make himself known to us in such a Way as to force himself upon us, whether we will or no. If he were to be seen with our bodily Eyes, and we could behold him from the Throne of his Glory, dealing out his Blessings among us with an indulgent and plenteous Hand; sending us Food, sending us Raiment, sending us all Things; in not *knowing* him, we should be more senseless than the Brutes; for *the Ox knoweth his Owner, and the Ass his Master's Crib*. But because we are here to *walk by Faith, and not by Sight*, we therefore want some external *Warnings* to put us upon making use of our Reason, and *considering* what we are, and to whom we are indebted for all we have, and all we hope for: And what more effectual Course could God have taken to beget in us an habitual Sense and Conviction of this, than by making it our Duty, that so often as we feel our own Wants, so often we should bear Witness, with our own Mouths, of his Sovereign Power and Goodness, and of our Insufficiency to do any Thing without

without him? I do not say, that Prayer is a Means *absolutely* necessary to put us in Mind that we are Creatures depending upon God. All the Works of Providence which we see about us are an Evidence of this great Truth, which we are at all Times at Liberty to take Notice of, if we find ourselves so disposed. But to *secure* this Temper of Mind, and to make it *familiar* to us, we should find it no easy Matter if there were nothing to check that natural Propensity, which we all of us feel, to let ourselves loose to those more pleasing Reflexions which Sense and Passion are ever apt to throw in our way.

This (if there was nothing more in it) would account for an Observation no less true than common, That in Proportion as Men accustom themselves to neglect their Prayers, they grow more loose and careless in their general Behaviour. For through Lack of these Calls to Thought and Consideration, the Mind insensibly steals away from the Creator to the Creature. And for the self-same Reason, bad Men are never less at Ease, than when they

are obliged, on some worldly Views, to do Homage to their Maker, or rather to make a Show and Appearance of doing it; for they must be quite stupid, and past feeling, if the Solemnity of Religious Worship, will not raise those Reflections which gall the Conscience, and make them uneasy with themselves. You will see this very plainly, if you will apply this Reasoning to those several Acts of Worship, which by common Use are generally comprized under the Notion of Prayer, and the Particulars which are the Subject Matter of it. Prayer, in the strict Sense, is the calling upon God for the Supply of our Wants, and these are either Temporal or Spiritual. *Christ* hath taught us to pray for our *daily Bread*; which comprehends both the Necessaries and the Conveniencies of Life. Put this Prayer now into the Mouth of a Glutton, or a Sot, and see where will be the Decency of it. Can you ask of God the Continuance of those Blessings, which you every Day abuse to his Dishonour? So we are taught to pray for the Forgiveness of our Sins, and the Aids of God's Grace; which
may

may well become us, if we mean to repent and amend. But can you ask that Grace which you turn into Wantonness? Can you beg of God to forgive you those Sins to Day, of which you are resolved, if Opportunity serves, to be guilty again to Morrow? Finally; we are taught not only to ask for what we want, but to return Thanks also for Benefits received; which will be a reasonable Service, if we bear with us a grateful Mind. But can we profess Thankfulness with our Mouths, and deny it by our wicked Works? — They who come to their Prayers without any Degree of Attention or Seriousness, may do these with as much Ease as they do many other absurd Things: But if bad Men will but mind what they are about, there is that in Prayer which will be a Reproach to them, and shame them into some good Resolutions. And therefore it is a very idle Thing to ask, “ To what End should we pray, since God, infinite in Wisdom, knows our Wants, and infinite in Goodness, must be supposed at all Times ready to bestow upon us what he sees to be needful? ”

This is an old Objection against Prayer, and it is observable, that those who reasoned in this Manner rejected * all Institutions. With great Consistency with themselves! For if you measure the Value of these Things by their *natural* Efficacy, as to God, they are all alike. God has no more need of Prayer than he has of Sacrifices, and how little that is, he tells us himself, *Isaiab* i. 11. *To what Purpose is the Multitude of your Sacrifices TO ME, saith the Lord? — I DELIGHT NOT in the Blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He-Goats.* And *Psalms* i. 12. *If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the World is mine, and the Fulness thereof. Will I eat the Flesh of Bulls, or drink the Blood of Goats?* But as God commanded Sacrifices of which he had no need, so he hath commanded Prayer of which he hath no need; and both for the same Reason, *viz.* because *Men needed* them to be as Memorials of his governing Providence, and to keep alive that Faith and Trust in him, which is necessary to their well doing.

* Vid. Origen. de Orat. § 11.

Thus

Thus much for the *Nature* and *Use* of Prayer; which appears, in its general Notion, to be no more than a Recognition of God as the Creator and Governor of the World. And thus far Prayer is a Part of Worship, not peculiar to Christianity, but common to all Religions in the World. How it came to be so, is a Question very easily answered. For those who think not Prayer to be a natural Duty, may see its Appointment in the Appointment of Sacrifice; for Sacrifice is Prayer by outward Symbols; and the Appointment of Sacrifices is as old as the Fall of Man. But there is a Circumstance in Christian Prayer peculiar to Christianity, which makes it to be a Recognition of God, not only as our Creator, but as our Redeemer; for we are commanded to pray for all Things *in the NAME of Christ*, i. e. in Trust in his meritorious all-sufficient Sacrifice; and in this View it is an Instrument serving to perpetuate the Memory of our Redemption, and to excite in our Minds all those grateful Sentiments which the Consideration of our Redemption yields. Now as Prayer, whether publickly or privately performed,

performed, is, in the Nature of it, one and the same Thing, it may be demanded what particular Uses are served by its being commanded to be done publickly; and they are these.

I. The Duty is hereby more secure from being neglected. When Things are to pass only between God and Mens Consciences, and they have nothing to influence them but the Ingenuity of their Temper, it is an easy Matter for them to grow remiss and careless. But when they cannot commit a Fault but the World must take Notice of it, this lays hold of natural Modesty, and the Concern which every Man has for his own Credit will help to keep him within some Bounds of Decency. In the first Ages, those who customarily absented themselves from God's publick Worship, fell under the Censures of the Church, and were denied the Privileges of Christian Fellowship. This was intended to shame them into better Manners, as in all other Cases where the like Discipline was exercised. For so says *St. Paul*, *2 Theff. iii. 14. Note that Man, and have no Company with him, that he may be ashamed.*

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And though at present this sort of Discipline is well nigh lost among us, it is nevertheless a Disgrace to a Man to pass among his Neighbours for a Heathen, and will be so till evil Customs have wrought out all Sense of what is fit and decent. You will say, perhaps, that to join in publick Worship merely to avoid Censure, is not Religion, but Art and Policy, and you will say very right. But if the Motive begins here, it is not supposed to end here too. He that comes to Church at first only to save Appearances, may, by degrees, see the Reasonableness, and feel the Benefits of it; and will do so, if no great Vices stand in the Way. It is by this kind of Management in other Cases, that we are often led as it were by the Hand to do reasonable Things, and all Mankind see the Necessity of it; which shews, indeed, the Weakness of our Natures, but is no Disparagement to our Virtues, when such Means are followed by real Improvements.

2. It is likely to have a more general Effect. Few besides ourselves are the better for what is done in our private Retirements, but many may profit by a publick

lick Example; and there is that Force in those Virtues which others learn from us, which seldom fails to minister back an Increase to our own. Examples work reciprocally, as we see in War, where each Man, by brave and gallant Actions, breathes Courage into his Companion, and is again inspired by him. This is what *St. Paul* seems to allude to, when he exhorts us to PROVOKE *one another to Love, and to good Works*, which indeed is the natural Effect of every good Example. But never is the Force of Example so experimentally felt as among those who are devoutly met together in God's House, to join in their Prayers and Thanksgivings to him; where Zeal catches like Fire, and from small Sparks rises up into a mighty Flame. The Solemnity of the Place, the Awfulness of the Assembly, the Voices and Gestures of those about us, are all of them Circumstances which help to raise Devotion, and leave strong and lasting Impressions upon our Minds; and no Man can, with any Heart, think of returning back to his Sins, who remembers, that in the Presence of God, and in the
Face

Face of so many Witnesses, he hath made such solemn Professions of Duty.

I speak now of what might reasonably be expected, not of what is always found in Fact and Experience. It is but too common for Men to come to Church and join in the publick Worship, and to go Home again not one Jot the better Christians. The Cause is; they take it as a Thing of Course, that they have been always used and bred to, and do not come with that Preparation of Mind, which is necessary to give it Force and Virtue. But these, no doubt, are the Ends of publick Worship, and reasonable Ends they are, howsoever, through human Defects, they may, in many Instances, prove unsuccessful. And this shews one Thing very plainly, which will be of great Use to be observed, *viz.* That the Ends of Publick Worship can never be fully answered by private Devotion, how frequently soever it may be performed. For private Prayer yields no publick Example, and publick Example was the Thing intended by publick Worship. Many are wont to excuse themselves

selves in an habitual Neglect of publick Worship, by alledging that they say their Prayers at Home. I am always, I confess, suspicious of such Pretences; for if a Man is devout in his Closet, it is not very natural to suppose that he will think publick Prayer a Burden. But suppose the Thing done, I say it is by no Means an Equivalent. You may be the better for your private Prayers, but no Body else can. They are the Exercise of your Piety, but they are not the Profession of your Faith, or the Evidence of your Virtues.

Let us now consider the *Efficacy* of Prayer with respect to God. God hath not the Passions of a Man, and therefore he is not to be moved by Prayers and Intreaties, as Men are. But though he hath not the Passions of a Man, he hath the Wisdom of a wise and good Governor; and as he hath commanded us to pray, in respect of our Weakness, so, for our Encouragement to do it, he hath annexed to the due Performance of this Duty, Blessings both Temporal and Spiritual. That we are directed to pray for Blessings

Blessings

sings of both Kinds is most evident. For when we pray for our *daily Bread*, we pray for Temporal Blessings, as for Rain and fruitful Seasons, for Success in our Occupations and Callings, and the like. So it is when we pray for Deliverance from our Enemies, from Afflictions and Calamities, for all which there are Directions in Scripture. We pray for Spiritual Blessings when we pray for God's Holy Spirit to enlighten our Minds, or to correct our Wills, for these Things have Reference to the Good of the Soul, as the other are subservient to the Welfare of the Body. Now it seems a natural Inference from our being *commanded* to ask these Things of God, that our Prayers will do *something* towards our obtaining them, and the *Style* of Scripture imports as much. *Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; for every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened*, Luke xi. 9. But it is most expressly asserted by St. James, Chap. iv. *v* 2. *Ye have not, BECAUSE ye ask not.* And

Chap.

Chap. v. *ŷ* 16. *The effectual fervent Prayer of a righteous Man AVAILETH much.* These Passages, with others that are easy to be met with, shew plainly, that Prayer is strictly and properly *efficacious* with God; and it hath the Efficacy of a Condition, by which God hath determined, in the Wisdom of his Providence, to grant many Things to those who ask him, which he will not grant to those who ask him not.

It is not easy to make Sceptical Men enter into this Notion. For they observe that People live and prosper, and get Estates, who never go into a Church, or into their Closets to pray: And the Scripture tells us that *God is kind to the unthankful and the evil, and sendeth Rain upon the just and upon the unjust.* That *there is one Event to the Righteous and to the Wicked, to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not.* This Observation, no doubt, will shew that God hath not left every Thing to depend upon the Prayers of Men, (which he could not do, without resigning the Sovereign Authority out of his own Hands into the
Hands

Hands of his Creatures) but that *nothing* depends upon them, or that it will in *all* Cafes be equally the fame Thing, whether we pray, or whether we let it alone, no Experience can poffibly fhew. For there are a thoufand Ways in which the Hand of God may be employed in fending Good or Evil, which do not fall within our Notice; and amidft all that Inequality which is obfervable in God's Dealings with refpect to this World, there may be ftill fo much Regard paid to Virtue, as to verify the Promifes of God, and make it worth every Man's while to ferve him faithfully. The main Strokes of Providence which lie moft within the Compafs of our Obfervation, may be determined by fettled Laws refpecting the general System of Nature, which the Behaviour of Men cannot alter. And yet there may be other Acts of it, ferving only as Under-Parts to fill up the Harmony of the whole, (but of the greateft Importance to the Happinefs of particular Perfons) which admit of Variety, and leave God at Liberty to determine this Way or that Way, as particular Reafons fhall direct. We cannot

point out these Instances; but it is not therefore the less probable that there are such Instances. If we had the same sensible Evidence when God hears our Prayers, and when he rejects them, as we have when we deal with Men, this would yield the Conviction which some Men seem to want. But as we have to do with an invisible Being, we cannot have such Evidence without a perpetual Miracle, and therefore it is unreasonable to expect it. But tho' we have not the Evidence of Sense that God hears the Prayers of good Men, we have the Evidence of his Word; and his Word is not the less to be relied on, because he fulfils it in such a Manner as to leave Room for the Exercise of Faith and Trust in him, which is the proper Work of a Christian in this State of Tryal.

As to *Spiritual* Blessings, it will be more easy to conceive that they may depend upon our Prayers, because they are more special in their Nature, and have not (so far as it appears) that Connexion with any general System which Temporal Blessings have. God cannot, without a Miracle, make his *Sun to rise upon*

upon the Good, but the *Evil* also will feel its Influences; nor can he *send Rain upon the Just*, but the *Unjust* also will have a Share in the Advantages of it. But he may give the Graces of his Spirit to them that ask, and deny it to those who ask it not. The Gospel teaches us to expect that he will do so, and there is no Evidence from Experience to shew the contrary. God will give so much Help to all, as to leave Sinners without Excuse, and justify himself in their Condemnation. But he is in a more particular Manner nigh unto all that diligently seek him; which should make us cautious, and fearful to neglect our Prayers, which is removing ourselves out of the Protection of God's Providence, and exposing ourselves naked and defenceless to those Temptations, which surround us in this miserable and naughty World. But the great Difficulty here is to make Men understand that there are, or can be, any such Influences of the Spirit upon our Minds as the Scripture speaks of. I have no Concern with this Question at present; for I am arguing with Christians, who must be

supposed to believe their Bibles. And yet I will say thus much to Unbelievers, that in treating this Doctrine with Ridicule and Contempt, they shew no great Sign of their good Sense. Do they believe that the Soul operates within the Body, and directs its several Motions? Why is it not as easy to conceive, that there may be another Principle working within the Mind, and directing its Motions likewise? They will answer; We feel it not. Hold off your Hands, and try if you can feel your Heart beat. We grow in the Womb, and feel not the Fingers of him who fashioneth us; and whilst we increase in Wisdom and Stature, the Degrees by which we increase are imperceptible. Why may it not be thus with every one that is *born of the Spirit*? Such Objections are the Effect of nothing but Short-sightedness and want of Thought!

But tho' Prayer hath Efficacy with God for the obtaining Blessings both Spiritual and Temporal; it is only upon Supposition that it is rightly qualified, *i. e.* that we ask for proper Things with proper Dispositions. We see this among ourselves,

ſelves, that all Prayers are not alike. A Man will grant a Favour to a Friend, which he will deny to an Enemy, or to a Stranger; and be it to Friend or Foe, there are ſome Favours which he will think reaſonable, others not ſo. Even thus it is with God, who as he is good, ſo he is alſo wiſe; tho' he has a Compaſſion for our Wants, yet he has likewiſe a Regard to his own Honour. It is ſuppoſed all along in the Argument, that GOD is the Being to whom our Prayers are to be addreſſed, and not any Creature; and therefore concerning the Object of Prayer, I ſhall ſay no more than this, that GOD being made known to us under the Chriſtian Revelation as three Perſons, each acting diſtinctly, and bearing his proper Part in the Diſpenſations of his Providence towards us; the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Ghoſt as Sanctifier; Care ſhould be taken, that each Perſon has his proper Honour given him. But for the *Matter* of our Prayers, and the *Disposition* with which we ought to pray, they are Subjects

of larger Enquiry. Let us consider these Points a little distinctly. And,

I. As to the *Matter* of our Prayers; a Thing is fit for us to ask, which is fit for God to give; and nothing is fit for him to give, but what is agreeable to the Perfection of his Nature. Therefore, in the first Place, we should be secure that what we ask is lawful; for, to ask of God unlawful Things, is to ask him to be unjust, which is a Disparagement to his Holiness. This would be the Case, if a Man should be engaged in unlawful Attempts against his Neighbour, and pray to God for Help; not so, if any one should be engaged in the like Attempts against him, and he should pray for Deliverance, even though it should end in the Destruction of his Enemy. If a Man makes his own Destruction necessary to my Safety, I may kill him in my own Defence; and therefore praying for Help in such Cases, is only appealing to God for Justice. I will go farther, and say, that when Iniquity greatly prevails, it is very consistent with the Character of a good Man to pray that God would interpose, to correct, pu-

nish, or even to extirpate wicked doers, for the Honour of his Laws, and the making his Power and Providence the more visible among Men. For this is only asking God to do an Act, which he himself hath declared he has a Right to do, and will do, whensoever he thinks fit. There are many Prayers in the Book of Psalms that are penn'd with this Spirit; and which came so much more properly from the Mouth of *David*, as he was a publick Person, and stood at the Head of a Commonwealth, that was established upon Temporal Promises. But in these, and in all other Matters which concern this Life only, whether it be that we pray for Deliverance from Evil, or for the obtaining of Good, one Caution should never be forgotten, which is, that we do it with perfect Resignation to the Will of God. We have an excellent Pattern in that Prayer which our Saviour made in the Garden, a little before his Passion, when (as the History reports) his *Soul* was exceeding sorrowful even unto Death. *O my Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but*

but as thou wilt, Matt. xxvi. 38, 39. And to shew us how necessary a Circumstance this is in all Cases, he hath drawn the Substance of it into that Prayer which he hath left us for standing Use: *Thy Will be done*. The Reason is, that in these Things more especially, we *know not what to pray for as we ought*. God is good, and cannot therefore send hurtful Things to good Men, as our Saviour intimates, upon this very Case. *If a Son shall ask Bread of any of you that is a Father, will he give him a Stone? Or if he shall ask a Fish, will he for a Fish give him a Serpent? Or if he shall ask an Egg, will he offer him a Scorpion?* Luke xi. 11, 12. And yet, should God grant us every Thing we ask, (such is our Ignorance in our own true Good) he would act in this Manner, and do by us what a good Father cannot do by his Children; he would sometimes give us, a Stone for Bread, a Serpent for a Fish, a Scorpion for an Egg. That is good which is so upon the whole, or our principal (that is, our eternal) Interest considered. But in this respect it is many Times necessary that God should cross

cross our Inclinations; not to mention that even in the Things of this World, we are not always the best Judges of our own Interest; for our most hopeful, and, in the first Instances, the most successful Projects, sometimes fail us in the long Run, and turn upon us to our own Prejudice: In all which Cases the Goodness of God is shewn, not in giving us what we ask, but in denying it.

Scrupulous Minds are apt to give themselves great Disturbances for want of observing this necessary Caution. When Things press hard, it is natural for us to look out for Help; and if we are religiously disposed, we shall as naturally have Recourse to God, as to him in whom all our Hopes must center. Thus far all is well. But if, from our Unsuccessfulness in Prayer (as we may esteem it) we draw Inferences in Disparagement of our Virtues, and conclude, that because God answereth not our Requests in the particular Way we desire, therefore we have done something or other to forfeit his Favour and Blessing, we reason extremely ill. To *assure* his Heart before God, every
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Man hath a proper Rule, which is to compare his Behaviour with the Law of God; and tho' he may be partial to himself in many Cases, yet, if he is conscious of nothing but common Failings, and stands clear of all willful habitual Sins, such a Knowledge of his general State as this will always be a much better Reason for him to hope well, than the Unsuccessfulness of his Prayers can be to despair; because if a Man is ever so good, it will not thence follow, that he is not to be exercised with Afflictions. *Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth,* Heb. xii. 6. We are accustomed to call our Prayers unsuccessful, when we are disappointed of the particular Things we ask by Prayer. But though they are unsuccessful in that Point, they may not be so upon the whole; for though God granteth not that Thing, he may grant us something that is better, and he will not be the less, but the more good for so doing. This World only considered, it is a good Thing to be delivered from great Trials; but if we carry our Views to the next, it is a much better
Thing

Thing to obtain that Help and Assistance from God, which will enable us to bear them patiently.

When religious Scruples have laid fast hold upon the Mind, it is a hard Matter to shake them off; especially if (which is frequently the Case) they fall in with a melancholly Constitution of Body. And therefore, to prevent Mistakes of this kind, I think it would generally be a good Rule, as much as is possible, to avoid Particularities in our Prayers. I have great Authority for this Advice. *Christ* hath taught us to pray for our *daily Bread*, which is only asking such a Supply of temporal good Things, as God shall see fit for us, so long as it shall please him to continue us in this World, which is the least we can ask, if we pray at all. But should it come into any one's Mind to pray for Wealth, or Honour, or Power, he would do it without Warrant either from Scripture or good Sense, and there would be no End of Mens Doubts and Fears, if they should make an Estimate of their Interest with God by their Success in such Prayers as these. Not that these are
not

not very good Things, when Men have Virtue and Discretion to use them well; but it is an Offence to common Decency to take upon ourselves to be our own Carvers, and to direct God in what Way he is to provide for us. The Reason of the Case is the same as to the *Evils* of Life; for we know no more what it is proper for us to *suffer*, than what it is fit for us to *have*; and therefore here too, general Requests, to the Purpose of what we find in the Lord's Prayer, *lead us not into Temptation, but deliver us from Evil*, will be for the most Part best; and I believe that a wise and a good Man would be no more inclined to be earnest with God for the Removal of this or that particular Affliction which he suffers, than to be urgent for the obtaining any particular Blessing which he may desire, if it were not that it is much harder to bear Pain, than it is to suffer Want in Things which are not necessary for us. It is our Impatience that makes us run out into Particularities; which is our Infirmity: And I am not the more afraid to call it so, because we have our Saviour's Example for

for it, in asking that the *Cup* (by which he meant the *Sufferings* that he was to bear for our Sakes) might *pass from him*; for he was a Man, and had the common Feelings of Human Nature. But if we will take our Saviour's Example, let us take it throughout, and we shall still be right; that is, let us never presume to ask of God Deliverance from Afflictions (how hard soever they may be for Flesh and Blood to bear) but with this Reserve, secret or expressed, *Nevertheless, not my Will, but thine be done.*

In a few Words: The single Thing which we may absolutely ask of God, because we may be absolutely secure it is not unfit for him to give, is the Grace of his Spirit to assist us in well doing. And this is what our Saviour intimates to us in the Passage before cited, where 'having first shewn us our Ignorance as to temporal Good, by the Comparison of a Son's asking a *Stone* for *Bread*, a *Serpent* for a *Fish*, &c. he directs, in the Conclusion, to that which we may ask of God with full Assurance not to fail. *If ye then being evil know how to give good Gifts unto*

your Children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask it? He does not say, that because a Father will give his Son Bread, or a Fish, or an Egg, therefore God will do so too; but he says, that God will give *his Holy Spirit*, which is equivalent to all the Gifts of his Providence put together; which will always be good and profitable for us, though the Blessings of this Life (as they are commonly esteemed) may not always be so. We are to understand this (as was hinted above) of that kind of Assistance which is necessary to enable us to do the Duties of our Stations, and to qualify us for Favour and Acceptance with God. For as to those kinds of *Improvements* by which different Men excell one another in the *Perfection* of their spiritual Estate, these are (or may be at least) subject to the Will of God, as directed by the general Views of his Providence, as all other Blessings are. All whom God calls to Salvation by the Gospel shall have the Means of qualifying themselves for it, by the Conditions of the Gospel, if they will honestly and carefully
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endeavour after it. But it will not follow, that all may attain to the same Degree of Perfection. God hath created Men to different Degrees of Happiness in this World, and he may have created them to different Degrees of Glory in the next; which I remark that we may not think the worse of our Prayers, if, when we are not wanting in any Thing which is necessary to a common Virtue, there should be some rare Examples, which by all our Endeavours we cannot come up to. It may be the Will of God that we should advance no farther, and if it is so, there we must be content to rest; nor should we be any more displeas'd with ourselves, because we cannot reach the Perfection of the *best*, than the *best* are, or ought to be, that they cannot equal the Perfection of *Angels*.

2. From the *Matter* of our Prayers I now pass on to the *Disposition* of *Mind* with which we ought to pray; and this in general must correspond with those Professions which Prayer imports. For Falshood is an immoral Thing, and false Professions, under the Shew or Mask of Religion,

Religion, are of all kinds of Falshoods the worst. Every Christian is supposed to believe in *Christ*; and it is self-evident, that without the Faith of a Christian, the Prayer of a Christian cannot stand. But if a Man has Faith, he may be wanting in Obedience; and it is a Point well worth considering how far an immoral Life disqualifies us for the Duty of Prayer. St. *Paul* exhorts us to *lift up holy Hands*, 1 Tim. ii. 8. And the wise Man tells us, that *the Sacrifice of the Wicked is an Abomination*, Prov. xxi. 27. This implies that the Acceptableness of our Prayers with God doth greatly depend upon our moral State. Yet we must not say that it *so much* depends upon our moral State, that every Defect will unqualify us; for it is by God's Grace that we are enabled to do well; and this Grace is to be obtained by asking for it. My Way of thinking in this Matter is this; 1. That the lowest Degree of Virtue is sufficient to qualify us to ask that Help from God which is necessary to our farther Growth and Improvement. Some Degree of Virtue is necessary to qualify us to pray; for when

when Men, quite careles and hardened in their Sins, presume to pray (as they may do for Custom or Fashion-sake) they do but add Sin to Sin; because they make a Profession of Reverence to God with their Mouths, whilst their Hearts are far from him. But if a Man has so much Thought and Reflexion as to be convinced of his evil Ways, and to take up some good Resolutions of Amendment for the Time to come, he may pray to God to strengthen these good Resolutions, and to place his imperfect Repentance to his Account so far as the Value of it will go. For why? He asks only what is fit for God to give, and what he hath given us Encouragement in his Word to believe, that he will bestow. But this I would have understood of *private* Prayer only; for in *publick* Prayer there is another Consideration to be taken into the Account. In private Prayer the Transaction lyes only between God and a Man's own Conscience; and God who searcheth the Heart, seeth the Correspondency of our inward Sentiments, with our outward or verbal Professions. But when a Man

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joins with a Congregation of Christians in publick Prayer, the Transaction lyes also between him and the Church, to which he offers himself as a publick Example; and where an Example is offered there ought to be Consistency, otherwise the Nature of the Example changes. And therefore those who are scandalously immoral in their Lives, are not qualified to join in Prayer in the publick Assemblies or Congregations of Christians: For a Man's Behaviour is a much better Evidence to the World of his inward Disposition, than a mere Profession can be, which when it agrees not with the general tenor of his Life, will be look'd upon as Hypocrisy; and Hypocrisy makes a bad Example worse instead of mending it. This exactly agrees with the ancient Discipline, whereby, publick notorious Offenders were excluded from the Prayers of the Church, as well as from the Participation of the Holy Sacrament.— But of this more hereafter, when I come to treat of the Sacrament. And therefore, 2. Tho' the lowest Degree of Virtue is sufficient to qualify us to ask that Help
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from God which is necessary to our further Growth and Improvement; our general Interest with God, and consequently the general Efficacy of our Prayers, will depend upon the Measure of our Improvement. The Blessings of Providence are the proper Instances of God's Love to us; and this we feel within ourselves, that the more we love our Friends, the more ready we are to listen to their Requests. And reasonable it is that it should be so; for it is shewing a proper Distinction to real Merit, which is or always ought to be the Foundation of Love. With God it always is so, who being infinitely removed from the Weaknesses, and Passions of Men, esteems every Man in Proportion to his Virtues. This shews the Reason of those Passages in Scripture (of which there is a great Variety) where God is represented as taking *Pleasure* in the Homage paid him by good Men; as having his *Eyes over* them, and *his Ears open to their Prayers*: And if he is *kind to the Unthankful and to the Evil*, it is not because they pray to him, but be-

cause, for Reasons of Providence, he sees it to be convenient.

This is a great Encouragement to well doing, that it makes God our Friend, who will be ready to hear us in all Things that we call upon him for. And this is the proper Foundation for that *Trust* in God which seasons our Devotions, and makes them to become *an Offering of a sweet smelling Savour*. St. James exhorts us to *ask in FAITH, nothing wavering, Jam. i. 6.* And our Saviour — *All Things that ye shall ask in Prayer BELIEVING ye shall receive, Matt. xxi. 22.* A bad Man cannot *ask in Faith*; and therefore bad Men are not fit to pray, any further than (as I said just now) for that Grace which is necessary to enable them to repent and amend. But good Men, whatever be the Subject of their Prayers, may *ask in Faith*, and ought to do so; because where there is a proper Foundation for Trust, in our own Conduct, to suspect that God will reject our Prayers, is to dispute his Goodness. It is supposed that a good Man will ask nothing but what it is fit for him to ask, and with
such

such Submission to the Will of God in doubtful Points as Religion implies. And therefore the Faith here recommended is not an Assurance that God will grant us precisely the individual Thing we may wish for, but *that* or something *equivalent* to it. In short it is an Assurance that *all Things shall work together for good to them that love God*; and when we are fully possessed of this Belief, we have all the Comfort within ourselves that Religion can yield.

There is one Disposition more mentioned in Scripture, and that is *Fervency*; which implies not only Attention, but some Earnestness of Desire also to obtain what we pray for. Want of Attention in Prayer (so far as it is avoidable by a common Degree of Prudence) is a sure Token of a careless Mind; and shews great Irreverence to Almighty God. But we are not to think the same of every wandering Thought, which may arise from mere Inadvertency, Surprise, or a strong Attachment of Mind, when, in his general Temper and Disposition, a Person is serious and devout. If a Man

wants the Spirit of Devotion, his Prayers will be faulty how punctually soever he may attend at the Time of Praying. But if he comes possessed with humble Reverence to God, be the Interruptions which he may *casually* feel more or less, they will not spoil the Virtue of his Prayers. The general Honesty of his Intentions, will supply such particular Defects as these. And if Men attend to what they are about when they are saying their Prayers, and consider the Value of the Blessings they ask, they cannot want Earnestness; such a Degree of it, I mean, as is suitable to their natural Tempers. They may not feel perhaps Extasies and Transports, nor is it necessary that they should; for this plain Reason, because it may not be always in their Power. Every Man may be Sober and Serious; but every Man cannot work himself up into a Passion. This depends upon Constitution, and Occasions, and Circumstances accidentally administered; and therefore it would be judging very ill, if a Man, in all other Respects well disposed, should find fault with himself, and think his
Prayers

Prayers will not be heard, because they are not offered up with a Degree of Warmth and Vehemency, which he is not accustomed to find upon any other Occasion. We may have the more Satisfaction in our Prayers perhaps, the warmer they are; and there may this good Effect follow, that as the Impressions of Religion are the more strong, so they may also be the more lasting: For which Reasons no Helps should be neglected, which are proper to raise and quicken our Devotions. The Piety of Christians since the Reformation, hath furnished us with a Variety of Books serving as Helps to Devotion; and I doubt not but many have found and will find very good Improvement from the Use of such Books: But they are to be used with Caution. For these Writers above all others are most apt to give a Scope to their Imaginations, and affect more to draw fine Pictures than to express what is just and natural in human Life; and if Men will not be pleased with themselves, unless they can feel such Dispositions as will answer to every high flown Expression

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which

which they meet with in such Books, they will be made very uneasy, and very *unreasonably* so. Perhaps these Writers themselves felt nothing equal to their own Descriptions; but if they did, why must the Warmth of one Man's Temper be made the Standard of another Man's Devotion? I think that for general Use, Forms of Prayer cannot be too chaste in their Composition; and our Reformers were of the same Mind. For look into the *Book of Common Prayer*, and what will you find? Why every Thing that is solemn and grave, but none of those rapturous Expressions which are to be met with in many private Compositions. The Reason was, not that our Reformers wanted a Spirit of Piety, but they saw plainly, what every wise Man sees, that to feel Extasies and Transports in Devotion is not the Turn of every Man's Temper. But this amounts to a Confession that God may as acceptably be served in a more sedate Way; and this I will venture to say, that if there be any Degree of Warmth which a serious Use of these Prayers cannot raise, it is such a Degree as a Man may
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be without, and be never the worse Christian. I would not be understood as condemning all other Forms in a private Way; I would only give a Caution (as I said) against those Mistakes, which very good Persons are sometimes apt to run into by the undue Use of them. Men should consult their particular Tempers and Constitutions in the Choice of such Books, as they do in the Choice of their natural Food, and be content with a plain and simple Diet when the Stomach will not bear high Sauces.

One Caution should never be forgotten, which is, that we ask all Things *in the Name of Christ*, or in Trust upon his all-sufficient Sacrifice. I have before observed to you, that *Christ* hath commanded us thus to pray; and therefore he that does not pray after this Manner, does not pray as a Christian ought to pray. It is not always necessary that this Circumstance should be *expressed*; but in *Mind* and *Intention* it always ought to be. It may seem strange, perhaps, that in the Lord's Prayer we are not taught to ask in the Name of *Christ*. The Reason is, that
this

this new Manner of praying was not to take Place till after the Death of *Christ*. HITHERTO (says our Saviour) *ye have asked nothing in my Name* — AT THAT DAY *ye shall ask in my Name.* — Joh. xvi. 23. At *what Day?* Why after my Death and Resurrection; for this he had been speaking of just before. *A little while and ye shall not see me, and again, a little while and ye shall see me. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the World shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your Sorrow shall be turned into Joy.* This shews that the Circumstance of praying *in the Name of Christ*, was founded upon the Consideration of his Death, * by which having discharged the Office of our High Priest on Earth, he was to enter into the Heavens to appear in the Presence of God for us. To this the Apostle alludes, *Heb. iv. 14. Seeing then we have a great High Priest that is passed into the Heavens — let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace,*

* Ignoratus erat ille precandi mos & vim suam præcipue accepit ex obedientiâ Christi in morte præstitâ. *Grotius.*

that

that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in Time of Need.

From the Duty of Prayer,
I now proceed to the Partici- Of the LORD'S
SUPPER.
pation of the Sacrament of the
Lord's Supper, the End of which is thus
set down by St. Paul, 1 Cor. xi. 23, 24.
*The Lord Jesus, in the same Night that
he was betrayed, took Bread, and when
he had given Thanks, he brake it, and
said, Take, eat, this is my Body which is
broken for you, this do in Remembrance of
me. After the same Manner also he took
the Cup, when he had supped, saying, This
Cup is the New Testament in my Blood,
which (as our Saviour's Words are, Matt.
xxvi. 28.) is shed for many for the Remis-
sion of Sins; This do, as oft as ye shall
drink it, in Remembrance of me.*

From hence it appears, that the End
of the Institution of the Lord's Supper, is
the Remembrance of *Christ* as the Saviour
and Redeemer of the World; or the Re-
membrance of *Christ* under the special
Character of one, who by his Death hath
obtained for us Remission and Reconcili-
ation

liation with God. And this (by the Way) yields a good Evidence backward, that the Blood of *Christ* is a real *Propitiation*; for considering it only as a Testimony or an Example, the Sacrament might have been appointed in Remembrance of all the Martyrs that ever should be, as well as in Remembrance of *Christ*. If you say that *Christ* was the Founder of our Religion, and therefore had this Distinction paid him; this Answer will not serve. For the Sacrament was appointed not to shew forth *Christ*, but to shew forth *the Death of Christ*: And why *his Death*, I ask, but because there was a *Virtue and Efficacy* in his Blood, which there is *not* in the Blood of common Men? We must now, therefore, enquire what this Remembrance means, or how much the Act of eating and drinking at the Lord's Table implies: And this we may learn from the Words of *St. Paul*, 1 Cor. x. 16. *The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ? The Bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ?* The Apostle's Intention here,

was to dissuade the *Corinthians* from Idolatry. *My dearly beloved, flee from Idolatry, y 14.* What Sort of Idolatry this was we understand from *y 27, 28.* *If any of them that believe not bid you to a Feast, and ye be disposed to go, whatever is set before you eat, asking no Question for Conscience Sake. But if any Man say unto you, this is offered in Sacrifice unto Idols, eat not, for his Sake that shewed it, and for Conscience Sake.* This was Idolatry; eating of Things that had been offered to Idols, in Company with Idolaters in their idolatrous Feasts. For the Manner of those Sacrifices was, that when Part of them had been consumed upon the Altar, as the Idol's Portion, those who offered them sat down with their Friends, and feasted upon the rest. This was shewing a religious Respect to the Idol, and so intended by the Offerers; just as a Man shews a civil Respect to his Neighbour, when he eats and drinks at his Table. And the Act had the same Construction in all, who, understanding the Meaning and Intention of these Feasts, were Partakers of them, though they themselves sacrificed

sacrificed not. They joined in an idolatrous Act, and in so doing were guilty of Idolatry.

To make them feel the Weight of this Reasoning, the Apostle states a Comparison between these Idol Feasts, the *Jewish* Sacrificial Feasts, and the Christian Sacrament. *The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the Blood of Christ? The Bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the Body of Christ?— Behold Israel after the Flesh, Are not they which eat of the Sacrifices Partakers of the Altar? — I say then, that the Things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to Devils, and not to God; and I would not that ye should have Fellowship with Devils.* The Amount of which is this; That as eating Bread and drinking Wine at the Lord's Table, is the Communion of the Body and Blood of *Christ*; and as the eating of the *Jewish* Sacrifices was the Communion of the *Jewish* Altar; even so, the joining with the Heathens in their idolatrous Feasts was the Communion of Devils, or having Fellowship with Devils. It is supposed that the Act of
 eating

eating and drinking had the same Meaning in all these Cases, and that the Christians of those Times well understood what this Meaning was, in Reference to the Christian Sacrament and the *Jewish* Sacrifices; whence they were led to conclude what it meant as to the Heathen Sacrifices. But the Argument will go backward as well as forward, and we may reason thus; “ Whatever was meant by feasting upon the Heathen or *Jewish* Sacrifices, the same is meant by eating and drinking at the Lord's Table, Respect being had to the essential Points, in which these several Ways of Worship differ from each other.” Consider then how the Comparison will lye. The Christian Sacrifice is *Christ* once offering himself upon the Cross as an Attonement for the Sins of the World. The Bread and the Wine are, by his own Appointment, his Body and Blood symbolically represented; that is, they stand in the Place of his Body and Blood, and are to be *considered* as such. Consequently, the eating Bread and drinking Wine at the Lord's Table precisely answers to the feasting upon

upon the Sacrifices both among the Heathens, and under the *Jewish* Dispensation. As therefore the Heathens in their Feasts paid a religious Respect to Idols, and the *Jews* in their Feasts, a religious Respect to the true God, consider'd under the special Character of their Deliverer from the *Egyptian* Bondage; so Christians, by eating and drinking at the Lord's Table, pay a religious Respect to the same God, considered as their Deliverer from Sin and Condemnation by the Sacrifice of *Christ*: And what can this amount to less, than an Acknowledgment of their Trust and Reliance upon the Sacrifice of *Christ* for Pardon and Reconciliation with God?

It appears from hence, that the partaking of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, hath the Nature of a solemn Vow and Covenant, in which we declare our Acceptance of the Salvation offered by the Gospel, through the Redemption that is in *Christ Jesus*, and bind ourselves to a Behaviour suitable to our Profession. For he that accepts the Benefits of the Gospel must be understood as accepting them upon the Terms the Gospel offers them,
and

and these, you have seen, are Repentance and good Works. This is the Purport of the Baptifmal Vow, of which therefore every Act of communicating is the Repetition and Confirmation: And in their kind they are both of them very useful Institutions; the one, to give Evidence of our Faith at first, the other, to give Proof of our constant Continuance in it afterwards. Such publick Professions as these, are not only a good Example to others, but likewise very profitable to ourselves; as solemn Engagements are generally apt to be a greater Curb upon Mens Tempers, than a naked Sense and Apprehension of Truth and Right. He who acts against his inward Persuasion must know it himself; but he may hope that no Body else may know it, and may have Recourse, whenever he pleases, to the common Plea of Ignorance and Mistake. But he who acts against his own Engagements, has no Excuse to offer. The Engagement shews his Conviction; and his acting against Conviction thus publickly known and understood, exposes him to publick Shame.

And, with respect to Conscience, it is evident, that it will be held more strongly by many Obligations than by one; as a Man's Body will be faster bound by many Cords than by one. A voluntary Engagement will create an Obligation where there is nothing in the Thing (separate from the Engagement) that is binding; And therefore when any Thing is in its own Nature obligatory, the Engagement strengthens the Obligation in a Degree proportionable to its own binding Force. It is upon this Principle that the Use of Oaths in Civil Cases is founded. A Man is bound, antecedently to his Oath, to pay due Allegiance to his Sovereign Prince; and to do Justice between Neighbour and Neighbour, when Questions of Right come before him as a Witness, or as a Judge. But Oaths add Weight to these Obligations; for Perjury is a worse Sin than simple Injustice. Now the Act of receiving the holy Communion hath something in it equivalent to an Oath; by which we pledge our Allegiance to *Christ* and his Laws. This aggravates every Sin we commit afterwards; which is so sensibly

sibly felt by many serious Christians, that they are afraid to come to the Sacrament, lest by breaking this solemn Engagement, so often repeated, they should offend God more and more. This, as a *Scruple*, shall be considered hereafter. What I mention it for now is only to shew, that the due Participation of the holy Sacrament, must be a very great Security to the Virtues of a Christian, as it helps to make Men uneasy in their Vices; and what but this can be the Reason why many others, Christians indeed by Profession, but immoral in their Lives, refuse to come to the Sacrament, though customarily they join in other Parts of Worship? Every Act of Worship virtually contains a Profession of Reverence and Obedience to God; which yet may, and does in a great Measure, escape careless Men, who come with little Thought and Attention to what they are doing. But this most solemn Act of the Christian Worship, by which we more directly and formally bind ourselves to Repentance and a new Life, commands our Attention; and comes with such Awe

and Terror, that bad Men cannot stand it, till they have got quite the better of their Consciences, and laid aside all serious Thoughts of Religion.

You have now seen what is the *Nature* and *Use* of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; and hence you may see likewise the Obligation that lyes upon all who profess the Name of *Christ*, and hope to be saved by him, to shew a proper Regard to it. The Institution rests upon the Authority of *Christ*, who hath commanded us to *do this in Remembrance of him*; and since the Sacrament is the Renewal of the Covenant founded in his Blood, the refusing to partake of it must therefore, virtually, be a Renunciation of the Covenant, as it is also the actual Neglect of the very best Means which the Gospel has provided to lead us to a good Life. I speak this not of those who keep from the Lord's Table upon Scruples of Conscience, and are in other Points observant of the Law of *Christ*; for in such Cases the Construction will not hold; and it is to be hoped that the Goodness of God will, in some other Way, supply the Want
of

of the Means, when he sees that a Man is withheld from the Use of it, not for want of Conscience, but by the real (though perhaps mistaken) Dictates of Conscience. But whoever profanely neglects the Sacrament, gives the same Evidence of his Disaffection to *Christ*, as he would do of Disaffection to his Sovereign Prince, should he refuse an Oath of Allegiance, when called to it by lawful Authority: And whatever be the bad Consequences of this Neglect, as to his Spiritual Estate, they will lye at his Door.

This Observation will be confirmed by what I am next to offer concerning the *Efficacy* of the Sacrament. You have already seen, that all who partake of the Lord's Table profess their Acceptance of the Salvation offered by the Gospel. And since this is done by the Appointment of God, they must at the same Time be understood as receiving an Assurance from him that he will fulfil his Promises in *Christ* to all worthy Receivers. When *Christ* gave the Sacrament to his Apostles, at the first Institution of it, his Act in administering it, was virtually a Promise of

Salvation through the Sacrifice of his Body and Blood. And this Ordinance being appointed for perpetual and standing Use, the same Promise must be understood as perpetually repeated and ratified whenever the Sacrament is administered. So that, in Virtue of this Institution, there is a constant and visible Communion kept up between *Christ* and his faithful Members: He, by the Institution, constantly and visibly declaring Salvation by his Blood; and They, by complying with it, constantly and visibly testifying their Acceptance of the Mercy offered, and thereby (principally) maintaining and preserving their Interest in *Christ*, that is, their Claim or Title to Salvation by his Sufferings and Death. I say *principally*; for every Prayer which we offer up *in the Name of Christ*; every publick Profession we make of our Faith and Trust in him, contributes, in its Place and Order, to the keeping up our Interest in *Christ*. But the Participation of the Sacrament, eminently and above all other Religious Acts, serves to this Purpose, as it was a Rite *especially* appointed to be the Memorial of the Death and

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Sacrifice of *Christ*. When the *Jews* were called to be the People of God, their Observance of the legal Appointments was the *Tenure* upon which they held their Privileges; and the Contempt of them would have inferred a Revolt from God the Creator. In like Manner, the Observance of the Appointments of the Gospel, is the *Tenure* upon which we hold the Gospel Privileges; and the Contempt of them will infer a Revolt from *Christ* the Redeemer. Mere Natural Religion cannot give us an Interest in *Christ's* Blood: For when Men, repenting of their Sins, come to Baptism; it is not their Repentance that gives Remission. This is the free Grace of God in *Christ*, which their Repentance qualifies them to receive by the Use of the Sacrament. What mere Natural Religion cannot give, mere Natural Religion will not *continue*; upon Supposition that being once admitted by Baptism to the Gospel Privileges, there is any other Appointment, supported by the same Authority, by which, as Christians, we are bound to make *constant* Profession of our Union and Communion with *Christ*.

This is plainly the Case of the Lord's Supper, which is as much a covenanting Rite as Baptism is; and whenever a Covenant once made, by the Will of the Founder, requires *Renewal* and *Confirmation*, the want of Confirmation destroys the whole.

If the Sacrament is the Assurance of God's Mercy and Goodness towards us by the Blood of *Christ*; it must be the Assurance of every Benefit which is the Fruit of his Death; of which *one* is the Gift of his Spirit. Our first Title to this Gift we acquire at our Baptism, in which we are said to be *born of Water and of the Spirit*, (Joh. iii. 5.) which, as you have seen before, God hath promised to *give to them that ask him*. This shews that Prayer is a means of obtaining God's Spirit; and it shews that receiving the Sacrament is a means of obtaining it too: For the Act of Communicating hath in it the Nature and Virtue of Prayer. The Sacrament is a covenanting Rite; and as God on his Part must be understood as *assuring* us of the Benefits of the Covenant, so we on our Parts must be understood as *pleading* them. We may pray by Actions as well as by
Words:

Words. If a Man knocks at my Door, he may not ask to be let in; but I know his Meaning as effectually as if he did: And our Saviour has made Use of this Comparison in the very Case before us; *Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* And must not every one who devoutly comes to the Lord's Table, signifying by that Act his Trust and Reliance upon God for Salvation thro' *Christ*, be understood, as signifying his Trust likewise that God will vouchsafe him that spiritual Help and Assistance, which he is taught by his Word to believe necessary to qualify him for the Salvation offered? There is not, there cannot be, a plainer and more necessary Construction than this. We are not bound to say, that there are any Communications or Influences of the Spirit of God, attendant upon the Sacrament at the very Instant of receiving it: nor can any one shew that there are any such Communications attendant upon the Act of Prayer. It is sufficient in either Case that we have put ourselves under the Protection of God's Providence, and by performing the Conditions upon which he

hath

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hath promised the Aids of his Grace, qualified ourselves to receive them on all Occasions, when they shall be necessary or profitable for us.

But you are to understand (and I hope you have all along borne it in Mind) that whatever Use there is in the Sacrament, or whatever Benefits we hope to receive from it, all depends upon our being duly qualified to receive it. For *St. Paul* tells us that, *he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself.* This leads me to consider what Qualifications are necessary to prepare us for the Lord's Table; and this I shall do in as short and plain a Manner as I can, paying, all along, an especial Regard to what our Church hath determined upon this Subject.

In the first Place then it is evident, that the Partaking of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper pre-supposeth Faith in *Christ* as the Redeemer of the World; that is, as having by the Sacrifice of himself purchased Pardon and Reconciliation for Sinners. For the Sacrament (as has been shewn) is the Memorial of *Christ*

under this Character; and contains the Profession of this Faith, in all who partake of it according to the true Scripture Meaning. Of this our Church puts us in Mind in the Communion Office, where the Sacrament is said to be received in Remembrance of the meritorious Cross and Passion of Christ, whereby alone we obtain Remission of our Sins, and are made Partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven *. And, elsewhere in the same Office, *Christ* is set forth to us as having suffered Death upon the Cross for our Redemption, and as having made there by his own Oblation of himself, once offered, a full, perfect and sufficient Sacrifice, Oblation, and Satisfaction for the Sins of the whole World †.

It is evident in the next Place, that as the Sacrament was appointed to be received not by one singly, but by many jointly, or in common; it hereby becomes a social Act; and that therefore, between those who do not mutually agree in this Faith, there can be no lawful Communion. When one Man receives the Sacrament, doth he not thereby profess his Faith

* First Exhortation.

† Consecration Prayer.

in *Christ*? And when another Man is admitted to communicate with him, is he not understood as making the same Profession? And what is this but saying, that joint Communion is and must be founded in a mutual Agreement in the same Faith? It is to be observed here, that Faith in *Christ* takes in the Belief of every Doctrine which that Faith necessarily implies, and upon which it fundamentally rests; in which Points Churches, as well as private Christians, must judge for themselves by the Rule of God's Word. Consequently, when any Church or Number of Christians have determined for themselves what is the Faith of *Christ*, they may lawfully communicate among themselves whether such Determination be right or wrong. I say *lawfully*, that is, so far as the Act of Receiving the Communion is concerned. If they err in the Faith, they may be answerable for that Error; but so long as they are so persuaded, they cannot be chargeable with a Profanation of the Lord's Table by communicating unworthily. For they perform this Duty agreeably to the End of its Institution, according to what they know and understand

stand about it, and more than this the most orthodox Communion cannot do. But then, such Church cannot admit any to communicate with them who differ from them in any of those Points which they judge necessary to the Faith of a Christian; nor can those who differ in those Points (knowing themselves so to differ) lawfully offer themselves to communicate with such Church; for this is making Profession of an Agreement in the Faith where there is no Agreement, which is a Fraud upon the Society, and a Falsification in the Sight of God.

There is another Case when Communion with any Church or Society of Christians, will accidentally become unlawful; and that is, when by human Prescription, or thro' some Error in Point of Doctrine, certain Circumstances come to be connected with the Act of Communicating, as cannot lawfully be complied with. This is our Case with Respect to the present Church of *Rome*, with which we refuse to hold Communion, because we cannot communicate with them, unless we will profess our Belief (for Instance) in the Doctrine of Transubstantiation,

tiation, and without paying religious Adoration to the consecrated Elements; which we judge to be unlawful and idolatrous. This likewise is the Case with Respect to such Separatists from the Church of *England*, as think our Worship to be contrary to the Law of God. They would in communicating with us, do a Thing *to them* unlawful, and profane the Lord's Table in so doing. The Act of Communicating in such Cases, is not Worship, but Irreligion.

It is not agreeable to my present Intention to enter into those Points which may arise upon the Question of *lawful* or *unlawful*, as it concerns the Members of different Communion. And therefore I proceed to a Disqualification of another Kind, which concerns us as Christians at large, and will equally affect us of whatever Sect or Communion we may be; and that is an immoral Life. This is *presumed* in the foregoing Cases. For the Reason why a Man cannot lawfully communicate with a Church from which he differs in Point of Faith, or on the Account of Circumstances which in Conscience he cannot approve, is because
false

false Professions are an immoral Thing; which supposes that an immoral Life is a Disqualification. And to this Purpose the Words of our Liturgy deserve our Attention, in which all who are invited to come to the Holy Communion are exhorted to search and examine their own Consciences—that they may come holy and clean; i. e. (for so the Exhortation proceeds) to examine their Lives and Conversations by the Rule of God's Commandments, nor dare if any of them be a Blasphemer of God, an Hinderer or Slanderer of his Word, an Adulterer, or be in Malice, Envy, or any other grievous Crime (till they have repented of their Sins) to come to that holy Table*. All which is but agreeable to the Scripture Directions. For St. Paul says, *let a Man EXAMINE himself, and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup,* I. Cor. xi. 28. That is, let him examine his Life and Conversation, and see that his moral State be such as he can justify to his own Conscience. The Disorders committed in receiving the Holy Communion (or rather at those Feasts of

* First Invitation.

Charity which were appendant to it) which gave Occasion to this Advice were of the moral Kind. There were *Divisions among them, y 11.*— *In eating each Man took before other his own Supper, and one was hungry, and another was drunken.* These were the Fruits of an *evil Mind*, which was to be corrected before they could come worthily to the Lord's Table. Methinks the Reason of the Thing speaks itself. For what Consistency can there be in professing our Acceptance of God's Mercies in *Christ*; if we will take no care to qualify ourselves for those Mercies, by the Terms upon which the Gospel offers them? In truth there is no Act of Religion for which an evil Heart will not unqualify us. Even the Prayers of the Wicked *are an Abomination**; so are his Sacrifices, especially *if he bringeth them with a wicked Mind†*. And we should not forget with what Scorn God rejects the *Jewish* Sacrifices, for the Defectiveness of those who offered them up, in respect of their moral Qualifications; in that famous Passage of *Isaiab*, Chap. i. y 11. *To what Purpose is*

* Prov. xxviii. 9. † Chap. i. 27.

the Multitude of your Sacrifices into me, saith the Lord? I am full of the burnt Offerings of Rams, and the Fat of fed Beasts, and I delight not in the Blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He Goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your Hand 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. Your new Moons and your appointed Feasts my Soul hateth, they are a Trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your Hands I will hide mine Eyes from you; yea, when ye make many Prayers I will not hear.—Why? your Hands are full of Blood. 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. There is in all Solemn Acts of religious Worship one general Meaning. They are a Profession of Duty and Reverence to God; which Pro-

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feſſion, when there is nothing to answer it in our Behaviour, is Mockery and Profaneness, as our Saviour intimates, *Matt. xv. 7. Ye Hypocrites, well did Esaias prophecy of you, saying, This People draweth nigh unto me with their Mouth, and honoureth me with their Lips, but their Heart is far from me.—Therefore in vain do they worship me.*

This may serve to shew in general, that Repentance and a good Life are necessary to qualify us for the Lord's Table; or if any Thing be yet wanting, let us only consider what was required of those who believed in *Christ* upon the preaching of the Apostles to qualify them for Baptism; and this, we know, was Repentance. REPENT (says St. Peter) and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ, for the Remission of Sins, Acts ii. 38. Now if Repentance is necessary to qualify us for one of the Sacraments, it must be necessary to qualify us for the other too; for they both contain the same Profession. And what Sense is there in supposing that any one should be fit to profess his Relation to *Christ*, by the Memorial of the Covenant founded in his Blood,

Blood, who wants the Qualifications that are necessary in order to his very first Admission into it?—But a Question will here arise, In *what Degree* is Repentance and a good Life necessary? If no bad Actions would hinder, the worst would be qualified as well as the best. If no Allowance is to be made for common Failings, the best will be excluded as well as the worst; for *absolutely* perfect there are none. Some middle Way therefore there must be between these two Extreams, which I shall point out as distinctly as the Nature of the Thing will bear; as well to encourage the weak and over-scrupulous, as to check the bold and presumptuous. And,

I. A Distinction is to be made between *secret* and *notorious* Sins. As to *secret* Sins, this Rule is to be observed, That no Man should come to the Lord's Table, 'till he hath taken up such Resolutions of Amendment as he may reasonably presume will be effectual to a new and a better Life. I say, *reasonably presume*; for if it were said that no Man should come till he is *absolutely secure* of his future Conduct, it would be equivalent to saying, that no Man should come

at all; for this is a Security not to be had on this Side the Grave. But a reasonable Presumption there ought to be; for, in Matters of a civil Nature, no Man thinks it prudent to make a solemn Promise, when he has cause to suspect his Want of Resolution to be as good as his Word; especially if a Failure in his Promise will turn to his own Prejudice. We should not be less cautious in making solemn Engagements to God; who the oftner we vow, the more he will be offended, if we *vow and do not pay*. There are some Sins which if we hold not in great Abhorrence, we may be very certain that we have not the Grace of Repentance, even in the lowest Degree of it. Of this Sort are Blasphemy and Profaneness, Murder, Adultery, Malice, and the like, of which no Man can be deliberately guilty, who has any Sense of Virtue, or is under any Awe or Reverence of the supream Being. But I will not say the same of every Act of Intemperance, or Sensuality, or of every rash and hasty Word or Action; because these are Faults incident to a Mind, in the Main, very well disposed, but thrown off its Guard by particular Accidents,

dents, or overborne by some great Temptation. And yet even with Respect to Faults of the lower Kind, if the Returns of them are frequent, it is much to be feared that the Heart is not right: For it is seen and felt every Day in other Cases, that what a Man dislikes thoroughly and resolves against earnestly, he is not often brought to comply with. A Disposition founded upon right Notions of Things, is not soon lost, nor easily shaken. And therefore in such a Case I would not encourage Men to go hastily to the Sacrament upon the first new Resolution that may be taken (which for ought they can tell may be as vain as those that went before) but rather advise that by more Diligence and severer Watchfulness over themselves, they would try to bring themselves to some settled Temper; and when they find that they are gaining Ground, to come to the Lord's Table, which will be a Means to perfect what is wanting, and to confirm them in every good Work. Most Changes are gradual. The Change from Evil to Good is almost always so; and I think it to be a clear Point, that such a

Degree of Reformation as is suitable to a good Beginning, will be sufficient to qualify us for the Lord's Table. This seems to be agreeable to the Sense of our Church, which exhorts us to bewail our own Sinfulness; and to confess ourselves to Almighty God with full Purpose of Amendment of Life; and invites all to draw near with Faith, and take the Holy Sacrament to their Comfort, who truly and earnestly repent of their Sins, and intend to lead a new Life. Confession of Sin to God with Resolutions of Amendment, are necessary to Repentance in the very first State of it. For not to resolve against Sin, is to persist wilfully in Sin, which is inconsistent with the Notion of Repentance. But when Men resolve heartily, something will come of it; some Change it will produce; and if it is not every thing we could wish, yet so long (I say) as the Effect is suitable to our present Strength and Abilities, it will be accepted so far at least as to qualify us for God's Ordinances; which are intended as Helps to farther Improvement, and therefore do not suppose us grown up to Perfection,

fection, when we first apply ourselves to the Use of them. When the Apostles first preached the Gospel, they had to do with Novices in Religion; with those who had had no more Time than to be instructed, and convinced, and to begin well. Yet were such admitted to Baptism; and if such are fit for Baptism, they are fit also for the Lord's Supper, which is every Christian's Birthright, 'till he hath forfeited it by Apostasy from the Faith, or a Behaviour unworthy of his Profession. Lapses may follow after receiving the Sacrament; and if they do, it will be a Reason indeed for greater Care and Watchfulness; but it will not therefore follow, that what was before done was ill done, nor that we are obliged to abstain from the Sacrament for ever after. For, as I said before, if we are never to communicate 'till we can be absolutely secure of our future Conduct, we must never communicate at all.

It must be left to every Man's Conscience to apply these Rules to his own particular Case; in which there will always be need of Prudence and Caution,

and sometimes perhaps, of the Advice of some spiritual Guide. In view of this, our Church in one of her Invitations, having first recommended Self-Examination, directs the Minister to say— If there be any of you who by this Means cannot quiet his own Conscience, but requireth farther Comfort or Counsel, let him come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his Grief, that by the Ministry of God's Holy Word, he may receive the Benefit of Absolution, together with ghostly Counsel and Advice, to the quieting of his Conscience, and the avoiding of all Scruple and Doubtfulness. How little soever it may be practised at present, it is surely a very prudent Method, when Men find their Consciences perplexed with Doubts and Scruples, to consult those in whom they have Confidence and whom they may reasonably presume are qualified by their Learning and Skill to give them proper Advice. We do this in all other Cases; and if it were more frequently done in this, much Good would come of it. The Church
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of *Rome* hath carried this Point to great Abuse; and as we are ever apt to run from one Extream to another, from believing Confession to be necessary in all Cases, we are come almost to think it useful in none; to the great Hurt of Mens Consciences, and the Decay of true Religion. But as to that Part of this Order which concerns ABSOLUTION, because the true Intent of it may not, perhaps, be commonly understood, I shall take this Opportunity to give a short Account of it, that every Christian may see how much he is concerned in it.

In the primitive Church it was the Custom to separate those who by Apostasy from the Faith, or by their ill Lives, had given publick Scandal, from the Use of the Sacrament, and other Parts of the Christian Worship; and after some Time of Separation, and the proper Evidences of Repentance, to reconcile them again to the Church, upon an open Confession of their Faults. In Proceſs of Time, when Corruptions grew in the Church, open Confessions for publick Offences, were changed into private Confessions for
secret

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secret Sins; which was a very different Thing, and had very different Effects. In the first Way, Absolution was nothing more than a Releasement from Church Censures, and a Restoration of the Offender to the Privileges of visible Communion. In the second, it had the Face of a Releasement from Guilt in the Sight of God; for having no Relation to any publick Scandal given, or to any Sentence of Separation passed by the Church, it was natural to understand it as operating *internally*, in respect of Conscience. This occasioned great Licentiousness of Manners; for private Absolutions not being hard to come at, Men grew less careful to amend their Lives; and the higher the Opinion of the Sacerdotal Power grew, (as it did, by Degrees, grow to an exorbitant Heighth) the Evil became so much the worse.

Our Reformers saw an Abuse in this Change of the ancient Discipline, which they were not able to correct. But two Things they did. In the first Place, they put into the Communion Office a general Confession of Sins, and Prayer of Absolution,

lution, to serve instead of the private special Confession and Absolution, to those who could so satisfy themselves; leaving those who could not satisfy their Consciences in this Way, still at Liberty to go to the Priest for private Confession and Absolution. This appears upon the Face of the foregoing Exhortation; which is directed to those only who cannot otherwise **quiet their own Consciences**; and will be more plainly seen by a Clause in the first Book of King *Edward*, (since expunged) in which it is said, that “such
“ as should be satisfied with a general Con-
“ fession, should not be offended with
“ them that do use, to their farther satis-
“ fying the auricular secret Confession to
“ the Priest. Nor that those who thought
“ it needful for the Quietness of their
“ own Consciences, particularly to open
“ their Sins to the Priest, should be of-
“ fended with those that are satisfied with
“ their humble Confessions to God, and
“ the general Confession of the Church;
“ but in all Things follow and keep the
“ Rule of Charity.” The same Temper
is observed in the Office for the Visitation
of

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of the Sick, where, after a Declaration of Faith, the Minister is directed to *move* the sick Person *to make a SPECIAL Confession of his Sins*, IF HE FEEL HIS CONSCIENCE TROUBLED WITH ANY WEIGHTY MATTER; *after which Confession, the Priest is to absolve him*, IF HE HUMBLY AND HEARTILY DESIRE IT.

You see in both Cases, that private Confession and Absolution are left as mere discretionary Things, which both the sick Person and the Communicant are directed to use or to omit, according to the State of their Consciences; in which our Reformers did sufficiently declare their own Opinions, that there was no *Necessity* of such special Confession and Absolution, to qualify Men for the Remission of Sin. But the Liberty granted to those who might be otherwise minded, was very prudent and necessary, as Matters then stood. The Nation was but then recovering from Popery and the Popish Notion of the *Necessity* of Absolution had laid such Hold upon the Minds of many; that had not this Temper been found for
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the quieting their Consciences, the Progress of the Reformation must greatly have been obstructed. But by this Indulgence many were invited in who would otherwise probably have stood out, and Time was given for these Prejudices to wear off, as in Fact they have done since; insomuch, that (so far as I know) this Order now stands as an *useless* Part of our Liturgy; and, so long as it does stand, will be an Evidence to Posterity of the great Wisdom and Piety of our Reformers, who, in the Alterations which they made in the publick Offices, considered the Exigencies of the Times in which they lived, and ordered all Things as best served to Christian Edification.

Some, perhaps, may think that our Reformers went too far in their Compliances. In Things indifferent (it may be said) Mens Prejudices are to be indulged; but not in Things which touch the Essence of Religion, as all Opinions certainly do, which lead Men to place the Hopes of Forgiveness any where but in true Repentance. But this is not the Case here. For, in the next Place, our Reformers took Care

to inculcate, in the strongest Terms, (without any of those Softenings and Relaxations which prevailed, and do still prevail, in the Church of *Rome*) that without true, unfeigned Repentance, there can be no Remission of Sin. In the Form of Absolution in the Communion Office, it is said, “ Almighty God — who — hath
 “ promised Forgiveness of Sins to all them
 “ that with HEARTY REPENTANCE,
 “ and TRUE FAITH, turn unto him —
 “ have Mercy upon you, &c.” The same Caution is observed in the most precise Form of Absolution retained in our Church, I mean that in the Office for the Visitation of the Sick, which runs in these Words, “ Our Lord *Jesus Christ*, who
 “ hath left Power to his Church to ab-
 “ solve all Sinners WHO TRULY RE-
 “ PENT — forgive thee thine Offences,
 “ &c.” These Cautions inserted (by way of *Addition* to the Popish Form) in the very Words in which Absolution is to be pronounced, with those frequent Declarations to the same Effect, that occur throughout the whole Communion Service; are a sufficient Notice to all Men to
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place no Reliance upon the Absolution of a Priest, without Repentance and a new Life; and will fully justify our Church in the Indulgence granted to the Prejudices of those Times. For whatever Men may believe of the Necessity of Priestly Absolution, or of its internal Effects as to the Conscience of the Sinner; it is plain, that so long as they hold and firmly maintain this one Principle, that without Repentance there can be no Remission; there is nothing at all in such kind of Speculations, * that can encourage a licentious

* What the Church of *Rome* teaches of the Sacrament of Penance (whereof Absolution is the *Form*) is that by it the Benefit of Christ's Death is APPLIED to the Sinner, who thereby actually obtains Reconciliation with God, SUPPOSING him duly qualified. Vid. *Canon. Conc. Trid. Sess. 14.* How much good Sense there is in this, or whether it be true or false, are Questions foreign to our present Purpose. The Point is, Where would be the Harm supposing a Man should have a Notion of some such *internal* Effect of Absolution, as the Church of *Rome* contends for, *provided* he believes, at the same Time, that true Repentance, in the Sense in which we now understand it, is necessary to qualify him to receive the Benefit? The Sting of Absolution, which gives the fatal Stab to Religion, is the loose Manner in which the Church of *Rome* hath explained the necessary Qualifications. The Council of *Trent* itself is very faulty in this Respect; and some modern Popish Casuists have made such large Concessions, as entirely make void Repentance and good Works. Those who would be satisfied in this, may consult Mr. *Paschal's* Provincial Letters.

Way

Way of living; which should a little better have been considered by some *Preachers* † of late, who have taken a Handle from hence, to reproach the Church of *England*, as countenancing a Doctrine injurious to the Prerogative of God. A Power in the Clergy to absolve Sinners independently of Faith, or their moral Qualifications, is a Power injurious to the Prerogative of God. But a Power to declare Forgiveness upon the very Terms upon which the Gospel declares it, does not destroy the Prerogative of God, but asserts it. Such a Power the Church of *England* challenges, and such a Power there is wrapt up in the Ministerial Office.

It is not likely that the common People at that Time did, or could, enter into those Niceties which their Divines had grafted upon this Subject. The express Doctrine of the Church was, that the Absolution of a Priest was necessary to Remission. This they understood; and it is probable that most of them had been taught, that Absolution once obtained, very little else was necessary. Our Reformers took Care to set them right in this last Opinion, in which there *was* much Hurt; and left those, who could not otherwise be persuaded, in Possession of the first, in which, so far as *Religion* is concerned, there was certainly *none*. This, in my humble Opinion, was taking a prudent Course, and following the very Spirit which they professed, which was to *keep the Rule of Charity*.

† See Dr. *Hunt's* and Mr. *Burroughs's* Sermons, preached at *Salters-Hall*, in the Year 1734.

As to the *internal* Effects of Absolution, since our Church defines nothing about them, I think every Man has Reason to be satisfied that he is left quietly to enjoy his own Opinion.

2. To return to my main Subject. We have seen how the Rule of Conscience lyes as to *secret* Sins. I am next to shew what Sort of Repentance is necessary to qualify us to receive the Sacrament, in Case of *publick Scandal*; and this common Reason will tell us must be such a Repentance as ends in the Removal of the Scandal, that they who were justly offended by our ill Behaviour, may be satisfied by the Reformation of our Manners. This agrees with what is said in the Rubrick before the Communion Service; *If any be an open notorious evil liver, or have done any Wrong to his Neighbours, by Word or Deed, so that the Congregation be thereby offended; the Curate having Knowledge thereof, shall call him, and advertise him, that in any wise he presume not to come to the Lord's Table, until he hath openly declared himself to have truly repented and amended his former naughty Life, that*

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the Congregation may thereby be satisfied, which before were offended. In private Matters we have nothing to do but to satisfy God and our own Consciences; but when our Sins come to be publick and offensive, there is a Satisfaction due to the Church, which is a Party in this Case. The Acts of the Minister officiating publickly, are, interpretatively, the Acts of the Church; that is, of the Body Christian; held together, first, by the Subordination of the whole to *Christ* the Head; and then, by the Subordination of the several Members one to another, in the Manner which *Christ* hath appointed: And when the Church by her publick Officer administers the Sacrament; she, by that Act, gives publick Testimony that she accepts and acknowledges the Person as a Member of *Christ*, according to the Terms of the Gospel: Which the Church cannot consistently do when there is any *visible* Disqualification on the Part of the Receiver. If a private Person knows his Neighbour to be a grievous Sinner, and the Church, nevertheless, receives him as a Communicant; the Innocent may lawfully

fully communicate with the Guilty: Because the Authority to reject not resting in private Hands, the Act of a private Man, in such a Case, is not, by Interpretation or Construction, his Testimony. But the Church having such Authority, her Act hath the Virtue of a Testimony; and should she administer the Sacrament to notorious Sinners, she would be found a false Witness in the Sight of God.

It is upon this Principle that the Discipline of the ancient Church was founded, of which I made mention just now; which is agreeable also to Scripture Rule. For *St. Paul* says, *I have written unto you not to keep Company if any Man who is called a Brother (or who professes himself a Christian) be a Fornicator, or covetous, or an Idolater, or a Railer, or a Drunkard, or an Extortioner, with such a one no not to eat,* 1 Cor. v. 11. Such was the Religion of those Times, that he who was a Scandal to his Profession, was also a Shame to his Company; and it will not consist with common Sense to suppose that a Man should be qualified to partake with us in the Body and Blood of *Christ*,

who is not fit to sit down with us at a common Meal. The Church ought not, by so solemn and sacred an Act, to give her Testimony that a Person is qualified by the Terms of the Gospel, without a reasonable Presumption that he is so; and such a Presumption there cannot be, where a Man's Character is justly suspicious. And therefore here, if ever, we should take Care to *abstain from all Appearance of Evil*, and to *cut off* such *Occasions*, if unwarily they should be administered. We owe thus much to the Honour of God, to the Christian Society, and to ourselves. If private Persons will not pay a Regard to Conscience in such Cases, it may be difficult for the Church, in many Instances, to act properly. But every Man should consider for himself; that if he will presumptuously offer himself to receive the Communion, when he knows his Behaviour to be justly offensive, he is guilty of Profanation, and of the Scandal too.

You have now seen what those Qualifications are which are necessary to make us worthy Partakers of the Lord's Table;
and

and you learn, at the same Time, what it is to be *prepared*; for to be prepared is nothing else than to be duly qualified. Whoever *holds the Faith in a pure Conscience* is prepared for the Sacrament; and may come upon the shortest Warning that can be given. Not that I would discourage those previous, religious Exercises, which commonly pass under the Name of Preparation; but rather encourage them, when Men have Time and Opportunity for them. We cannot come to the Sacrament with too much Devotion, but it is a very easy Thing to come with too little; and therefore, if by retiring from our worldly Business for some Time before we intend to receive the Communion, and giving ourselves to Meditation and Prayer, we can quicken our Sense of Spiritual Things, such Opportunities should by no Means be neglected. But such previous Exercises as these are to be considered but as Helps, contributing to the greater Perfection of the State of Preparation, not as essential to it; nor indeed any farther useful, than as our Virtues, in their whole Extent and Compass, receive Growth and Improve-

ment from them. It may be possible for Men, by such artificial Helps, to screw themselves up into a Fit of Devotion, whilst at the same Time their Lusts remain unmortified. This is not to be prepared for the Lord's Table. The great Matter to be attended to is the general Tenor of our Lives; in which if there be an Evenness and Regularity in well doing, arising from an habitual Sense of our Duty to God, and his Mercies to us in *Jesus Christ*, a Man may be (as Bishop Fleetwood says) *about his Business on Saturday, and a good Communicant on Sunday Morning*. But let us take Heed not to come reeking from a Debauch to the Lord's Table; which is so shocking an Offence to common Decency, that whoever is capable of it has a much stronger Evidence within himself, that he is not qualified, than any Formalities of Preparation can be of the contrary.

When Men are prepared as they ought for the Lord's Table, there can be no Reason why they should not communicate *constantly*, i. e. so often as the Opportunities of doing it are ministred to them.

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These Opportunities are more or less frequent in different Places; but I hope there are not many Parishes where the Sacrament is not administered three or four Times a Year; and so often at least no Christian, I think, should dispense with himself not to communicate, without great and weighty Reasons. If we communicate oftener, it will be so much the better; for good Impressions are apt to wear off, if the Occasions of them are not frequently repeated. Perhaps nothing contributes more to Neglects of this kind than superstitious Notions about Preparation. For those who think themselves obliged every Time they come to the Lord's Table to pass through (it may be for a whole Week together) the several Stages of Self-Examination, Confession, &c. which are prescribed to them in some modern Books of Devotion, may find it to be so troublesome, that they may not have Inclination to repeat it often. And this will more especially be the Case, when through a melancholic Turn of Mind, Men cannot think themselves sufficiently prepared unless they feel Rap-

tures and Transports; to which, the more even and regular they are in their Tempers and Behaviour, the less they may find themselves disposed. There is nothing more hurtful to true Religion than this kind of Enthusiasm; which leading Men out of the plain Path of sober Reason conducted by the Word of God, teaches them to judge of themselves by I know not what *inward Feelings* and *Experiences*; whereby many are kept away from God's Ordinances who have the best Right to them, and others again are bloated with Conceit and Spiritual Pride, whilst they mistake the Boilings of an over-heated Imagination, for the Workings of the Spirit of God.

But there are others who never communicate at all, for fear that they should afterwards lapse into Sin; the Consequence of which Principle if it were right, would be, that no Man ought to receive the Sacrament but at the Point of Death; and so far some Men seem to carry it. There is this plain Evidence to shew that the Scruple is wrong, that it agrees not in Fact with the Circumstances of the Sacrament at its first Institution, nor with the Practice
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of the Church which followed upon it. For the Apostles were not dying Men, when *Christ* said *Take, eat, this is my Body*; nor were those dying Men of whom we read *Acts* ii. 42. that *they continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in Prayers*. There were some in the first Ages of Christianity, who had the same Scruple about Baptism; which, for fear of breaking their Vow, they would not receive till they were upon their Death-Beds: But the Practice was looked upon as scandalous. To the *Reason* of the Scruple I therefore thus answer: That in Cases of vowing where Men are at liberty to keep themselves free, they ought to be very secure of their future Conduct before they take the Vow upon themselves; for in such Cases the Rule holds *it is better that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay*, *Eccles.* v. 5. This is the Case of many Vows in the Church of *Rome*; as Vows of Continency, Vows of Poverty, and the like; which are very often grievous Snares upon the Consciences of Men. But this is not the Case of the
Vow

Vow of Baptism, or the Vow of the Sacrament; where the Vow itself, and the Matter of it, are both of them commanded. To receive the Sacrament is the Law of *Christ* to all who believe, and profess his Name; as believing and professing is the Law of God to all, to whom the Gospel is offer'd, and are or may be convinced by the Evidence it yields that it is of God; for he that willfully refuses God's Call, is condemned in so doing. And what do we vow when we come to the Sacrament? Why, nothing but, what we are obliged to whether we vow it or not, to *love God, and to keep his Commandments*. And therefore the Considerations of human Weakness and Frailty, are so far from being an Objection against our vowing Obedience by the Sacrament, that they are the very Reason why we ought to do it; as the Sense of the Engagement we thereby lay ourselves under, will be a Means to make us more watchful against the Temptations of the World. This, as I have shewn you above, is the proper End and Use of this Sort of Institutions; to add Weight to the natural Obligation we are under to serve
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and obey God, and to make us more diligent and industrious in our heavenly Calling. And this is all that is at any Time wanting (and for lack of which alone we miscarry) to be diligent and industrious to do our best; for God doth not expect Impossibilities. To avoid wilful deliberate Transgressions of the Law of God, or not to act against Reason and Conscience in known Cases, must be supposed to be in every Man's Power; and these alone are the Sins which will infer a Breach of Vow; for we do not vow Perfection. We do not vow never again to be overtaken by a Fault; this we cannot answer for: But we vow to be prudent and circumspect, and this we may answer for; and if we are as good as our Word, we shall not offend in any considerable Matters. And therefore when Men hang back and will not communicate for fear of breaking their Vows, it seems to betray some Consciencefulness in themselves that they mean to break them; which is a Reason against Communicating, that they do not think of. It is a *present* Disqualification; for it shews that they are not so seriously resolved against Sin as they ought to be. In

In one Word: It is idle to incur a certain Guilt by neglecting the Sacrament, thro' Fear of an uncertain one in breaking the Sacramental Vow. The Law of *Christ* is peremptory upon all Christians, *This do in Remembrance of me*; and the Breach of this Law is a certain Offence both in those who are qualified, and in those who are not. The proper Advice therefore, to the one, is, that they would lay aside their Fears; and, to the other, that they would lay aside their Sins; for whilst they are not qualified for the Lord's Table, they are not, they cannot be, qualified for the Kingdom of Heaven. That State which disqualifies for one, disqualifies for both, and would have condemned us if *Christ* had never appointed the Sacrament to be received. I blame not Men for keeping away from the Lord's Table whilst they are not qualified for it by true Repentance: But they must not imagine that because they avoid the particular Sin of receiving unworthily, therefore all Things are right with God; which yet seems to be the Mistake of many, if one might judge of their Opinions by the Ease with which they

they indulge themselves in an habitual Neglect of the Sacrament; making great Conscience not to come unqualified, but making no Conscience at all whether ever they qualify themselves or not: As if there was but one Way of offending in this Case, and it were a great Sin to communicate unworthily, no Sin not to communicate at all. This is a very partial Way of judging, and what they will not endure in any other Cases. If a Master should call his Servant to wait at his Table, and the Servant, being drunk, should refuse to come; what would a reasonable Man say? Why I suppose he would say, that the Servant did right not to come when he was not fit to appear. But it must be said withal, that the Servant ought to have kept himself sober, that he might have been in a Condition to attend upon his Master's Call. And thus it is in all Cases where Duty obliges us to do any Thing, and to do it well. We offend by not doing it at all, and we offend by doing it in an improper Manner. Rightly therefore doth our Church advise: *If any Man say,*

say, I am a grievous Sinner, and therefore am afraid to come; wherefore then do ye not repent and amend? When God calleth you, are ye not ashamed to say ye will not come? The Case is well represented in the Parable of the Supper, recorded *Matt. xxii.* which our Church, on this Occasion recommends to our Consideration. *A certain Man made a great Supper, and bad many; and sent forth his Servants to tell them that were bidden, behold I have prepared my Oxen, and my Fatlings are killed, and all Things are ready, come unto the Marriage. But they made light of it, and went their Ways, one to his Farm, another to his Merchandize.* Upon this, he was obliged to send and invite others; and when the King came in to see the Guests, he saw a Man which had not on a Wedding Garment. And what does he say to him? Why, that which God will say to every one that comes to his Table without the Qualifications of Faith and Repentance. *Friend, how camest thou in hither? What hast thou to do here who art in no Condition to appear before me? The Sentence which follows*

follows upon this Presumption is severe and dreadful; *Bind him Hand and Foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer Darknefs, there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.* This Part of the Parable then, you'll say, is Caution strong enough to keep us away from the Lord's Table, whilst we are unworthy of it. True; so it ought to be. But is not the other Part of it as good a Caution against not coming at all? For did the King excuse those who refused to come? No; he rejected them in great Displeasure. For, as St. Luke reports it, *the Master of the House was angry, and said to his Servant, Go out quickly into the Streets and Lanes of the City, and bring in hither the Poor and the Maimed, the Halt and the Blind— For I say unto you, that none of those Men which were bidden shall taste of my Supper,* Luke xiv. 21.

I have now gone through the several Parts of the Christian Worship; which you see is an open and publick Profession of our Faith in *Christ*, and a Method of Discipline preparing us for the Obedience of his Will. Now from hence give me
Leave

Leave to enforce a conscientious Observance of all Seasons set apart for religious Worship; an absolute Neglect of which is a giving up the publick Profession of Christianity, and with it Christianity itself, which will not long outlive the publick Profession of it. If *Christ* and his Apostles, having once delivered the Christian Doctrine to the World, had left it to the common Fate of Things; in all Probability, it would have been lost long before this Time: But the erecting a publick Worship upon this Doctrine, was the Way to make it perpetual. Such a publick Memorial as this, was an Instruction to the then present Generation of Men, and to the Generations that were yet to come; as *Moses* intimates in a like Case. *And it shall be, when thy Son asketh thee in Time to come, saying, What is this? That thou shalt say unto him, By Strength of Hand the Lord brought us up out of Egypt, from the House of Bondage — and it shall be for a Sign unto thee upon thine Hand, and for a Memorial between thine Eyes, that the Lord's Law may be in thy Mouth, &c. Exod. xiii. 14.*

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The most solemn Season for Religious Worship is *Sunday*, or the Lord's Day; in the Neglect of which there is a double Mischief. For Men lose the Opportunity not only of worshipping God, but also of hearing and being instructed by the Administration of his Word; which seems, from the Days of the Apostles, to have been an Appendage to the Christian Worship, as we may not obscurely gather from *Acts* xx. 7. where we read, that *upon the first Day of the Week, when the Disciples came together to break Bread, Paul PREACHED to them.* So early was this Day (which is our Lord's Day) set apart to the Uses of Religion: So early was the Practice of joining with the Worship of God, the preaching of his Word as Means co-ordinate to the same general End, the Edification of those who were already Christians. It was for this Purpose, among others, that a standing Ministry was appointed, as *St. Paul* testifies, *Eph. iv. 11, 12. He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some PASTORS and TEACHERS, for the*

perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the EDIFYING OF THE BODY OF CHRIST. Some, I know, have a low Opinion of the Work of the Ministry in this respect. The Scriptures (they will tell us) are in every one's Hands, containing an authentick Account of the Christian Doctrine, and the best Precepts for a good Life. But this is a very unreasonable Objection. It was not long that the Christian Church was without the Scriptures; and when they were published, did the Labours of the Clergy thereupon cease? No such Matter. The Scriptures were received as a standing Evidence of the Faith to all Ages; but Oral Instruction still went on, and was, as it always must be, the principal Instrument of propagating Christian Knowledge. The great Instrument by which Religion is propagated, is *Education*: And what is Education but Oral Instruction? When a Child is put to learn his Catechism; does he take his Religion from the Scriptures, or from his Parents and Governors? As Children take their Religion from their Parents, so the Parents themselves, ordinarily, take theirs
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from the Christian Ministry, to whom they are incomparably more indebted for their Knowledge in Spiritual Things, than to their private Use of the Scriptures.

To make you sensible of this, let us remove ourselves back as far as the Reformation, and see how Matters were then carried on. The Nation had long been in Bondage to the Church of *Rome*; which had sealed up the Scriptures from vulgar Use, and obtruded upon the People her own Inventions, as the Doctrines of *Christ*. Our Reformers, who meant to shake off this Yoke, began with opening the Scriptures; that all Men having the Evidence of the Faith before them, might see and judge for themselves. Suppose now, that instead of ordering a Bible to be set up in every Parish Church, they had order'd one to be sent to every Family in the Kingdom, and there had stopp'd; What would they have gained? Why just as much as if they should have sent them the Statute Book to instruct them in the Laws of the Land: Little, very little, as to the common Information; for I suppose I shall speak within Compass, when I say, that not one in a Hundred, at that Time

of Day, were able to read the Scriptures. But the main and immediate Advantage from opening the Scriptures was this, that it turn'd the Stream of the publick Instruction into its proper Channel. They who had opened the Scriptures to publick Use, on purpose to reform the Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, took Care, of Course, to frame the publick Faith according to the Scripture Model; and the Scriptures stood as a Check upon all who were disposed to adhere to the old Superstition, who could not, without exposing themselves to Scorn, any longer attempt to support a System in so many Points contradictory to the Evidences of the Faith, which every private Christian might so easily come at. What advanced the Reformation at first, was its principal Support afterwards, when the Scriptures came to be more generally read, the right Application, I mean, of the publick Instruction; without which the private Use of the Scriptures would probably have given Rise to more and greater Mischiefs than it cured. It is an Observation as old as the Scriptures themselves, that *they who*
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are unlearned and unstable wrest them to their own Destruction, 2 Pet. iii. 16. There were Corrupters of the Oral Instructions of the Apostles; and there are Corrupters too of the written Word. This is no Objection against the Scriptures; since, considering the great Variety that there is in the Tempers and Capacities of Men, it was scarce possible to give such a System of written Laws, as should be liable to no Misconstruction. But it fully shews the Use and Necessity of publick Teaching, under all the Advantages which the Scriptures yield. For where will be the End of Error and Dissension, if when Multitudes are left under the Hazard of setting out wrong, it shall be made no one's Business to direct them right? The Scriptures are, like most other Writings, so capable of different Interpretations, as to leave Room for Judgment and Choice in the Use of them; and amidst that Diversity of Opinions for which (according to the different Apprehensions of Men) the Authority of the Scriptures may be alike pretended, it will ever be a Mark of no common Skill to know how to chuse wisely.

In View of this it was that our Reformers, when they open'd the Scriptures, did not leave every Man to his own private Interpretations, without a Guide; but, together with the Scriptures, diverse Forms of Instruction were set forth by publick Authority, serving as Helps to the understanding of the Scriptures in the most necessary Points of Christian Doctrine. This was a wise and a necessary Provision; for though publick Authority is not a Law to private Judgment, it will always be of great Use to private Judgment, to have the main Traces of Religion, as they lye in the Bible, pointed out by learned and skillful Hands; which will prevent many Mistakes that would unavoidably arise, if every one, who is just able to read the Scriptures in his Mother Tongue, should be left to the Workings of his own Imagination, to frame a Religion to himself, as he should find himself able.

In this respect then the Clergy were useful Instruments in restoring and setting forwards the Knowledge of true Religion; nor were they less so by their Preaching, in which they were more constantly and
diligently

diligently exercised than had been customary in Popish Times; and by which a Foundation was laid for the mutual Improvement both of Pastors and People. For as the People by Degrees grew acquainted with the Scriptures, the Clergy were brought under a Necessity of studying them more diligently themselves; and as the Age became more knowing, the Necessity was still more urgent; and what the Consequence of this has been, we see very plainly in that great Increase of Christian Knowledge, even among the lower Sort of People, beyond what it was in the Times of Popery, or what is observable any where in Popish Countries to this Day. But it would not have been reasonable to have expected the same good Effects, if the Use of the Scriptures only had been restored, and no Care taken for the Administration of publick Instruction. The People would have been left open to their own Mistakes; and the Clergy having no Call to give publick Evidence of their Skill in the Scriptures, would few of them have taken that Pains which was necessary to qualify them to instruct them better.

Of all Arguments, Facts are the most convincing; and I chose to call in this great Example, as giving us a very sensible Proof, that the private Use of the Scriptures, and publick Instruction, are mutually helpful to each other, and best serve the Interests of Religion by a joint Application. There have been and will be at all Times, many who cannot read the Scriptures; and more who, if they can read, know not how to use them with Judgment. But supposing that all could both read and understand, Who shall secure the Scriptures from being neglected? All are in Duty bound, no doubt, to the Study of the Scriptures, in a Measure suitable to their Abilities, and the Condition in which God has placed them; and much might all improve by this Exercise, if all would do their Duties faithfully. But in Points which concern the Government of Men, we must always take our Measures from observing, what in Fact they generally are, not from what in Reason they ought to be; and in this View of the Case, pray tell me, What are those great and visible Effects from the private Use

Use of the Scriptures, that supersede the Necessity of publick Instruction? Go to the Men of Pleasure, or the Men of Business; search from the Palaces of the Great to the Cottages of the Poor, and what will you find? Why a Bible, it may be, set up in their Houses as a Piece of common Furniture, but little Use made of it, more than now and then on a *Sunday* Evening, if even this by many is not thought a great deal too much. Time was when the Scriptures were held in greater Esteem, and the reading of them was much practised in private Families; but this was whilst the Novelty of the Thing lasted. As Letters grew to be more common, and the Use of the Scriptures more general and familiar, it happened (as is usual in other Cases) that less Account was made of them. By this Time, I think, they are well nigh thrust out of Doors by a Variety of other Books, which (for the greater Part perhaps) serve more for Entertainment than Instruction. This has introduced such an Itch after Wit and Humour, and other Ornaments in Writing, that there is scarce a 'Prentice Boy
who

who can relish such plain artless Lessons as he finds in his Bible. Under such a State of the World as this, it may then reasonably be asked, How much are Mankind in general the better for the private Liberty of the Scriptures? The Bible will make us wiser, if we will read it carefully, and with Reverence, as becomes the Word of God; but if we throw it aside as Lumber, or call it in only to the Relief of a few heavy Hours, what can it profit us? Some useful Rules of Instruction we may receive; some awakening Reflections the Scriptures may administer to us, tending to encourage us in well-doing. This may be: But the Point is, What can such a careless, and as it were casual, Use of the Scriptures do towards enabling Men, without farther Help, to settle a Scheme of Religion to themselves? He that would learn Christianity from the Scriptures, must (as *St. Paul* speaks) *give himself wholly to them*. He must read them diligently, meditate upon them frequently: He must compare Place with Place, and call in the more plain and easy Passages to help out the

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the Sense of the obscure. It is not to be expected that a great many should take thus much Pains, but *some must*; and by the Labours of such it must be that others profit, who want either Abilities, or Inclination, or Opportunity, for such an Employment.

The Truth is, that Study and Meditation is a Way of Improvement for which the Bulk of Mankind are by no Means fitted. Men of Parts and Leisure may do much for themselves; but the far greater Number must have Knowledge at a more easy Rate, or they must go without it. This is not oftener a Crime than it is a Misfortune. As we have Souls to be saved, so we have Bodies to be provided for; and what can you expect from those who by their Condition are born to Labour? Is it a Time when their Children are crying for Bread, to sit themselves down to read their Bibles? God requires no such hard Measures, but hath provided for them the Ministry of his Word, by which that Spiritual Sustenance, which they are not able to gather for themselves, comes ready prepared to their
Hands,

Hands, and Millions are every Day furnished with the most useful and necessary Knowledge, who would otherwise have gone out of the World as ignorant almost as they came into it.

All this shews the great Goodness of our Saviour in appointing a standing Ministry; and the Obligation that lyes upon all Christians to attend upon their Instructions; for all may improve by it, from the greatest to the least, if they come prepared with a serious and an honest Mind. No Man should think himself so wise or so good as to be above Instruction. If Knowledge is perfect, something may be yet wanting to touch the Heart; or if we have already made a considerable Proficiency in a good Life, we may still be growing, and going on to Perfection; to which the Attendance upon Instruction will always be an useful Instrument. If we learn nothing, we may receive such Hints as will enable us to improve upon our own Stock. No Man is so much a Fool, if he talks but common Sense, but that a wise Man may be the better for him.

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I will beg Leave to add to all this, that something is due to those about us, as well as to ourselves. You, perhaps, may think your Time would be better employed by staying at Home to read the Scriptures, or some other useful Book, than by going to Church to hear a Sermon: But will not this Excuse serve your next Neighbour as well as you? Every Man stands as an Example to his Neighbour; and wise Men, above all others, are bound to make themselves Patterns of good Works, because their Examples come with a more commanding Force. So it is as to every Thing which in common Estimation passes as an Equivalent to Wisdom; as Riches, Honour, Power. Persons of Rank and Distinction may do much towards bringing Religion into Credit and Esteem; and so may Heads of Families, (who are all wise and great within their respective Spheres) if they will observe a proper Behaviour themselves. But if when the Wife and Family are sent to Church, the Master shall stay at Home, or go Abroad after his Business or Pleasures, what will be the Construction? It is an
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old Reproach upon Religion, that it is a Trick of Knaves to impose upon Fools. This Sort of Conduct places it exactly in that Light; which is not the Way to procure it Reverence, but to make it odious; and when a Contempt of Religion gets into Families, it will be very sensibly felt. I can therefore give no Account why any serious well meaning Christian should make light of attending upon the preaching of God's Word (how mean soever the Instrument may be by whom it is administered) otherwise than by saying that what some Men do through a vicious or unbelieving Mind, others are insensibly drawn into by Custom and Fashion; which shews a *Carelessness* at least about Religion that ought to be amended; for what are Customs and Fashions to a reasonable Man, when they come to interfere with the Law of God and the Duty of a Christian? Such as these should consider that they are accountable to God, not only for the Loss of the Opportunities of Improvement to themselves, but in a Degree for all the bad Effects of that Custom under which they are willing to shelter

shelter themselves: For who make Custom, but they who set the Examples? Nor are these Effects light or trivial; they are the Corruption, the Licentiousness, the Infidelity of these Times, which, as in the Beginning of them they lead Men to neglect Instruction, so they owe their Progress and chief Support to that very Neglect. Mens Vices naturally make them hate Rebuke; and when by the want of this they are put out of the Way of Thought and Reflection, they grow apace from bad to worse.

If there are any who want Instruction more than others, they are those of the younger Sort; for they are most under the Power of Temptations. Those who have had the Advantages of a sober Education may be supposed to be already furnished with such a Stock of Knowledge and Virtue as is necessary to a good Beginning. But there is a Time when every Man must be left to his own Conduct, and when it will be hazardous whether he takes safe and prudent Courses, or runs out into foolish and extravagant Ways. Suppose now a young Man sent up to Town, to
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learn a Trade or a Profession. Perhaps he may find little Regard paid to God's Worship in the Family where he lives; and he will quickly observe, as he gets more Knowledge of the World, that going to Church is grown to be an unfashionable Thing. The Consequence of this will be, that instead of spending his *Sundays* as he ought to do, and improving those good Beginnings which he brought with him from his Parents and Governors, he will make Use of those Vacations from Business to acquaint himself with bad Company, who will plunge him at once into all the Vices and Follies of the Age. And can you wonder, if after this the Man turns Unbeliever? Christianity has Evidence enough to satisfy all reasonable Men who will give themselves Leisure to consider it: But if a Man will have his Ears open to every Buffoon that scoffs at Religion, or every grave Atheist that disputes against it, and will never enter into a Church to hear it seriously and soberly defended; it will be impossible that Faith should stand its Ground. There is no Evidence for the Gospel that will
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conquer thus much Partiality, nor was it fit that there should be any such.

What is true of the publick Faith, is as true of the publick Virtue: Or if you want Conviction, look among the numerous Swarms of those about this City, who instead of repairing to their Parish Churches, spend the Lord's Day in strolling about the Fields, or in frequenting disorderly Houses, and see what Sort of Morals you will find among them. If this were a general Case, the Mischief would be general; and it is plain, that every single Man who neglects his Duty in not paying that Regard to the Religion of the Lord's Day, which, as a Christian, he is bound to pay, contributes his Share towards making it general: For if one Man may be excused, Hundreds and Thousands may be excused as well as he. Nor is the Evil likely to end in one, or in a few Instances; for evil Customs spread apace, and slide down with great Facility from the highest to the lowest Orders of Men. Custom, which all Men feel, weighs more than Reason, which few attend to; and when any Practice

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falls in with the vicious Inclinations of Men, it is Encouragement enough that their Betters do it before them.

This necessary Connexion that there is between the religious Observance of the Lord's Day and the publick Virtue, naturally brings it under the Authority of the Christian Magistrate; who has a Right to take Care of the publick Virtue, for the publick Safety's Sake. The Religion of a Country is a Country's best Security; and the Magistrate, as Christian, may, and ought to support common Morality upon Christian Principles, and by Christian Methods; which are in themselves the very best Methods he can pursue. He may therefore oblige all his Christian Subjects, under penal Laws, to join themselves with some Communion for publick Worship on the Lord's Day; and lay a Restraint upon all such Occupations, as interfere with, and draw Men off from, their Attendance upon publick Worship. This is no Encroachment upon Conscience; for every Christian may be presumed to think himself bound in Conscience publickly to
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worship God in one Communion or another: And if it is no Encroachment upon Conscience, it can be no Invasion of Civil Liberty; for Civil Liberty always is, or ought to be restrained by Conscience. Upon this Principle our Laws will be justified, which forbid Men the Exercise of their ordinary Callings on the Lord's Day; for if Tradesmen might be allowed to open their Shops, and Traffick and Commerce were to go on freely on *Sundays*, as on other common Days; it is to be apprehended that most Men would find very little Leisure to go to Church. So it is as to Pastimes and Recreations; which, therefore, Civil Laws have a Right to restrain within due Bounds; and subordinate Magistrates cannot in any Way more properly express their Concern for Religion, than in shewing a proper Regard to the Spirit and Intention of such Laws themselves, and taking Care that the Breach of them, in no remarkable Instance, be suffered to pass without Correction. It is not a proper Token of such Regard (give me Leave to say) when the Lord's Day is *singled out* for Travelling, or other secular

Employments. This is grown to be a very customary Thing; and the Consequence we may naturally expect from it is, that in a little Time we shall see common Carriers and Waggoners passing and repassing on the Lord's Day, with their Wares and Merchandizes. If this should happen; with what Decency can Magistrates interpose to correct such Disorders? It is not surely less excusable to transgress for Gain, than to offend out of mere Wantonness.

But the great Hindrances of Religious Duties, lye frequently within private Walls, where human Laws cannot reach. In these Cases, Conscience should serve instead of Law. When private *Business*, or private *Diversions*, or private *Ceremony*, are suffered (customarily) to encroach upon the Duties of the Day, all reasonable Men must condemn them as unlawful; but when the Duty of the Day is over, there are many who think that they have a Right to dispose of their Time as they please. I will not go so far as to say, that any Action, in itself innocent, is simply and absolutely unlawful on the Lord's Day; but I think that
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letting ourselves loose to Recreations of any kind that call the Mind off from all serious Thought, or border nearly upon a vicious Excess, is quite inexcusable. In the first Place, it is not safe; for Liberties grow by Indulgence, and insensibly steal up from less to greater. I may venture to say, that exposing Goods to publick Sale, is at least as innocent as some Diversions which are allowed in many Families on the Lord's Day; yet our Laws forbid it: And with Reason. Why? why because, when a Breach is once made, and an Inlet is given to Worldly Business, no one can tell where it will stop. To assign Part of the Lord's Day to Business, and Part to Religion, would be like setting up two Rival Powers; where, each industrious to enlarge its Boundaries, the stronger would, by Degrees, swallow up the weaker. We all know which draws strongest with most Men, this World or the next; and therefore the safe and prudent Way in this Case, was to suffer no Competition. It was easier and better for the Law to take away the Snare, than to watch to keep People from running into it. The

publick Wisdom in this Case, is a proper Direction for private Wisdom in like Cafes. When Recreations are apt to encroach too much; stop them in the first Instance, and you may be secure they will do no Harm. You would think it prudent to act thus in other Cafes. If a Man was afraid of the Plague; he would never suffer the infected Thing to enter into his Doors: And where, I pray, is the Hardship? Is it reasonable that Men should be debarred the Means of their necessary Sustainance for one Day in seven; and not reasonable that they should suffer the like Restraint in Matters of Recreation? It were much to be wished, that some Kinds of Diversion were less in Vogue than they are, even on common Days: But it shews a Degree of Fondness not to be justified, if we cannot forbear on such Seasons, when even commendable Employments are publick Offences, and Authority calls upon us to attend to better Things. The private Transactions of Families, as I said just now, are not within the Reach of publick Laws; but our Laws, if we will mind them, *recommend* to us the Exercise of
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the Duties of Piety, *privately* * as well as publickly. These Things may be run up to too much Preciseness, no doubt; but Prudence, under the Direction of an honest and serious Mind, will easily shew us how to make the proper Distinctions.

I do not wonder at a free Indulgence even of publick Diversions of all Kinds on the Lord's Day in Popish Countries, where People are bred up under an Opinion, that the whole Virtue of Religious Worship lyes in the naked Act of saying over so many Prayers. If this was right, the Work done, it would be of no Significancy what went before, or what follows after, supposing that Men kept themselves barely within the Bounds of Innocency. But the founder Notions which obtain in Protestant Communions, direct to a different Kind of Behaviour. We say, (and we say rightly) that outward Acts of Religion are of no Value, any farther than as they suppose an honest and a good Heart, or help to make one. If a Man says his Prayers as a Thing of Cu-

* Stat. 29. Car. II. Chap. 7. and 5 & 6. Edw: VI. Ch. 3.

from only, it is not Religion: If he receives the Sacrament often, and does not mend his Life, it will avail him nothing. Now I would ask any reasonable Man, what Construction will arise when a Person comes to Church, and brings his Family with him (perhaps) on a *Sunday Morning*; and shews by his Behaviour all the rest of the Day, that he has not one serious Thought about Religion, or any Thing that has the most distant Alliance to Religion? A Form of Religion is easily put on; what affects the Heart is not presently laid aside. If a Man worships God with Seriousness and Devotion, and comes away from Church with good Impressions on his Mind, he will find himself more disposed to go into his Closet, and, when Religion hath had its Turn, to relieve himself by sober Conversation with his Family, or with his Friend, than to sit down to a *Card Table*. And therefore to those who ask, Where is the Offence? I answer, not in the mere Act, but in the Habit, and in the Construction that hangs upon it. The Thing, you say, is lawful. Be it so. What is lawful may

not be expedient; which is always the Case, when by allowing ourselves in Things lawful, but on no Account necessary or useful, we bring our own Virtues into Question, and destroy the Force of a good Example.

In the Use of Things in themselves indifferent, Regard should always be had to the Opinions of others, so far as not to give Offence, when it may as well be avoided. At present, the Abuses I am speaking of are generally offensive to the more serious Part of this Nation, and will be so, till the Spirit of Religion is worn out among us; for the Offence is not founded in superstitious Notions, but in the Reason of Things. A serious Concern for Religion, naturally makes Men industrious to improve all Means to the best Advantage; and will not suffer them lavishly to throw away those Opportunities, which, if properly employed, would help them forward in a virtuous Life: And therefore, whenever it is observed that a Spirit of Carelessness prevails, and that Men are industrious, not to do as much, but as little as they can, to shew
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their Respect to Religion, the Presumption will lye, that the Sense of Virtue is but cold; and that whatever Forms are kept up for outward Decency's sake, there is very little of Seriousness at Heart.

When Men observe a Con-
Of FASTS. science in respect of the Duty
of the Lord's Day, it is to be
hoped that they will not think it burd-
some to pay a due Regard to other Sea-
sons appointed for the Worship of God;
the next of which are our yearly *Fasts*
and *Festivals*. These have both of them
this in common, that they are Calls to
God's publick Worship: But as our pub-
lick Fasts have this in them special, that
they are also Calls to *Religious Absti-
nence*; something I would say very briefly,
to shew how far Religion is concerned in
this Practice; that Christians may act up-
on some reasonable Principle, when they
eat, and when they abstain; when they
regard a Day, and when they *regard it
not*.

It should be observed in the first Place,
that Fasting is not a Custom peculiar to
Christi-

Christianity; for we read of it in the old Testament as well as in the new: And if we will consider the Occasions on which it was used, we shall easily discern what was proposed by it. Now this you may constantly observe: That whenever Men were in Distress; whenever they were awakened by any Accident into a Sense of their being under God's Displeasure; whenever Good seemed distant, or Evil threatened near at Hand: In a Word, whenever they stood in more than ordinary Need of the Protection of God's Providence, or the Comforts of his Grace; these were the Seasons for Fasting: Which evidently imports that *some* Virtue, *some* Efficacy, was conceived to belong to it as a Means to avert God's Anger, and to engage his Goodness on their Behalf. *Wherefore have we fasted (say the Jews) and thou seest not?* * Why were they astonished that God had not regarded their Fasting, but from a Belief that Fasting was an acceptable Service? And Reason enough was there for this Belief, supposing Fasting to have been as it ought. For the Old

* *Isaiah* lviii. 3.

Testament contains many Evidences of God's approving this Service; as in particular that well known Passage in *Joel*, Chap. i. v. 14. *Sanctify ye a Fast, call a solemn Assembly, gather the Elders, and all the Inhabitants of the Land, &c.* And that we may not think the Propriety of it to be less under the New Testament than it was under the Old, our Saviour has given Rules * about Fasting, and his Apostles practised it; of which we have a clear Instance, *Acts* xiii. 3. where it is said, that when *certain Teachers that were at Antioch*, had received a Command from the Holy Ghost to separate *Barnabas and Saul for the Work of the Ministry*, they fasted and laid their Hands on them; which was the constant Manner of commending Men to the Grace of God, on all solemn Occasions, as we may see, *Acts* xiv. 23. *St. Paul* tells us, that he was in *Fastings often*, *2 Cor.* xi. 27. and *Chap.* vi. v. 5. that he approved himself to God, among other Things, by *Fastings*. So that, upon the whole, there can be no Doubt but that to despise Fasting as a mere Supersti-

* *Matt.* vi. 16.

tion,

ion, is one Extream in this Case that ought to be avoided.

When and whence this Practice had its Beginning, it is very hard, if not impossible, to say with Certainty. It is very probable it might originally have taken its Rise, not from any divine Precept, but from the natural Correspondency it has with a State of Sorrow and Humiliation. But what is certain in this Matter is, That on the great Day of Attonement, when the Priest, once a Year, was to make a Sin-Offering for all the People; the *Jews* were expressly commanded to hold a Fast. The Law to this Purpose is to be found, *Levit. xvi. 29.* and runs in these Words. *And this shall be a Statute for ever unto you, that on the seventh Month, on the Tenth Day of the Month, ye shall afflict your Souls, and do no Work at all — For on that Day the Priest shall make an Attonement for you to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your Sins before the Lord: It shall be a Sabbath of Rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your Souls by a Statute for ever.* In this Passage the distinguishing Marks of a most solemn Fast are set down. They
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were to rest from all Manner of Labour, as on the Sabbath; and they were to abstain from Meat and Drink, and all other Pleasures whatsoever. This is signified by the Phrase, *ye shall afflict your Souls*; for *afflicting the Soul*, in the Scripture Language, signifies *Fasting and Self-Denial*, as appears from *Isaiablviii. 3. Wherefore have we fasted and thou seeest not? Wherefore have we AFFLICTED OUR SOUL, and thou takest no Knowledge?* Again, *Y 5. Is it such a Fast as I have chosen? a Day for a Man to AFFLICT HIS SOUL?* The Word *Soul*, in both these Places (as in many other Parts of Scripture) denotes the sensitive Part of Man, which is afflicted by Fasting; not the Mind, or rational Part, which is afflicted by Sorrow and Compunction; for this kind of *afflicting the Soul* (which is indeed the *Sacrifice of a broken and a contrite Heart*) God would not *have despised*. Now the *Jews* having so plain a Law for fasting on this great and solemn Occasion; it is natural to suppose that they transferred this Practice to all other Occasions, both publick and private, whenever they thought it seasonable

to humble themselves before God. And that this was proper and useful, and that God approved it, we have already shewn. But it is carefully to be observed; that under the *Jewish* Law, Fasting had not the Force and Virtue of an *Institution*, any otherwife than as it stood connected with the great Day of Attonement; because this was the only Day on which they were commanded to fast *by a Statute for ever*. Fast they might, and did, upon diverse Occasions, besides this; but as the Humiliation of such Seasons was a free and voluntary Service, so was the Fasting that attended them; insomuch, that if they had omitted Fasting on such Occasions, though their Services might have been less perfect, and therefore less effectual to the Purposes intended, yet they could not have been charged with a formal Violation of the Law of *Moses*.

This Observation will help us to determine the *Obligation* to fast, as it now stands under the Gospel Dispensation. With Fasting, considered as an *Institution* of *Moses*, it is plain we have nothing to do; Consequently, the Obligation to Fast cannot

cannot be stronger upon a Christian, than it was upon a *Jew*, with respect to those other Fastings which the *Jews* customarily observed, but which the Law of *Moses* prescribed not; unless our Saviour, by his Authority, hath made it a positive Institution; which does not seem to have been the Case. The only Place in which our Saviour hath spoken to the Point, is *Matt.* ix. 15. where the Disciples of *John* object to *Christ*, *We and the Pharisees fast OFTEN, but thy Disciples fast not.* Of what Sort of Fasting do they speak? Of their *voluntary* Fasting, no doubt; for the Law of *Moses* did not oblige them to *fast often*. Our Saviour answers, that though they did not now fast, yet the Time was coming, when they should fast. *Can the Children of the Bride-Chamber mourn, as long as the Bridegroom is with them? But the Days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.* In which Words *Christ* intimates; that as to Matters of this Kind, the Dispensation which he was come to introduce should make no Difference. As *Jews* they fasted often, and so they might

as his Disciples, when it should become seasonable so to do: Which was leaving the Practice of Fasting just as he found it, a free and a voluntary Service; to be done, or to be left undone, as the Circumstances of Times should direct; not binding it upon them as a Gospel Institution. Therefore, though it will be a culpable Omission in a Christian to neglect Fasting at proper Seasons, in Consequence of that general Obligation which all Men are under to make the best Use of the Means and Opportunities of Improvement which lye before them; and to pay due Regard to Rules appointed by the Church for Order and Edification; yet it will not be an Offence of the same Nature, as if he should neglect to receive Baptism, or to partake of the Communion of Christ's Body and Blood, when he is called upon to do it, and has no reasonable Impediment to keep him back. These are Duties strictly commanded; and with the wilful Omission of them the Obedience of a Christian cannot stand. The other is a Practice *approved* and *recommended* as useful to the Purposes of Religion; not insisted upon as a consti-

tuent Part of that Obedience which the Gospel requires as necessary to Salvation.

Let us now therefore enquire, how Fasting comes to be useful to the Purposes of Religion; or by what Virtue it is a Service acceptable to God. And here it is plain, that the Virtue lyes not in the *Work itself*: For, as moral Agents, we must be approved or disapproved of God, in Consequence of some moral Quality; but in *Fasting* (the Work only considered) there is nothing morally good, or morally evil: For, as *St. Paul* says, *Neither if we eat are we the better; neither if we eat not are we the worse. Meat, therefore, commendeth us not to God: * No more does Abstinence, considered merely as Abstinence. And this is the Nature of all external Acts of Worship whatsoever; that, considered in themselves, or separate from all Relation to something further, they are of no Value. God had commanded Sacrifices under the Law; yet to the Jews he saith, To what Purpose is the Multitude of your Sacrifices unto me? I am full of the Burnt Offerings of Rams,*

* 1 Cor. viii. 8.

and the Fat of fed Beasts; and I delight not in the Blood of Bullocks, or of Lambs, or of He Goats? The Meaning is; not that Sacrifices, absolutely, were unacceptable to God, but, that God delighted not in Sacrifices merely for the Sacrifices Sake. And how indeed should he? Think we that God eateth the Flesh of Bulls, or drinketh the Blood of Goats†? In like Manner, with respect to Fasting; God asks by the Mouth of the same Prophet, 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 like a Bull-rush, and to spread Sackcloth and Ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a Fast, an acceptable Day unto the Lord‡? God doth not condemn these outward Services; he doth not reprove them for afflicting their Souls by Abstinence and Self-Denial, nor for appearing in the Guise and Fashion of those who sorrowed, by spreading Sackcloth and Ashes under them. But he tells the Jews, that if they did this and nothing more; if they fasted and mourned, and nothing came of it; it should nothing*

* *Isaiah* i. 11. † *Psalms* l. 13. ‡ *Isaiah* lviii. 5.

avail them. What then were they to do? You have it, *Isaiab* 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.* Again; *Chap.* lviii. *ŷ* 6. *Is not this the Fast that I have chosen? to loose the Bands of Wickedness, to undo the heavy Burdens, and to let the oppressed go free.— Is it not to deal thy Bread to the hungry? — When thou seeest the Naked, that thou cover him, &c.* These are plain Descriptions of that Repentance and Righteousness towards God, which the Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testament, set forth to us as the proper Ground of our Acceptance to his Favour. So that whatever Virtue there is in Fasting, it must needs arise from some Relation it bears to Repentance and Righteousness. And it hath, whenever there is any sincere Meaning in it, *First*, the Relation of an *Evidence*, to shew the inward Sorrow of the Heart; which is precisely the Thing that avails with God. When the *Ninevites* proclaimed a Fast, upon the preaching of *Jonah*, it is said, that *God repented of the Evil that he had said*

said

said that he would do unto them, and he did it not. Why? not merely because they fasted; but because *God saw their Works, that they turned from their evil Way,* Jonah iii. 10. God wants not any outward Evidence to shew *him* how the Heart is inwardly disposed; but Men do: And therefore when National Offences call for National Humiliation, publick Fasts are highly expedient; for they are a publick Admonition, and a publick Example. *Secondly*; Fasting hath the Relation of an *Instrument*, serving to promote and help forward Repentance; and to strengthen and improve every virtuous Disposition of Mind which Repentance produceth. Virtue is properly the Work of Reason, directed by the Law of God, and supported by the Expectations of a Life to come. By how much the less therefore Reason is disturbed by Passion, by so much the more regular and certain will it be in its Operations; and Virtue not only stand more secure, but extend itself more in every Respect in which it is capable of Growth and Improvement. Now this is the proper Use of Abstinence, to *keep the*

Body under, and bring it into Subjection *, as St. Paul speaks: To withdraw that Fewel which is apt to provoke and inflame sensual Appetite; to cut off the Opportunities of Sin and Vanity; and to bring ourselves to a sober, considerate, and devout Frame of Mind; and in this View there is a great deal to be said to recommend the Practice. But if we imagine that there is in Fasting, or Austerities of any other kind, a Virtue to *atone* for past Transgressions; this is not only a foolish, but a dangerous Superstition. God hath given us (as free Agents) the Power of sinning; but when we have sinned, he hath not put it in the Power of any Creature in Heaven, or on Earth, to say what shall satisfy his offended Justice. It is his, and not ours, both to punish and to forgive Offences committed against himself; and he hath told us, that there is no *Attonement* but the Blood of *Christ*; no Means of Acceptance to the Grace offered by this *Attonement*, but sincere Repentance; which is like to go but slowly on, if Men shall once come to believe that by submitting

* 1 Cor. ix. 27.

to a certain stated Course of Discipline imposed by a Priest, or voluntarily undertaken by themselves, they *shall have Peace, though they walk in the Imaginations of their own Hearts* *.

From the whole then of what hath been said, it appears, that Religious Abstinence is a Practice very fit to be encouraged in the Christian Church. For what if our Saviour hath not bound it upon us as an indispenfible Law? Is it not enough that he hath recommended it to us as expedient in its Season; and that in the Nature and Reason of the Thing it appears to be an Instrument ferving to an holy Life? It was upon these Accounts that the Apostles took it up immediately after his Departure; and that it became a Part of the Discipline of the Church in the purest Ages (from whence it has been continued ever since) to fet apart certain Days and Seasons in the Year, as Times of Fasting; that Christians might not want frequent Calls and Admonitions to retire from the Business and Pleasures of the World, and to give themselves up to Re-

* *Deut.* xxix. 19.

ligious Exercises. It is certain that Popery has grafted many Superstitions upon this Practice; but this is not a Reason why the Practice should be laid aside. It was the Wisdom of our Reformers to distinguish the Good from the Bad; to pare off those Excrescencies which had grown out by Time, and were the Effects of a sickly and distemper'd State of Religion; but cautiously to withhold their Hands from touching any Thing, the Want of which would diminish from its Perfection and Comeliness. In this View it was, that the Order of Fasting was preserved in our Church. That it is little attended to, is owing, not to the Virtues of the Times, but, to a general Decay of Religion; a warmer Sense whereof till it shall please God to raise up among us, there can be little Hopes that Fasting will recover its ancient Esteem. Nor would I propose the Practice of the ancient Church, in all the Circumstances of it, as a Pattern for all Ages. The Abstinencies of the first Christians were frequent and severe; and it must be said, that there was great Need of them, when the Church being liable

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to constant Persecutions, an uncommon Degree of Fortitude and Mortification to the World was necessary for their Support. But if the Severities of Abstinence are not always necessary, the Thing itself will be always useful and proper, in a Degree suitable to our Conditions and Circumstances. And if so much Regard (at least) were paid to our Seasons of Abstinence (that of *Lent* in particular) that you should see Christians reserved in their Diversions, and frequent in their Attendance upon the publick Duties of Religion (which used to be the Way in more reasonable Times) as this would be shewing a decent Respect to publick Authority, so there can be no Doubt but Mankind would be considerably the better for it.

I am next to consider our yearly *Festivals*; which were taken up (as our *Fasts* originally were) from the like Usages among the *Jews*. To what Purpose, our Laws will best shew; which tells us, it was to call Men to the REMEMBRANCE — of Almighty God's great BENEFITS — And

Of FESTI-
VALS.

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in remembrance hereof, to render unto HIM most high and hearty Thanks, with Prayers and Supplications for the Relief of all our daily Necessities. It is added, That the Times appointed specially for these Works, are called HOLY DAYS—for the Nature and Condition of those HOLY WORKS wherewith God is to be honoured, and the Congregation to be edified, whereunto such Times and Days are sanctified and hallowed, that is to say, separated from all profane (or common) Uses, and dedicated and appointed NOT UNTO ANY SAINT OR CREATURE, but ONLY unto God, and his true Worship.* From these Words we may observe, that (in the Intention of our first Reformers) Holydays are not set apart in Honour of THE SAINTS, considered as Objects of Religious Adoration; but, to the Honour of GOD, whom we praise and bless for his Mercies vouchsafed to us by his Saints; whose Lives are set before us as Ensamples of Virtue and Godliness. And in this Spirit it is, that all our publick Prayers on such Occasions, are drawn up, as every

* 5. 6. *Edw.* VI. Chap. .

one must have observed, who has read over the Common-Prayer Book with an ordinary Care. Some Christians object against this, because it is not commanded. To which I answer, That a divine Precept was in no wise necessary. For in appointing Festivals, the Church only provides us with *Opportunities* for the Exercise of Publick Worship; with this Circumstance of Distinction peculiar to those Days, that our Prayers are then directed to be offered up under the special Remembrance of such Mercies, or in View of such Examples as, if consider'd, will quicken our Piety, and help to make us the better Christians. And what is there in this that Men should condemn, or which God will not approve? You will say, perhaps, that St. *Paul* blames the *Galatians* for *observing Days, and Months, and Times, and Years* *. So he does: But pray mind how this Charge is introduced. *Now after ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly Elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in Bondage?*

* Gal. iv. 10.

The observing these *Days*, and *Months*, and *Times*, and *Years*, you see, was considered by the Apostle as turning again to that State of *Bondage* from which the Gospel had set them free; *i. e.* as a turning again to *Judaism*; as appears by comparing v 3, and 5, of this Chapter; where, to be *under the Elements of the World*, (which he here calls *weak and beggarly*) and to be *under the Law*, are used as Expressions importing one and the same Thing. Therefore the Festivals, by the Observance of which they must be understood as *returning* to the Law; could not be *Christian* Festivals, but were *Jewish* Festivals. To observe a *Jewish* Festival *out of Conscience* to that Festival, was to declare the Law of *Moses* still in Force; and mixing *Judaism* with the Religion of the Gospel. This was what some Teachers pressed upon the Christians of those Times, but which the Apostle condemns as an Encroachment upon their Liberty in *Christ*. But surely the observing Days set apart in Memory of *Christ*, or in Memory of an Apostle (if there were any such Festivals of so early a Date) could not
import

import a returning to the Law; nor can any good Account be given why the Apostle should have treated them as *weak and beggarly Things*. The *Jewish Rites* were, by the Apostle, termed *weak and beggarly*, considered as appertaining to that COVENANT which was *weak and beggarly* in Comparison to that Covenant of which CHRIST was the Mediator. But a Custom borrow'd from the *Jewish Worship*, and adapted by *Christ* into his own Worship, is no longer to be consider'd as appertaining to the Oeconomy of *Moses*, but as appertaining to the Oeconomy of *Christ*. Therefore the Observance of such a Custom cannot be understood as a returning back to the Law of *Moses*; for it is observed not *as* the Law of *Moses*, but as the Law of *Christ*. I say, as the *Law of Christ*. For though *Christ* directly commanded them not, yet so long as there is in them a natural Tendency to set forward the Faith and Piety of the Gospel, and so long as they are observed not as *Jewish*, but as *useful and profitable* Customs; they are *virtually Christ's Law*, by that general Maxim of
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the Gospel (which is also a Maxim of common Sense) that *all Things* should be *done to Edification*.

No Objection then can lye against the Observation of Christian Festivals upon the foot of Scripture-Authority; nor yet upon the foot of Reason, consider'd as directing us to Things in themselves useful and profitable. But if, instead of attending to those good Effects which such Appointments ought in Reason to produce; we will consider only those bad ones of which they are many Times made the Occasion, great Prejudices may be raised against them. That our holy Seasons are, by many, turn'd into Seasons of Licentiousness and Excess, is a notorious and a shameful Truth; which gives a Handle, which those who dislike this Part of our Establishment, never fail to make the most of. But let the Objection rest, where it ought to rest; not upon the Appointments themselves, but, upon those who are guilty of such Abuses. The Case was not better among the *Jews*, who, as the Prophet complains, *rose up early in the Morning, that they might follow strong Drink,*

Drink, and continued until Night, till Wine enflamed them; and the Harp and the Viol, the Tabret and Pipe, and Wine were in their Feasts, but they regarded not the Work of the Lord, nor consider'd the Operations of his Hands *. No doubt the Wisdom of God foresaw these Abuses; and yet, these Abuses notwithstanding, he appointed them Festivals; which should have been a little better consider'd by those who have insisted upon the like Abuses among ourselves as a Reason against the Expediency or Lawfulness of our Festivals. They were not, you see, of that Weight with God; and why should they have more Weight with Men? Or what will there be left for us to do, if nothing is to be ordered which may be perverted to a wrong End? If we consider what Use Multitudes make of the Rest of the Sabbath, it must be acknowledged that they would be much better employed, if they were sent to work in the Field. Will you therefore plead that the *Lord's Day* ought to be abolished, and prescribe that all Men should be kept constantly to La-

* *Isaiab* v. 12.

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bour, in order to keep them sober? Absurd! Vacations from Labour you *must* have, whether you had Festivals, or whether you had none. If Religion had not ministred such Opportunities, Civil Policy must; for Men are not to be used worse than Beasts. Let any reasonable Man judge then which are most proper, Vacations from Labour appointed for Idleness, and Pleasure; or Vacations from Labour, appointed for the Worship of God. Whatever be the Abuses which our more solemn Festivals are subject to, no one will say that those Abuses arise from their being *religious* Festivals; or that the People are not put into a much better Way, by being call'd upon on such Seasons to the Exercises of Piety, than if, without any such Opportunities vouchsafed, they had been left to dispose of their Time (to say the least) in an *unprofitable* manner. In a few Words; as there are many who employ these Seasons ill, so there are many who spend them well; and why must good Men be deprived of any Means which tend to their Improvement in Piety and a good Life, because bad ones will

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make that bad Use of them which they generally make of every Thing else?

There is but one good Use (so far as I know) that can be made of this Objection; and that is, to shew Christians how much it concerns them to avoid those Irregularities which give so great and so just an Offence, and to improve to the utmost, the Advantages which are set before them. The Appointment of Festivals in the Christian Church is a very wise Provision, if we will make a wise Use of it; and if we will not, the Blame lyes at our Doors. A Fault there will be, when Festivals are multiplied beyond Reason and Discretion; in which respect the Church of *Rome* is much to be blamed, which by taking in such Numbers of modern Saints (many of whom were chiefly remarkable by their Zeal for the Corruptions of that Communion) have made their Festivals burdensome. Our Reformation hath lopt off these Superfluities, and left us nothing to commemorate, but what is well worth our Remembrance; some great and remarkable Occurrences, I mean, relating to the Oeconomy of *Christ* in the Flesh,

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and the Examples of Apostles or Apostolical Men, famous for the Purity of their Faith, as well as for the Constancy of their Virtue. Whether this was not to observe the golden Mean, or those are rather to be commended, who, together with the *Superstition* of Popery, have thrown out the *Piety* of the ancient Church, I shall leave all serious Christians to consider.

As the Appointment of
Of the DAILY SERVICE. Festivals in the Christian Church was a Custom borrowed from the *Jewish* Festivals; so the Appointment of our daily Service was taken from their daily Sacrifice. And a great Advantage, no doubt, it is, to have the Opportunity of worshipping God daily administered to us. For daily Worship is a daily Improvement, if we perform it with due Seriousness. I do not apprehend that in settling the daily Service, it was expected that *every* Christian should attend daily. For we have Bodies to be taken Care of, as well as Souls, to which such a Degree of Care and Application

cation is frequently necessary, as is inconsistent with a daily Attendance. In this Case we should remember what the Scripture saith, *I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*, Mat. ix. 13. — And — *If any provide not for his own, and specially those of his own House, he hath denied the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel*, 1 Tim. v. 8. But if many are born to earn their Bread by their daily Labour, there are others to whom Providence has been so indulgent as to have left them little more to do than to enjoy what the Labour of others has provided for them: And can such as these give so proper a Testimony of their Thankfulness to God, as by devoting a Share of their Time daily to his Service? I do by no Means consider Rich Men, as Men of no Business. For Wealth was never intended as a Support for Idleness, tho' that Use is too often made of it by many. The Rich Man may serve his Country as a Magistrate; his Neighbour as a Patron and Friend; and, setting these aside, there are a Variety of Avocations which attend upon large Fortunes, which may afford just and reasonable Ex-

cuses. But I confess I have no Notion, but that all, whose Conditions set them free from great Hardships, might *frequently* find Leisure to attend upon the daily Service, if they were not over-borne by evil Customs, and had not gotten a Habit of excusing themselves, by every little Pretence which offers itself as a Handle to lay hold of: As if God was never to be worshipp'd but when we can find nothing else to do! In the Concerns of this World, we act by another Spirit. In buying and in selling; in eating and in drinking; in working and in playing; in every Thing in which our Profit or our Pleasure is concerned; we are wont to use much forecast, and to take Care, so far as is possible, that each may have its proper Season, and that great Concerns may not interfere with little ones. Let us but once shew the same Discretion in the Business of our Souls, and I am greatly deceived, if in most Parishes the daily Service might not be perform'd with so much Decency at least, that when the Minister comes to do his Office, he shall not want those who will *say AMEN to his Prayers, or giving*

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of Thanks; nor seem as if he were speaking to the Walls.

I do not so much wonder at this Neglect in many Country Parishes, which consist chiefly of labouring People, from whom a daily Attendance upon the publick Worship, (as I hinted before) is not to be expected. But in large and populous Places, where Opportunities daily offer themselves, and where there are Multitudes who are forced to be at a good deal of Expence and Contrivance to find out Ways of spending their Time, it seems to be entirely without Excuse: And one cannot without Grief observe, that when all Places of Resort for Diversion and Pleasure are thronged, the Houses of God are left desolate. As this is the Effect of a great and general Corruption of Manners, so it portends the utter Ruin and Downfall of Christianity, if the good Providence of God does not signally interpose to awaken us into a more sober Sense of ourselves. It is the Business of *Infidelity* to nurse the Vices and the Follies of Men, as it is the End of the Gospel to root up and destroy them; so that in Proportion

as our Taste for Virtue and Goodness declines, we shall always be prepared to receive bad Impressions from those who are not wanting every where to insinuate irreligious Principles; which will have so much the more certain and speedy Effect, as we must be supposed, under such a State of Mind as this, to be less fortified by that *Grace* from above which is necessary to our Continuance in well-doing. The less Reverence we have for God; the less we are awed by the Dread of his Majesty, (which Principles will naturally rise or fall, as we are more diligent or more remiss in our Attendance upon Religious Duties) the less qualified shall we be to withstand Temptations of all kinds; those especially which flatter Flesh and Blood, by offering such *Systems* as loosen the Bands of Religion, and leave us more Scope and Liberty to act as we please. It is here that we are to look for the true Cause of the Growth of *Infidelity* among us; not that its Abettors have more Sense, but that we have less Virtue; not that the heavenly Seed hath less of vital Force, but that we are in no Condition to give it proper
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Nourishment. If the Husbandman will not till his Ground, what can he expect but Briars and Thorns? And what is Neglect of God's Worship but the Neglect of that which is the proper *Culture* of the Soul; that which gives it Seriousness, Resolution, Earnestness, and whatever else it be, in which the Strength of a rational Being consists? This is the great Use of Frequency in the Exercise of religious Duties, that it makes God always present to our Minds; by which every inbred Corruption is check'd in its most early Motions; every Suggestion from without, which reflects Dishonour upon the Gospel, is received with Abhorrence; so that Men can neither sin without Shame, nor be perverted without Deliberation. Whilst the Outworks are thus carefully guarded, we are secure we shall not be taken by Surprize; and we need be under no Fears about our Faith, if the Cause is to be decided in fair and open Trial. But if we throw down these Fences to our Virtue; if we dissolve in Ease and Sloth, and never think of God, and a future State, but when we cannot help it; our Adversaries

will find too easy a Conquest. For easy must be the Victory, when those who are assaulted are more than half willing to be overcome.

To conclude all; *The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom*; the first Principle of Virtue, and therefore the Foundation and *Corner-Stone* of that Happiness, present as well as future, publick as well as private, which must be raised upon, and supported by, Virtue. And since publick Worship is the great Instrument of securing that general Sense of Providence; that Knowledge of God's Will; that Remembrance of his Mercy and Goodness vouchsafed us in *Jesus Christ*; those Hopes of eternal Life, and those Fears of eternal Vengeance, which the Religion of a Christian imports; It becomes every one's Concern, as he tenders the Honour of God, and his Son *Jesus*; as he values his own Happiness; the Happiness of his Family, or the Happiness of Society; by Example, by Authority, by Instruction, by every Means which the Station and Capacity he is in, puts into his Power; to endeavour to procure it

Esteem

Esteem and Reverence. The wider its Influences reach, so much the better will Religion thrive: For all Men may, and will improve by it; the Wise and Learned, as well as the most Ignorant; the Rich, as well as the Poor. But to the latter it is more particularly necessary, who by their Condition being debarr'd almost all private Means of Improvement, must owe their Virtues chiefly to these publick Administrations. This shews of how much Consequence it is, that the People be brought up in a Liking to our publick Worship; and it shews the Advantage which the Members of the Church of *England* have above the Members of any separate Communion among us. I speak not this by way of Re-proach; but in Fact it is true, that the Church of *England* ministers more frequent Opportunities of worshipping God in publick, than any separate Congregations do; and it is a Point well worth considering, whether in judging of the Reasonableness or Unreasonableness of separating from the established Church, this Circumstance ought not to be taken into the Account? For what have the Dissenters to lay as a Balance

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to this Advantage? Our Disputes with most of them are chiefly about Forms of Discipline, and Forms of Worship; which Things indeed do affect the Decency, Regularity, and Perfection of the *outward Oeconomy* of the Church: But surely cannot stand in competition with that *Faith* and *Righteousness towards God*, to which all *Order* is subservient, and which the frequent Attendance upon God's Worship naturally helps daily to strengthen and improve. Men may work themselves up almost to any thing; and by giving way to Prejudices, contract such an Aversion to our publick Worship, as shall un sanctify their Devotions, and make them as unacceptable to God, as they are disagreeable to themselves. But this is their own Fault. Cool Reason, sound Judgment, and a diligent Trial, would soon convince them, that our Worship (contemptible as it may seem) would, if minded as it ought, minister more real and solid Benefit, than all the fancied Advantages of separate Worship, (under such a Scarcity of Opportunities) can possibly yield. The Argument would come with more Strength, as well as Decency, if we had

had it to say, that the Order of our Church is in all, or in most Places regularly observed. But allowing, (what cannot be denied) that in most Country Parishes the daily Service is seldom read; How stands the Case with Dissenters in those Places? Why, proportionably as bad. I hope there are few Parishes in which Divine Service is not perform'd, at least every Lord's Day; but it is very certain, that there are Numbers of Families, who (if they had not been taught to dislike the established Religion) would probably have gone to their Parish Church every *Sunday*, but, thro' want of Conveniency to go to a Meeting-house, seldom resort to any Place of publick Worship at all. Thus *Nonconformity* degenerates into a kind of *Heathenism*, which, if by Degrees it does not wear off a good deal of those common Notions of Religion in which Men have been bred, leaves them open to the Delusions of their own Mind, and to great Unfruitfulness in their Lives and Conversations.

I wish there was Encouragement enough to recommend the Revival of FAMILY WORSHIP; so far lost at present, that in
many

many Families it is thought a Disgrace to acknowledge God's Goodness even at those Times when they have the most sensible Experience of it, their common Meals. I should hope that no good Christian will easily fall in with this Heathenish Custom; but even in the soberest Families there is too general a Neglect of *joint Prayer*, which I look upon to be a very great Omission, and what has helped, among other Things, to bring Religion into Disesteem. Care only should be taken, when Masters of Families make it a Custom to call their Children and Servants to their daily Prayers, that there be a Consistency and Correspondency in all other Points of Behaviour; otherwise Worship degenerates into an empty Shew, and does but expose Religion to Scorn.



A
DISCOURSE
ON
S P E E C H,
AND
The ABUSES of it.



M A T T. xii. 37.

*By thy Words thou shalt be justified,
and by thy Words thou shalt be
condemned.*



HIS Passage shews in general, that Men are accountable to God for their *Words*, as well as for their *Works*; or that there are certain Rules of *speaking*, as well as acting, in which the Morality of a Christian is concerned. It is my Design, with as much Brevity as I can, to point out the distinct Boundaries of right and wrong in this Case, and the Grounds from whence the Distinction arises,

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The End of Speech cannot be mistaken. It is the Instrument whereby we communicate our Thoughts and Conceptions one to another; without which there can be no Intercourse between Man and Man, nor therefore any Society. If the Interests of Men were independent, the Communication of their Thoughts to one another would be an useless Thing; for what is it to me what the Emperor of *China*, or the *Great Mogul* think of? But if I am concerned with any Man in Trade and Commerce; if I would give Advice, or take it; if I would command where I have Authority, or obey where I am in Subjection; if in any Case I would please or profit others, or be pleased or profited by others, (and in these Things consists the whole Business of civil Life) in these Cases it is necessary, that Men should understand one another's Minds, or nothing can be done.

This shews the Obligation that every Man is under, that his Words be *true*; that is, that they truly express the Sentiments of his Mind; otherwise we do not follow the natural End and Use of Speech: For an untrue Representation of a Man's Thoughts is

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not a Representation of his Thoughts, but of something else. To tell a Lye is like putting off false or counterfeit Coin. A Brass Shilling bears the King's Image and Superscription, as a Lye bears the Image of a Man's Mind; but neither of them are the Thing they are understood to be. In both Cases there is a Fraud committed, and every Fraud is an Invasion of natural Right.

To explain this more distinctly, it is necessary to be observed, that Words have no Virtue to signify our Thoughts or Conceptions, otherwise than by some Sense affixed to them by mutual Agreement; and whenever this Agreement is common it makes a common Language. This shews that the whole moral Turpitude of a Lie rests precisely in this, that it is a Breach of Contract; for mutual Consent is a mutual Compact; and mutual Consent apart, it is plain, that there will be in Words neither Truth nor Falshood. Now if Contract *makes* Truth in Words, a Lie can be no otherwise a Lie, than as it is a Breach of Contract; nor let it therefore be esteemed a small Offence, for the observing Contracts is the first Law of Society.

There is in every Affirmation or Negation a twofold Contract: One is, that he who uses known, or common Words, will (unless it is aforehand otherwise settled by private Agreement) use them in their known, or common Acceptation; and if common Use hath affixed more Meanings to any Word than one, the Law of Truth requires, that the Speaker uses it in that Sense, in which he is conscious the Hearer will most naturally understand him; for when a Man speaks, he pretends to speak for *his* Information with whom he converses, and is by him always so understood. But if a Question, for Instance, is asked in one Sense, and the Answer be given in another, the Person is not *informed*, but *deceived*. This is what we call *Equivocation*, and it hath in it the whole Essence and Formality of a Lie.

The other Contract in every Affirmation or Negation, is, that he who speaks will declare his real Sentiments; for he pretends to do so. No Man speaks but with an Intention to be believ'd; therefore he must be understood as professing that he will declare his Mind; for if he were to profess
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eitherwise, nobody would, or could believe him. The Declaration of a Man's Mind is the Declaration either of his *Judgment*, or of his *Knowledge*, which in all Cases should be carefully distinguish'd. If a Man says *I believe*, or *I think* a Thing is so or so, he may speak Truth, tho' the Thing be otherwise; but if (in a Matter in which it may be presumed that he is a competent Judge) he says absolutely *it is* so, whilst he doubts, or even tho' he should believe it to be so, but does not know it, it is a Lie; for he pretends to speak not his Opinion or Belief, but his Knowledge.

It is farther to be observed, that to make our Words true they must fully come up to the Expectation of the Hearer, *i. e.* to what we know he expects, and what by our Discourse we are understood as taking upon ourselves to discover. As in Matters of Judgment; when a Witness is examined, what is expected from him, is, that he declares what he knows, that will help towards clearing up the Point in Question; and it is upon the Presumption of his Intention to do this, that the Judge receives his Evidence: Therefore, tho' all that he says be

true, yet if he knowingly conceals any material Thing or Circumstance he is a false Witness. That which is concealed makes that which is truly declared to become a Lie.

We see now what a Lie is, and that every Lie, as such, is morally bad; for it is a Breach of Contract. A Contract supposes the Essentials of a Contract, and this is always the Case, when Men transact together upon equal Terms. An unlawful Force may be applied to make Men speak against their Wills, as it may be applied to make them promise a Sum of Money against their Wills; but these Cases have so little to do in common Life, that they are not worth considering.

In Cases where telling a Lie is prejudicial to our Neighbour, no one doubts of its being an Offence: But when a Lie hurts nobody, (much more when it serves to some useful Purpose) there are those who think it to be no Crime. But if a Lie is bad in itself, (as has been shewn) Consequences can never make it either good, or absolutely indifferent. Place the Immorality of a Lie in any Thing but the Violation of Truth, and you will never know
where

where to fix. If a Man accustoms himself to tell Lies to make Sport, it is hard to believe him; for who knows when he means to be serious? And if there are Cases where telling a Lie is so near a-kin to nothing, that it may be suffered to pass for nothing, this will not prove it to be *right*, but *excusable* only. If a Stick be a little bent, it may as well serve the Purposes of a Stick, as if it was strait to a Mathematical Exactness: But *wrong* is *wrong*, and will be eternally so.

Things in themselves bad, are generally capable of Aggravation by Circumstances, and this is no where more evident than in the Sin of Lying. There are three Points of principal Concern, in which Truth ought most religiously to be observed. As,

1. In Matters which concern the *Credit*, or *Reputation* of another, which is sometimes his ALL. A Man that is not born to an Estate, for Instance, but must live by his Trade or Profession; what has he to trust to but the good Opinion of the World? To vilify him therefore in these Points tends to the depriving him of his
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Bread; and is, many times, a much worse Injury than stopping him upon the Highway, and taking his Purse. But how little soever Men may have need of others, they always desire to be well thought of by others, and with Reason; for a good Name makes us Friends, and Friendship is the great Sweetner of human Life. A Man without Character, if he has Justice done him, is worse than a Brute, and is seldom better treated; but there is this material Difference in their Cases, the one has Sense to feel the Contempt, the other not.

What should make us more cautious not to offend in this way, is, that when a Man's Character is once hurt, the Mischief seldom admits of a thorough Remedy. All that one can do to put a Stop to an ill Report, is to unsay what hath been said; but what will this avail, when the Report is spread far and wide? Bad Words fly apace, whilst good ones move slowly, and lag behind: Such is the ill Nature of the World! Thousands may have heard the Scandal, who will know nothing of the Retraction, or if they should know it would not believe it. Prepossession is a
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great Matter with most, and with many the first Impressions are the last too.

As to those Mischiefs which may follow from an evil Report, with respect to a Man's outward Circumstances, something may be done by way of Reparation; but the Infelicity is still the same, that if we design never so honestly to make full Amendments, we can never have the Satisfaction of being sure that we have done it. If any one steals from me, or cheats me of so much Money, he knows what he takes from me, and how much he is become my Debtor; but he that robs me of my good Name, can never make a certain Estimate how much he owes me; for who can tell with whom I may have suffered, in whose Power it is, it was, or it might have been, to do me good; or what Advantages I may have lost, which I might have had if I had been better thought of? When one Man sues another for Defamation, and recovers Damages, the Law is satisfied, but the Debt may not be satisfied. Juries can judge only by probable Circumstances, and award so much as (the Nature of the Scandal, and the Situation of the injured Person considered)

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dered) appears to them to be a reasonable Satisfaction : But the utmost Recompense that a reasonable Man will think fit to give, may fall greatly short of the real Damage sustained, which may depend upon such a Chain of unknown Causes, as will make it impossible for any Wisdom, less than infinite, to settle the Proportion with any tolerable Exactness. The relative Interests of Men are so involved a Thing, that a Change in some small Circumstance, not attended to, may quite ruin a Man's Fortunes ; just as the stopping up one little Channel may turn the whole Course of the Water which feeds a Spring, and leave it dry.

2. In *Promises* and *Contracts*, Truth should likewise strictly be observed, otherwise the whole Business of the World must stop. Every Promise or Contract is understood to convey Property ; for it is a Declaration of the Owner's Consent, which is all that is necessary to the transferring of Right. To enter into particular Cases here, would be outrunning all Bounds : I shall therefore make only this general Observation, (very necessary to be attended to

in common Life) *viz.* That a Contract whispered in the Ear, is as much binding upon Conscience as the same Engagement repeated in the Presence of a hundred Witnesses, and executed under all the Formalities of Law. If a Man gives a Promise under his Hand, what else does he do but give Proof of his Consent? If he calls in Witnesses this is not to strengthen the Obligation, (which it cannot do) but to strengthen the Evidence of the Contract. If farther, he lays himself under a Penalty, (as in case of Bonds) neither does this add any thing to the Obligation; it only offers a Pledge to enforce the Execution of a Contract already subsisting, already perfect. Forms of Law are necessary for the Methods of legal Administration; for the Law can judge of nothing without the proper Evidence of Fact, and where the Law cannot judge, the Law will yield no Remedy: But this does not destroy the Contract, for the Law does not make the Contract, but finds it; and what the Law does not make, a mere Defect in Law cannot disannul. If a Contract did therefore bind, because the Law gives Help; the
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Aid of the Law would be essential to the Contract; and if the Law refused its Aid the Obligation would be void. But on the contrary, the Law gives Help because the Contract binds, for there would be no Justice in enforcing the Execution of a mere Nullity. One Man sues another for a Sum of Money, and the Law compels him to pay it: Why does the Law compel him? Why because the Law finds it to be a just Debt. The Justice of the Debt therefore is *prior* to all Effects of the Law, and borrows nothing from it but a compulsive Force to constrain a Man to do that, which in Conscience he wou'd be bound to do, whether the Law interpos'd or not.

One might apply this Reasoning to a Variety of Cases, which daily occur, and it were much to be wish'd, that all Men would have a strict Regard to it in their Dealings one with another. If a Man executes a Bond or a Deed, which by reason of some Defect the Law makes void, he is bound *bona fide* to fulfil the Conditions. So if the Law says, that a Man shall not recover a just Debt, unless Suit be commenced in such a time, and the Creditor

suffers

suffers a Lapse; an honest Man will pay the Money: For the Design of such Laws is not to cancel just Debts, but to make the Recovery of them more safe and easy. There may be many Considerations respecting the general Ends of Society, which will make it reasonable to preclude Men from the common Benefit of the Law, but under certain Limitations by Law prescribed: But tho' such Laws may be good, they are certainly bad Men, who take Advantage from them to defraud their Neighbours. To this Purpose we may apply what St. *Paul* says, *1 Tim. i. 8. The Law is good if a Man use it lawfully.* But,

3. The Circumstance which most aggravates the Malignity of a Lie, is when it is confirmed by an *Oath*, which is the Sin of *Perjury*. A false Oath presupposes a Lie as its Foundation; for an Oath does not make any thing to be true or false, it only adds to the Bond or Obligation we are under to speak the Truth; and therefore no one can be at a Loss to know when, or in what Cases he forswears himself, if he considers, when, or in what Cases he tells

a Lie. If a Man equivocates in an Oath, if he swears to what he knows nothing of, if he swears the Truth, but not the whole Truth, he is in all these Cases forsworn; for these are but different Ways of telling Lies, as you have seen already.

And it should be observed, that a Man may be guilty of the Sin of Perjury, as well by another's Act as by his own. If by a Reward directly or indirectly offered, if by the Influence of Friendship or Authority, or by any other Means, one Man procures, or is instrumental in procuring, another to take a false Oath, both are guilty; for to be instrumental implies Consent, and to *consent* is to *do* the Thing. It may so happen, that he who is employ'd by another to take an Oath may believe the Thing he swears to be true, tho' he that employ'd him knows it to be false: In this Case Perjury falls upon the Suborner, for the other is his Organ or Instrument. If a Man could influence a *Statue* to utter a false Oath, that should serve the Ends and Purposes of an Oath, it would be Perjury.

Now let us a little consider the heinous Nature of this Sin of Perjury. : An Oath is

an Appeal to the Majesty of GOD, as Judge of the secret Thoughts and Purposes of Men's Hearts; and is in Effect, and by Construction, a Call upon him for Justice, in case we falsify in what we affirm. This is fitly expressed in that common Form of an Oath now in Use among ourselves, *So help me God, i. e.* may God so bless and prosper me, as I deal sincerely, and with Integrity in this Thing. What is this but laying ourselves under a Curse, if we deal not sincerely? And what does such an Act imply less than an absolute Contempt of the Majesty of GOD? Can such a Man be supposed to have any Conscience? Or is he fit for Society? If a Man pays no Regard to his Oaths, it is not to be presumed that he will pay a greater Regard to his bare Word, and therefore he is upon all Accounts an incompetent Witness. Do but suppose this to be a general Case, and the Consequence must be, that there can be no Administration of publick Justice. No Man is allow'd to be a Witness in his own Cause, and if there is nobody that is fit to be a Witness for him, how shall Justice be done? But if there is no Administration

of publick Justice there is no Society; for Society, in the very Notion of it, is a League operating to the Security and Protection of every Man's Rights. Perjury therefore, so far as it goes, is the Diffolution of Society; for tho' an Oath is not an infallible Evidence of a Man's Veracity, it is the strongest Pledge that human Faith can give; and if Men are not to be depended upon in what they swear to, they can be depended upon in nothing. He that will forswear himself for Hire is worse than a Highwayman, for he may do more Mischief. A Robber puts every Man upon his own Defence, and if he takes his Money leaves him in Possession at least of the legal Remedy: But against a false Witness nobody is forewarned; and the Law, which should be every Man's Defence, is itself made the Instrument of Oppression.

I have but just now observed in the Case of Lying, that if a Lie does no Hurt, many are wont to make little or no Account of it. If they should judge in the same manner with regard to Oaths, the Mischief would be still worse. Suppose, for Instance, a Man should make no Conscience
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of Custom-house Oaths, presuming it to be no Crime to cheat the Publick; or, in capital Matters, that a Witness should give a false Evidence, or a Jury bring in a Verdict against Evidence, because the Case is very unfortunate, and deserves Compassion: There would be, in this Way of judging, a double Mistake. For, in the first place, it is wrong to suppose that there is no Crime in cheating the Publick. Publick Cheats are as bad as private Cheats, for in the Event and Conclusion they are one and the same *. Nor is it more excusable in
Point

* This is easily proved; for the publick Stock is the Sum total of each Man's Allotment to the publick Charges. When every Man's Share is answerable to the Interest he has in the Society, he pays in just Proportion, and this ought always to be presumed to be the Case, when every Man pays his legal Dues; but if whilst one Man pays what the Law charges, another has (suppose) his Commodities Custom-free; he enjoys the Benefits of Society equally with other Subjects, but contributes to the Charges of it unequally, and is this common Justice? Put the Case if you please, as it concerns Companies in Trade; (for there is no Difference) All Companies are Societies, and as Societies they subsist by the Execution of common Laws, the most essential of which is, that every Man's Gains and Losses be proportional to the Share he has in the common Stock. If any one was to break in upon this Rule, and not bring to Account the whole Gains, but fraudulently secrete Part of them to his own private Use, it would be a Crime of the first Magnitude, and all Mankind would think it so; yet this is the very Case in the Matter now under Consideration; for every Shilling which one Man pays to the
publick

Point of Justice, for a Witness, or a Jurymen to be influenced by the compassionate Circumstances in any Case, to give a false Evidence, or a Verdict against Evidence; for the *Compassion* of the Case is not before them. Their Business is to do *Justice* as the Case appears, *Mercy* lyes in other Hands, upon whose Right their Act in interposing to shew Mercy is an Usurpation. But in the next place, suppose there were no Injustice in either Case, is there therefore no Perjury? Or is Perjury therefore no Sin, because it is not an Appendage to Injustice? Is an Adulterer no Sinner, because he is not a Thief? Or a Thief no Sinner, because he is not an Adulterer? If a Man were to

publick Duties is as so much Gain to the rest, because all Deficiencies which arise from private Substractions must be made good at the common Expence, in which every Particular has his Share. It is true, that what one single Man gets by such Frauds as these, may be a very Trifle when divided among the whole Community, which may be the Reason perhaps that makes them so easily pass; but cannot Men see, that if one may cheat the Publick, Hundreds or Thousands may do it, and what immense Sums such Trifles when cast up together may amount to? They can see this fast enough in all other Cases, and if all that see this would consider it as they should do, it would be impossible that dealing with common Smugglers for their uncustomed Goods, (which is making one's self accessory to Frauds of this kind, and all the Perjury that commonly attends them) should be thought so light a Matter as by many it is esteemed to be.

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give a false Oath in the most indifferent Thing in the World, it would be Perjury in all Respects full and compleat; for an Oath is a Testimony not to the Justice or Injustice of any Thing, but to the Truth of it: And if Perjury is in its own Nature a criminal Act (as undoubtedly it is) no Views which Men can propose by forswearing themselves, be they ever so just or laudable, will make it otherwise. In all Cases then, let the Truth of an Oath be religiously observed; for which there is this further Reason to be given, which every Man should well consider, *viz.* That if once he can reconcile himself to a false Oath, he has gone a great Way towards getting the better of his Conscience; for in no Instance does Conscience more strongly bind.

There are other Abuses of Speech, which have no Relation to the Truth or Falshood of our Words; as,

i. In the Matter we are now upon, that of *Oaths*. An Oath should be used not only with Truth, but with Reverence; for it is a solemn Act of Religion, as Prayer is. Prayer is an Act of Religion,

as it is an Acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty, and a Token of our Conviction, that all we have, and all we want, comes from him. An Oath carries with it the same Confession, with this Difference only, that he who prays applies to the Goodness of God to give him good Things, whilst he that swears appeals to his Justice to withhold, or take them away.

Men never shew themselves so unmindful of this, as when they get into a Habit of Swearing in their common Talk; in which there is so little of Reverence, that there is scarce any Thought or Meaning. But we are guilty of Irreverence, not only in this Case, but in all Cases where Oaths, how solemnly soever administered and taken, are made Use of to serve such Purposes as may as well be answered without them. The Use of *assertory* Oaths seems, from the very Nature of them, to be confined to such Cases only, where the Truth so much depends upon the Veracity and Credit of the Relator, that it is not otherwise possible or easy to come at it. For when a Thing is notorious, or may by other Ways sufficiently be made
appear,

appear, to what Purpose is it to swear? Agreeable to this is that Law of *Moses*, *Exod. xxii. 10. If a Man deliver unto his Neighbour an Ass, or an Ox, or a Sheep, or any Beast to keep, and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, NO MAN SEEING IT, then shall an Oath of the Lord be between them both, that he hath not put his Hand unto his Neighbour's Goods.* The Reason of the Law, you see, is founded in the want of Evidence, which if it could have been had, the Oath would have been needless. In *promissory* Oaths, by which Men engage themselves to something hereafter to be done; the Reasons for them will always be proportionable to the Opinion we have, or ought to have, of the Honesty and Integrity of the Person we have to deal with. If upon long Experience, I have always found a Man punctual to his Word, it would be impertinent to require him to confirm his Promise by an Oath. But this Rule takes Place in private Transactions only. Magistrates must proceed in another Manner; and in all Cases where Oaths are judged necessary; treat all Men alike; as if they

were suspicious, because ordinarily they are not to be supposed qualified to enter into the private Characters of Men; and Laws might easily be defeated, and many Offences would be given, if it were left in the Breasts of those who are empowered to administer Oaths for publick Uses, to make Distinctions of Persons as they should think fit. All that Law-givers have to consider is, whether an Oath, for the Matter of it, be requisite for the publick Security; and though in judging of this they may err as well as private Men, and sometimes require Oaths where they would be better spared; yet it is an Observation very proper for private Persons to take Notice of, that when a needless Oath is required by Authority, the Irreverence in such a Case is not chargeable upon him who, in Compliance with Authority, takes the Oath, but upon the Authority that imposes it. I desire not to be mistaken: I am here speaking of *unnecessary* Oaths, not of Oaths which Men cannot take without swearing against their Knowledge or Perswasion. To swear falsely no one ought, in Compliance

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ance with any Authority, for no Authority can reach so far. But when an Oath, for the Matter of it, contains nothing but what a Man may truly and honestly swear to, and the *only* Question is, Whether there are Reasons of Weight sufficient to justify the requiring such an Oath: I say, that private Persons have no Right to oppose their own Judgments to the Judgment of the Law. For private Judgment (in Things lawful, and which are of publick Concern) must give Way to the publick Judgment, or nothing can be done. This shews us then one general Rule, which if we would always follow, we should always be safe; and that is, never to use an Oath, but when we are called upon to do it by publick Authority. I do not say that an Oath is never lawful to be used in private Transactions; but there is so little Use of them in common Life, that prudent Persons may generally avoid them.

2. In Cases which concern the *Reputation* of another, Words may be culpable though they are not Lies; as in *uncharitable* Words. A Lie is when a Man

speaks against his Knowledge or Belief; but if I believe an ill Thing of my Neighbour, I am not therefore justified in reporting it; for I may be too hasty in believing it; and in that Case I am not clear of the Mischiefs which may follow to my Neighbour from my Report. To give out an ill Report hastily taken up, is not so bad as inventing or giving out a Lye; but bad it is no doubt. It is a Breach of that Charity and Tendernefs which I owe to my Neighbour's Reputation. So it may also be, even if I know the Report to be true; for there may be, sometimes, more Good done, and therefore more Charity shewn, by concealing a Man's Faults, than by making them publick. To do Mischief, merely for Mischief's sake, is spiteful and cruel; and therefore, the Question in all these Cases should be, *Cui bono?* To what End will it serve to publish my Neighbour's Faults? When a good Man is overtaken by a Fault, every one sees that it is Charity, both to him and to the Publick, not to expose him; because every Blemish in a worthy Example, takes away something from its Credit and

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Influence. And if a Man is even bad, it may be a Point sometimes worth considering, whether his Vices, or his Example, will do most Hurt. If I know a Man to be a Knave, I have a Right to warn any, whom I think fit, to beware of him; and the Ties of Friendship or Relation may, in many Cases, oblige me to it: But if his Vices concern no Body but himself; I see no Reason that can enforce or warrant the Publication of them, unless it be the Hopes of reforming him; of which private Admonition will, ordinarily, be a more likely Means; since, when Men, by being publickly exposed, have conquered their Shame, they commonly grow the more hardened.

3. Words may be *wicked*, though they are neither Lies, nor have in them the Nature of an Oath; as in profane *talking*, or *curfing*. By profane *talking* I do not mean the Discourses of serious and thinking Men, who have Difficulties about Religion, and offer their Objections in a proper Way; but rash, unseasonable, and contemptuous Speeches uttered against God, or against *Christ*, his Worship, or

his Mysteries, by Men who do not seek Information, but take a Pleasure in shewing their Disaffection to Religion. It will be granted, I suppose, by all reasonable Judges, that before any Man ventures to talk against Religion, he ought himself to have well consider'd it; for otherwise he will have no Right to the common Allowance that is due to a mistaken Judgment. And what is criminal in the first Conception, will not be less but more so, when it comes to be uttered by Words. So long as a Man keeps his Opinion to himself (be his Opinion culpable) he hurts no Body but himself; but when it is given forth in common, it becomes a common Mischief. It is, I know, a favourite Point with some, that Men are not accountable for their Opinions; but there is nothing more false: For, why are we accountable for our Actions? Is it not because they are in our Power? If then our Opinions are in our Power, we must be accountable for our Opinions; and Opinions are certainly *so much* in our Power, as it is in our Power to use or neglect the Means which are necessary to qualify us to judge well.

well. The Consequence of which is, that those who give out Speeches against Religion, founded upon Notions hastily taken up, are Offenders, both against God, and against Society; and become responsible, more or less, for every bad Effect which they may have upon weak and unstable Minds. But if Men have been ever so careful in their Enquiries, or are ever so much in earnest in their Dislike of Religion, one Rule should not be forgot, which is, never to allow themselves the Liberty of calling it in Question, but when it is seasonable to offer Reasons to support their Opinions; and then is it seasonable, when it is well understood, or there is Cause to presume, that others are disposed to give Attention to what they have to say. To condemn bluntly, and without Ceremony, what another Man holds as sacred, is rude and insolent; for to what Purpose can it serve, but to give Uneasiness? And though no Man ought to be so wedded to an Opinion, as to seal up his Ears against all Objections that may be offered in a reasonable Way; yet, surely, every Man has a Right to chuse when,
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and where, and with whom he will converse. A Man may be no Bigot, and yet not like to be call'd upon in every Coffee-House, to give an Account of his Faith; nor to have a religious Dispute obtruded upon him every Time he goes into Company, for his Business or his Recreation. This is an unreasonable Hardship; and those forward assuming Tempers, that will spare neither Time, nor Place, nor Persons, but impose upon others the disagreeable Necessity, either to defend Religion unseasonably, or else to sit still and hear it abused, should be treated as Disturbers of the Peace, and banished the Society and Conversation of Men. Much less are those to be endured who attack Religion by Ridicule, instead of Argument. Many a Man is able to talk Sense, who is not qualified to return a Joke; and why, if you will suppose him to be in the wrong, must he be treated as if he were a Fool? The only reasonable End of Religious Disputes, is Conviction; but Men are not to be convinced by Reproaches; and to laugh at Religion, is a Reproach upon all that believe it. If I cannot think

as you think, am I to be *persecuted* for it? And yet the Petulancy of some Mens Tongues is, to an ingenuous Mind, one of the worst Kinds of Persecution.

As to profane *Cursing*, the Question may be asked, Where lyes the Immorality of it? If you can suppose that a Man really means what he says, when he curses his Neighbour, the Point is decided: For he must have a very wicked Spirit; who can wish from his Heart, that the eternal Wrath of God may fall upon the Head of his fellow Creature. But I do not consider the Thing in this Light; For, in the first Place; when a Man *wishes* Damnation to his Neighbour, it must be supposed that he has great Malice against him; but Curses are often thrown out, not only where there is no Malice, but even where there is no Provocation. In the next Place; he that really wishes Damnation to his Neighbour, must be supposed to *believe* what he says, when he talks of Damnation; *i. e.* he must be supposed to believe that there is a God, and a Judgment to come: But, on the contrary, Curses generally come most plentifully from
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from the Mouths of those who have no Sense of Religion, nor ever seriously think with themselves that God will eternally punish Sinners; of which this is a most evident Proof, that it is not more familiar with such to call for Damnation upon others, than it is to call for it upon their own Souls. Can any Man do this, who believes that he has a Soul to be made happy or miserable in a future State! The Offence, therefore, which this Practice gives, and very justly gives, is, that it discovers a profligate and abandon'd Mind, which makes itself Sport with the vindictive Justice of God; which amounts, by plain and necessary Construction, to a Denial of his Being, or a Contempt of his Authority, and governing Providence. I do not say that every Curse, hastily and passionately thrown out, will justify this Construction, but a Habit of Cursing imports little less: And it is observable, in Fact, that this Practice scarce ever grows to be habitual, but in those who shew too plainly, by other Parts of their Conduct, that they have not the Fear of God before their Eyes. No one pities the Man

on whom such Curses fall, but all must detest the Wretch that utters them; who, by despising God's Judgments, sets an Example to others to despise them, and reads to every one, with whom he converses, a Lesson of Atheism.

4. Words may be culpable, as they are an Offence against *Decency*. Of this Sort are *unmannerly* Words, which, though neither false, nor malicious, nor uncharitable, nor wicked, are (constructively) a Denial of that Esteem which is due to a Man's Worth, his Station, or Character. For this Reason, they are always offensive; and, upon some Accounts, they may be reckoned, not the lowest kind of Injustice. He that cheats me, or steals from me, means not Me, but my Money; but Rudeness is an Attack upon a Man's Self; in this, worse than Slander; that whilst it charges him particularly with nothing, it leaves him open to charge himself, with every Thing he can but suspect of himself, that may render him worthy of Disesteem; which, the less Self-Confidence a Man has, the more it hurts him. Nor is there any Defence against rude

Treat-

A Discourse on SPEECH,

Treatment. One cannot avoid an unmannerly Man, as he may avoid a Knave, or a Thief. Ill Breeding is unbecoming; not scandalous. We may meet with it in most Companies; and when we do, there is no Remedy but Patience. For though there is always enough in it to make it troublesome, there is commonly too little in it to make it accountable. Ill Manners, it is true, have not always an ill Meaning, but they have always a bad Appearance; and make even what is well done, to come with an ill Grace; which spoils much of that Pleasure and Satisfaction, which Conversation, and the mutual accepting and returning good Offices, is naturally disposed to yield. But the worst kind of unseemly Discourse, is that which is lewd, wanton, or lascivious; which is so shocking to natural Bashfulness, that nothing but the very Crimes, painted out by such Discourses, can be more offensive to a virtuous Mind. Therefore as, by discovering a naughty Heart in those who make them familiar to themselves, they set forth a bad Example; so they carry with them a tacit Imputation upon those
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that hear them; and a very just one upon those who are delighted with them. There would be scarce Decency even in saying what might justly be offered in Rebuke of this filthy kind of Communication, fitter for Beasts (if they were able to speak) than for Men. Therefore I shall close this Head only by repeating St. Paul's Advice; *But Fornication, and all Unclean-ness — let not be once named among you, as becometh Saints; neither Filthiness nor foolish talking, nor jesting — For this ye know, that no Whoremonger, or unclean Person hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ, and of God, Eph. v. 3, 4.*

I have now gone through the several Abuses of Speech; and shall conclude with observing, that our Conversation will then be as it ought to be, when we shew forth those Virtues, which stand in Opposition to them. To this Purpose the same Apostle; *Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the Use of edifying, that it may minister Grace to the Hearers, Eph. iv. 29.* As Words are the Image of the Mind; and it is out of the Abundance
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of the Heart that the Mouth speaketh; the Innocency, the Benevolence, the Decency, the Seriousness, the Instructiveness of our Discourses, will be a Proof that we are possessed of every amiable Quality; according to that of St. James; If any Man offend not in Word, the same is a PERFECT Man, Jam. iii. 2.

F I N I S.











