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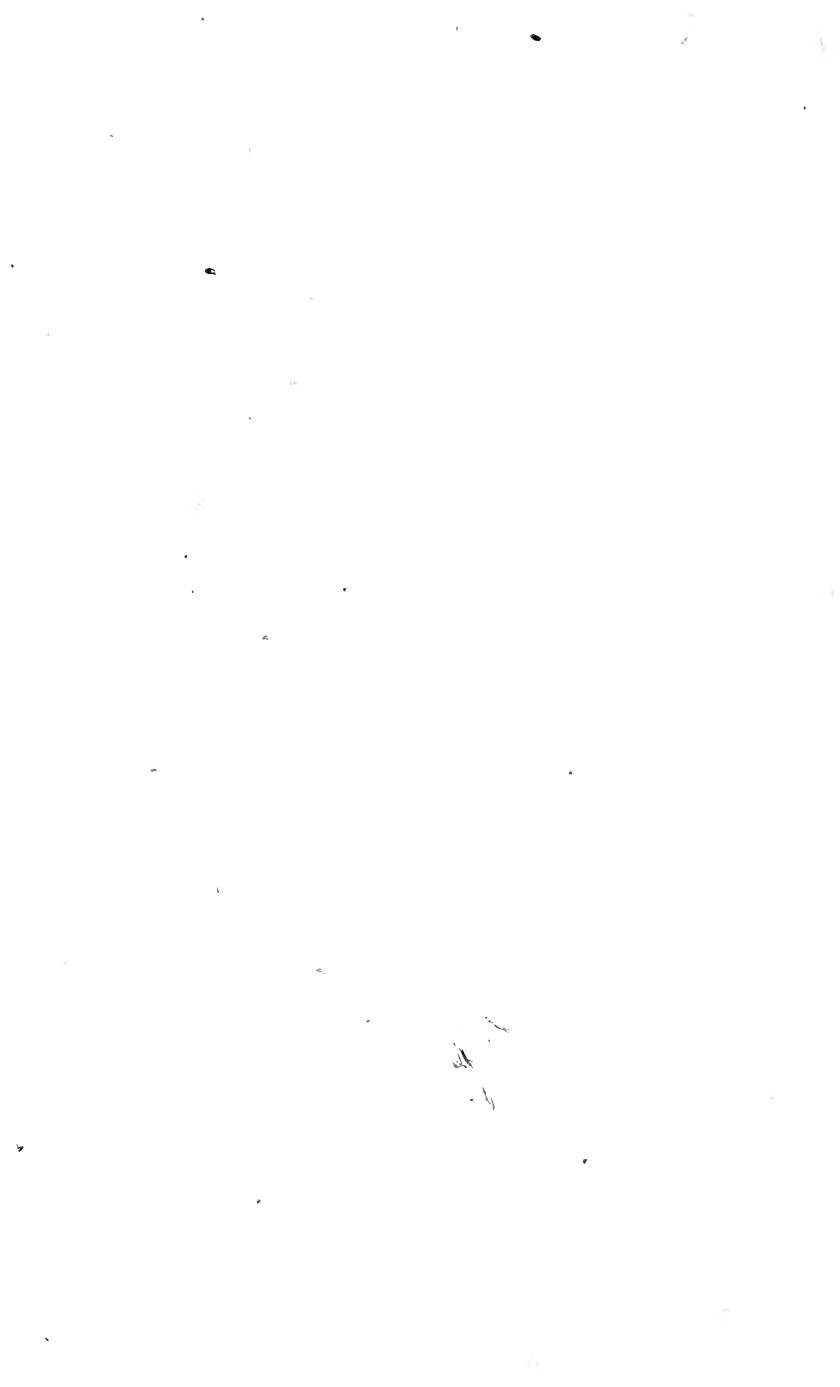
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Chas. Burnes









# DISCOURSES

CONCERNING THE

## Perfections of G o d ;

IN WHICH HIS

HOLINESS, GOODNESS,

AND OTHER

MORAL ATTRIBUTES,

Are EXPLAINED and PROVED ;

The FOUNDATIONS of true RELIGION, consisting  
in the FEAR and LOVE of GOD, in OBEDIENCE  
to, and TRUST in him, are illustrated, and  
established.

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VOLUME II.

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BY THE LATE REVEREND,  
JOHN ABERNETHY, M. A.

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## Advertifement.

**T**Hese SERMONS are published from the Author's rough draught. He had begun to transcribe them, but went no farther than the middle of the first. The reader will, no doubt, lament it, that they appear without the finishings that might have been expected from such an hand; yet it is hoped that (notwithstanding this disadvantage) they will be effectually recommended to the world, by the strength of reason, compass of thought, and propriety of sentiment that will be every where found in them.



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*Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify  
thy Name, for thou only art Holy.*

**O**F all our inquiries concerning the SERM.  
supreme Being, none are more im- I.  
portant than those which relate to   
his *moral Character*, for that is the im-  
mediate foundation of our duty to him, and  
our hopes from him. An intelligent Agent  
possess'd of an eternal immutable existence,  
almighty Power, and infinite Knowledge,  
might be an object of speculation which  
would naturally end in distrust and horror;  
but perfect rectitude, equity, and goodness,  
are considered as practical principles, which  
so determine his views and direct the mea-  
sures of his conduct towards other beings, as


SERM. to be the object of affections, which we  
 I. know are in the human mind, and of the  
 utmost consequence to its happiness; the  
 objects of reverence, esteem, love, trust and  
 a desire of imitation, This shews of how  
 great moment, and how worthy of our at-  
 tention the subject is, which we are now en-  
 tering upon, namely, the consideration of  
 God's *moral attributes*. In this discourse I  
 will endeavour, first, to shew what clear and  
 rational evidence we have of his *moral agency*  
 in general. 2dly, In what sense, and  
 with what limitations it is attributed to him.  
 3dly, To what useful purposes it may be ap-  
 plied for the forming our tempers, and go-  
 verning our practices.

First, to shew what clear and rational  
 evidence we have of God's *moral agency* in  
 general. Our idea of moral agency arises  
 from an attention to what passes in our own  
 minds. We find in our selves conscious per-  
 ception with a self determining power, and  
 affections to certain objects variously exert-  
 ing themselves, all which in some degree,  
 and within a limited sphere, seem to be com-  
 mon with us to other animals. But there is  
 in the mind of man, which the brutal na-  
 ture appears to be incapable of, a power of  
 reflecting

reflecting upon affections, its own, or those S E R M. of other agents, together with the actions I. proceeding from them, which are necessarily *approved* or *disapproved*, in other words, judged to be *good* or *evil*, and become objects of a distinct affection, that like others, is a spring of action, influencing and directing our practice. It is this that makes us moral agents, which is the most important part of our constitution. It implies not only intelligence, free agency, and direct affections to other beings, but affections arising from our reflecting upon characters, affections, and actions morally distinguish'd, that is, appearing good or evil to our minds, according to a certain invariable standard planted in them. Our highest enjoyment arises from self approbation, or a consciousness of intire moral affection, and a course of morally good action, so far as human nature can attain to it. And our most intense affection to other beings, accompanied with the greatest, the purest, the most rational pleasure we know, terminates on the same characters in them, manifested by their works.

Now, if *the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*, if from

SERM. the powers and capacities of the creatures

I.  we justly infer his existence and perfections, particularly, if the conscious intelligence and active powers of some beings form'd by him, be a proof of his own self-original intelligence and activity, may we not in like manner from the moral powers he has given to mankind and other rational creatures infer his moral agency? especially since this character necessarily appears to our minds the most excellent and amiable, and of all others the most important to a rational happiness. Is it possible for any man who believes God to be the father, the designing cause of spirits, of their intelligence, liberty, and all their other rational faculties and enjoyments, to doubt whether he himself is possess'd of intelligence, liberty, and rational enjoyment? whether since he has indued them with a power of self-reflexion, particularly, of reviewing their own affections and actions and judging concerning their rectitude, his own actions and the principles from which they proceed, be not the object of his own understanding and attention? whether having annexed the highest enjoyment to their self-approbation upon this review, and made their principal happiness to depend upon it, he

*in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.*

5

he possesses the like, or a more exalted enjoyment in the approbation of his own actions and principles of action? and this being the sum of what we mean by moral-agency, can we doubt whether God be a moral agent? SERM.  
I.

Another way of apprehending this subject, will lead us to the same conclusion. It has been prov'd, \* and must here be suppos'd, that God is the designing cause, the preserver and governor of the world and all things in it; and from the relations and correspondencies of things which he has made, and continues to uphold, we discern his particular ends. Now this implies a *Character* or a *Will*, a permanent principle determining him to act after one particular manner, rather than another. But it has been also prov'd † that morality is an eminent part of the human constitution, that is, the mind of man is so fram'd, as when it attains to the full exercise of its rational powers, to be necessarily sensible of moral obligations, and to have all the determination to satisfy them, which is consistent with the nature of such a being, and the nature of virtue itself, *i. e.* with free-agency in an imperfect state, That

\* Vol. I.

† Vol. I. Sermon. 3.

SERM. morality is of the greatest moment to the  
1. perfection and happiness of every individual,  
and the whole collective body of mankind ;  
and therefore it must be attributed to our intelligent Creator as the true cause of it, thereby intending those very ends, the perfection and happiness of our nature, which it is naturally apt to serve. If it be so, it must then, I think, be allowed a just consequence, that it is the will of God man should practise virtue and abstain from vice, or that he approves the one, and disapproves the other. Is it possible to conceive that he should not be pleas'd with his intelligent creatures acting agreeably to his own designs, voluntarily fulfilling the law of their nature, and displeas'd with their wilfully rebelling against it ? Since he has made them capable of discerning the end of his constitution, and of acting freely either in pursuance of it, or in opposition to it, to suppose that he is indifferent to their choice and to their course of action, is absurdly to suppose that he is indifferent to the intention of his own works ; indeed, to suppose such confusion and inconsistency in his counsels, as cannot be reconciled to any notions of wisdom. Inanimate things are altogether passive in fulfilling his purposes,



*in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.*

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purposes, that is, they are mov'd and dispos'd of merely by his sovereign irresistible Will. As they can never be the objects of his dislike, all the complacency he can be suppos'd to have in them, is properly no more than self-enjoyment which arises from the exercise and manifestation of his own attributes, and which in proportion to the degree of its perfections, must belong to every intelligent nature in a natural and happy state. But free agents are the proper objects of his approbation or disapprobation, according as they do or do not actively comply with his will made known to them, and with that eternal invariable reason, by which his whole administration is conducted. I believe it is scarcely in our power when we think seriously, to imagine that the most perfectly wise Being is not pleas'd with his creatures choosing to conform themselves to the wisdom of his counsels, and displeas'd with such as obstinately set themselves in opposition to his will, tho' we ought never to impute to him any thing like that passion, which in our weak minds accompanies resentment or aversion. But it may be said, that by the same reasoning, our natural actions, such as eating and sleeping, are agree-

S E R M.  
I.  


SERM. able to the will of God, because they are  
 I. the means he has appointed us to use for preserving our lives. Be it so. As natural governor of mankind, it is his will we should use the necessary means for the preservation of our lives ; as governor of moral agents, it is his will they should conduct themselves with a regard to moral deficiencies. Therefore as the governor of such agents (which relation is to us most important and comprehensive, and in it our highest interest is immediately concern'd) his character is moral, or in that respect he is a moral agent. Perhaps the clearest notion we can form of God's moral attributes is by resolving them into Benevolence, which in conjunction with infinite wisdom, will fully account for them all. As no principle of action can appear to our minds more amiable, more worthy of an absolutely perfect Being, there is none more justly attributed to the Deity, if we judge by the appearances of design and final causes in the constitution of things, and the government of the world. Now if it be allow'd that the Creator of the universe intended the most *absolute good* in the whole of his works, and particularly in the creation and government of rational beings, it will evidently follow  
 that

that his administration must be moral, or it SERM. must be so conducted as in the whole to encourage virtue, which tends to promote the most universal happiness, and discountenance vice, which is naturally productive of misery. In other words, the supreme Being is *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works*. But in whatsoever manner we endeavour to investigate a subject which is too high for our comprehension, and to range our thoughts concerning the order, connection, and dependence of the divine moral perfections, it is plain, that to the purposes of a practical application, they are to be consider'd as dispositions or principles (I do not say the same as in us, but something analogous to them and which we conceive in that manner) determining him to act according to moral differences, and with a regard to them. As inferior agents are called just and good and true, because their temper and their conduct are agreeable to the rules of righteousness, goodness, and veracity; the same characters are ascrib'd to the supreme Being and on the same account, tho' in a more exalted sense, and without any degree of imperfection. Our disposition even of the virtuous kind have their weaknesses. They  
rise

SERM. rise and fall according to the measure of our  
 I. knowledge, and the diversity of lights in  
 which the objects appear. They are some-  
 times cool'd by the influence of other affec-  
 tions and passions in our nature, and some-  
 times attended with perturbation, from  
 which and all other infirmities, the absolutely  
 perfect divine nature is wholly free. But a  
 constant, uniform, and invariable rectitude,  
 or a regard to right and moral goodness, and  
 opposition to evil or moral turpitude, is what  
 we attribute to God, and have as clear and  
 distinct ideas of it as of any perfections which  
 belong to him.

I have said that God's moral attributes are  
 dispositions or principles analagous to what  
 we call dispositions in our selves, determi-  
 ning him to act according to moral differen-  
 ces, that is, to act freely, but constantly and  
 invariably in the way which he approves,  
 in opposition to that which he does not ap-  
 prove. There must therefore, be something  
 in the divine mind which constitutes this  
 difference. Philosophers are not agreed, in  
 their opinions concerning the foundation  
 upon which the distinction made by the  
 mind of man, between moral good and evil  
 with approbation and disapprobation, is to  
 be

be explained. Whether by reducing them SERM.  
to *truth* and *falsehood*, or by a moral *fitness* I.  
and *unfitness* arising from the invariable re-  
lations of things, which necessarily appears  
to the understanding, or by an implanted  
*moral sense* which distinguishes its proper  
objects, as the external senses distinguish  
theirs. How then shall we pretend to assign  
the cause of this difference in the supreme  
mind which is so little known to us? But  
how little soever we know of God, there  
are some things which we are sure belong to  
him in common with other beings, tho' in a  
more perfect manner than as they are pos-  
sessed by them. We attribute existence to  
him as we do to the creatures, tho' his exist-  
ence has the peculiar characters of *eternal*  
and *necessary*, of which we have but very in-  
adequate Ideas. We are conscious of intelli-  
gence in our selves, and the knowledge of  
some truths, and we cannot help ascribing  
the same to the deity, notwithstanding the  
infinite disparity which there is between his  
knowledge and ours. And in like manner  
as moral powers and enjoyments are the  
greatest glory and happiness of our nature,  
we cannot avoid attributing them to him,  
tho' he possesses them in a manner which  
tran-

SERM. transcends our comprehension. If however,  
 I. we conceive benevolence in the Deity to  
 be the great, indeed the sole spring of his  
 Actions which terminate on other beings,  
 this gives a plain reason why he has an in-  
 variable regard to moral rectitude in all his  
 ways and works, namely because his perfect  
 understanding sees the necessary connection  
 it always has with the greatest Good in the  
 whole, which is his ultimate end.

Supposing our necessary discernment of  
 moral good with approbation and moral evil  
 with disapprobation, to be founded in a  
*Sense*, this being the effect of a voluntarily  
 divine Constitution, may be alledged to fur-  
 nish an objection against our inferring from  
 such a sense in us, that the same is in God  
 himself; as in a seemingly parrallel case it  
 must be acknowledged he has not such sen-  
 sible perceptions, nor pleasure and pain from  
 them, as we have by the external senses,  
 which are, equally with the moral sense, to  
 be attributed to his appointment. But be-  
 tween these two cases, however in some res-  
 pects resembling each other, there is a great  
 and manifest disparity. The external sen-  
 ses have plain marks of infirmity upon them,  
 whereby they evidently appear to be below  
 the

the transcendent excellence and perfection SERM.  
of the supreme Being. They serve only the I.  
purposes of a weak condition. They convey the notices of things (and by the frame of our bodily organs they must be very imperfect notices) to a Spirit which is nearly allied to, and depends in the exercise of its power upon a frail body. The ideas receiv'd by them are very inadequate, not true and full representations of the nature of things, but some of their qualities and effects, principally relative to the purposes of our animal constitution. And therefore they cannot, without gross absurdity, be attributed to the supreme most perfect mind, whose knowledge is independent on all occasions and events, who sees not causes by their effects, but effects in their causes. Not the external appearances only, but by immediate intuition the intimate essences of all things, and whose condition is infinitely above every kind and every degree of weakness or indigence. But on the contrary, a sense of moral rectitude, especially pure benevolence into which it may be ultimately resolved, cannot but appear to have an absolute excellence in it, worthy of the most perfect nature. Nay we cannot look upon  
any

SERM. any Agent as truly amiable without it. It

I. does not suppose the least degree of imperfection, nor is to be conceiv'd as ordain'd to a higher end; but constitutes its own chief end, is the immediate foundation of the highest enjoyment we can apprehend any intelligent nature capable of, and esteem'd by all rational beings merely for its own sake, or as some learned men speak, tho' I think not very clearly, it seems to have a necessary foundation in the eternal reason of things. And upon the whole, so much of this sense, as is engraven upon our hearts, may well be accounted the finishing part of the divine image in our nature.

What has been said may be sufficient to answer the objection, but that which was last mention'd concerning the external senses, will lead us to a distinct proof of the moral-agency and rectitude of the Deity. Tho' we cannot say, in general, that whatever sense there is in us, the same must be in God; on the contrary, whatever imperfection there is in any of our senses, it must not be attributed to him; for there is and necessarily must be an imperfection in the effect which is not in the voluntary, designing cause. Yet this must be allow'd as a true





true principle, that whatever real perfection (i. e. capacity either of communicating or enjoying happiness) there is in man or any creature, the same is in God, or a superior perfection analogous to it. And therefore it is justly infer'd even from our external senses, that since we perceive by them, which is a perfection above the state of inanimate nature, he also perceives, tho' in a manner altogether free from the weakness which belongs to our manner of perceiving *He that planted the ear shall he not hear? he that formed the eye shall he not see? he that teacheth man knowledge shall he not know?* \* that is, since God is the author of that knowledge which we have by our senses, or otherwise, whatever we can discern in our imperfect way, he knows more perfectly. In like manner the judgment of moral differences which is in the mind of man, being derived from God, the same is in him more perfectly, and moral rectitude being the highest excellence which the human nature is capable of, raising it not only above the inanimate, but all the other animal kinds, it must be in the original fountains of all excellence, without

\* Psal. xciv. 9. 10.

SERM. any of the infirmities which cleave to it  
 I. in us.



It is true, a great part of this reasoning only proves directly and immediately, that God knows and approves moral good, and disapproves moral evil; but as it is *that* which essentially constitutes moral-agency in general, it is sufficient to establish the rectitude or moral Perfections of the Deity, especially, so far as is necessary to settle in our minds a sense of indispensable moral obligations from a regard to him. Indeed in imperfect beings, mere approbation of virtue is not enough to make a virtuous character; because we know by experience, that the dispositions and practice are not always agreeable to it. Men are often hurried by irregular propensities and passions into those pursuits which are contrary to the calm dictates of their understandings, and rashly do, nay sometimes thro' the prevalence of vicious habits, continue in doing, what upon reflection their own judgments disapprove. But this can never be the case of a perfectly wise Being, infinitely above all intellectual and moral infirmities, above the possibility of being surpris'd or misled, or of any discord between his understanding and affections.

And

And therefore if God approves moral good SERM. and disapproves evil, it follows that moral <sup>1.</sup> rectitude is his true character, and the inva-  
riable principle by which his actions are di-  
rected. I proceed,

2dly, To consider in what sense, and with what limitations, moral agency is attributed to God. It is evident that the practice of virtue, and the obligation to it, differs according to the diversity of conditions where-  
in agents are placed. That may be the indis-  
pensable duty of one, which is not re-  
quired from, nor is indeed practicable by an-  
other more perfectly righteous and good be-  
ing, in circumstances intirely different. Gra-  
titude is unquestionably due to a benefactor,  
so that we can scarcely believe there is any  
goodness at all in a mind which is not dis-  
posed to make affectionate acknowledgements,  
or suitable returns for favours received. Pa-  
tience and equanimity is an important part  
of a virtuous character in distress. Absolute  
resignation to the will of a perfectly wise  
and good superior, is undoubtedly required  
from those, who being imperfect in wisdom  
and goodness, are in a state of intire subjec-  
tion to him, and necessarily depend upon him.  
But tho' all these, and others which might

SER.M. be mentioned, are eminent virtues in men, and  
 1. absolutely necessary to a good moral character, yet the obligation of them evidently arises from the imperfection and indigence of our state, to which there is nothing parallel in the infinitely perfect and independent condition of the supreme Being ; and therefore they can be no part of his moral rectitude; *Who hath given to him that he should recompence it?* None of his creatures (and all things in the world are his creatures) can be suppos'd to lay him under any previous obligations by beneficence, or to have independent rights. There is no wisdom or goodness above his own to trust in, no superior authority to which he owes submission ; he is far out of the reach of sufferings, or the least degree of unhappiness ; and therefore, the virtues which have a large share in a good human character, and indeed the greatest part of the moral system, as accommodated to our dependent and imperfect state, can have no place in the perfections of the Deity, or be any otherwise attributed to him, than as by his authority he enjoyns, and by his perfect rectitude, wisdom, and goodness, approves them. Of righteousness, as practised by him, we must form an idea, abstracting from

from all kinds of subjection or indigence as SERM.  
 much as possible ; but remembring, on the I.  
 contrary, the absolute supremacy of his do-  
 minion, the glorious immutable excellence  
 of his nature; and felicity of his condition.  
 Still, however, it ought to be received and  
 inviolably maintain'd, as a moral certain  
 principle, and of the utmost importance,  
 that he is a *moral agent, a God of truth and*  
*without iniquity, just and right is he,* act-  
 ing towards his creatures, not in the way of  
 absolute sovereignty, and arbitrary dominion,  
 disposing of them as he pleases, without any  
 regard to what is fit and reasonable, equit-  
 able and good, dispensing natural good and e-  
 vil, or happiness and misery, merely as he will,  
 not always willing, and therefore not always  
 doing, what is in itself best, and determining  
 by his sole despotic power, the measures of  
 what is called right and wrong, indepen-  
 dently on the nature and reason of things, or  
 moral fitness and unfitness ; not acting thus,  
 I say, but always and uniformly from an  
 inward principle, according to the methods  
 of moral rectitude and goodness apparent to  
 his own most perfect understanding. Upon  
 no other foundation can he appear amiable  
 to the human mind. For a sense of mo-

SERM. I. ral rectitude with high approbation is indelibly impressed upon it, and it is not possible for us to esteem any intelligent being suppos'd to be destitute of that Perfection. Religion therefore, or the practice of virtue from a regard to the Deity essentially founded in good affections to him, must rise or fall, nay it must be or not be, according to the notions we have of his moral character, and 'tis certain that nothing has so much tended to corrupt it, as men's enormous opinions concerning that article.

To form as complete a notion of this subject as the narrowness of our capacity will allow, we may reflect on the order and connection of moral qualities in the human mind, and from thence take our rise to the consideration of the same attributes in other agents endued with them, and even the supreme Being himself. We know that in ourselves there are various particular affections of the virtuous kind accompanied with approbation, such as gratitude, compassion, natural affection, &c. which are principles of self-approved action, without a design'd reference to any other principal or higher end. But there is also another principle, namely, benevolence, to which the virtuous instincts

instincts before mentioned, and others like SERM.  
them are subordinated, and the mind is justified to itself in restraining and regulating I.  
their exercise by its direction. It will appear  
at first sight to any considerate person, that  
gratitude, natural affection, and compassion,  
must give place to the greatest public good,  
or most general happiness, which is the im-  
mediate object of benevolence. This, there-  
fore, is the principal, the most comprehen-  
sive, and the controuling moral affection in  
our minds, which will be farther confirm'd,  
if we inquire into the reasons and ends of all  
the virtuous affections. If the question be,  
*why are compassion and gratitude planted in  
the human nature?* the answer is, because  
they tend to the good of the whole; but if  
it be, *Why have we universal benevolence, or  
a disposition to promote the good of the whole?*  
No answer can be given, but that so our na-  
ture is constituted, and so is the will of its au-  
thor. From this idea of our own moral  
frame, if our thoughts ascend to superior a-  
gents, and even to the eternal absolutely per-  
fect Being, as we cannot avoid apprehend-  
ing an order and connection in his moral  
attributes, we shall find ourselves led to con-  
ceive of them in the same manner. It is

SERM. no presumption to enquire into the reasons  
 I. and ends of the divine actions, since in many  
 instances he has laid them open to our inquiry, and this is a part of *what he hath shewed us, which may be known of him.* If therefore we ask, *Why has he planted kind affections in the human nature? Why has he given us excellent moral laws? Why does he often interpose to relieve the distressed? Why does he bear long with many of his offending creatures? Why does he reward virtue and punish vice?* all which belong to his moral administration, and are, in our way of thinking, refer'd to distinct moral principles or perfections in him, as beneficence, pity, long-suffering, justice. The answer to all is, that such is his conduct, because thereby he promotes in the wisest and most effectual manner, the greatest absolute good of the whole rational creation. If it be ask'd farther, *What is the reason of his acting from benevolence, and what superior end is the greatest absolute good or the most universal happiness subordinated to?* No answer can be given. Here then we must rest, and there seems to be no error in conceiving that the greatest good or most universal happiness is the ultimate end of the Deity, and pure benevolence  
 the



*in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.* [ 23

the ultimate determination (if it may be SERM.  
so called) of the divine mind. I.

From what has been said, I think, we may infer, that *benevolence*, the noblest and most excellent moral affection, is to be attributed to God in the strictest and most proper sense. Other moral principles, as justice, mercy, faithfulness, which we cannot help thinking inferior, because they ultimately refer to benevolence, and its immediate object is their last end, these we also ascribe to God, but in a more improper sense. They are so many distinct qualities or principles of action in the human mind, accompanied each of them severally with a sense of excellence and approbation, which is wisely ordered by the author of nature, to animate us to that diligence in the good works they tend to produce, which the more general calm virtuous principle would not be sufficient for without them; and because our weak understandings could not always discern the connection between them, and the ultimate end of virtuous action. But these reasons do not affect the supreme Being, and therefore there is no need of supposing distinct moral affections in him, tho' we apprehend his moral attributes in that manner,

SERM. being led to it by the analogy it bears to the  
 I. constitution of our own nature. Nor does  
 there appear any inconvenience in this way  
 of thinking, provided we preserve always in  
 our minds a just sense of the divine absolute  
 perfection, infinitely above the infirmity  
 which accompanies particular affections  
 in us. But however we distinguish, or do  
 not distinguish the perfections comprehended  
 in the moral rectitude, or holiness of the di-  
 vine nature, 'tis plain that it is not, nor can  
 be universally practised in the same way as  
 by any other being, or brought down to the  
 standard of inferior virtue. It is the rec-  
 titude of a superior in every respect, and con-  
 sists in what is more strictly call'd goodness  
 and justice, which I propose afterwards par-  
 ticularly to consider. Goodness diversified  
 in its exercise, according to the condition and  
 circumstances of the objects, comprehending  
 grace, mercy, patience, and righteousness,  
 whereby he is universally inclined to render  
 to all his rational creatures, according to their  
 works.

But the principal exercise of the divine  
 rectitude in the administration of providence,  
 as it relates to us, and which ought very  
 sensibly to affect our minds, consists in  
 what

what I have already shewn to be most di- SERM.

rectly prov'd from the law of our nature, I.

considered as a divine constitution, namely, that God approves *good* and disapproves *evil*, in the dispositions and works of his rational creatures. Tho' his actions are not to be

brought down to the standard of inferior moral agents, and their virtues suited to the im-

perfection of their state, are too low to be practis'd by him in kind; and tho' his ad-

ministration, as the supreme infinitely wise and powerful ruler, in itself exactly agree-

able to goodness and justice, and so it will appear in the last issue of things, is too

deep for our narrow understanding to comprehend, and therefore we cannot take upon

us to judge in particular circumstanc'd cases, how these perfections are to exert them-

selves, and what they require to be done: Yet this is very plain, and ought to make a


deep impression upon our minds, that the iniquities of man, and all other moral agents,

are always an abomination to him, and that *he beholds the righteous with a pleasant*


*countenance.* That as his eye is always on our behaviour, and the most secret of our

actions, even our thoughts are not hid from his view, he is not a careless indifferent

spec-


SERM. I.  spectator, but pleas'd with what we do right, and displeas'd with what we do amiss. This shews that the Omniscience of the Deity, *his searching the hearts and trying the reins of the children of men*, is not a point of meer speculation, but in conjunction with that glorious attribute of his nature, his perfect purity, his unchangeable love of righteousness, and aversion to moral turpitude, renders him the just object of our highest veneration, and makes it our most important concern to be approved by him. So it is, even abstracting from the future consequences of his favor or displeasure as our judge; for the mind of man is so fram'd, as naturally to desire the esteem of other intelligent and moral agents, and the more perfect their characters are, the more solicitous we shall be to obtain their approbation. Above all, the universal and most accurate inspection of that Being, who is perfectly free from the least moral defect, must be regarded by the mind which believes and fervently attends to it, as a powerful motive to the avoiding of all evil, and the sincere practice of every virtue. But this has still the greater force, when we consider that as the consciences of men necessarily approve the whole

whole work of God's law written in their S E R M. hearts as pure and righteous, and as this cannot but raise in us a high veneration for the lawgiver, so his inviolable regard to rectitude, which makes our conduct now the object of his special attention, gives us the greatest reason to believe he will hereafter call us to account.

I.  


It may be a very proper and useful illustration of this subject, to consider it in the light in which the scriptures set it. One great excellency of these sacred books, as a rule of religion, is, that they contain noble descriptions of the Deity, tending to form in our minds the most becoming sentiments concerning the transcendent perfection and dignity of his nature, and glory of his supreme government, and the most apt to excite in us pious and devout affections. Particularly, they represent that which I have been endeavoring to prove and to explain, his moral attributes in general, or that perfect rectitude which comprehends them all under the character of *holiness*, as the object of our highest admiration and most profound reverence, which in a peculiar sense they ascribe, nay appropriate to him, as in the text: *Who shall not fear thee, O Lord,*  
*and*


SERM. *and glorify thy Name, for thou only art Holy?*

I.  In like manner, the angels are represented in vision to the prophet *Isaiah*, as in *God's train* which filled the temple, that is, as attending in their ministry, when he reveals his will to men, and governs them according to that revelation; and on that occasion they celebrate his glory under the same denomination, as expressing the most proper idea we can have of the object of our worship, saying, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.* It is therefore the incommunicable title of the true God, denoting his incomparable moral excellence, which the prophets often gave him, *the Holy one of Israel.* Other persons, 'tis true, and even inanimate things, are called holy in scripture; but *things* are so denominated, only, because of their being used in the external religious services performed by men; and *persons* in a more proper, but far inferior sense, so that the glory of the purest and most exalted created beings is represented as sinking into nothing, when set against original and immutable holiness. *The heavens are not clean in his sight, and he chargeth his angels with folly.* But when this designation is given to God, it means that which is the principal

principal and peculiar object of reverence, SERM.  
which ought to be held sacred by all intelli- I.  
gent creatures, and claims their humble adoration on its own account, without reference to any thing else as a superior excellence, or its original pattern, and it is the universal, perfect rectitude of the divine nature.

Now the *holiness* of God, that most eminent character given him in scripture, comprehending all his moral excellencies, and proposed as the just object of our religious fear, and the perfect pattern to which we should always endeavour to conform our temper and behaviour; the *holiness* of God, I say, is celebrated as consisting in such particulars, as you will see are imported in his approbation of good, and disapprobation of evil; his moral character as it appears by the evidence of reason, consisting in an eternal distance from every kind and degree of sin and unrighteousness, in an utter abhorrence of all manner of moral impurity. *Thou art* (says the prophet) *\* of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*, that is, otherwise than with detestation, and in a constant opposition to wicked men, who continue obstinately and impeni-


\* Habb. i. 13.

SERM. tently in their wickedness. *Thou art not a*  
 I. *God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither*  
 *shall evil dwell with thee, the foolish shall not*  
*stand in thy sight, thou hatest the workers of*  
*iniquity* \*. Sin is constantly represented, as  
 that alone, which separates between God and  
 any of his rational creatures, obstructing the  
 channels of his overflowing goodness to-  
 wards them, and hindering his complacency  
 in them. Whatever benevolence and com-  
 passion he has for sinners, and indeed he has  
 shewn amazing pity to guilty mankind, no  
 consideration can reconcile him to their sins,  
 so as to give them the least degree of coun-  
 tenance or approbation ; on the contrary,  
 the scriptures constantly teach, that having  
 distinguished some of mankind by his favor,  
 and honoured them with peculiar privileges,  
 it is not the intention of his grace to indulge  
 them in any evil way ; but he has chosen  
 them for this very end, *that they should be*  
*holy, and without blame before him* †. *And*  
*if they break his statutes, and keep not his*  
*commandments, then will he visit their trans-*  
*gressions with the rod, and their iniquity with*  
*stripes* ‡. For says the prophet §, in the

\* Pf. v. 4, 5. † Eph. i. 4. ‡ Pf. lxxxix. 31, 32.  
 § Amos iii. 2.



*in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.* 31

name of God, to the *Israelites*, *You only have* SERM.  
*I known of all the families of the earth, there-* I.  
*fore will I punish you for all your iniquities.* 

Thus is he represented as acting invariably, according to the essential rectitude of his nature, pleased with moral goodness in his creatures, displeased with evil.

Above all, the Gospel, that last, and most perfect revelation of the divine will, instead of giving the professors of it any allowance to sin, because grace has abounded, (which is an injurious imputation cast upon it by ignorant and impious minds) its chief design is to establish that great principle, God's moral purity, and to manifest his abhorrence of sin, and inviolable regard to purity and virtue in his reasonable creatures. It was for this he sent his son into the world, *to turn men from their iniquities*, and reduce them to the paths of righteousness. For this the blessed *Jesus* submitted to the deepest humiliations and most grievous sufferings. *He gave himself* (as St. Paul speaks) *\* for his church, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, but that it should be holy and without blemish*, or as 'tis elsewhere

\* Eph. v. 26, 27.

expressed,

SERM. expressed, *he gave himself for us, to redeem us from our iniquities, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.*


I.

In all this he is said to have done the will of his father, and glorified him, that is restored and promoted in the world the cause of virtue and righteousness, which is the glory of God. And his life was the visible image of the divine sanctity, proposed as a familiar example to mankind, for *he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* And as christianity appears by the character of its author, and by his actions and sufferings, to be a designed evidence of the holiness of God, or of his aversion to sin, and his gracious desire to turn men from it, so the institution itself is perfectly pure, it contains the clearest and most lively descriptions of moral virtue, and the strongest motives to the practice of it. It promises, as from God, the kindest assistance to men, for making the Gospel effectual to *renew them in the spirit of their minds*, and to reform their lives by his spirit sent down from heaven, on purpose to *convince the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment.* To enlighten them who were in darkness, and turn the disobedient

*dient to the wisdom of the just, to strengthen sincere but weak converts to true religion, unto all obedience and long-suffering patience, to enable them to resist temptation, to abound in the fruits of righteousness, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.* SERM.  
I.

Thus it is plain, that it was the design of the christian religion to give all men, and all intelligent beings who should come to the knowledge of it, a convincing proof of the holiness of God ; that is, to confirm this most important and necessary truth, which the light of nature also teaches, that he is a being of the most perfect purity, who is displeased with all moral turpitude, and has an inviolable regard to virtue in his reasonable creatures. And of this we have still a farther evidence in the account which the scriptures give us of the divine judgment, or distribution of rewards and punishments, which shall be impartially rendered to all men according to their works. As the creatures who are represented as surrounding his throne, continually ministering to him, and standing before him, that is, his chief favourites, and who have the nearest admission to his blissful presence, are perfectly innocent, free from all sinful stains and de-

SERM. facts; so mankind in their lower sphere and

I.  more distant situation, are regarded by him, not according to outward considerations, such as their nations, their tribes and families, their worldly condition, for he regardeth the rich no more than the poor, the external appearance of their persons; nor yet according to their forms of devotion, and shew of religious profession (outward privileges may aggravate sins, they can atone for none) but they are only regarded by the righteous God according to the integrity of their hearts, and the goodness of their actions. In this he acts with a steady impartiality, as the apostle *Peter* excellently speaks, and agreeably to the whole tenor of the sacred writings, \* *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* And not only does the unbiased rectitude of their judge determine their condition according to their general moral character, and the general tenor of their moral actions, but the degrees of his favour and displeasure, and the effects of both, are in exact proportion to the degrees of their moral goodness or evil.

\* Acts x. 34, 35.

*in what Sense it is to be attributed to God.* 35

*The righteous are his delight, he takes pleasure* SERM.  
*in them that fear him, his eyes run to and* I.  
*fro throughout the whole earth, to shew him-*  
*self strong in the behalf of them, whose heart*

*is perfect towards him †. And he has reserved*  
*for them a great happiness to be enjoyed here-*  
*after, a crown of righteousness and glory. But*  
*that happiness shall be unequal, bearing ex-*  
*act proportion to the degrees of their virtue,*  
*and useful service in a state of trial, for he which*  
*soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully, and*  
*he that soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly†.*

On the other hand, the punishment of sinners in the future state shall also be unequal, *for that servant who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes\*.*

Thus I have shewn what evidence we have from reason of God's moral rectitude, particularly, as exercised and constantly manifesting itself towards his creatures, in his approbation of virtue and goodness, wherever it is found, and his disapprobation of the contrary. And I have also shewn, that the

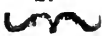
† Chron. xvi. 9. † 2 Cor. ix. 6. \* Luke xii. 47, 48.

SERM. general strain of the scripture declarations

I. upon the same subject, is exactly agreeable to this, when they represent *holiness* as the true, essential, distinguishing character of the supreme Being, the very sum of all his adorable and lovely perfections, consisting in an impartial and invariable dislike of, and opposition to all moral impurity, and his perfect complacency in the righteousness and goodness of all moral agents, and their good actions; distinguishing them by his favour, according to the measure of their real goodness. Upon which this reflection naturally arises, that as there is no doctrine of greater importance to the ends of religion and virtue, none which the human mind, upon calm and serious consideration, can more fully rest satisfied in, as in all respects worthy of the best and most excellent of all beings, the just object of their highest love and adoration, none which has a more direct tendency to excite pious and devout affections in our minds, to be the foundation of true and rational religion, and thereby promote the utmost perfection and happiness of the human nature; this, which is the peculiar glory of christianity above all other pretended revelations, justly recommends it to our esteem, and strongly supports

supports its pretences to a divine original. It SERM.  
remains now that we consider, I.

3dly, To what useful purposes this doctrine may be applied for the forming of our tempers, and governing our practice. First, the moral rectitude of the Deity intitles him to our highest esteem and veneration. The human mind is so constituted as necessarily to discern the difference between right and wrong, good and evil in the dispositions and the conduct of intelligent beings, and to distinguish them in its regards, according to that difference. If a good moral character is represented to us, abstractly, so that our private interest is not affected by it in any degree, as in a distant part of the world, or even another order of beings with whom we are not supposed to have any manner of communication, yet it will immediately appear to us amiable, nay, tho' there be an opposition of interest, and danger apprehended from it to ourselves, the heart will feel a secret veneration arise for inflexible integrity, and an unbiased impartial aversion to all moral deformity. In the imperfect measure in which this good temper discovers itself among men, it is acknowledged to merit our approbation and our praise. Superior

SERM. natures are held more venerable, because of  
I.  their greater moral perfection, not because  
of their greater power and knowledge, which,  
supposing them destitute of good moral qualities,  
would render them more detestable; and for this reason evil Dæmons are the most  
abhorred of all beings. What admiration then, and honour should we have in our  
hearts for original moral excellence, that absolutely pure and perfect being, in whose  
sight the inhabitants of heaven are not clean, because they are not immutably so  
by the independent perfection of their nature? Every agent of a limited understanding  
may possibly be misled, that is, he has no absolute security in himself against being  
drawn into erroneous opinions, and thereby into wrong actions, which diminishes our  
respect for him, in proportion to the apprehensions we have of his fallibility or liability  
to change. But the rectitude of the Deity is invariable as his essence; he is no  
more capable of being imposed on by any artifice or misrepresentation from without,  
than of changing thro' the influence of any infirmity within. This therefore challenges  
our most peculiar and superlative esteem.



*steem. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy.* SERM.  
I.

It was the great unhappiness, as well as inexcusable folly of the heathens, at least many of them, that they honoured as a sort of Deities those beings, whether real or imaginary, who were of immoral character, so that the most infamous vices among men had their patrons among the Gods. The consequence was, that as their religion corrupted their manners, (for those immoralities, from which disgrace ought to be inseparable, were held innocent, yea honourable, being attributed to the objects of adoration, thus vice took deep root and spread far and wide) so their worship itself became a poor, contemptible, and impure thing. For the spirit of the worshipper will always be suitable to the sentiments he has of his God; if they be low, corrupt and vicious, so will his temper be even in his devotion, and so in fact the religion of the Gentiles, instead of raising the minds of men to a divine temper, sunk them beneath humanity; and their rites of service were agreeable to the character of the Gods, and the spirit of the worshippers, they were not only foolish, but obscene and barbarous. But however unwilling some may

SER.M. be to own it, the generality of men in those  
 1. parts of the world where christianity is known, are indebted to it for juster notions of the Deity, and therefore a more rational worship. Not to mention its doctrines concerning his other perfections, it has particularly set us right in the great article of his moral character, continually inculcating as a truth most necessary to be believed, that he is Holy, that is, as has been already observed, averse to all kinds of moral evil, and a constant impartial lover of virtue, ready to encourage and reward it in any of his creatures. It ought to be acknowledged, that some christians have wrong ways of thinking in this point, some profess opinions inconsistent with God's universal impartial rectitude as governor of the world; opinions which represent him as ruling over mankind in an arbitrary way, partial to some, distinguishing them by his favour, and appointing them to happiness, without any consideration of their behaviour; severe against others without any regard to their demerit; as laying great stress upon trifles, offended where there is no moral impurity, as for involuntary mistakes, where there are no ill affections, or for the violation of foolish human decrees; as appeased by insignificant

significant ceremonies, without the real re-SERM.  
formation of sinners ; nay, as pleased with I.  
cruel and barbarous persecution. But these  
absurd doctrines are not chargeable on the  
rule of christianity, which, on the contrary,  
teaches that God is perfectly pure, and im-  
partially righteous in the whole of his admi-  
nistration ; and on this account claims for  
him, what our minds must confess to be due,  
our highest esteem and honour.

2dly, The firm belief of this principle,  
which I have endeavoured to prove and ex-  
plain, and a serious attention to it, must  
have the greatest influence to promote virtue  
among men, and to restrain them from all  
kinds of moral evil. For what can more  
rationally induce them to any practice, than  
that thereby they shall obtain the approba-  
tion of the supreme Being? What can be a  
more powerful dissuasive from any thing, than  
that it renders them obnoxious to his dis-  
pleasure? All the motives taken from other  
considerations relating to the Deity, his so-  
vereign dominion, his almighty power, his  
omnipresence, his perfect knowledge of our  
ways, and even our thoughts, all the mo-  
tives, I say, taken from these considerations,  
derive their force from *this*. Supposing it to  
be

SERM. be acknowledged, that he is the great ruler  
 I. of the universe, that we and all creatures are  
 absolutely subject to his disposal, and that he  
 is continually inspecting our secret purposes,  
 as well as our outward actions, what can all  
 this avail to the forming our dispositions, and  
 directing our practice, unless we know what  
 will please, and what will displease him ?  
 But if we are thoroughly convinced, that  
*the righteous Lord loveth righteousness*, and  
 wickedness is an abomination to him, then  
 every relation we bear to him and every one  
 of his perfections, joins in demanding a con-  
 formity of our tempers and our lives to his  
 essential rectitude ; and all of them taken  
 together lay us under an indispensable ob-  
 ligation, which an attentive mind cannot  
 but be sensible of. And let us still remem-  
 ber, what was observed before upon this sub-  
 ject, that even abstracting from the conse-  
 quences to ourselves, that is, the rewards  
 and punishments to be distributed by the  
 judge of our conduct, this motive duly at-  
 tended to must have a very great force.  
 The desire of honour from other intelligent  
 beings is so strong in the mind of man, a  
 sense of shame accompanies the consciouf-  
 ness of having done amiss before them, and  
 satisf-

satisfaction arises from having merited their SER M.  
esteem; this desire, I say, is so strong in I.  
the minds of men, even where the virtuous  
affections are weak, that to it principally is  
owing the decorum observed in their deport-  
ment which is open to the views of each o-  
ther, on the foundation of that sense which  
is common to them all, of moral good and  
evil. Scarcely is any one arrived to such a  
height of impudence, as not to affect secre-  
cy in his crimes, even when the fear of pu-  
nishment is laid aside. But still the more  
venerable any presence is on account of re-  
puted moral worth, the more will men be  
ashamed of base actions, and restrained from  
committing them. Now the divine presence  
ought to be, and will be, by those who firm-  
ly believe and seriously consider it, regarded  
above all others, because of absolute purity,  
and because it is universal.

*There is no darkness nor shadow of death where  
the workers of iniquity may hide themselves from  
God.* His eye pierces into the deepest soli-  
tude, and sees the secrets of all hearts; and  
there is no kind of moral turpitude which is  
not odious to him. He is partial to no cor-  
ruptions, nor can the least offence against  
perfect rectitude meet with his approbation,  
any

SERM. any more than it can escape his notice. The  
 I. most ingenuous and the most pious minds  
 are sensible of this, they feel an inward  
 shame, remembering their sinful imperfec-  
 tions and failures, which none know but  
 God and their own hearts.

Lastly, the moral perfection of the Deity  
 is the great pattern which we ought to imi-  
 tate. This is the application which the sa-  
 cred writers always direct us to make of it,  
 and the principal view with which they in-  
 sist on that important doctrine. They do  
 not teach us that God is Holy, merely as a  
 point of speculation, nor only to attract our  
 esteem and veneration to him, but chiefly  
 that we should follow his example, *and be  
 holy in all manner of conversation, as he is  
 holy.* It must be acknowledged that the me-  
 thod they take is very rational, and the mo-  
 tive they insist on very apt to work on the  
 human mind. For there seems to be natu-  
 rally in mankind a proneness to imitation,  
 which is so strong a principle of action that  
 it is exceeding difficult to resist it. Perhaps  
 there is no one greater cause of corruption in  
 morals spreading so universally, as it has been  
 known to do in some parts of the world, a-  
 gainst the dictates of reason and conscience,  
 and

and against the clearest religious instructions, S E R M.  
than that it has been recommended by some I.  
great examples, whereby the sense of its turpitude gradually wear off, till at last it is thought honorable. Now if this disposition to imitate be so strong, that by its influence example prevails, even contrary to the dictates of reason and nature, what can have a greater tendency to strengthen virtuous affections, which our minds must necessarily approve, than to set before them a perfect pattern of moral rectitude, the proper effect of which is to raise in them an ardent desire of resembling it, as far as their condition will allow? And this is the true dignity of the rational nature, which every one who partakes of it, will find an inward self applauding satisfaction in aspiring to.

If we reflect on our own constitution, and 'tis very becoming such creatures as we are to do so, there appears a great diversity in it. One part of our nature has an affinity with the inferior kinds of living creatures: We have external senses like theirs, and appetites which determine us to things necessary for the preservation of the animal life, in the same manner as they have. In some of the brutal species there are remarkable discoveries  
of

SERM. of reasoning, within a narrow sphere, and  
 I. upon objects which fall within the percep-  
 tion of their senses. 'Tis religion and vir-  
 tue which makes the distinction. There is  
 no appearance at all which leads us to ima-  
 gine that the lower kinds of animals have  
 any sense, or capacity of moral obligations.  
 Here, then, is the preeminence of man above  
 the beasts. By the body, its senses and ap-  
 petites, we are allied to them and shall pe-  
 rish like them ; but by the knowledge of  
 God and religion, by conscience, by the de-  
 vout and generous affections, and a sense of  
 the dignity and excellence which is in them,  
 we are related to superior orders of beings,  
 and even to the supreme. If this be so,  
 there needs little reasoning to shew what is  
 worthiest of a man. Whether to be like the  
 beasts, and live as if we had nothing in our  
 nature more noble than they, or to *partake*  
*of a divine nature*, and improve those powers  
 and affections wherewith our minds are in-  
 dued, so as to resemble the perfections of God.  
 Let any man who has a just value for his  
 kind, and a sense of the true dignity of hu-  
 man nature, judge then, whether this does  
 not lay him under an obligation to follow  
 holiness and virtue, which above all things  
 enobles



enobles humanity, raising it to the similitude even of the highest perfection. No creature has, or can possibly have, the least likeness to God in some of his natural attributes; but as his moral character appears to our minds infinitely amiable whenever we consider it, the capacity of imitating it, is the distinguishing excellence of intelligent natures; the actual likeness to it in virtuous dispositions and practices, is their highest glory and felicity, and every step of their progress in it, is accompanied with high self enjoyment. Thus it is evident, that as wrong notions of the deity, which have sometimes prevailed among mankind, particularly relating to his moral perfections, have, above all things, tended to corrupt men's morals, and produced very fatal effects in the world; so on the contrary, a just representation of him, as a being perfectly pure and righteous, has the greatest force, as an example, to promote universal righteousness and goodness.

'Tis certain that the highest moral rectitude of any creature comes far short of the divine, essential, and original purity. The *Lord God Almighty* and the *King of saints*, only, is holy; and the moral attainments of men

SERM. men in this imperfect state, come short of  
I. what a created nature is capable of, they  
come short of innocence or sinless perfection. Yet notwithstanding all the abatements which must be made, not only because of our natural imperfection as finite beings, but moral imperfection, having infirmities whereby we are betrayed into sinful failures, there is a real, tho' faint resemblance of the divine holiness, in the virtues of good men. And pursuant to the account which has been given of this perfection in the Deity, his image in men discovers itself by their hearty dislike of all moral turpitude, wherever it is found, whether in others or in themselves, and their sincere hatred of every false way, even of vain thoughts. And because we are always in danger of being misled, thro' the frailty of nature, and the influence of our lower appetites and passions, therefore ought we always to employ our selves in a careful vigilance, and in the exercise of a strict discipline over these sources of evil in ourselves, aspiring to a greater freedom from their power. The mind that is formed to the imitation of God, habitually inclines to good ; the remains of sin are its most grievous burden ;

A conquest over moral infirmities yields it S E R M. the most sensible pleasure, and is matter of I. secret self-applauding triumph; and it enjoys its growing liberty with sincere delight. The natural fruit of this disposition will be a resolved abstaining from sin in practice, for no man can be supposed frequently, and of choice, to do what he sincerely hates. Therefore nothing can be more vain than a pretence of holiness in heart, and an abhorrence of sin, which is not justified by a regular conversation.

Tho' it is not to be expected we should attain to the perfection of innocence in this world, yet it is the disposition of those who *follow God as dear children*, and keep his purity always in view as their pattern, to contend for it with ardent desire and constant endeavour, pressing on unwearied in the paths of virtue, and zealously opposing every kind of evil which they are tempted to. Again, the imitation of the divine rectitude will direct us to an abhorrence of all vicious characters, and to an high esteem of all good men. An universal benevolence to mankind, even the worst of them, and a disposition to do them kind offices, such as their condition requires, or renders them capable of, is a

SERM. God-like temper ; but so is a peculiar distinguishing esteem for good men, according to the measure of their goodness, and an impartial aversion to obstinate, irreclaimable iniquity, wherever it appears. As the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and is angry with the wicked every day, so his sincere worshippers follow his example, *for in their eyes a vile person is contemned, but they honour them that fear the Lord.*

## S E R M O N II.

The Goodness of God, proved from  
his Works.

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Mark x. 18.

*There is none good but one, that is God.*

**A**S *goodness*, in general, is a most admirable subject of meditation, it is impossible for the human heart, designedly and deliberately, to think of it without pleasure. The goodness of the Deity is, in a peculiar manner, above his other perfections, attractive of our highest esteem and delight. They are all excellent in themselves, absolute, independent of any other being, necessary as his existence, and infinite ; but beneficence finishes his character, which is the just object of our adoration, our reverence and love, the foundation of our hope and confidence in him, and most wor-

SERM.  
II.

SERM. thy to be imitated by us, as far as our limited capacity, and the frailty of our nature will allow. The consideration of eternity and immensity, of power and wisdom, nay, and of holiness and justice, abstracting from love and kindness, may strike the mind with admiration and awe; but the bounty of God to all sensitive, and especially rational creatures, his opening his hand liberally, and giving them that which is convenient for them, suitable to their several natures, this inspires the heart of man with hope and joy, excites the best affections, and makes all the rest of the divine attributes appear most lovely.

I intend afterwards more particularly to explain this subject. My present design is to prove that God is good. Some have endeavoured to prove all his moral attributes, and particularly his goodness, from his natural perfections; and their reasoning seems to be very strong. As morality has a necessary foundation in the nature and reason of things, independently on, and antecedently to all will, and positive appointment; for the essences of things being different, there must be different relations, an agreeableness and disagreeableness of some to others, and particularly

particularly a suitableness of certain conditions S E R M.  
and circumstances, to certain persons, or II.  
their characters and qualifications: So this  
necessarily appears to the human understanding, and we cannot help thinking it appears  
to every understanding, more or less clearly,  
according to the measure of its perfection,  
and every intelligent agent must of necessity  
(not natural but moral, consistent with the  
most perfect freedom) direct his actions by  
that distinction of fit and unfit, so far as it is  
known to him, unless he be hindered by im-  
potence or wrong affection. Now the su-  
preme cause of all things being absolutely  
perfect, self-existent, independent, and un-  
changeable, his understanding infinite, his  
power almighty, as he discerns all the rela-  
tions and even possibilities of things, no rea-  
son can possibly be imagined why he should  
not always act according to these invariable  
respects, which he has made every intelligent  
creature capable of seeing, and thereby ca-  
pable of approving and praising his admini-  
stration. He can never mistake evil for good,  
or fail in distinguishing the true limits of fit  
and unfit: There is no superior power to  
controul or restrain him in doing what he  
thinks most reasonable to be done: He is  
D 3 infinitely

SERM. infinitely above all indigence, or want of  
 II. any thing to make him perfectly easy and  
 happy, and therefore his mind cannot be  
 biassed by any selfish or partial affections,  
 which are in other agents the sources of offence against the eternal rule of right. In particular, the supreme Being must be good, or inclined to communicate happiness, because he is in himself, and was from eternity, perfectly and unchangeably happy, and therefore cannot be supposed to have designed the production of any kind or degree of unhappiness, unless his wisdom should foresee it might be a means of greater good in the end. Nor indeed can it be supposed, that such a Being could have another motive to make any creatures at all, than to communicate good in such variety, and always in such proportion, as to his infinite wisdom should seem meet. That God is beneficent also, appears from his absolute all-sufficiency, whereby he is at an infinite distance from malice, envy, and all temptations to do evil. For these malevolent dispositions, and every disposition contrary to goodness, as they are known to be tormenting to the mind in which they are seated, so they always proceed, and in their nature must



must proceed, from weakness and imperfection. SERM.  
II.



But tho' this reasoning may be very convincing to some attentive persons, yet another, and a larger method of illustrating the subject before us, may be more generally useful, which therefore I shall endeavour in the following discourse ; namely, by considering the genuin fruits of goodness apparent in the works and ways of God, or in his constitution of things, and administration of providence. To which purpose it is only necessary to observe, that the evidence of the divine goodness is the same with the evidence of that disposition in any other being, as the principle itself is the same in kind, tho' different in the degree of its perfection. If a designing cause actually produces those effects, which in their nature and tendency are beneficial to other beings, and we see no reason to think that he acts upon selfish principles, we cannot help concluding, that he is beneficent. Now it has been proved, that God is the supreme intelligent designing cause of all things in the universe ; he has disposed its form, fixed its order, the relations, the connexion and dependence of all its parts, and the harmony of the whole. That he

SERM. continually superintends and irresistibly governs it, being every where present, and every where exercising his power and wisdom.

II.



And therefore if in the intire state of things, and series of events, it appears that there are many benefits actually conferred, and much happiness actually communicated to beings which are capable of it, various happinesses suitable to their various natures and conditions, either in their possession or placed within their reach, so that by the proper use of their own powers, they may attain it; and at the same time they have a sufficient direction as to the manner of attaining it; if, I say, these things be so, and this apparently prevalent in the constitution of nature, and the administration of providence, as far as our knowledge extends, then we do justly infer, that the author of nature and governor of the world is good or benevolent.

It is true indeed that a vast variety of creatures in the universe are not proper objects of beneficence, and therefore the manifestation of *this*, is not altogether so extensive as of the other divine attributes. In all the kinds of inanimate things, from the most magnificent celestial orbs to the lowest pebble or grain of sand on the earth, the wisdom and power

power of the creator are displayed ; but they are capable of no enjoyment, and consequently the goodness of God can no otherwise, properly, be said to be manifested in them, than as they are the means of happiness to sensitive or intelligent beings. But as we cannot certainly know, that any part of the universe is wholly uninhabited by living creatures, and as its principal parts and appearances have an evident relation to life, and are useful to its preservation and entertainment ; so this system, which we are best acquainted with, would be but very imperfectly understood, and a wrong judgment made of it, if it were considered only as dead nature ; a curious fabric indeed, but unrelated to, and not made for the use of the animated kinds which dwell in it, and which we cannot avoid thinking to be a superior and more perfect rank of beings. As for the earth, it seems to have been chiefly intended as a dwelling-place for animals, and all its parts and productions principally designed for their conveniency. We cannot take upon us, so peremptorily, to judge what the main ends are of those moving globes in our heavens, which do all of them, in common with this terrestrial one, partake of the vital heat and  
light

SERM.

II.




SERM.

II.



light of the sun, and which, tho' appearing to our naked eyes very small, because of their distance, are really of a vast magnitude. It is not improbable, that as they seem to be well fitted for it by their situation, they are inhabited by rational creatures, who there celebrate the praises of their maker, and pay him their homage, being as we are, the monuments of his bounty. But however that be, we reasonably conclude, that the uses which we see some of the far distant orbs do serve, those the wise author of nature designed they should serve, and if they are of great importance to animal and intelligent beings, he is good in appointing them for such uses; especially the sun, that glorious orb, the perpetual source of light and warmth, tho' it may answer ends above our comprehension, and may be fitted to other parts of the world in the same way it is to this we live on, or in different ways; yet upon the partial view we have of it, and of its various usefulness to the inhabitants of the earth, we reasonably judge that it is designed to be beneficial, and that therefore the maker of it is beneficent.

From what has been said, it appears, that one proper illustration of the present subject, will

will be by considering the visible frame of SERM.  
inanimate nature which falls within our ob- II.  
servation, and its most obvious appearances,   
as they relate to animal and rational life,  
which afford us a strong convincing evidence  
of the creator's bounty. It has been obser-  
ved on another occasion, that the apparent  
relation between the parts of the mundane  
system, particularly the constant conveyance  
of light and heat from the sun to the earth,  
causing such a variety of productions on its  
surface, and of so manifold use to its inha-  
bitants, that we cannot conceive how they  
could possibly subsist without them (which  
light and heat are so conveniently distributed,  
by means of the daily and annual revoluti-  
ons, that all parts of our globe, have, in their  
turns, such supplies as are necessary for the  
living creatures which dwell in them) it has,  
I say, been observed, that this is a clear evi-  
dence of *design* in the frame of the world.  
But the same argument as fully proves *good*  
*design*, that is, a design of doing good to a  
multitude of sensitive and intelligent beings.  
Will we call a man beneficent who employs  
his time, his labour, and treasure, for re-  
lieving the indigent, for preserving life, and  
rendering it comfortable? And shall we not  
acknow-

S E R M. acknowledge him a kind and generous being,  
 II. who has so contrived the fabric of the world,  
 and so constantly directs its regular motions,  
 that by them all the species of living creatures upon the earth, and mankind at the head of them, are daily nourished, and have a vast variety of enjoyment? The uniform appearance which there is in the face of nature, and the constant course it keeps, makes the continual, intelligent, and beneficent direction of its author, to be overlooked by those ungrateful and unthoughtful mortals, who stupidly attribute the benefits they constantly receive, to a kind of undesigning necessity ; whereas to an attentive mind, the power of God appears as much in the ordinary works of nature, as in the most miraculous interpositions. His bounty appears by its constant, yet voluntary communication, so much the more to be admired, because thus it is manifested to be a never-failing principle ; and the sun's visiting the earth every day, is a daily fresh instance of his favour ; the suspension whereof, for a very short time, which he could as easily effect, and goodness only prevents it, would involve all the animals of the earth in the utmost horror, nay inevitable ruin.

Again,

Again, if we look into the constitution SERM.  
of this lower world itself, which can only be II.  
attributed to the will of the wise creator as  
its cause, it will lead us by the same sort of  
reasoning to the acknowledgement of his  
liberality. There is an admirable correspon-  
dence between the parts of the terraqueous  
globe, whereby it is made a convenient ha-  
bitation for the various tribes of animals  
which it sustains. The thin fluid that sur-  
rounds it is immediately necessary to the  
preservation of their lives, by breathing, as  
well as for the transmissiion of light, and  
nourishing warmth from the sun; its solid  
parts support heavy living bodies, and it is  
every where so well supplied with water in  
perpetual courses, and by refreshing showers,  
as to answer sufficiently, every where, the  
purpose of producing food for them, and to  
furnish them with drink, besides other con-  
veniencies of life. The several kinds have  
their proper elements assigned them, to which  
they are fitted by their make, and there is  
suitable provision made for them. The sea  
and the rivers are stored with scaly inhabi-  
tants, which pass thro' them with ease and  
pleasure, having organs adapted to that pur-  
pose, and abundance of food convenient for  
them;

SERM. them; but they cannot live on dry land,  
 II. which, in its turn, is appropriated to other  
 species, and they, by a quite different organisation of their bodies, are fitted to move on it with equal ease, and have the means of their subsistence plentifully afforded them. None of these can mount up into the air, which yet is visited by several sorts of animals, that wing their way thro' its regions, and by it easily ascend to the tops of mountains and tall trees, where they find both nourishment and shelter. Now is it not a just and obvious reflection on all this, that God has diffused his bounty every where, and that all his works which come under our observation, are filled with the fruits of it. Neither earth, nor air, nor sea, are empty of living inhabitants, which he provides for. No place is without many witnesses of his liberality, and life is the care of his providence. What human heart can be so insensible, as not to join with the pious psalmist in celebrating the praise of the divine wisdom and goodness? *The earth is full of thy riches, O Lord, so is the great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts. These wait all upon thee, that thou mayst give them their meat in due*



*due season. That thou givest them, they gather, SERM.  
thou openest thy hand, they are filled with II.  
good \*.*

In the next place, as the animal life, considered by itself, especially its principal appearances, sensation and spontaneous motion, has been proved to be a convincing evidence of the being of God, or of an intelligent agent who made the world; so it carries in it a very strong argument of his goodness. It is indeed the lowest immediate object of his goodness that we know, because its perceptions and enjoyments are of the lowest kind; but the benevolent disposition will always incline any agent to give pleasure rather than pain; and it is a plain instance of the creator's benignity, that he has made even this low life, with a capacity of some happiness, and provided for it all the happiness it is capable of. The animal constitution is such, that in every species of it we may observe a curious texture of the interior vital parts guarded by a strong outside; whereby it is preserved from those things which might be hurtful to its tender frame, and enabled to perform its proper functions without pain. The organs of sense are so situ-

\* Ps. civ. 25, 27, 28.

SERM. ated, as to convey the necessary notices for  
 II. the safety and benefit of the whole body, and  
 its instincts are all plainly fitted to its condition, determining it to that which is useful for its preservation, and to such enjoyment as is suitable to it. But these self-motions, sensations, and the following of instincts, are accompanied with a kind of gratification, so that the sensitive life itself is not dragged on with sorrow, nor is altogether joyless and insipid; but in its measure, partakes the bounty of kind provident nature. Of this, many species of the brutes give plain enough discoveries. With what ease, and natural indications of delight, do the herds graze in their pastures? They sport in their manner, and play, satisfied with their portion, and as enjoying all that nature craves. The birds sing their chearful notes, and mount upwards with their signs of joy, as contented with what liberal nature has bountifully dispensed to them.

But of animal enjoyment we have a more direct and immediate knowledge, by what we feel in ourselves; having senses and appetites very much resembling those of the inferior kinds, we cannot but know what a variety of gratification arises from them, and thereby

thereby are led to acknowledge a large ma-  
nifestation of the divine liberality, diffused  
thro' the whole extent of sensitive nature.

SERM.  
II.  


Another observation concerning all sorts of animals that we know, is obvious to every one, namely, that their affections do not wholly terminate in themselves. Besides the instincts which relate only to every individual, whereby it is determined to seek its private good, such as food, sleep, and other necessary refreshment, they have strong attachments to their kinds, and inclinations prompting them to be useful to one another. Some live in a sort of regular society, resembling a human commonwealth, especially, the feeblers kinds, which have the greatest need of mutual aid. The savage beasts, however destructive they may be to other species, are in their rough manner, affectionate to their own; and the tamer beasts flock together, when any danger threatens them; and the strong do not save themselves by flight, but run hazards, and will engage in painful struggles for the defence of the weak. What labor and difficulty, nay extreme sufferings, will the dam undergo for her young, regardless of ease and life itself, so strong is natural affection in her! There seems indeed,

SERM. farther, to be an established general relation  
II. between the species themselves, and a bond  
of union to run thro' the whole animal  
Kingdom ; so that the interests of the several  
tribes do not in the main interfere, but rather,  
they are mutually useful to each other ; especially  
as there is a visible subordination, the lower  
kinds are evidently serviceable to the superior,  
and seem to be made for their use. Above all,  
the very highest of the brutal species, are either  
willingly, or by a superiority of power and  
understanding, made unwillingly subject to  
mankind. Such an œconomy in the whole,  
tending to the common good, and to render all  
the individuals, and all the kinds, as publickly  
useful as they can be, shows a benevolent  
intention in the wise super-intending disposer.

This observation is founded on the general  
state and order of animals, which fully  
justifies it. Some particular exceptions there  
may be ; not only individuals, which have  
somewhat unnatural in their dispositions,  
whereby they are pernicious to others of  
their kind ; but whole species which do not  
to us appear to be useful in the earth ; on the  
contrary, they are destructive to the best of  
the brutes, and are enemies to men. But  
these

these are rare instances, and the effects of SERM.  
 them do not reach so far, as to be danger- II.  
 ous to any species of living creatures. The  
 strength of the argument lies in this, that  
 good is evidently prevalent in the constitu-  
 tion of nature; and not only the individu-  
 als, but the kinds of animals, are under a  
 general law of sympathy, whereby they are  
 useful, rather than hurtful to each other; con-  
 spiring together, as parts of one whole, to  
 promote the common safety and happiness;  
 which plainly shews a beneficent design in  
 the author of the system. If some few ex-  
 amples can be alledged, which have a con-  
 trary appearance, that ought not to be urged  
 as an objection against what is *so evidently*  
 the general, and effectually prevailing inten-  
 tion of nature. Rather it becomes us to ac-  
 knowledge our own ignorance, than rashly  
 to censure the works of providence which  
 we cannot comprehend. It is certain, that  
 may have the appearance of ill, upon a slight  
 and imperfect view, which in the whole  
 may be good; and those parts of the crea-  
 tion, particularly some animals, which seem  
 to our short and narrow understanding use-  
 less, nay hurtful, may yet answer some im-  
 portant, and beneficial purposes in the intire

SERM. œconomy of nature, tho' we do not at present perceive it.

II.



Again, as thus there appears upon the face of the animal Kingdom a regular œconomy, and an union of interests and affections, whereby good is predominant in the whole, manifesting good in the design and contrivance of the author and ruler ; so there is a very remarkable *variety* which discovers the wisdom of God. For a diversity of regular productions shows the understanding as well as the liberty of an agent. But this, instead of being any diminution of his goodness, shews it in a stronger and clearer light. For it shews, that the benevolent principle is not confined to one method of manifestation, but that the exercise of it is suited to every exigency of all the objects which are capable of it. The unexhausted fountain flows in various streams, satisfying every living thing with that which is convenient for it. Besides, no one kind could so replenish the earth with inhabitants, the monuments of the creator's bounty, as now it is replenished ; nor could an equal multitude of one kind be so well furnished with the necessities of life by its productions, as the different kinds are. Men would increase no farther than

than they do, if there were no brutes; nor S E R M.  
would they be better accommodated. On II.

the contrary, they would want many advantages for the comfortable enjoyment of life, which they now possess. One of the brutal species does not hinder the increase, or the subsistence of another; but there is a liberal, and for the most part, a different provision made for every one of them. So that the multi-form appearance of the sensible life is only a more extensive object for the divine munificence to display itself upon. Animals, indeed, have different kinds and degrees of perfection and enjoyment. Some have powers and faculties which others want. Some are fitted for quick motion, others are made for strength. Some are endued with a greater sagacity than others, and man excels them all in intellectual powers. But it does not follow that God is not good to all, because he has not made them all equal. Goodness is a principle which does not exert itself to the utmost of the agent's power, in every single effect he produces. When conducted by wisdom, its exercise is accommodated to the condition of the objects, or if the whole of their existence and state depends upon it, which is the case of all crea-

SERM. tures with respect to God, it manifests itself  
 II. in the variety of its gifts; but whatever distinction there may be, and however some may be dignified and made happy above others, there is no pretence for a complaint against the goodness of the creator, from the condition he appoints to any creature, when good is prevalent in it, and it is better than non-existence.


The duration of the animal life is fixed by the meer pleasure of its author, as well as the degrees of its perfection while it does continue. And it may be longer or shorter, just as he thinks fit, without any reproach on his beneficence. If upon the whole, its existence is preferable to the contrary, as having in it more pleasure than pain (besides its being part of a good system, and useful to superior life) the shortness of its continuance can no more reasonably be objected against the creator's goodness, than the imperfection of its frame and state, when compared with creatures of a higher rank. Is not God to be acknowledged good to his living creatures on the earth, if he communicates to them all the happiness they are capable of, though he does not perpetuate their being? And is not a measure of enjoyment distributed among



a multitude of short lived beings as great a SERM.  
manifestation of benevolence, as the same II.


measure of enjoyment, continued longer in the possession of a few. I observe this to shew that the preservation of the animal species in a succession of individuals, which is the established law of their nature, is no ground of objection against the goodness of God to them; since if by that method the exercise of it to *some* is shortened in duration, the objects of it are multiplied, and it is exercised towards a greater number. Nor is it any imputation on a regular good œconomy, that some individuals of the different kinds, in their several successions, devour others. For what disadvantage is it to a short-lived animal, or how is it inconsistent with the goodness of providence, that after it has enjoyed the happiness that is suitable to its condition, it falls at last a sacrifice to a superior nature, and so serves the good of the whole? Thus it plainly appears, that the care of divine providence extends to the earth and all its inhabitants. It is made a convenient place of abode for living creatures, and is plentifully stocked with them. If one considers the number of them, it is amazing how they should be provided for,

SERM. yet not one of them is *forgotten before God.*

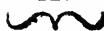
II.  They all live plentifully, on the alms of his bounty. *Their eyes wait upon him, and he gives them their meat in due season, he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing.* These are indeed the lowest objects of his beneficence, but since they are not neglected, much more may we be assured, that beings of a superior order and dignity, partake of his goodness, in a way suitable to their nature.

Let us proceed to higher instances of the divine benevolence, and of which we ourselves are directly, and immediately the conscious witnesses. Man is the principal inhabitant of this lower world, and in every light in which we view him, he will appear to be the monument of his creator's bounty. If we consider the life which he has in common with other animals, it is cared for and enriched like theirs, by the liberality of providence. It is adorned with a variety of senses and appetites, which afford various entertainment, being all provided with objects suitable to them. He has food convenient for him, and all his frequently returning wants plentifully supplied. But the human nature is distinguished, even in this  
lower

lower part of it, from all other sensitive beings, by many and great advantages in its constitution. The exterior form itself has a visible preeminence above the brutal shapes, by the delicacy of its composition, its erect posture, a beautiful countenance, and organs fitted for a vastly wider compass of perception, and a vastly greater variety of action. The tokens of man's supremacy upon earth are so visible, that the greatest part of the other kinds, some of them far superior in bodily strength, seem to be sensible of it. They acknowledge him their Lord, and in their way pay him homage, with little difficulty being brought to spend their lives in his service. Especially, that *Reason* which is our chief prerogative, and considered by itself is a fund of noble enjoyment, therefore a separate clear demonstration of the goodness of God, reason, I say, as it is joyned to the lower part of our constitution, does greatly embellish and enoble it. The brutes go on in one perpetual track, by the direction of their instincts; between eating, drinking, a few other animal functions, and rest, their time is consumed, till the perishable machine, made only for a short duration, fails from inward disorders, or yields to exter-

SERM. external violence. But man by his superior  
II. understanding, is taught to enjoy life at a  
 higher rate, it is diversified with much more  
pleasure, and takes in a great number of en-  
tertaining objects.

It is true, the brutes seem to have some advantages above us. They quickly arrive at maturity, and are enabled to shift for themselves. Nature has provided them with the means of subsistence, without any forethought ; and with instruments of defence against foreign injuries, which they have skill to use without any instructor. The hardy Frame of their bodies makes them easy, uncovered, in the open air ; and the bare earth is a pleasant resting-place for them. Whereas man, a helpless creature in infancy, long nourished by the tender care of others, even when grown to his full vigour, and the perfect use of all his faculties, cannot enjoy life in any tolerable manner, without a great expence of thought and labour. His feeble constitution needs a great deal of art to preserve it. Great pains must be bestowed on preparing a mansion for him, much industry used for his cloathing, and forecast, with diligence, as well as frugal management, in providing, and keeping for him constant supplies



supplies of food. But all these inconveniences are abundantly compensated by other privileges of his nature, especially, the inward powers and affections wherewith he is endued, which enable and direct him to improve life, and exalt the enjoyment of it to a high degree of perfection, beyond what any other animal ever did, or can attain to. *The inspiration of the Almighty which has given us understanding, and taught us more than the beasts of the field,* qualifies us for contriving means in order to render our condition easy and comfortable, far beyond what their instincts prompt them to. But when to this is added the social affections, planted in every human heart, disposing mankind for the supply of their common necessities to join counsels together, and to be mutually assisting to each other (which they can the more easily do, because of the excellent faculty they have of communicating their thoughts by speech) and to form themselves into regular societies, for preserving order and encouraging arts and industry ; all these advantages taken together, cast the ballance so sensibly on our side, that not only they *may* render, but actually have rendered human life abundantly more noble and elegant. We  
look

SERM. look down upon the brutal as low and mean,  
 II. nay as void of happiness in comparison.



But this is not the chief pre-eminence of man above the beasts. If we consider the superior part of his constitution, abstractly, and without regard to the influence it has on the animal life, exalting and adorning it, in this view, he will appear a yet more peculiar, and illustrious monument of his creator's goodness. Every one who attends to the powers of reflection and reasoning, must be conscious of a sublime excellence in them. As a great variety of ideas arise in our minds from external objects, the faculty of comparing them, of examining their relations, their agreement and disagreement, and thereupon forming a judgment concerning them, this faculty, I say, which we perceive in ourselves, is accompanied with a sense of such dignity and perfection, that we cannot but value it as a high prerogative of our nature, and look upon the beings which are void of it, as far inferior to us. Not only so, the intellectual capacity, carefully improved, affords a high enjoyment, which upon comparison appears vastly superior to the pleasures of the senses. It is not limited as they are, to singular existing objects, and their presence;



sence ; the mind by its reflecting power re-  
viving the images of things which it once  
perceived, besides an immense fund, which  
arises from reflection or attention to its own  
powers and operations, can entertain itself  
agreeably in the absence of outward objects,  
with their images which it retains ; can en-  
quire into their properties, and investigate  
truths concerning them, which are agree-  
able objects to its perception, even though  
they be mere speculations, not applied to  
any practical purpose. But if they be so ap-  
plied, and are found useful in life, which  
sometimes is the case, the enjoyment is  
thereby greatly increased. This is a grati-  
fication we have always at hand, and the fre-  
quent repetition of it does not pall the desire,  
but whets it rather, it does not occasion sa-  
tiety and disgust, nor is reviewed with re-  
morse, as sensual pleasures often are ; but the  
mind dwells upon it with delight, and has  
satisfaction in it, as an exercise and entertain-  
ment worthy of itself. Such an application  
and improvement of the intellectual capacity,  
gives a high relish to our existence, a con-  
sciousness of vast superiority to, nay, by it  
we seem to enjoy a kind of wide command  
over the material world, subjecting the whole  
of

SERM. of it to examination, separating its nearest  
 II. parts, uniting its most distant extremes, view-  
 ing it on all sides, and so possessing in some  
 sort, whatever is entertaining in it. But by  
 the exercise of this power, we rise in the  
 objects of our knowledge above corporeal  
 nature. We have the ideas of thought, of  
 consciousness, of liberty, of volition, and of  
 moral objects, which have no manner of af-  
 finity with extended solid substance, or any  
 of its modes. Thus we are introduced into  
 another world, vastly more delightful than  
 the visible, in the mental survey of which,  
 we may entertain ourselves with high satis-  
 faction. We see an excellent spiritual œco-  
 nomy in our own constitution ; a subordina-  
 tion of powers, and a ballance of affections ;  
 we imagine, not without a great probability of  
 truth, superior orders of intelligent beings,  
 and we are convinced by strong arguments,  
 of uncreated original excellence at the head  
 of all, possessed of the highest absolute per-  
 fections, the noblest of all objects, in the  
 contemplation of which the mind rests, with  
 the utmost complacency. This part of the  
 human frame carries the plain marks of its  
 author's benevolence. What but supreme  
 goodness could be the motive to a production,  
 so





so formed, as by its proper and natural operation, to yield such noble enjoyment?

But I will not pretend to examine the parts of our inward constitution, minutely. Every power of our nature, and every affection, when duly exercised, is naturally attended with enjoyment ; and the harmony of the whole yields a high degree of complicated felicity, which clearly shews that the gracious father of our spirits designed them for happiness. Let us consider that, which is certainly the source of the most intense, sincere, and lasting pleasures, the sense of moral goodness, and the practise of it. That the human mind is made with a knowledge of right and wrong, or of moral good and evil, with their eternal necessary difference, I have endeavoured elsewhere to show, and shall not now repeat it. And that this part of the constitution (the judgment of rectitude, and the approbation of it with the disposition of our minds towards it) is good, or that it tends to happiness, and must have been designed by the author of nature, must appear to every considerate person. For, first, let us set before ourselves the idea of virtue in the most abstract way we can think of it (it is not difficult for any man to form

SERM. form in his own imagination a good moral  
 II. character, made up of purity, justice, grati-  
 tude, sincerity, and universal benevolence) nothing appears more amiable to the mind. As from a regularity in the situation of external objects, and a due mixture of sensible qualities, or the contrary, there arises an idea of beauty and deformity, so from good and bad dispositions and actions of moral agents, the ideas of moral beauty and turpitude strike the interior sense of the soul, raising in it the highest approbation or dislike ; so that rectitude, considered only as an object of speculation, yields great pleasure to the mind, and is the loveliest form which can be presented to it. If the external senses which serve the low ends of animal life, and give it pleasure, by conveying the images of material objects, are to be attributed to the goodness of the creator ; much more that more excellent sense which serves nobler purposes, and is attended with higher delight, is a glorious proof of the pleasure he takes in communicating happiness. But morality is intended by the author of the human constitution, not merely as a subject of agreeable meditation ; our tempers are to be formed, and our practice regulated by it. There is there-  
 fore

fore a high esteem, a strong affection, and SERM.  
an ardent desire to it, excited in the heart of II.  
every man who attends to it calmly and de-  
liberately. He cannot think of a state of  
virtue, otherwise, than as the happiest and  
best that it is possible for him or any rational  
being to be in ; that it is most becoming the  
rational nature ; and an intelligent creature  
altogether destitute of it, if there be any  
such, is an object of the utmost horror and  
aversion ; that it is most praise worthy, to  
prefer moral integrity to the gratification of  
all animal desires, and selfish passions ; nay,  
to despise them in comparison ; and the mind  
can never be thoroughly easy and satisfied in  
itself, without resolving to sacrifice every  
thing in this world to virtue, and to bear  
the utmost extremity of pain, rather than  
betray its cause, and depart from its rules.

This shews of what importance morality  
is in our constitution ; and experience will  
convince us, that the most serene, solid, and  
lasting joys, perpetually spring from the prac-  
tice of it. If a man can reflect on good ac-  
tions done by him, from hearty affection, and  
truly virtuous motives, let him judge whether  
any other satisfaction is equal to that which  
such reflection yields. It is a pleasure for

SERM. which he is not indebted to any thing without ; it does not depend on variable accidents as sensual gratifications do, which must be supported by foreign objects, and are liable to the changes of their condition, and circumstances; besides the inconstancy of the appetite itself, makes animal enjoyment subject to many interruptions, and the transient pleasure is succeeded with pain, still in proportion to the degree of its vehemence. But *the good man is satisfied from himself*; he possesses an inward tranquility independent on external events; the vigorous exercise of his own virtuous affections, is accompanied with high delight; the good he communicates to others is reflected back upon himself, and greatly increases his pleasure; he reviews the temper of his mind, and his actions with self-approbation. This is a perpetual spring of undecaying joy, which suffers no abatement by length of time, or change of circumstances. When the mind reflects upon it, it is always fresh; never exhausted, but by repetition strengthened, rather than diminished. No outward calamity or reverse of fortune, not the indisposition of the body, or the approach of death, which quite extinguish all animal enjoyments, can take away

way the relish of these moral pleasures, which SERM. seem to be inseparable from the mind that II. is qualified for them, in every state of its existence. Must not the virtuous Soul retiring into itself, calmly and attentively surveying those its own powers and operations, (a perpetual inward spring of pleasure!) rejoice in its own being, and tracing them back to the true original, the free and kind intention of the designing cause, must it not acknowledge him infinitely good?

It is farther to be remembered, that the tendency of virtue is not merely to the good of every individual, it diffuses its beneficial influence over the whole human species, and promotes their common happiness. This is so evident that I need not insist upon it: Every attentive person must be convinced, that piety, justice, temperance, and charity, universally practised, would render the condition of men in this world, as happy as it could possibly be. That the greatest part of the misery which we see, and feel, proceeds from the contrary vices; from luxury, injustice, covetousness, wrath, and pride, which only make men enemies and hurtful to one another; and that whatever measure of safety and comfort in this life subsists among

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men,

SERM. men, is principally owing to the measure  
II. which there is in them, of the good and benevolent, or the virtuous affections. And now upon reviewing this part of our constitution, must we not pronounce it very good? Must it not be acknowledged, that the author of it is a kind and benevolent being, and that human nature was made for happiness? Since the principles which lead to it are so deeply wrought into our frame, we pursue it effectually, by following the dictates of our minds, and cannot fail of attaining it, without doing violence to ourselves. If we should suppose a species of creatures constituted after a quite different manner, every individual uneasy to itself, having a quick sense of pain, which should arise from a multitude of occasions the most common in life, and attend the proper exercise of its powers, and render all the functions of nature whereby life is preserved, at least joyless and insipid; at the same time with malevolent dispositions towards its fellows, having no pleasure in social communication with them; but a natural bent towards their misery and destruction, how unhappy must such a state be? and what a frightful idea must we have of the contriver? And yet nothing but the  
good-

goodness of the creator could hinder its being SERM.  
actually the condition of created beings, since II.

the whole of their constitution, and every circumstance in it, depends intirely on his pleasure. But when we find ourselves in such a state, that not only we are capable of much enjoyment, but prevented with instincts which naturally determine us to it ; and not only furnished with selfish affections which terminate in private good, making every one easy to himself, but with publick affections, whereby we are directed to pursue the common happiness of the kind, as inseparable from that of individuals, all conspiring to produce the greatest moment of good which could be produced ; when, I say, we find it so, it would be the utmost ingratitude, not to acknowledge the beneficence of the author of our being.

It must be confessed, and every one finds it by experience, that there is in the human frame a sense of pain, as well as pleasure, and equally to be attributed to the author of nature as its cause. There are both bodily, and mental uneasinesses, set against enjoyments of each kind ; from which it clearly follows, indeed, that our present state is imperfect, but if we examine this appearance

SERM. thoroughly, and consider the plain tendency  
II. and design of these opposite sensations, it is a  
direct proof of the divine beneficence in our  
constitution, rather than any just objection  
against it. For pleasure is the natural result  
of life, and of every one of its powers in  
their due operation. Pain arises only from  
such things as are hurtful to it, determining  
us to avoid them, or apply proper remedies.  
The uneasy sensations produced by external  
objects, and the disordered condition of the  
body, excite us to necessary care, and the use  
of means for our safety, much more effectually,  
than our imperfect knowledge of things,  
and calm reason would do without them;  
and that inward remorse which accompanies  
evil actions, is the most powerful dis-  
swayer from the repeated commission of  
them, and consequently to imperfect moral  
agents, whose infirmity makes such a motive  
necessary, it is a very strong one to the  
practice of virtue, which is their greatest  
happiness. And thus, I think, it plainly  
appears, that the constitution of the human  
nature, imperfect as it is, and not without  
a mixture of unhappiness (probably holding  
the lowest rank in the rational and moral part  
of the creation) yet carries in it the clearest  
marks



marks of the creator's bounty, and is a pro-  
duction of his power and wisdom, which at  
the same time fully proves him to be a bene-  
volent, and a gracious being.

SERM.  
II.  



There is yet another view of the human nature and condition, applicable to all its capacities, and all its enjoyments, in which we may discern the plainest marks of goodness, on the part of its designing author and Ruler. What I mean is (and no one can miss of observing it) that we grow up by degrees to the proper use of all our powers, and to the business and enjoyment of life, in the whole compass of it. Man at the commencement of his being, is a very weak unfinished creature, intended, but no way qualified, for important employments, and a considerable figure in the world; unfurnished with knowledge and abilities of every sort, for the province assigned him: And if experience did not convince us, one would not imagine, that a new born infant could ever arrive at that measure of understanding, and that useful and delightful activity, in various ways, which we see grown men have actually attained to. But as the body with all its members, in due proportion, increases to a fitness for the part appointed to it, so the faculties of the mind

SERM. are enlarged gradually ; the understanding  
 II. advances by slow steps to its maturity ; and  
 by it the objects are introduced, which excite our affections, and occasion the exertion of our active powers, which become more vigorous by their exercise, acquiring habits attended with facility, promptness, and pleasure in acting. Our first essays, both in thinking and action, are so feeble and imperfect, as scarcely to discover the very being of the internal, rational and active principles ; and from so low beginnings, it is wonderful such progress should be made, as we find in fact there is. But the progress is by imperceptible degrees, and every step of it really, though not sensibly, strengthens the faculty, and prepares it for farther improvements. And as the various powers of the human mind, the understanding, the memory, and the affections, jointly exert themselves in the finished scheme of life, they are during their progress mutually helpful to each other in preparation for it. When we arrive to a capacity of reflecting on the frame of our nature and its powers, with their ends and uses, we are then charged with the care of ourselves ; so to cultivate our faculties and affections, and to regulate their exercise, that  
 the


the purposes of them may be obtained, and we may possess that happiness, which by a due culture they are naturally fitted to produce: And as thus it is evident, that in this important work, a great deal depends on our prudence, diligence, and resolution; so our experience in the progress of life will convince us of the necessity, and furnish us with the occasions, of controuling our appetites, and passions, which is a most necessary part of self-discipline, to qualify a man for behaving suitably to his condition, and enjoying all the advantages of it.

I have said that this is applicable to every capacity of the human nature, and every state of its existence. Consider man as a rational and social creature in this world, and in this view the various steps of his progress from infancy to manhood, together with the changes of condition suitable to them, prepare him gradually for the part he is to act here, and for the enjoyment which is appointed for him. Suppose a man brought into the world in a mature state, having all his faculties in as great perfection as ever they attain to, yet being wholly uninstructed in the affairs of life, and unpractised in its arts, utterly deficient in all that skill and self-government, which

SERM. which are acquired by habits, he must be  
 II. very much at a loss how to conduct himself;  
 even how to use with decency, and in due proportion, the organs of his body, and the powers of his mind; how to provide for his own subsistence, how to govern his natural propensions of all kinds, and under what restrictions to gratify them, and how to behave in society. And as this was actually the case of the first man, we must suppose that the gracious author of his being, was his immediate instructor in the whole art of living, otherwise human life, if it could have subsisted at all, must have been at least for a long time, a rude, uncultivated, unharmonious, and uncomfortable thing. But now that a course of nature is established, that extraordinary method of instruction has ceased, and the want of it is supplied by the education we have, in our leisurely passage through the various periods of childhood and youth, to complete manhood, (still under the tuition of kind providence) whereby we are fitted for the offices, and enjoyments of a mature state. Thus it is also in the highest capacities of our nature, the intellectual and moral, considered abstractly from the use of them in the temporal life. The human mind

is capable of great improvements in know-S E R M.ledge and virtue; but in the beginning of its II.existence, there are no appearances of either;  no discoveries by their exercise, of rational and moral powers. While our sensitive faculties advance slowly to their appointed measure of perfection, the interior nobler powers, which distinguish our species from other animals, begin to appear very weak and imperfect. By degrees however, the mind is opened to those sentiments, and its affections and active powers, by a vigorous attention, and repeated acts, is formed into that character, and ripened into those confirmed habits, in which our true perfection and happiness consists; and for this the discipline of our present probationary state, where instruction is mixed with trial, is a good preparation.

Like this probably in some measure, is the state of all finite, free agents, in the beginning of their existence. There are deficiencies in knowledge, and moral perfection, whereby there is naturally a possibility, and even a danger of their falling into error, and deviating from rectitude. Their escape from this danger, which the good author of their being has put into the power of every such

SERM. such creature, must be by the proper exercise  
 II. of their own powers, by a careful attention,  
 a resolved adherence to their duty, and the  
 steady practice of virtue, which confirms  
 good affections, and raises them to a security  
 against temptations. But whatever the con-  
 dition of superior natures may be, and how-  
 ever ignorant we are of the reasons which  
 make it necessary that it should be thus pro-  
 gressive, we know that in fact, this is the  
 state of man; and we may with delightful  
 gratitude observe in it the wisely conducted  
 benignity of our creator. What could be  
 more worthy of perfect wisdom and good-  
 ness, than that such rational creatures, pro-  
 bably the lowest order of them, should not  
 be brought into their largest sphere of action,  
 till they were fitted for it by a preparatory  
 discipline; nor raised to the highest happi-  
 ness, till by the gradual enlargement of their  
 faculties, they should be qualified to enjoy it  
 in the best manner; that they should be  
 trained up by degrees to a meetness for their  
 noblest employment, and principal felicity,  
 which their full-grown faculties are by no  
 means adapted to, without such an education;  
 that every step of their progress should en-  
 crease their capacity, enable them more and  
 more

more to contribute to their own perfection, S E R M.  
the consciousness whereof is, and in such II.  
creatures, must be a chief ingredient in their  
happiness. Thus God, agreeably to the or-  
dinary methods of his operation in the course  
of nature, carries on this work of his, the  
noblest in this lower world, by a continued  
series of well-chosen means ; and brings man  
by slow successive steps, to his finished form,  
a monument of his own goodness. And as  
we find it so in every capacity of our being,  
so we have reason to believe it will be thro'  
the whole of our existence ; for since our  
highest powers are capable of improvements  
to which we cannot fix any limits, yet still  
infinitely distant from absolute perfection ;  
every addition to our intellectual and moral  
attainments, is a fresh manifestation of the  
divine unexhausted bounty, will increase our  
rational happiness, and furnish new matter  
of praise to its original author. And,

Lastly, Still confining our inquiries con-  
cerning this subject to the points which we  
have the best means and opportunities of un-  
derstanding, let us consider men as in their  
present existence, under the care of divine  
providence, and the general tenor of its dis-  
pensations towards them ; and we shall find,  
that

SERM. that goodness and mercy follows them thro' the whole course of their lives. Man is not sent into the world to shift for himself, and to improve the powers of his nature, and the advantages of his condition, in the best manner he can for his own happiness, without the interposition of a superior power in his behalf. As God continually superintends the whole course of nature, by his own immediate agency, governing the affairs of the universe, the intire series of events in it, and all its various appearances; he particularly preserves, and constantly watches over all the nations of men, *whom he has made of one blood, to dwell upon the face of the whole earth*, with a tender compassionate care. His goodness, manifested in providing daily supplies for the numberless wants of the animal life, has been already observed; and not only does man partake of this in common with other living creatures, but it may be said to be, in some sense, peculiar to him; he being the principal, and all the other species by the appointment of providence, serving him with their labors, and their lives, as made for his sake. Must it not appear to the conviction of any attentive mind, that in all the generations of men which have been since the world



world began, God never left himself without a witness of his bounty, *in that he gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons*, whereby not only themselves were fed with the vegetable productions of the earth, but a multitude of animals, all in subjection, and ministring to them in a variety of ways. As the devout psalmist observes, man has been cared for by his indulgent father, like a king in this low world. *Thou Lord, says he, hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and dignity. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet, all sheep, and oxen, yea and the beasts of the fields, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.*

The argument has still a greater force, if we consider the moral state of mankind. Instead of approving themselves to God, by a proper use of their rational faculties, in pursuing the true ends of their being, they are greatly degenerated, all flesh have corrupted their ways, fallen *short of the glory of God*, and by a multitude of transgressions, rendered themselves obnoxious to his displeasure. This consideration sets his goodness

SERM. nefs towards them in the most amiable light,  
 II. heightening it into tender pity, and long-suffering patience. Nothing is more apparently essential to the character of the supreme governor of the world, than perfect holiness; he loves righteousness and hates iniquity. As every man's own conscience approving the righteous laws of his nature, is a witness to the moral rectitude of the great Lawgiver; and leads him to the expectation of his just judgment, or impartial distribution of rewards and punishments; so the remarkable interposal of divine providence in the affairs of the world, by inflicting severe judgments for the heinous wickedness of men obstinately persisted in, has been universally acknowledg'd; and desolating strokes, such especially, as were sudden and surprising, not expected according to the ordinary course of nature, as *when the foundation of the wicked*, nay, the whole world of the ungodly was overthrown with a preternatural flood; *Sodom and Gomorrah* were destroy'd by a fire from heaven; such strokes have been always attributed to the immediate avenging hand of God, as a signification to men, even in their state of trial, of his general design at last finally

finally to condemn impenitent sinners, when the righteous shall be saved ; of which great distinguishing judgment, there were eminent examples set forth, in the deliverance of *Noah* from the flood, and of *Lot* from the destruction of *Sodom*. These signal surprising desolations, I say, have been universally attributed to the immediate hand of God ; the other catastrophes of nations and cities, which had not such miraculous appearances, have been accounted for by the wisest of men in the same manner, when (which upon a careful observation will appear to have been generally the case in fact) they followed a long course of obstinate and irreclaimable iniquity. But these interpositions are extraordinary, and evidently intended as examples for the reformation of sinners, and that *by the judgments of God which are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof may learn righteousness* ; which is their greatest good, and the only sure foundation of their happiness. The general administration of providence is different. The gentle methods of mercy and loving kindness are always first used to lead men to repentance : They never have reason to complain, that they are surprised with destroying vengeance, in the beginning of their

SERM. departure from the paths of virtue ; or indeed that it overtakes them, till after many repeated provocations, and till by their incorrigible perverseness, and the impenitency of their hearts, they have treasured up wrath to themselves. The instances recorded in scripture, which I have referred to, of God's righteous severity against heinous offenders, do also afford us remarkable examples of his patience : When God had resolved to destroy the world with a flood, yet \* *St. Peter* observes, that *his long-suffering waited while the ark was preparing* ; during which time, *Noah* was a preacher of righteousness to them, to try if they could possibly be reclaimed, and that ruin prevented ; and before the overthrow of *Sodom*, just *Lot* was sent to be a teacher, and an example of virtue there, *whose righteous soul was long vexed with their unlawful deeds* ; while God continued such a warning to them, unwilling that they should perish ; and at last represented himself as ready to spare the city, if there were found in it but ten righteous persons. Towards the generality of mankind, and in the ordinary course of things, lenity is so apparently the character of the divine government, the


\* 1 Pet. iii. 20.

instances of its severity so very rare, and punishment so long delayed, that this is often abused by sinners, to the encouraging and hardening themselves in their wicked courses; *and because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.\**

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And now to conclude, If upon the whole it appears by the best judgment we can make of the works of God, which are known to us ; by the frame of inanimate nature, and the constant providential direction of its course, as related to living creatures ; by the animal constitution fitted for various kinds of enjoyment, and liberally supplied with the means of it ; especially the constitution of the human nature, indued with noble powers and affections, in the proper exercise of which, it is capable of attaining to a high degree of perfection and felicity ; and by the conduct of divine providence towards mankind, continually heaping favours upon them, notwithstanding their sins, and exercising all the forbearance and indulgence to them, which can consist with a regard to righteousness and virtue, the promoting whereof thro' the whole creation, is his uniform design,

\* Eccles. viii. 11.

SERM. most worthy of perfect goodness; if, I say,  
II.  it appears by the best judgment we can make upon a survey of these the works and ways of God, all of them which fall under our observation, that the universal tendency is to happiness, and therefore the universal intention, seeing the cause is perfectly wise; various happiness, according to the various capacities of the beings it is designed for; must we not conclude, that he is a kind and benevolent being, *that the Lord is good unto all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.*

## SERMON III.

The principal Objections against the  
Goodness of God answered.

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Mark x. 18.

*There is none good but one, that is God.*

AS there is no principle of greater necessity and importance in religion SERM. than the goodness of God, indeed III. without it religion cannot subsist, there is none of which we have more clear and satisfying evidence. Universal nature proclaims it, and wherever eternal power and God-head are manifested, there also goodness is seen, *being understood by the things that are made.* The inanimate part of the creation, itself incapable of any enjoyment, is so framed and governed as to have a visible relation to life, and to be subservient to its preservation and happiness. The animals of the earth are continually cared for by bountiful providence,

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and especially man, considered in the whole compass of his being, is a monument of his creator's beneficence.

But there is an objection against this doctrine taken from the *evil* which there is in the world: This very world which is represented as such a theatre of the divine goodness, and particularly the state of mankind, seems on the contrary to contain so much evil of various kinds, that some have been extremely shocked by it. If the supreme ruler, whose power is irresistible, and his knowledge unlimited, be perfectly good, and designed the happiness of his creatures, how shall the many calamities which men feel themselves perpetually subjected to, and deeply affected with, be accounted for? Whence come sickness and pains, poverty and distress, famine and pestilence, wars and desolations? And if these miseries are alledged to be the natural or penal consequences of moral evil, how shall the permission of that moral evil be explained?

This difficulty has appeared so great, as to give occasion to a scheme of principles directly opposite to those which we have endeavored to establish, I mean that which is commonly called the *manichean* system (first, 'tis probable



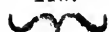
ble, vented among the *Persian Magi*, afterwards embraced by some professed christians) concerning two *independent principles* in the universe, the one *good*, the *father of lights*, from whom good of every kind is derived, as from its proper author and cause; the other an eternal, necessary, and self-originated principle of *evil*, to whom, as its true cause, must be attributed all the evil, both natural and moral, which is in the world. It may be observed, that this opinion, absurd as it is, professes a respect to the article we are now considering, the goodness of God; being not avowedly levelled against it; the evidence of it is, it seems, so glaring, that none of mankind, who acknowledge a deity, pretend to deny it, but is levelled against his omnipotence, his independence, and absolute supremacy. But as the proof of these perfections and glories of the supreme being is too strong to be shaken by any pretence whatsoever, so the *manichean* error, whatever it pretends, really subverts the doctrine of God's goodness itself; so far as it is the foundation of religion, and defeats the most essential pious affections which arise from it, by destroying confidence in God, from whose dominion, according to that scheme, evil is exempted, and we can

SERM. have no hope of escaping it by his insufficient  
 III. power; and it corrupts the true notion of  
 moral evil, leading us to understand it, not  
 as the voluntary and therefore culpable act  
 of a free agent, but as derived from an independent necessity of nature.

The principle of two *co-ordinate* and *independent* powers the causes of all things; or of two *Deities*, is unsupported by any pretence of proof; a merely arbitrary hypothesis, invented to salve the appearance of evil, of which however it gives no satisfying account. I have endeavoured on another occasion to prove the unity of God, by shewing *unity of design* in the frame and course of nature, or in the constitution and government of the inanimate, the sensitive, the intellectual, and moral world; and all the arguments insisted on for that purpose, conclude still more strongly when applied to the present subject; that is, they demonstrate that there are not, nor can possibly be two intelligent beings absolutely supreme and unmade, the makers and rulers of the world, of directly opposite characters, the one perfectly good, from whom all happiness and every thing truly worthy and valuable proceeds; the other malicious, always intending, and always producing

ducing all the misery and wickedness he can. SERM.  
Must it not appear to any plain understanding- III.  
extremely absurd, that there should be a  
constant harmony in the effects, when there  
is not only a diversity, but a stated irrecon-  
cileable contrariety in the counsels, the inter-  
ests, and intire characters of the intelligent  
causes? That two agents, whose designs con-  
tinually thwart each other, and their dispo-  
sitions are as inconsistent as light and dark-  
ness, should join together to form and carry  
on a vast system, which comprehends an al-  
most infinite variety of parts, yet without  
any marks of disagreement, but, on the con-  
trary, the order of their works is preserved,  
and the obvious ends of them uniformly pur-  
sued ; that there should be a malevolent, self-  
originated, and independent being, active and  
intelligent, ever prone to mischief, and ex-  
erting his utmost power in the production of  
it ; and yet in the whole extent of nature,  
as far as we can discern, not one monument  
of his true character to be seen ; not one  
finished piece or system which by its consti-  
tution and the law of its nature tends to, and  
ultimately terminates in misery ; but every  
living thing, capable of pleasure and pain,  
that we know, is so framed, that its natural  
state

SERM. state is a state of such happiness as is suitable  
 III. to its condition of being?



The truth is, when one looks attentively into the *manichean* scheme, it appears so full of gross absurdities, so destitute of any rational evidence, nay utterly inconsistent with the most obvious *Phænomena* of the world, as scarcely in the judgment of any reasonable man to want a refutation. But the appearance, which gave rise to it, deserves to be seriously inquired into as an objection against the divine goodness. In this view therefore I shall consider it, in the present discourse; and if we can get fairly rid of the difficulty, and a rational account can be given of the origin of evil, without having recourse to two independent principles, the foundations of religion, upon the foot of one sole supreme monarch of the universe, will be still more firmly established.

To begin with that part of the objection which relates to natural evil, or unhappiness, such as sickness, and pain, and death; here we acknowledge all that can be demanded, namely that not only this is permitted by the Deity, but that his providence is the cause of it, as well as of other appearances in the world. He is intimately present with all  
 his

his creatures, continually superintending all their affairs, exercising his power and wisdom in the preservation and government of them. He makes them to be what they are, guides their motions and tendencies, and by his own agency effects the alterations which are in their state. He is particularly the author of life, it is sustained by him, and all its enjoyments are derived from his bounty. *In him we live and move and have being.* It would be unreasonable, then, not to attribute to him the appointed changes in our condition, and to alledge that he gives joy, but not grief; health, but not sickness; and that he is the author of life, but not of death; seeing events of one kind as naturally fall out in the usual course of things as the other, and if there be one government of the world, must be equally under its direction. The scripture, which so fully asserts the goodness of God, representing it as an essential perfection of his nature, and manifested by his diffusing its beneficial fruits over the whole creation, and opening his hand liberally to satisfy every living thing, yet at the same time declares very expressly, that natural evil is his creature as well as good, and that the sufferings of sensitive and intelligent beings proceed

SERM. proceed from him as truly as their happiness.

III.



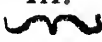
Thus one of the prophets, in the name of God, says \* *I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create evil, I the Lord do all these things.* Another, § *Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it.* In the 104th psalm, where the argument of the divine beneficence is designedly treated, and the plentitude of its manifestations in all parts of the terraqueous globe, yet it is said, || *he hides his face and living creatures are troubled, he takes away their breath, and they die and return to their dust.* And to add no more, *Moses* fully asserts the supreme dominion and power of almighty God as exercised in destroying life, and in wounding as well as healing, ‡ *see now that I, even I am he, and there is no God with me; I kill, and I make alive; I wound and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.*

Now the question is, whether all this, which we have acknowledged as certainly true in fact, is inconsistent with the goodness of God? Here the proof seems fairly to lie on the objector; for positive evidence

\* *Isaiah* xlv. 7.    § *Amos* iii. 6.    || *Ver.* 28.

‡ *Deut.* xxxii. 39.

has been brought on the other side, which SERM.  
we think clear and convincing; if then an III.  
appearance is alledged to be inconsistent, it



is most reasonably required that the inconsistency should be shewn. But this is never to be done, if we take into consideration all that is necessary in order to our making a true and certain judgment. Indeed if the point were to be determined by the first report of sense, we should be apt to pronounce every kind and degree of pain or uneasiness evil, and the designing author of it unkind. But experience has taught all men, that have common sense, to judge otherwise; for nothing is more obvious, even within the narrow compass of our own affairs in the present state, than that many things which at first seemed to be grievous, upon a more thorough consideration of the effects they produce, and their remote consequences, are found to be salutary; and those which have the flattering appearance of pleasant or good, prove in the issue destructive; some things, for instance, which are very pernicious to life, and on that account must rather be judged evil; as on the other hand very unpleasant medicines, or painful operations, being the means of health, are called good.

And,

SERM. And, with respect to societies, in which public and private interests frequently interfere, he is a good governor who promotes the former at the expence of the latter, who by the sufferings of individuals, when it cannot otherwise be done, provides for the peace and safety of a whole community. It is therefore necessary, in order to judge what is absolutely ill or good for a particular being, that we should know all its interests, and the whole of its existence; and to judge what is good or ill for a system, we should have a thorough comprehension of all its parts, with their relations and dependencies, and the last result of all events concerning it. But with respect to individuals of mankind, and much more with respect to the whole rational creation, these are points quite above the reach of human understanding. Who can take upon him to say that an event is altogether bad, and was so intended by the directing cause, who does not know the connexion it has with other events past and future, which if it were known, might shew it to be inseperable from a scheme, *in the whole*, most worthy of perfect wisdom and benevolence. And thus we see that the strength of the objection against the divine good-



goodness taken from the appearances of ill SERM.  
or misery in this world, which has been re- III.  
presented as so formidable, rests wholly on the  
imperfection of our knowledge, which can  
never be a just foundation to reason upon,  
in the very points whereof we are ignorant.  
If it is proved by a multitude of instances  
which cannot be otherwise accounted for,  
that God is beneficent, and the contrary is  
supported only by bare appearances, which,  
when examined, we are sure may be consist-  
ent with goodness, nay the genuin fruits of  
it, and our experience leads us to believe it,  
at least probable, that they are really so, let  
any attentive impartial mind judge what the  
true conclusion is, and whether the evidence  
of the doctrine we are now considering,  
does not remain unshaken.

But though what has been said is a suffici-  
ent answer to the objection, we may proceed  
to farther considerations which strongly e-  
vince that all the imperfection and unhap-  
piness we see in the world is consistent with  
the goodness of God, its maker and ruler.  
First, it can never be alledged, with any pre-  
tence of reason, that the goodness of the crea-  
tor required all his creatures should be of one  
order, and equal in the degree of their per-  
fections

SERM. fections and happiness. That were to set limits to omnipotence and infinite wisdom, both which are gloriously manifested in a diversity of productions. Now if it was fit and becoming the wisdom of the Deity to diversify the manifestations of his power by creating essentially distinct natures, with different capacities, or different kinds and degrees of perfection, it necessarily follows, that the exercise of his goodness must be various, as suited to the condition of the beings which are its objects. How the glorious principle of divine benevolence displays itself in other parts of the universe, and towards superior orders of creatures, does not fall within our observation; but we see, that in this lower world there is not only a vast multitude of individual animals, but of different kinds, which shews the wise œconomy of providence, and gives such a multiform appearance to its bounty as must raise in attentive minds a very high admiration of it, instead of being any reasonable objection against it. Shall we say that God is not good to all his creatures, because he has not made them all equal; that the brutal kinds have no share in his bounty, because they are not moral agents; or, that mankind owe him no thanks, because

because they are in a mixt imperfect state? SERM.

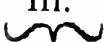
On the contrary, is it not rather to be acknowledged, that his goodness is the more conspicuous, by this variety; and that, by their different enjoyment derived from him, the creatures proclaim the riches of his beneficence, as well as the largeness of his understanding? There is therefore no ground of objection against the divine goodness from the natural imperfection of some created beings, from their inferior condition, and the lower kinds and degrees of enjoyment which are appointed for them. III.

But farther, It may be alledged, nay I am willing that the strength of the whole cause should be singly rested upon it, that goodness not only allowed, it *required*, that there should be different degrees of perfection and happiness among the creatures of God. This will be evident as soon as we reflect that a scheme of *perfect equality* must of necessity exclude all participation of that part of the divine blessedness, *the communication of good*. For where the same kind, and the same degree of happiness, is at all times possessed by all, there it is manifest beneficence can have no place, being from the *nature* of such a state, in every instance, plainly impractica-

SERM. ble. After saying this, I am something a-  
 III. afraid, that the generous human heart can hard-  
 ly have patience while I am going through  
 with the argument. Indeed this kind of hap-  
 piness which the objection has found out as  
 the most perfect, and therefore fittest for the  
 creatures of God, is the very same, and can  
 be no other, than that indolent, unaffection-  
 ate, and altogether selfish enjoyment of ex-  
 istence, which the *Epicureans*, in high com-  
 pliment, reserved for the Gods *themselves*.  
 And so far these philosophers had certainly  
 the advantage, that allowing this state of  
 pompous ease to be fullest of felicity, it was  
 but fitting and decent it should be ascribed to  
 the Gods ; and in consequence of it, that  
 goodness being an active principle, incompat-  
 ible with such divine repose, should be deem-  
 ed unworthy of so delicate an habitation as  
 the breast of such Deities. Wretched how-  
 ever, that philosophising at best, where be-  
 neficence is in conclusion required to be ex-  
 terminated as an enemy to happiness. But  
 let it be remembered that what lies at present  
 before us, is not to give any direct proof that  
 God is good ; the evidence for this most im-  
 portant article of theism has been already pro-  
 duced ; but it is only to shew, that the fact  
 of

of subordination, and diversity in the degree of happiness, which we see and know actually to take place in God's creation, is so far from having any tendency to make void the former reasoning on that subject, that allowing that reasoning to be just, and that goodness is in truth an attribute of the deity, it unavoidably follows, that there must have been instituted such a subordination. Can any thing be more plain, than if goodness be essential (and if it be an attribute at all, it must be essential) to the divine perfection and felicity, and be in its own nature communicable, that it must likewise be essential to the highest perfection and happiness that God can communicate; and consequently, that seeing goodness determines him to confer the highest possible happiness, goodness itself must be the cause of this subordination, without which this noblest, and truly divine perfection and felicity, could not have found any place in the whole circle of dependent being; not one creature that could be the object of another's beneficence. This is not the place for pursuing this argument unto all its consequences; but from what has been already said, the attentive mind will be naturally led to infer, that the same cause that re-


S E R M.  
III.  


SERM. III.  quired a subordination at all, may be justly supposed to require, that this subordination should be continued down through a vast variety of orders, so long as happiness was preserved superior in degree to imperfection, or in other words, so long as existence can be pronounced a blessing, or preferable to that, which if it can be wished, is the most unnatural of all conceivable wishes, *annihilation*, or *not to be*. Observe, here, a most pleasing instance of that perfect harmony and connection, that will always be found to subsist between the true principles of theism, and the reality or truth of things: An appearance which has often been talked of, as a most shocking objection against the goodness of God, turns out upon a more attentive examination, to be the natural and inseparable consequence and effect of this very goodness.

2dly, As natural good and evil, or happiness and misery, are of various kinds and degrees, and experience shews, that some of these opposite kinds and degrees may be mixt together in one state, the condition of any being is to be denominated from the prevalence of either, and consequently the disposition of the agent, by whose appointment that condition is determined. Every state is to be

be acknowledged good, and the author of it SERM.  
benevolent, in which good prevails, though III.  
not without a mixture of evil, and which  
therefore is better than non-existence. Now  
this is so evidently the case of living creatures  
during the continuance of their being, that  
the objection against the divine goodness,  
taken from the imperfection of their enjoy-  
ments and their liableness to pain, is fully  
removed by it. And for the difficulty ari-  
sing from the shortness of their duration, it is  
answered upon the same grounds, for how  
unreasonable were it to alledge that God is  
not good in giving life, because he intends to  
take it away; that a favour freely bestowed  
by him is not worthy to be acknowledged,  
because at a time appointed by his wisdom it  
is to be recalled, or because an inferior life is  
shortened for the sake of a more important one,  
and by the wise administration of providence  
serves higher, more useful, and beneficial  
purposes, than merely its own enjoyment?  
especially it is to be considered, that the short  
lived animals, which as far as we know, are  
not destined to a future existence, give no  
discovery of their having any painful desires  
of it, or any anxiety about death, which may

SERMON. interrupt such present pleasures as they are capable of.

III.  3dly, As the state of man is what most immediately affects us, what we are best acquainted with, and concerning which we are the most capable of making a judgment, we may observe, that when the natural good and evil which we see and feel in it, are compared together, and a just estimate made of the whole, it will appear that the former is the superior end of the divine administration, which therefore ought to be denominated beneficent from its principal and ultimate view. I observed before, that both in the animal and moral part of the human constitution, pains are salutary, and were by the gracious intending cause designed as means of safety and happiness. But it is farther most worthy of our serious consideration, that through the whole condition of being in this world, as under the government of almighty God, the same end, *our greatest good* is uniformly pursued, by the discipline of his providence, in our afflictions. I take for granted, what every wise man will agree to, that virtue is the greatest good, the highest perfection and happiness of the human nature: Whatever therefore has a tendency to promote



mote *that*, is for our good, and may be attributed not to a malevolent design, but rather to the appointment of a gracious and compassionate father. Now experience shews, that such is our present infirmity, and we are liable to so many temptations of various kinds, especially in a prosperous and easy state of outward things, which affords the plentiful means of a free indulgence in the gratification of our lower appetites and passions, that very few of mankind maintain their virtuous integrity uninterrupted, and escape *the corruption that is in the world through lust*: At least it may be said of all universally, even of the best, that they are in danger of being misled from the paths of righteousness, and neglecting its superior pleasures, in a constant series of flowing worldly enjoyments. Therefore are divine corrections profitable to them, and pains, sickness, and distresses of various sorts wisely dispensed by providence, tending to abate their relish of inferior gratifications, put the mind on pursuing the more noble and solid satisfaction which arises from the practice of virtue.

Besides, adversity is not only the means of instruction to men of amending their tempers and reforming their lives, as it brings

SERM. them to calm reflection, and sensibly convin-  
 III. ces them that the pleasures of the animal  
 life are uncertain, in comparison low, and  
 unworthy of their eager pursuit; it is also  
 the immediate occasion of the best exercises,  
 and the highest moral improvements which  
 the mind is capable of. Equanimity in all  
 the changes of our outward condition, pati-  
 ence under sufferings of divers kinds and of  
 a long continuance, resignation to the will of  
 the supreme, perfectly wise, righteous and  
 good governor of the world, and an unsha-  
 ken confidence in him, with a benevolent  
 disposition towards all mankind, even the  
 most injurious, and a hearty persevering zeal  
 for the publick good, notwithstanding many  
 disappointments and continued ill usage,  
 these will appear to our thoughts, in specu-  
 lation itself, the most lovely parts of a beau-  
 tiful moral character; but the heart that is  
 conscious of having practised them, has ar-  
 rived to the very top of self-enjoyment, and  
 possesses the highest felicity which the human  
 soul in its present state can possibly attain to.  
 Persecution or suffering for the cause of truth  
 and virtue, which has sometimes happened  
 to good men, seems to furnish a plausible ar-  
 gument against the equity and goodness of  
 the

the divine government. But upon a thorough examination, we shall be satisfied that it is consistent, not only with perfect righteousness, but God's most tender and compassionate care for his faithful servants. Virtue is far from being the less in their esteem, or yielding them the less satisfaction of mind, because they suffer for it; on the contrary, it is much endeared, and a greater confidence and security arises from it; for true goodness then appears in all its dignity and beauty, trampling over every thing that comes in competition with it; and it is impossible for the sincere, self-approving mind, to think that its cause, and the condition of its friends, however oppressed at present, can be always unhappy.

Again, the afflictions of some, especially of the virtuous, may be very useful to others, and the means of great publick good. It has been already observed, that extraordinary punishments inflicted on sinners are graciously intended by providence as publick warnings to the rest of mankind, that they may avoid the crimes against which the divine vengeance has been so signally testified: but the sufferings of the most innocent and righteous, however grievous they may be for the present,

SER M. present, are sometimes also the occasions of  
 III. their being more extensively useful than otherwise they could have been. Of this the history of *Joseph* affords us a very remarkable instance. That good man, cruelly persecuted in his father's family, having narrowly escaped the snare which his envious brethren laid for his life, was sold by them to a servitude which they (with great probability) thought would be perpetual and very wretched: But the wise providence of God so directed the event, that it proved not only the occasion of great prosperity to himself, but of preserving his own kindred, and indeed a great multitude of mankind who were otherwise in danger of perishing by a destructive famine; and he makes this wise and pious reflection himself on the whole amazing scene, that though his brethren had designed evil against him, yet *God meant it for good, to save much people alive*, which to a person of his humanity and goodness, did more than compensate all his sufferings. Though this instance is indeed extraordinary, and it is not to be expected that the issue of good men's afflictions will be generally parallel to it, yet it is very instructive, as shewing that however frightful and shocking the  
 first

first appearances of sufferings may be, and however wicked the intentions of those who are the instruments of them, they are under the disposal of a wise and good providence, which knows how to bring good out of evil. But the principal, and the most ordinary way whereby the sufferings of the righteous are publickly useful, is by setting their virtues in a clear and strong light as examples. Integrity never shines with so bright a lustre, nor appears so amiable, as in a great trial of affliction. To see a man struggling with difficulties to which, one would think, human strength is utterly unequal, oppressed with reproaches and injuries of all kinds, with a train of vexatious disappointments, with tormenting pains, and continually exposed to the very last extremities of suffering, yet still possessing his soul in patience, maintaining an undisturbed equanimity, and resolutely adhering to the cause of truth, and to his duty, by deserting which he might deliver himself out of all his troubles; this is certainly the noblest testimony that can be given to virtue, and must leave a conviction of its excellence on every mind which is witness to it, and not stupidly insensible or irreclaimably hardened in a wicked course. How often

SERM.

III.

SERM. often have persecutors themselves relented,  
 III. not to mention spectators, and even been  
 won to the love of goodness by glorious examples of invincible fortitude, patience, and meekness in the distressed; and feeble irresolute minds, otherwise in danger of being led away with the errors of the wicked, been animated to a courageous and persevering steadfastness in well-doing? 'Tis true, that even in ordinary life, example has very great force, perhaps nothing has contributed more to preserve the reputation of virtue, and to propagate it among mankind, than their seeing all excuses and objections against the practice of it, effectually refuted by the unaffected piety, the hardy temperance, the inflexible justice, and diffusive charity of frail mortals like themselves, who have the same infirmity of nature, and the same temptations to the contrary vices. But still exemplary virtue shines more illustriously under trials; and as then the strength of good dispositions appears the greater, it must proportionably have the more powerful influence on others. Surely a good man will think all the adversities of his life amply recompensed, when they not only produce fruits so advantageous to himself, and are the means of his growing in virtue, but are  
 so


so beneficial to mankind, tending to reclaim them from their pernicious ways, and to restore true piety and goodness among them. Who can deny that providence is beneficial to the human race, which makes the tolerable sufferings of a few individuals (therefore tolerable, because even during their incumbency, they are accompanied with pleasures of a superior kind) and sufferings of a short continuance, as the Apostle speaks, *light and for a moment*, become so eminently useful, by serving those glorious ends which are worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness.

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The sum of our answer, upon the whole, to this part of the argument is, that not only the appearances of natural evil or unhappiness, in the present state of things, cannot be justly objected against the goodness of the divine government, because they are not prevalent; on the contrary, every considerate person must be convinced there is more happiness than misery in the world, that all kinds of life in their natural state have enjoyment annexed to them, and pain only added as a means of their preservation, that happiness is the governing view in the human constitution, and the dispensations of providence towards men, in the general course

SERM. course and design of them, are for good,  
III. those, which for the present seem to be  
 most grievous, often tending to the greatest good. But farther, if some of these appearances were more difficult to be explained than they are, so that we could not see or conjecture any good to which they do or may tend, yet we could not reasonably pronounce them to be absolutely evil, and in the whole ; experience in a multitude of instances teaching us, that good and evil of this sort are connected together, so, as to be changed into each other. Now, if we take the whole series of events in the world as under one wise and good direction, and comprehended in the scheme of the divine providential administration, and if we allow what is so apparently reasonable, that one would think it cannot be denied, that nothing can be justly called evil, which in the event produces greater good whereby it is overballanced, if I say, we allow this, who can have sufficient reason to assert that any event is absolutely evil, since it is impossible for the human understanding to comprehend all the relations and the remote issues of things ? That which, in our narrow way of thinking, may seem the worst that could happen



happen, may yet in the intire plan of the S E R M. divine councils be necessary, and produce the III. best effects. God has given us such rules of action, and such notices of things, as are best accommodated to our condition of being, and the fittest to direct us so as we may answer its purposes, but he has not let us into the secret of his own designs, which are so complicated, and of so vast a compass, that our minds are utterly unable to comprehend them. This however we may safely rest in, that if the supreme governing mind perfectly knows all things, past, present, and to come, with all their connexions and dependencies, if the order of the world, and the harmony of things shews him to be wise, and prevailing good in it is a convincing proof of his benevolence, then all things, being under the direction of a wise and good Agent, are ordered for the best; and the contrary appearances are no just objections against this, seeing they are no more than *appearances*, amounting to no certain proof of absolute evil in the whole, but only of the defectiveness of our understandings. Nay, we may conclude, that the whole progressive scheme of nature and providence, comprehending all creatures, and the entire series

SERM. series of events which ever have been or shall be, is absolutely the best, and productive of the greatest happiness that could possibly be. For happiness being the proper object and end of benevolence, when this is accompanied in the agent with omnipotence and infinite knowledge, the greatest happiness in the whole, must be the intention and the effect. Is it not a contradiction to suppose, that a benevolent being would choose to execute a scheme which he saw would produce a lesser measure of good, when another which he saw would produce a *greater*, was at the same time present to his mind, and equally in his power to accomplish?

But there is another kind of evil, to which and the consequences of it, the difficulty also relates, that is *moral evil*. Of this it cannot be said that God is the author, or that he does at all approve it; but yet upon the principle of his sole universal dominion, we must conclude, it was in some sense permitted by his providence, and that it was foreseen by him without his intending to prevent it, which he could have done. Nay the most important measures of his conduct towards mankind, all known to him from the beginning, were formed upon the supposition

fit of its being. Now the question is, SERM.  
III.  
how such a permission can consist with the moral perfections of the Deity? Is it to be thought, that a being infinitely holy, and utterly averse to all moral turpitude, would not use his power to prevent it? That a being infinitely good, would leave his creatures unsupported against temptations to crimes which are ruinous both to themselves and others, which fully the beauty of his own works, and tend to defeat the design of them; nay, that he would place his creatures, frail and fallible, in circumstances wherein he foresaw they would fall from their innocence, and involve themselves in misery to be inflicted as a punishment by his own avenging hand?

The answer usually given, and which, when fully and impartially considered, seems in a great measure to take off the force of the argument, is, that moral evil is wholly to be imputed to the creatures themselves who commit it, that it proceeds from an abuse of their liberty, or free agency, which is a high privilege of their nature, worthy of the wisdom and goodness of God to give to such creatures, most suitable to their condition of being, absolutely necessary to virtue itself, and to the happiness that arises from it, which is the

SERM.

III.



greatest happiness they are capable of. It is not to be imagined (which yet the objection necessarily supposes) that the goodness of God, or his rectitude, require the exertion of his utmost power for preventing evil. His attributes are exercised in a perfect harmony, and he never does (it may be said in some sense, he cannot do) any thing, but what is agreeable to them all. His power, which cannot possibly be controuled by any opposite strength or resistance, is always, and must be directed in its exercise by wisdom, and it is not an indignity to his absolute omnipotence, to say, he cannot do any thing but what is fit and reasonable to be done. In like manner, holiness and goodness are to be considered as perfections, or principles in the divine nature, which exert themselves, not necessarily, but freely, or which do not require all to be done, in every instance, which can possibly be done by absolute omnipotence, in order to accomplish their ends, or attain what they incline to. In this, as in other cases, the wisdom of God requires that his operation should be according to the order which he has established, and to the nature of things which he has wisely framed to be preserved inviolable. As in the govern-  
ment

ment of the inanimate creatures, he acts *suit-* SER M.  
*ably* to their natures, moving and disposing III.  
of them by the irresistible determination of  
his sovereign will, so his influence on moral  
agents is such as does not destroy the essential  
powers which he has given them. Let it be  
more particularly considered, first, that per-  
haps there is not, nor can be, any being, of  
a limited understanding, above the possibility  
of being misled in its moral conduct, and all  
the orders of created free agents must natu-  
rally be in a state of trial, till by a right use  
of liberty their integrity is confirmed. If it  
be so, it does not necessarily follow from the  
nature of liberty itself; nor is it a contradic-  
tion, that rectitude should be immutable, for  
the divine rectitude certainly is so; but it a-  
rises from the natural imperfection of finite  
minds, and the fixed order of the divine o-  
peration on created things, in a congruity to  
their several natures.

Every imperfect agent, having a variety in  
his frame, must have propensions to particu-  
lar objects which are adapted to the indi-  
gence of his condition, which propensions,  
in a regular moral constitution, are under the  
government of conscience, but their being  
does not depend upon it; they are excited

SERM. by the presence of their suitable objects, or  
III. perhaps without it, and though their first  
motions, and perhaps their continuance in  
the mind for some time, may be innocent,  
yet it is easily conceivable that they may demand a gratification, in circumstances and degrees, which conscience forbids. Here then is a tendency or a temptation to evil, from which the creature, by the right use of its own powers, may escape, and thereby be more confirmed in virtue; but a possibility of falling and corrupting itself, seems to be inseparable from every finite nature, and even the danger of it seems naturally to attend the state of all finite moral agents, during some part of their existence. However that be, we know that we are possessed of such a liberty, that we are capable both of doing right and wrong; and our moral powers so constituted, with such a freedom, we cannot help thinking a very high privilege; whereby we are raised above the condition of many other beings, and have the essential foundation of noble enjoyments. Secondly, The human mind necessarily appears to itself the cause both of the moral good and evil which is done by it. When our hearts reproach us for doing wrong, we are conscious of no constraint,

straint, but that it was our own choice, and we were furnished with all the defences against it which we could expect or desire as free agents, and which might have been effectual, if we had carefully used them, and duly exercised our reason. When our consciences approve us for having done right, we are sensible that we acted with equal freedom, which is the very ground of inward satisfaction, and that no power is wanting to that moral integrity which yields true self-enjoyment. The mind therefore, I say, appears to itself the cause both of good and evil; the capacity is derived wholly from God, and is preserved by him, the particular determination is wholly from ourselves, only influenced, so far as is consistent with our free agency, by setting before us sufficient motives to good; yet the mind has a natural power of making a wrong choice. We must then be condemned by our own hearts, in charging the human constitution as defective to the purposes of virtue, and thereby of happiness, and impeaching the goodness of its author, since we are conscious to ourselves, that we are furnished with all which is necessary, and know of no power that is wanting to our doing good and eschewing evil.

SERM.

III.

Thirdly, Whereas it is alledged, that since God foresaw men would abuse their liberty, that they would pervert that which is right, and thereby make themselves unhappy, goodness seems to have required, that the occasion of such an abuse should have been prevented. The answer, so far as relates to the divine prescience, is, that it has no manner of influence on future events, nor does at all affect the nature or the being of them. It ought not to be said that things are future, or certainly will come to pass, because they are foreknown, but they are foreknown because they are future. Events to come, as well as those which are present, or past, are known to God, just as they are in themselves, and in their intire causes. The whole series of necessary causes and effects is seen by his perfect understanding from the beginning to the end; what he has determined to do by his own power is foreknown, as ascertained by that determination; but the transgressions of his creatures, of which themselves are the sole causes, appear quite otherwise; they are the actions of free agents, the futurity of which is no more determined by his appointment, than the actual production of them is effected by his power. As the bare know-  
ledge



ledge of crimes present, or past, does not SER. M. communicate the least degree of their guilt, III. but may consist with a perfect abhorrence of them, and the tenderest compassion for the offender, so may the foreknowledge of them, when future, unless something be omitted by the prescient being which was necessary for preventing them, and which was not only in his power, but fit and reasonable for him to do.

Fourthly, It must be acknowledged that, strictly speaking, it was in God's power to have prevented moral evil altogether: If a finite intelligent being cannot be absolutely impeccable, yet he certainly could have created moral agents much more perfect than men are, given them a greater measure of knowledge, set the motives of virtue in so strong a light before them, as more effectually to secure their attachment to it, and he could have placed them in a state much more free from temptations, and consequently in less danger of making defection; nay, as liberty itself is the gift of God, depending wholly on his pleasure, he could have prevented the abuse of it, by withholding it altogether, if nothing else was sufficient, or he could have prevented the conjuncture of cir-

I 4                      cumstances

SERM. cumstances in which he foresaw liberty could  
III. be abused. But the question is, whether  
goodness and wisdom required that such methods should be taken, or rather if, upon the narrow view we have of the works of God and the whole system of the universe, we can pretend to judge that the present constitution, in this branch of it, which relates to free agents, is inconsistent with the wisdom and moral perfections of the supreme Being? Shall we take upon us to say, that the order of the creation, and the ends for which it was made, did not require or even allow that there should be such a rank of beings in it, constituted as we are, with understanding, liberty, and moral affections, but capable of sin, tempted to it, and thereby in danger of becoming unhappy through their own fault? If we suppose one in a superior condition of being, having an understanding vastly more enlarged than the human, and a more extensive view of the universal system, which comprehends many orders of created intelligencies with various degrees of perfection and enjoyment, can we pretend to affirm that it would appear to that mind incongruous in nature, that there should be such a species of rational creatures as mankind,

kind, with all the appointed weakness and SERM.  
imperfection of their present state ; or even III.

that it would not appear a very proper part of the divine plan, necessary to the beauty and harmony of the whole, variously related to the rest, and forming a scene wherein the perfections of the Deity are admirably displayed, and where good is the true character of the intire scheme? But though such a supposition is reasonable, and shews that our understandings are too weak, and our knowledge too scanty to comprehend this subject, consequently, with how little judgment men take upon them to censure the works of God, of which they know so little ; we may consider the human constitution, and our whole state of being in this world, with all the advantages and disadvantages of it, in a way more accommodated to our capacity, that is, we may consider it, by itself, abstractly from its relation to the rest of the universe, and even in that view, it will appear no uneligible thing, and that the good in it overbalances the inconveniency which arises from the danger that attends liberty. Would not one who considers the privileges of our nature, and the various enjoyment which belongs to the general condition of men, together

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gether with that measure of perfection and felicity which we have in prospect, if we duly use our own powers and improve our opportunities, even though it be accompanied with the hazard of moral evil and unhappiness, which is only to be incurred by our own fault, but may be avoided if we are not wanting to ourselves, and we may reasonably hope, from the goodness of God, for all necessary assistance in order to it; would not, I say, one think this state in the whole preferable to non-existence? And if it appears to us preferable, then it is to be acknowledged good, to the praise of the author's benevolence, notwithstanding its frailty and mutability, and although, in the event, it could not reasonably be expected, but that some of such an order of beings would fall into sin and unhappiness.

What has been said on this subject is agreeable to the explications given by the most eminent ancient philosophers, of the origin of evil. They attributed it, not to an independent evil agent, nor to *unqualified matter*, into which some had absurdly enough resolved moral defects themselves, but to what they called the *necessity of imperfect beings*; meaning, that as all creatures must necessarily

rily have some degree of imperfection, particularly, the necessary imperfection of created free agents implies that they may possibly err, and act contrary to right, so the placing them in such a possibility, is by no means to be imputed to any deficiency of wisdom and goodness in God, but is the inevitable result of their nature and condition of being, so that if they should exist at all constituted as they are, it must be in their power to do wrong. For example, such a creature as man, compounded of flesh and spirit, must have a variety of affections, some higher, and some lower, some which determine him to pursue the proper perfection of his superior faculties as the chief end of his being, and others which attach him to the inferior part of his constitution, which must also be preserved by his care, during the time appointed for its subsistence. Since then, there are such different tendencies in the nature of man, and liberty also essential to him, he must be capable of acting differently, according to the different direction of his instincts and affections, and his acting always right could not be absolutely secured, or the possibility of moral evil avoided, without such an interposition of almighty power, as would import

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SERM. an essential change in his frame and his  
 III. state. In other words, if the divine perfections  
 required that sin should be absolutely prevented, or not at all permitted, they required that such a being as man in a state of probation, should not be created, which scarcely any considerate person will have the hardiness to affirm.

Another consideration of great importance for our rightly understanding this subject, and vindicating the divine perfections, is, that God over-rules the moral evil which his providence permits, so that it becomes the occasion of good. Tho' he has laid us under an inviolable law *not to do evil that good may come*, for the evil we do, proceeding from corrupt affections, a profest intention of good by the same actions, must be an absurd and utterly inconsistent pretence, nor have we any certain foreknowledge of the supposed good event, or power to bring it to pass; yet is he under no such restraint by the perfect purity and goodness of his nature, but that he may suffer his creatures, (so far suffer, as not to hinder them by an irresistible exertion of his almighty power) to deviate voluntarily from the rule of right, intending to take the opportunity from their  
 errors,

errors, of manifesting his wisdom and other SERM. attributes in a glorious manner, and of producing effects in the whole beneficial to his III.

creation. As the obligation of preventing evil must be limited, in the manner before explained, to what is fit and reasonable to be done, without infringing the essential liberty of rational agents, which is God's own rule of proceeding, and also the rule he has given us for regulating our conduct towards our fellow creatures, for he has not allowed us under the pretence of restraining them from sin, to encroach upon their freedom, no man surely imagines that charity requires or will justify him in it; so instead of being inconsistent with the most perfect rectitude and goodness, it is a great demonstration of both, and of wisdom, to turn the follies and faults of men, in the event, to an occasion of promoting virtue and public happiness. Would it not be very commendable in any human government, from the very irregularities of subjects, in their own nature destructive, to take the opportunity of enacting wholesome laws, and forming useful schemes, which with the tenderest pity to offenders, should not weaken the public securities, but tend more effectually to

SERM. to promote the common good. There is  
 III. indeed a great disparity between human governments and the divine, in this respect that their foresight of the behaviour of subjects is limited and uncertain, and therefore it is not in their power, nor can they be obliged, to take effectual measures for preventing crimes, whereas God knows all things future as well as present with the greatest clearness and certainty; but this does not alter the case so far as it relates to the point we are now considering, for as his prescience is not the rule of his actions, but his perfect reason and the fitness of things, so on the other hand, the wisdom of human governors and their goodness would be justified, if they did foreknow future transgressions without interposing to prevent them by any methods of force, provided they could foreknow with certainty, and had it in their power to bring it to pass, from such transgressions an increase both of moral and natural good, which we are sure God actually does, in many instances, and have reason to believe he does it universally.

We may consider then, what good the permission of moral evil appears to us in fact subservient to, at least the occasion of,  
 and



and which it may reasonably be supposed SER. M.  
that God intended. First, it is evident, that III.  
his own perfections are variously displayed  
in consequence of the sins of his creatures,  
and particularly of mankind. The perfect  
purity of his nature, or his aversion to evil,  
could not have appeared so fully if evil had  
never been; nor his impartial distinguishing  
justice in rendering to all moral agents ac-  
cording to their works: And above all, his  
goodness by the occasion of sin shines mar-  
vellously, his patience is exercised towards  
his guilty creatures, he shows a *desire to the*  
*offending works of his hands, and is kind to the*  
*unthankful and the evil*, at the same time  
that he has an indignation against their  
crimes; and pardoning mercy, of which  
there could have been no notion in a  
state of innocence, appears now one of the  
most amiable glories of the Deity. It may  
be justly said, that the whole human race,  
though by corrupting their ways they have  
greatly altered their condition for the worse,  
yet they all continue in a state of trial, the  
objects of the divine goodness, which is not  
diminished by their sins, but exalted into  
pity; and that God has not left any of them  
*without witness of his mercy, whereby they*  
are

SERM. are invited to repentance, that they may be  
 III. finally happy in his favour, tho' goodness  
 has appeared in a distinguishing peculiar manner to some of them beyond others. If it be said, that supposing this to be true, that God has taken occasion from the sins of men to manifest his own perfections the more illustriously, it follows, indeed, that he has erected a monument to his glory, but how does it turn to the good of his creatures? I answer, that the glory of God and the happiness of the intelligent part of the creation are inseparable, and whatever manifests the former actually does and was by him intended to promote the other. The displays of his power and wisdom, even in inanimate nature, must be supposed to have been principally designed for the benefit of rational beings in contemplating and enjoying it, for which purposes all the parts of the material world, known to us, are fitted in a wonderful variety: Much more the exercise of the divine attributes, and especially goodness towards moral agents themselves, has a direct tendency to excite in them, and also in other intelligent beings who are not the immediate objects of it, pious and devout affections, naturally accompanied

compained with a high enjoyment, and there-  
by to promote virtue and universal rational  
happinefs, more than in a different ftate of  
things there could have been occafion for.

Secondly, The permiffion of fin is fo over-  
ruled by divine providence as to afford, by  
the confequences of it, an occafion for the va-  
rious exercife of virtue, and thereby advan-  
cing the true perfection and happinefs of the  
human nature. Sin has introduced thefe ca-  
lamities and diftreffes into the world which  
try the integrity of good men, their patience,  
and confidence in God, and thefe are the  
finifhing and moft amiable parts of a beauti-  
ful moral character. But this was before par-  
ticularly infifted on. We may farther ob-  
ferve, that the paffions and frailties of men  
tending to animofity and difcord, are direct-  
ly, and immediately, the occafion to others  
of praftifing the moft excellent virtues; they  
are the occafions of their exercifing forbear-  
ance, meeknefs, and the forgivenefs of in-  
juries, all fum'd up in benevolence, the no-  
bleft affection of the mind. Thefe virtuous  
difpofitions, by thus variously exerting them-  
felves, are greatly ftrengthened, and fo the  
capacity of the mind for various rational en-  
joyments is enlarged; every inftance of their

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probation, and the resolved vigorous exercise of them against a contrary tendency or violent temptation, lays a foundation for farther improvement in goodness, and brings a return of true and solid pleasure, so that from this state of infirmity and discipline the mind naturally grows up to a more exalted virtue, and to an increase of happiness, which otherwise it could not be capable of. We know not indeed what room there might be for a diversity of virtuous exercises, even in perfect innocence, whereby good affections might be confirmed, and the satisfaction resulting from them increased, but we know that, in our present state, some very important branches both of piety and charity are occasioned by the moral imperfections of men, as well as by some degrees of misery; and that the practice of these virtues eminently contributes both to private and publick good: whereby it appears, that good and evil are wisely mixed together, and set against each other in the condition of mankind, and that the permission of evil, so far as God does permit it, is not unworthy of the best of beings, since his providence over-rules it, in the event, to the promoting of good, as an occasion of the most various and illustrious exercise of virtue,

virtue, and of adding a high relish to the enjoyment which arises from it. And,

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III.  


Lastly, We may take the state of mankind, containing this puzzling appearance of moral evil, in another view, that is, as related to the rest of the rational creation, which, if it does not explain the difficulty, shews that, in all probability, the reason why we do not attain to a full and satisfying solution of it, is, that the subject is above our comprehension, and that therefore the objection is founded not on evidence, but ignorance. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the affairs of this lower world, principally those of its chief inhabitants, have a relation to superior natures, and are extensively useful to the whole system of intelligent creatures. That there are in the universe other species of rational agents besides mankind, and above them, cannot well be doubted. When we consider the magnificence of the works of God, the vast fabrick in which he has displayed his power and wisdom, that there are other globes at an immense distance from that where we dwell, and of incomparably greater magnitude, who can imagine that they are all void of beings capable of rational enjoyment, and of celebrating the crea-

SERM. tor's praise, and that this little earth is the  
 III. only habitation of intelligencies? Now if  
 there be a variety of particular systems in the  
 moral as well as in the natural world, and a  
 diversity of administration in the divine go-  
 vernment of them, they may have a mutual  
 relation which we do not discern, and the  
 affairs of one, may answer purposes in ano-  
 ther; and in the whole, which may surpass  
 our present comprehension. As the state and  
 situation of distant orbs render them useful  
 to the earth, which may be also useful to  
 them in a different way, all conspiring to  
 make one regular harmonious system of ma-  
 terial nature, the like order may be, and we  
 have reason to believe there is established, a-  
 mong the several kinds of rational beings,  
 which under different particular œconomies,  
 do all of them together, make one beautiful  
 and perfect moral system. Who then that  
 does not comprehend the whole, can take  
 upon him to censure a part? Can he pretend  
 to judge, that this mixt imperfect state of  
 ours is a blemish in the universal frame, when  
 he does not know how variously it may be  
 related, and what purposes it may serve in  
 the kingdom of God, and what events may  
 arise from it beneficial to the whole, in the  
 scheme

scheme of providence? Nay, upon this view SER M.  
of things, which is vastly too large for our III.  
narrow understandings, can we possibly be  
sure, that the permission of evil among men,  
is not a necessary part of the intire moral  
constitution. This consideration may justly  
silence the impious clamors of short-sighted  
mortals against the wisdom and goodness of  
God, since it shows that they really amount  
to no more than this, that we cannot com-  
prehend his counsels. And if we pursue our  
inquiries further into a future existence, where  
the last punishments are to be inflicted on  
men for their wickedness, which our own  
foreboding thoughts naturally lead us to, and  
the scriptures explain it more fully, as a most  
powerful argument to restrain men from evil,  
of that state we can, at present, form but a  
very imperfect idea, the notices we have of  
it being only such as are intended for our ad-  
vantage during our probation; but we may  
be assured that the most exact measures of rec-  
titude, wisdom, and goodness will be ob-  
served in it, for if we have sufficient evidence  
that these perfections are the true characters  
of the active supreme mind which governs all,  
it would be unreasonable not to allow, that  
they shall prevail every where, and in every

SERM. state, and consequently, that the last result  
 III. of all the divine dispensations, comprehending the permission of evil, will be the greatest absolute good.

The sum of what has been offered upon the subject, is, that God is not the author of moral evil, nor did he fore-ordain it in his everlasting counsels, as any part of his works ; on the contrary, he always disapproves it as an irregular production, whereof the creatures themselves are the sole causes, and directly opposite to the essential rectitude of his nature ; but as he permits it in time, so far as not to prevent it by such extraordinary interpositions of his omnipotence as would violate the free-agency of his rational creatures (which free-agency is an essential part of their constitution, necessary to their answering the ends of their being, necessary to their practising virtue, their attaining moral perfection and rational happiness) so he foresaw it from eternity, and he chose to execute that scheme of creation and providence, as in the whole absolutely the best, upon which he knew that moral evil was unavoidable. We ourselves plainly discern that the permission of sin actually is, in many instances, the occasion of good, that it may be  
 so



so in many more instances and ways, but we SERM.  
cannot comprehend them, because we can- III.  
not see the infinitely various relations of things  
in the universe (indeed this must necessarily  
be the case with imperfect understandings,  
that things must appear to them differently  
from what they really are) we may therefore  
conclude that the objection, as formidable as  
it may seem at first, does not affect the doc-  
trine it is urged against, which is otherwise  
so well established; but that all the most  
shocking appearances of evil in the world,  
the oppression of innocence, the success of  
tyranny, the covetousness, pride, wrath,  
and superstition of men spreading desolation  
through the earth, that, I say, these, and  
other appearances like them, may terminate  
in good. It has often been so, and the con-  
sideration of the perfect goodness and wisdom  
of God, whose power is irresistible, satisfies  
us that it will be so universally. And for the  
miseries of incorrigible sinners in the other  
world, they shall be no greater, than what  
public order, and the universal good of the  
rational creation, requires them to be.

## SERMON IV.


The Goodness of God explained and improved.

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Mark x. 18.

*There is none good but one, that is God.*

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 **T**HE most important doctrine which our Saviour asserts in the text, that *God is good*, which the scripture constantly teaches, and indeed the very being of religion depends upon it, I have endeavored to prove by the manifold and most visible fruits of the divine beneficence which are scattered over all the earth, among the numberless multitude of living things which are in it, and for which the liberal author of nature has plentifully provided, giving every one what is most convenient for it, an enjoyment suitable to its nature and capacity ; particularly, by the frame and constitution of the human nature, made for various happiness,

ness, and the administration of providence S E R M.  
towards mankind. And I have endeavored IV.


to vindicate this doctrine against the objection taken from the appearances of evil, both natural and moral, which are in the earth. The design of the present discourse is to explain this glorious attribute of the divine nature, and to shew what is the application, and the practical improvement we ought to make of it.

Now, in order to understand the more distinctly what is meant when we say *that God is good*, or attribute that perfection to the Deity, let us, first, consider the notion of goodness in general. And here we proceed upon a sure and clear foundation, for scarcely is there any thing of which we have a more distinct idea, no sensible being or quality is more easily perceived; the mind of man as readily distinguishes between goodness and the contrary disposition in a free agent, as we know the difference between black and white by our eyes, or between other opposite qualities by any of our senses. Goodness, then, in the strict and proper sense in which we are now considering it, not as comprehending universal rectitude, which it is sometimes used to denote, and which constitutes the intire

SERM. tire character of a good moral agent, signifies  
 IV. benevolence, or a disposition to communicate  
 happiness. This is the plain meaning of the word when we apply it to man, or any other intelligent being; a good man is one who from an inward inclination exerts his power in doing good, not who is the passive instrument or occasion of it, which even an inanimate thing, incapable of any kind of intention may be, or who acting for his own private interest, and from merely selfish motives, may be accidentally useful to the public or to some of his fellow-creatures; but he is a good man who acts voluntarily and of choice for the benefit of others, and his inclination and his active powers terminate upon that as their proper end.

In the same sense, though in an infinitely more perfect manner, and higher degree, God is good, that is, he is a being of kind affection, who from an inward principle of good-will exerts his omnipotence in diffusing happiness far and wide, in all fitting proportion, according to the different capacities of the creatures which are the proper objects of goodness, and according to the direction of his most perfect wisdom. It is a very wrong notion which some have of the moral perfections

tions of God, particularly his goodness, that they are high excellencies of his nature, not only superior in degree, and free from all infirmity, but wholly different in kind, from moral qualities in the creatures, having indeed an analogy to them, because of their producing some similar effects, but no otherwise attributed to the Deity, than as human passions are, in a figurative and improper sense; and in their real nature so transcendent, that our understandings cannot form a distinct conception of them, so that the words whereby they are expressed, have no such determinate idea annexed to them as when they are used for the moral dispositions of inferior agents. This has an unhappy tendency to destroy true practical religion, for it essentially consists in an imitation of the divine moral perfections, and a suitable affectionate regard to them, together with the genuine fruits of it in sincere obedience to the laws of God; all which must be defeated, if our apprehensions concerning the moral attributes are uncertain. If when we say that God is holy, righteous, true, and good, we mean only that he is something we don't know what, incomprehensibly high and excellent, which produces, it is true, some effects

SERM. effects like those which the properties in men  
IV. signified by these words would produce, but  
 of the inward principle itself in the supreme mind we have no clear idea, how can this be the object of our adoration, of our reverence, love, and esteem? We know distinctly what the goodness of other agents is, that it means a disposition to do good to others, or to make them happy; and this, in proportion to the degree of it, appears to us, amiable; but if the goodness of God be not the same, only more perfect in the principle, and more extensive in the measure of its exercise than it can be in inferior beings, what is there in it to engage our affections and our gratitude? How, again, can we, according to this confused and undetermined sense of the divine goodness, make it the object of our confidence, which is an essential part of religion; and how can it be the rational foundation of hope and of inward security and peace to the human mind? All our expectations of good, considered as merely gratuitous, from any agent, are founded on the supposition of a benevolent principle in him, but if benevolence in God be a quite different thing from what it is in other good beings, so that we cannot distinctly perceive what it is, how shall

shall we hope for any thing from him? And lastly, how can we follow God as dear children, and particularly, imitate his goodness (which certainly is a most important branch of our duty, and absolutely necessary to our pleasing him) if we do not understand what his goodness is, or have not a determinate idea of it?

As I observed on the subject of the divine universal rectitude, that the scripture doctrine representing God as holy, and explaining wherein his holiness consists, is perfectly agreeable to reason, we may make the same observation concerning the attribute of goodness in particular. For the scripture constantly represents God as good, in the same determinate sense in which other free agents are called good, though in a more perfect degree, that is, it represents him as having a fixed disposition to communicate good to his creatures; it teaches us, that his beneficence is the invariable principle from which he acts, the fountain from which real benefits are derived to us; he is *the father of lights, from whom every good and every perfect gift cometh down*. Indeed the mind of man finds a difficulty in forming just apprehensions concerning the natural attributes of the Deity,

our

SERM. our weak understandings are embarrassed in  
 IV. conceiving eternity and immensity, but for  
 the moral perfections, and particularly this  
 we are now considering, our ideas of them  
 are as plain, positive, and determinate, as of  
 any objects whatever ; so that we may argue  
 from them, form our own expectations, and  
 found our confidence upon them with cer-  
 tainty, and imitate them with understanding ;  
 only let us observe in the

Second place, That we must take care not  
 to impute to the supreme absolutely perfect  
 Being any thing like human infirmity. There  
 are weaknesses which cleave to our nature in  
 every part of it, which accompany the ex-  
 ercise of all our powers, even our moral ca-  
 pacities, and best affections. To understand  
 this the better, and that we may avoid the  
 dangerous error of attributing any imperfec-  
 tion to the Deity, let us consider that there  
 are two great principles of action in the  
 mind of man, *benevolence* and *self-love*, which  
 are really distinct, and form different ulti-  
 mate ends, which we pursue without seeing,  
 at least attending to any connexion or depen-  
 dence between them. Self-love determines  
 us to seek private good, or our own happi-  
 ness ; by benevolence we are inclined to pur-  
 sue



sue the good of others ; and this every man S E R M.  
 who seriously reflects, will find in himself, IV.  
 though in some it is weaker, and in some  
 stronger, according to the degree of men's  
 attention to it, and of its vigorous customary  
 exercise, whereby it is confirmed, and its  
 power encreased, the force of habit being  
 added to that of nature. From this we ga-  
 ther, what are the ends of our being, I mean,  
 for which God ordained it, and they are,  
*happiness* and *usefulness*. The gracious creator  
 intending that the individual should be happy,  
 planted in every one self-love, by which all  
 are carried to the pursuit of that end ; and he  
 intended the good of the whole, and there-  
 fore united all men in the bond of benevo-  
 lence. But these two principles have each  
 of them particular affections, and passions  
 belonging to them, in order to give them the  
 greater efficacy, in cases which most require  
 their vigorous operation ; and to answer the  
 circumstances of our present state. The ge-  
 neral desire of our own happiness is cool and  
 dispassionate, directing to a regular uniform  
 course of action ; but there being a variety  
 of things necessary or convenient for the pre-  
 sent life which it would not put us upon seek-  
 ing, using, or avoiding, with the dispatch  
 and

SERM. and earnestness that is required, therefore this  
IV. want is supplied by particular appetites and  
passions, attended with an uneasiness sufficient to give them the needful force. In like manner, a common undistinguishing benevolence which unites us to the whole human species, nay to the whole system of intelligent beings, in itself a noble and very strong principle, yet is not sufficient to all purposes in the present condition of mankind, considering the imperfection of our understandings and other circumstances; therefore there are particular instincts of the public kind planted in us, and many of them also are attended with uneasiness, to make them the more vigorous and active. For example, the helpless state of children requires a peculiar care, and there is a strong affection to them planted in parents, which puts them upon running the utmost hazards and enduring extreme toil and pain, for the relief of their tender off-spring; and because mankind in this world are liable to, and some of them actually fall into great dangers and distresses, therefore have we the common, powerful, and painful instinct of *compassion* exciting and determining us suddenly to exert all our ability as the urgent need requires.

It is here that we must carefully distin-  
guish (as undoubtedly there is a great difference) between the goodness of God and men; the universal, calm, and dispassionate benevolence, we may safely attribute to him in the strictest and most proper sense, having nothing in it but what is excellent and worthy of his transcendent glory; as the measure of it which our nature is adorned with, is in us the noblest part of the divine image. But we must not imagine that there is in the Deity any of the infirmity or uneasiness, which in men accompanies particular kind affections; and when such affections are ascribed to him, as they frequently are in scripture, it must only be understood in a figurative sense, by way of analogy, and we must take care to remove from our idea of them, all the imperfections and pains, which we know by experience cleave to human passions, even of the most generous and beneficent kind. Thus, God is represented as our father, and as having a paternal tenderness for us, nay a greater, a more continually careful, and watchful love, than a mother has for her sucking child, which gives us a very high idea of his kindness; but we should be far from imagining any thing in

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him of the weakness or uneasiness which attends the affection of an indulgent earthly parent. His pity also is described in very strong terms; alluding to the exertion of that instinct in the human nature, it is said, that *his bowels found* for the distresses of his creatures, and that he is *afflicted in their afflictions*; but the meaning of all this is no more, than that his undisturbed benevolence continually exercised towards them, produces more perfectly the effects which the tenderest human compassion would produce, without the weaknesses and the pains of it.

Thirdly, It seems to be a just and necessary consequence from what has been already observed, that the goodness of God extends to all the proper objects of goodness. We know nothing in ourselves, nor can imagine any thing in other moral agents to limit that general good-will, which must always appear to us the glory of an intelligent nature; we know nothing, I say, to limit it, but particular attachments, and partial distinguishing affections, which are very useful in our present state, because of its indigence and weakness; but they always carry in them the idea of imperfection, and are therefore not to be attributed to the supreme Being;

ing. From which we conclude, that where-  
ever there are fit objects of good-will, and he  
knows them all, his good-will is exercised  
towards them. And this, when we calmly  
consider it, raises the divine beneficence high  
in our esteem, nor could that attribute in any  
other view, or supposing it more confined in  
its exercise, appear to our minds so amiable,  
and so perfect. Now if the whole system of  
beings that are the proper objects of good-  
ness, that is, which are capable of happiness,  
be the intire objects of God's kindness and  
care, it follows, that as he is perfectly wise,  
and knows all the possible relations, connexi-  
ons, and dependencies of things, his benefi-  
cence, in conjunction with infinite wisdom,  
always determines him to do what is best in  
the whole, or for the most absolute universal  
good. How can it possibly be imagined but  
that the most extensive benevolence, in a be-  
ing perfectly intelligent, must produce the  
most extensive happiness, which is its pro-  
per fruit? And hence we further infer, that  
as in the present state of mankind, some un-  
happiness is mixt with all the good they pos-  
sess, as some degrees of pain or uneasiness may  
be necessary to the greater good of individu-  
als, and the sufferings of individuals may be

SERM. necessary to the good of the whole, or to a  
 IV. general and more extensive good of many,  
 so we may be sure that one or other of  
 these is always the case in the divine administration, though not being able to comprehend the intire scheme, we cannot see it in every particular instance; we may be sure, I say, it is always so, that when any individual creature suffers, it is for the greater good of that creature itself, or for a more general good. And applying this to moral agents, the principal objects of the divine beneficence, whenever they suffer, as they do often by the hand of the *righteous judge of all the earth* for their faults, it is always either for their own amendment, which is the greatest immediate good to them, and will end in their happiness, or else it is for a more public advantage to the moral world.

What has been said, represents God as necessarily intending the greatest good of the rational creation; but that necessity must be understood in a way consistent with the most perfect free-agency; it arises not from a defect of power or liberty, but from the absolute perfection of his moral attributes, and of his wisdom. There are some things which are commonly said to act necessarily, as inanimate

nimate beings (though properly speaking SERM. they do not act at all) so the fire burns, and IV. the sun gives light; and in beings endued with freedom, some of their capacities are not the subjects of that freedom : Thus we ourselves are conscious of liberty in acting, but we are conscious, at the same time, that liberty does not belong to all the powers of our nature ; our understandings are exercised necessarily, and perceptions arise in them independently of our own choice. In like manner, we must conceive a difference between the natural and moral attributes of the Deity ; he is *necessarily*, not only immense and eternal, but omniscient ; but he is *freely* just and good : These attributes belonging properly to his will, which is essentially free in its exercise, and the image of it is in the *liberty* of intelligent creatures ; they exert themselves not necessarily (meaning by that, independently on his own choice) but voluntarily, which makes them appear so amiable, worthy to be praised and admired, as the virtuous instincts of our nature direct us to esteem *inferior* free-agents, who are beneficent and just. Still however it is as truly impossible, though for a different reason, that God should not be just and good,

SERM. or that he should not exercise justice and  
 IV. goodness, as that he should be ignorant or  
 weak, or even that he should cease to be.

The point now under consideration is certainly of the greatest importance to the purposes of practical religion, to direct our sentiments concerning the conduct of divine providence towards mankind, to regulate our affections to God, and our expectations from him. On the one hand, we are not to consider the divine goodness, as if it were an unintelligent principle acting necessarily, which supposition tends to destroy all true piety, all reverence and esteem of God, and gratitude to him ; and as he is a being of the most perfect wisdom and rectitude as well as benevolence, we are not to entertain any expectations from him, but such as are worthy of his intire character, not to hope for any thing but what is reasonable and fit, and what it becomes the wise and impartially righteous, as well as gracious governor of the world, to give. On the other hand, since the divine goodness is, and must be exercised towards all the proper objects of goodness, and in the best manner, carries on the greatest absolute good or happiness of the whole intelligent system, it is evident, that God  
 does



does not act towards any of his reasonable S E R M. IV. creatures in the way of absolute dominion.

He is indeed absolute sovereign, who *can do whatever pleaseth him in heaven and earth*, whose power the united strength of the creatures cannot resist, *none can stay his hand, or say to him, What dost thou?* The inanimate part of the creation is under the sole command of his irresistible will; *he speaks and it is done, he commands and it stands fast*; but his will is always for good to the beings which are the objects of beneficence, that is, which are capable of happiness. No other reason can be assigned for bringing them into being, than that he was so good as to intend the communicating of happiness, and there is no other end pursued in the whole of his government over them. As the good rulers of civil societies, stiled in scripture, God's upon earth, are the fathers of their people, the true end of their authority is only the public good, to which they should continually attend, and which they should constantly aim at in the exercise of their power, in inflicting punishments, as well as dispensing rewards, never acting from caprice, or a lust of domination, and merely to shew their own greatness, which is unworthy of a wise

SERM.

VI.

governor; so the government of the supreme Law-giver and Lord of the whole world, of the goodness as well as greatness whereof, the best and the highest civil authority is but a faint image, is always invariably conducted by the same rule, having no other design than the greatest absolute good, never appointing any of his creatures to happiness or misery, as an arbitrary sovereign, and merely because he will, but according to the most perfect wisdom, equity, and goodness, and so, as in the best manner to promote the advantage of the whole creation. Some expressions of scripture have been interpreted to a different sense, and understood as signifying, that God appoints men even to final happiness and misery, *merely* from an absolute will, without any consideration of their behavior; particularly some expound *thus* these words of the apostle, *Rom. ix. 20, 21*, which are an answer to the foolish cavils and complaints of men against the equity of the divine government over the nations of mankind: *Nay but O man, who art thou that repliest against God, shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the Potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto*

*unto honour, and another unto dishonour? But* SERM.

this passage has no relation to the exercise of IV.

God's authority, as judge, in dispensing happiness or misery to the individuals of mankind, in which the measures of equity and goodness directed by wisdom to pursue the universal good, shall be exactly observed; but it relates to nations, and other great collective bodies of men; some of whom God raises up, bestowing high privileges upon them, and others he casts down, after having permitted them to continue long in their wickedness, abusing his patience, whereby his power and justice appear the more eminently in their destruction. The subject there treated of, is the rejection of the *Jews* from the national advantages they possessed as the people of God, and the calling of the *Gentiles*, which the apostle resolves into the sovereignty of providence, and justifies his doing so, by declarations of the old testament, concerning the difference God made between *Jacob* and *Esau*, without any consideration of their having done good or evil, which declarations evidently relate, not to themselves *personally*, but to their posterity. As in all the works of God there is a beautiful variety, some have higher, some lower degrees of perfect-

SERM. perfection, in which his wisdom and his su-  
 IV. preme dominion are manifested, so his pro-  
 vidence makes a distinction among men, with respect to gifts and outward privileges, but he is good to all, and will judge every one of mankind with the most impartial equity, according to the improvement they made of the talents committed to them, and their obedience to the laws they were under.

Lastly, The only principle from which we can conceive God acts towards any object without him, or towards any or all of the creatures which derive their beings from him, is goodness. When we reflect upon ourselves, (and it is by attending to our own powers and affections of which we are conscious, that we take our rise to the consideration of, and forming such a judgment as we are able to form, concerning superior intelligent natures, and even the supreme) we find, as has been already observed, two general springs of action in our mind, *self-love* and *benevolence*. All our particular desires, affections and passions may be reduced to these two, and are comprehended in them. We cannot, I think, help judging after the same manner concerning all other beings like ourselves, that is all free-agents, that they constantly pursue

sue either their own good or the good of others ; for we have no notion of any other springs of action, than affections (or some principles analogous to affections in us) which constitute the ends of rational action, and no agent can have any object of affection, but either himself or some other being. Now, applying this to our conceptions of the Deity, and his manner of acting, we cannot imagine that he acts for himself in the sense we are now speaking of, that is, that in any of his works, or in any act which terminates on other beings, he pursues his own happiness, in such a sense as to imply indigence, and that his happiness depends on something without him. A being which is self-sufficient, and absolutely perfect and blessed, and who was so from eternity before any thing besides himself subsisted, cannot want any thing to make him happy, and therefore cannot be supposed to design the supply of his own wants in any thing he does. What can any creature possibly give him, or what can he receive from it? He was perfectly satisfied in himself, and in the contemplation and enjoyment of his own infinite excellencies from everlasting, and therefore must be supposed to act towards all things without him, from a motive of mere goodness.

It

SERM. It may be alledged, that as the Deity is  
 IV. interested by his goodness it self, in the af-  
 ~~~~~ fairs of his reasonable creatures, he has complacency in their happiness, which is originally his own gift, he is pleased with their good moral conduct, and that felicity which is the result of it, and the contrary is displeasing to him; we can hardly avoid apprehending that his enjoyment has some dependence on their behaviour and their condition. For if we form our notion of the perceptions and sentiments of other intelligent beings, by a regard to what we find in ourselves, we do not know how to separate the approbation of a good moral character, and the happiness consequent upon it from pleasure, and the disapprobation of a bad character with a sense of the misery that follows it, from some degree of uneasiness; it may therefore be supposed that God foreseeing these opposite events which must differently affect him, *for his own sake* determined to choose the one, and do what ever was fit for avoiding the other; that is, acted not merely for the good of his rational creatures, but for himself or his own enjoyment. If this reasoning be ever so just, it does not, nor ought to diminish in our esteem the benevolence



nevolence manifested in the work of creation, and the good communicated to the creatures. Is any being accounted the less beneficent because he finds pleasure in his beneficence? Is any man the less generous and disinterested in supplying the wants of the indigent, who can be no way profitable to him, because he has, and knows before hand he shall have, satisfaction in his liberality; much less can the complacency which the supreme independent Being has in the manifestation of his goodness, be thought any diminution of that goodness, or be any pretence for alledging that he acts from selfish motives, as if he wanted any thing, the communication of good being the immediate end of his works, chosen for its own sake, and not from any *indigence* of his. Besides, the changes which happen in the condition of the creatures, their acting right or wrong, their being happy or miserable, should not be imagined to affect the Deity, tho' perfectly perceiving them, and perfectly pure and good, in the same manner as they do good men, or any other finite good agents; they have, and cannot avoid having, new affections excited by events, to them intirely new, pleasure arising from present good,

SERM.

IV.



good, pain from present evil, which they had not while it was future; but he to whose mind nothing has any appearance different from what it had in his eternal fore-knowledge, possesses the same unvaried tranquility in all the vicissitudes of time. The whole series of events, in the foreseen order, passes under the observation of his eye, without any alteration or exciting any emotion in his undisturbed perfect mind. He is capable of no surprise, no painful sensation of *sorrow* from any calamity, or of *resentment* against any moral disorder, nor properly of *joy*, as that signifies a new sensation of pleasure, from any good which arrives. All things which comes to pass are comprehended in the scheme of providence, which was formed in his eternal counsels; and as the appearances of evil were not unexpected, they produce no uneasiness, and the fore-appointed good issue is the subject of his everlasting, delightful, serene contemplation, not heightened by its arrival, as it is in weak minds, to surprising and tumultuous delight. Upon the whole, since all the good that is in the creatures, natural or moral, is originally from God, and all the enjoyment to *him* which can be supposed to arise from it, is the result





sult of his own operations, always the same and uninterrupted, it may be properly called self-enjoyment inseparable from his own perfections and the exercise of them, and therefore the end of his works, is not the acquisition of felicity from other beings, but the communication of good to them, or in other words, the principle is *benevolence*.

It is commonly said that the *glory of God* is the end of the creation, and of all his actions towards the creatures; and if this be the meaning, that all his actions, his forming the world, and his whole administration in the government of it, is worthy of himself, becoming the most excellent and perfect of all beings, and that his perfections are manifested in conjunction, and in a beautiful harmony by all his works, it is just. None of the divine attributes is exercised singly; as *eternal power is clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made*, the same things manifest eternal wisdom; and as goodness is evidently the character of God's government of the moral world, the most perfect rectitude shines in it with equal lustre; in this sense, he is glorified in all his ways, and all his works, and in his eternal counsels, he intended it should be so.

But

SERM. But if we enquire concerning the principle  
 IV. from which the supreme Being acts in framing and disposing both the material and the rational creation, the former evidently subservient to the other, I think it appears from what has been already said, that it can be no other than benevolence, and consequently the end is no other than the communication of perfection and happiness, which he diffuses through all the universe, in such measures, and with such variety, as at the same time to manifest his glorious power and wisdom.

But though it may be said, in the sense just now mentioned, that the glory of God is the end of his works, and of his eternal purposes, we should take care to avoid another, and a very wrong meaning of that expression; let it be far from us to entertain any such thought concerning him, as if he had any thing like the ambitious views of weak mortals, to raise monuments to his honour. The desire of honour is indeed an original desire in *our* nature, and a very useful part of our constitution, having a tendency to the support of virtue, and to the publick good, but it carries in it the marks of insufficiency and dependence, the great  
 God

God is therefore infinitely above the need of SERM.  
it, and it is beneath the high perfection of IV.

his nature to act from such a motive. We cannot, I think, but acknowledge in our hearts, that to act from a principle of pure disinterested goodness, and with the sole design of communicating good, is more excellent and amiable; and to conceive thus of the Deity, is to conceive of him the most highly and honourably, which is the best rule we can follow in forming our apprehensions concerning him. It is true, God requires that his reasonable creatures should make his glory the end of their actions; that they should honour him with their devout acknowledgments, and the outward signs of adoration, which will appear to themselves a reasonable service, and what the best principles in their nature direct them to; but even this he requires for their sakes, not his own, and the affections he has planted in their nature whereby they are determined to it, bear the plainest marks of his goodness, for it is their most delightful exercise, and affords the highest enjoyment they are capable of.

What has been said under this last head, shews us the reason of the assertion in the

SERM. text, that none is good but God; which is  
 IV. not to be understood absolutely, for there is  
 ~~~~~ real moral goodness in some creatures; but  
 the supreme Being alone is *essentially* and *immutably* good; the sole original fountain of all goodness and happiness. And this is peculiar to him, that whereas from the limited condition of all other intelligent agents, it necessarily follows, that their own happiness must be an object of their pursuit, and an end of their actions, (they seek it from God, and they receive it from him) he, having in himself an underived sufficiency for his own unchangeable blessedness, infinitely above the need, or even the possibility of an addition from any other cause, acts purely and wholly from a principle of benevolence. I come,

In the next place, to consider what is the proper application and practical improvement of this whole subject. And, first, we and all intelligent creatures are indispensably obliged to praise God, to *call upon our Souls, and all that is within us, to bless and magnify him*. This is a tribute which our own reason, and the instinct of gratitude planted in our nature, will teach us to pay to him, as a kind and gracious benefactor. We cannot  
 indeed

indeed but highly esteem a beneficent disposition wherever it appears, though we ourselves do not partake of the benefits which flow from it. What acknowledgments, then, are due to the universal benefactor, the original author of all happiness, to whose favor we ourselves owe our being, and all the enjoyments we possess, and on whose bounty all our future hopes depend? His compassion to us is not lessened by the diffusiveness of his liberality to other beings; we are as much and constantly cared for by him, as if we were the sole objects of his care. And since in an infinite variety of creatures, which are capable of enjoyment, not one is neglected, he gives to all that which is convenient for them, those, whose faculties enable them to discern his hand so freely opened to distribute various happiness, ought to join according to their several capacities, in celebrating the glory of his benignity; particularly, as an affection for our own species is natural to our minds, and inseparable from them, when we consider God as the common father of mankind, doing good to them, and leaving none of them without witnesses of his tender pity, he must in that view appear very amiable to us, most worthy to receive our united thankf-

SERM. givings and honor. The narrow notions  
IV. which some have of the divine goodness, as  
if it were confined to a few, while others no  
less capable are overlooked or rejected, and  
which tend to change the idea of the attribute itself, into that of arbitrary will, these notions, I say, seem to take their rise from the selfish desires, too prevalent in some minds, of enjoying happiness by way of peculiar property and distinction from their fellows. But to a well-disposed benevolent heart, the more extensive beneficence appears, the more it is esteemed, and there cannot be a more delightful object of its contemplation, than the mercy of God dispensing its gifts freely to every individual of the human race, reaching out its unsparing hand to supply all their wants, and making no other distinction than what arises from the different qualifications of the particular objects, and what wisdom requires to be made for the greater advantage of the whole. This, which I hope has been sufficiently shewn to be the just way of thinking concerning the divine philanthropy, challenges our most affectionate esteem, indeed, should raise it to the highest admiration. And when we consider that the love of God is the only spring  
of

of our happiness, indeed all happiness, and that he does good, not like needy creatures, who give, hoping for something again, the very best of them, not unreasonably, nor to their reproach, seek the continuance and increase of their felicity as not immutable and absolutely perfect ; the only principle of his actions is pure benevolence ; and his kind intentions terminate on the happiness of other beings, the greatest and most universal happiness as their ultimate end ; do not our most exalted praises, the utmost gratitude of our souls, sink far beneath what we must acknowledge to be due ? *What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits ?* What returns can we make, which shall bear any proportion to the kindness of his unmerited affection, or the sovereign freeness of his mercy, and the extent of its fruits, for both are not only unparalleled, but exceed our comprehension ? Surely it becomes us to celebrate his glory, and to offer him the sacrifice of our thanksgivings, with sincerely willing and joyful hearts. No one can imagine that the praises of our lips only, or the meer external professions of gratitude, are a suitable, or will be an acceptable acknowledgment of his favor. What, goodness, such unexampled

SERM.  
IV.  


SERM.

IV.



goodness first of all demands, is true undissembled and superlative love, which will naturally arise in our minds, if we carefully attend to the motives of love contained in the character of the object, and particularly his benignity, and if we do not suffer ourselves to be diverted and prepossessed by an immoderate indulgence to selfish affections. Accordingly this is the sum of religion, to which the divine goodness is the strongest motive, and as our Saviour calls it, the first and great commandment, \* *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind*, that is sincerely, and constantly.

Secondly, The goodness of God is the proper object of our reverence and fear, as well as love. Thus the prophet § *Hosea* describes the religion of the *Israelites in the latter Days*, after that long afflictions, and other methods of divine instruction shall bring them to juster sentiments and better dispositions, than those which prevailed among them during their degeneracy, *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness*. Such a perfect character as that of the Deity, comprehending all moral excellencies, and particularly glorious benevolence, calls for the most awful respect of all

\* Matt. xxii. 37.      § Hof. iii. 5.



attentive minds ; and an ingenuous heart will be afraid of offending him, for this very reason, because he is so good, and will conceive an indignation against sin on this account, that it is not only a dishonor done to the supreme law-giver, but ingratitude to the best benefactor. Who would not be ashamed of such baseness, as to provoke and affront one who is continually kind and beneficent even to the unthankful and the evil, and always heaping favors on the undeserving. These two principles, the love and the fear of God, are the great security of our duty, and will be the lasting springs of sincere obedience to his commandments. The scripture constantly teaches us, and it must be very evident to the reason of men, that pious affections, gratitude and reverence to the best of beings, are in vain pretended to, without the practice of virtue. This is the love of God, and this is his fear, that we do his will ; that we fulfil the works of his law *written in our hearts*, and declared in his *word*, by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this world. And this consideration of the divine goodness shows the folly of sin, as well as ingratitude and baseness ; for how unreasonable is it that men should transgress those commandments

SERM.  
IV.


which are given them merely for their own sakes, and to make them happy? All the bad effects of their disobedience and provocations must fall upon themselves. \* *If they sin what do they against God, or if their transgressions be multiplied, what do they unto him?* The sole intention of his laws is their good, of which they may deprive themselves by their wickedness, but cannot affect his unchangeable happiness, which has no dependence on any thing in their power.

Thirdly, As to the goodness of God we owe our being, all the powers of our nature, the privileges of our condition, and whatever happiness we possess, so it is the just object of our affectionate confidence, and the only foundation of our hope for the future. What security can we, or any creatures have, that our existence, and all the advantages and enjoyments we have, shall be continued, or our felicity increased, but that the *father of lights from whom every good gift comes down*, is without variableness or shadow of turning. But let it be remembered, that we are not to entertain expectations from the divine goodness, as if it were an unintelligent proneness to communicate benefits; it is exercised with

\* Job xxxv. 6.



freedom, and the manifestations of it are always directed by the most perfect wisdom. And since the intire end which the good governor of the world pursues, is the greatest absolute good, or the highest happiness of the whole rational system, it is unreasonable to expect a profusion of beneficence towards every individual, in such a way, and upon such terms, as would be hurtful to the whole. But it ought not to be said, that this renders our hopes with respect to ourselves utterly uncertain, since we not being able to comprehend the scheme of the divine administration, cannot conclude concerning any particular supposable event, however grievous it may be to us, or other individuals, that it is inconsistent with the most public good, and therefore our confidence in the most perfect goodness, thus explained, cannot make us secure against it; for, besides, that doing all for the best, must appear amiable to us in the supreme agent, our minds necessarily approve it, and we ought therefore to acquiesce in it with pleasure, it cannot be reasonably imagined that the extreme insupportable unhappiness of individuals can be necessary to the good of the whole, excepting one case which our reason sufficiently instructs us to be aware

SERM. ware of, and we have it in our power to prevent it. The case is this, we are sure that  
IV.  for God to make no difference between good and evil in moral agents, and to communicate as much happiness to the vicious and wicked as to the best and most virtuous, that this would not be for the greatest good of the world, but destructive of it, as tending to take away the greatest encouragement to, and so subvert the very foundations of virtue, which is the true happiness of rational creatures; and therefore for men to pretend, that they trust in the goodness of God, while they live in contempt of his laws, and persist impenitently in their wicked courses, is the highest presumption; such expectation of favor from him being contrary to the reason of things, and the established order of his government, and inconsistent with goodness itself directed by wisdom, which requires that a distinction should be made between the righteous and the wicked by the judge of the world, at such time, and in such manner as he sees fit, and that transgressors should be punished for the safety and benefit of the whole. But if we faithfully and constantly adhere to our duty, and our hearts do not condemn us, then *have we confidence towards*  
God

God on a solid foundation, that however, in SERM.  
 the present state, *all things come alike to all,* IV.  
 and *there is one event to the good and to the*  
*sinner,* yet finally, and in the main, it shall  
 be *well with the righteous,* and that happiness  
 is inseparably connected with virtue.

It amounts to the same thing, if we set  
 this point in somewhat a different light, and  
 consider the presumptuous and pretended  
 hopes of impenitent sinners in the mercy of  
 God, as inconsistent with the notions which  
 reason, as well as the scripture, teaches us  
 of his other attributes, his wisdom, his jus-  
 tice, and the essential rectitude of his nature,  
 which will not suffer us to believe that he will  
 always, and in the whole of his administra-  
 tion, heap his benefits without distinction on  
 the righteous and the wicked. Nor is this  
 any reflection on his most perfect goodness,  
 which requires to its exercise a proper quali-  
 fied object. As the only object of power are  
 things possible, and the only object of wis-  
 dom are things reasonable and fit, so among  
 moral agents the only qualified objects of the  
 divine goodness, in the sense here spoken of,  
 that is *approbation*, are the sincerely virtuous.  
 And as the perfections of the Deity are exer-  
 cised in a perfect harmony, infinite power  
 never

SERM. never does, it may be said, cannot do what  
 IV. is disagreeable to wisdom or to the moral attributes, so the moral attributes never interfere with each other ; goodness is not manifested in such an undistinguishing manner, as to dishonor the *righteousness* of the supreme ruler. But of all sinners they are the most inexcusable, and have the least reason to expect the divine favor, who presuming upon it, take encouragement from thence to continue in their disobedience, who, as the scripture expresses it, † *Turn the grace of God into lasciviousness*, and \* *because sentence against evil works is not speedily executed, therefore wholly set their hearts to do evil*. Such have reason to expect a peculiarly severe punishment, and that, as *Moses* speaks, § *The Lord will not spare them, who hearing the words of his law, bless themselves, saying, we shall have peace, though we walk in the imaginations of our hearts* ; or, as *St. Paul* teaches, † *They who despise the goodness and forbearance of God, which should lead them to repentance, and persisting in the hardness and impenitence of their hearts, treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. And,

† Jude iv. \* Eccl. viii. 11. § Deut. xxix. 19, 20. † Rom. ii.



Lastly, We should always endeavor to imitate the divine goodness. That which is the glory of the supreme Being, and adds a lustre to all his other perfections, must even in the inferior degree in which the reasonable creatures are capable of it, be the highest excellency of their nature; and accordingly, beneficence is always regarded among men as the noblest quality, as that which signifies the most perfect character, and procures the most universal esteem. \* *St. Paul*, agreeably to the general sense of mankind, makes a distinction between the righteous and the good man, the former is justly valued, but the other appears much more amiable and praise worthy. And as thus we shall be perfect like our heavenly father, and obtain the approbation of men, the consciousness of having merited it, and of possessing that excellent quality, always shewing itself by its genuine fruits, will always yield the greatest inward peace and security to our own minds. We shall reflect upon it with pleasure, and look forward to eternity with confidence; for God will surely reward them who follow his example, who with sincere affection pursue the great end of his own administration, *the universal happiness, and are merciful as he is merciful.*

\* Rom. v.

## SERMON V.

The Justice of God explained and proved.

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Pfalm lxxxix. 14.

*Justice and judgment are the habitation of  
thy throne.*

SERM.  
V.  


**J**USTICE has always been considered by wise men as one of the principal moral virtues. It contributes eminently to the universal good of mankind ; for without it the peace and order of societies could not possibly subsist, nor could any individual enjoy the privileges of his nature, and the advantages of his condition with safety. It is one of those qualities belonging to human dispositions and actions which we necessarily approve, and the things which are just, always appear virtuous and praise worthy. We conclude, therefore, that justice has the sanction of God's own authority, and is an  
essentia



essential part of his law of nature; and since SERM.  
we conceive in it an absolute excellence V.

every way worthy of his supreme dignity and glory, we attribute it to himself, and number it among his moral perfections. 'Tis true, there is a great difference between the exercise of justice, and even the foundations of it, in God and in men; for there being an equality among them in their most important interests, they have all demands of right one upon another, and fundamental privileges not subject to any human authority, which cannot be invaded without iniquity; whereas no creature can lay him under any previous obligation, nor have an independant title whereby they may claim any thing from him; for their very beings, and all they have in possession or expectation, are his gifts. But since it appears in his own constitution, that there is an established relation of persons and things, and a fitness resulting from it, that the condition of moral agents should be according to their behaviour, we may be sure he will preserve that relation inviolable, and always act agreeably to that fitness, or that *the judge of the whole world will do right*. This has been ever received as an essential principle  
of

SERM. of religion, indeed if it be denied, the foundations of piety are destroyed at once, and there can be no such thing as a rational fear of God. It is elegantly expressed and strongly asserted by *Elibu*, as a point wherein all men of understanding are agreed, *\* far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall be rendered unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* In discoursing on this subject, I will first endeavor to give you a true notion of the justice of God, and to prove that it is an absolute perfection of his nature. Secondly, to shew, more particularly, in what instances it is exercised.

First, to shew what is meant by the justice of God, and to prove that it is an absolute perfection of his nature. In explaining the divine attribute of goodness, I observed that it is the sole principle from which the supreme Being acts towards the proper objects of it, that is, all sensitive and intelligent creatures, and that it extends to them all, that he being infinitely above all indigence

\* Job xxxiv, 10, 11, 12.

or the need of any thing from without to S E R M.  
 the continuance or increase of his self-suffi- V.  
 cient, most perfect, and unchangeable hap-  
 piness, always exerts his power in forming  
 and disposing of things purely from a motive  
 of benevolence, and with an intention not  
 to receive but to communicate happiness;  
 and that the intire adequate object of the di-  
 vine beneficence is the whole system of  
 living things, to all which he does good in  
 fitting proportion, according to their several  
 capacities, especially the rational system or  
 the moral world, for the universal happiness  
 whereof he constantly provides in the best  
 manner, diffusing his bounty to each indi-  
 vidual, under no other limitation than what  
 arises from the wise design of subordinating  
 it to the most public good. If this be so,  
 justice can be no otherwise considered than  
 as goodness towards moral agents regulated  
 in its exercise by wisdom, or as wisely, and  
 in the most proper manner pursuing, not the  
 private and seperate, but the united good of  
 all intelligent Beings. And indeed this is  
 the worthiest, and most becoming notion we  
 can have, of the just and wise administration  
 of the universal sovereign *Monarchy*, to  
 which its low image, the idea of a good hu-

SERM. man government naturally leads us. For  
 V. the chief, nay the sole end of civil authority  
 being the good of the community over  
 which it is appointed, and the good of particular persons, whether magistrates or subjects, so far only, as it is consistent with and subservient to *that*; all acts of power ought to pursue it uniformly, and ought to be so designed by the persons with whom power is entrusted. What then is the justice of a human governor? Nothing else than his promoting, to the best of his understanding, the safety and happiness of the society; not only justice is to be exercised consistently with that design, but affection to the public is the true principle of it, and the public good should be its ultimate end. The sole motive to the inflicting of necessary punishment, should not be passion, or a regard to the supposed rights and honor of *affronted Majesty* as a separate interest, but the same goodness of disposition, or benevolence to the collective body, and desire of promoting the general welfare, which in other instances where it can be safely done, produces effects that give pleasure to all as far as they can reach, without putting any one to pain. In like manner ought we to form our conceptions concerning the justice of God. Having

ing an unlimited dominion over all intelligent beings, he is inclined by the benignity of his nature to do them the greatest good, and to promote their most extensive happiness. But that same benignity of his nature, exerts itself freely with perfect wisdom, and therefore differently, according to the diversity of their conduct and circumstances ; it shews favor or communicates pleasure to qualified objects, having for its ultimate end the producing of the greatest monument of good. It withholds favor, or inflicts punishment on the particular unqualified objects of happiness, for the same ultimate end, the producing of the greatest good ; in other words, the divine *justice* or *righteousness*, however it may be differently apprehended as a distinct property, and it may be usefully so represented, yet really is nothing else but his goodness, directed to its exercise by infinite wisdom to pursue its proper end, the greatest and most absolute good of all rational beings in the best manner, and with that diversity in its administration, which their different behavior and circumstances require.


We ought, above all things, to avoid imputing to the Deity infirmities and passions like those we find in ourselves, and which

SERM. often corrupt the springs of action, even  
 V. mixing themselves with good dispositions.  
 I observed before, in explaining the goodness of God, that besides the principle of benevolence in the human mind determining it to seek the public happiness, there are likewise particular instincts planted in our nature, *not* selfish, but inclining us to assist and relieve our indigent fellow creatures; such as compassion and natural affection, which are attended with weakness and perturbation; and these we ought not to attribute to God, except in a figurative sense and by way of analogy. We have at least equal reason to avoid attributing to him painful and disturbing resentment, which often arises in the human mind against moral evil, which, so far as it proceeds from the constitution of nature and is faultless, seems to be intended as an excitation to justice. The supreme mind is altogether free from what is strictly and properly called wrath, and from the least degree of uneasiness, in disapproving the faults of his creatures; and when it is necessary to use the chastening rod, or even to proceed to the severest punishment, he does it with the same undisturbed calmness, and the same benevolent disposition, which  
 is

is manifested in those which we call acts of S E R M.  
clemency and mercy. V.



This I take to be a true notion of the divine justice, setting it in the most amiable light, and representing him as what he truly is, *the best of beings*: Nor does it give the least encouragement to sin by diminishing our apprehensions of its penal effects, for surely it does not alter the nature of punishment or abate its severity, to say that goodness requires it; but our judge must appear to us the more venerable, when we consider him as not depriving any one being of the happiness it is capable of, but for a greater and more general good. To explain the exercise of this attribute otherwise, and represent it as ultimately intending the *honour* of God, of his *majesty*, and *authority*, as the end of his administration, distinct from, and superior to the greatest good of intelligent beings, this is to render it less intelligible, and less agreeable to the best sentiments of our minds; for they must esteem that government the most excellent and perfect, which pursues the most public happiness as its last end, and not the glory of the sovereign, as an interest different and separated from it. But however that may be, and

SERM. V.  sing that *justice* and *goodness* are to be considered as distinct attributes of the deity, yet still they are inseparably joined together in his perfect moral character, and their interests never interfere, nor are they exercised inconsistently. Divine justice is not so rigorous as to demand any thing contrary to goodness, nor is goodness so indulgent as to require any thing which justice does not allow, no more than infinite power and wisdom towards each other. And it must be remembered, that we have a clear and distinct idea of justice as well as of goodness, and of certain invariable measures to be always observed in the exercise of it, otherwise it can be of no use to the purposes of religion, and regulating our moral conduct with a respect to God. How can we either love or fear, hope in, or avoid being obnoxious to the justice of God, and how can we imitate it in our behaviour towards our fellow creatures, unless we know what it is, and by what rule it proceeds? We are sure that the supreme, righteous, and wise ruler of the world, will preserve inviolable that order which he has established, that he will constantly and uniformly act according to his approbation of moral goodness in his rational creatures,





creatures, and his disapprobation of the contrary. Tho' he may not during their trial, so remarkably interpose as a judge, in rewarding the virtuous and punishing the wicked, yet he has given all men sufficient reason to believe that it shall be so, some way, and at some time or other, and to many has declared expressly, that there is a time appointed in which *he will judge the world in righteousness*. All this being clearly and distinctly apprehended by us, the divine justice is a proper and a determinate object of our esteem, reverence and fear. It adds great force to the eternal laws which are given to men, written upon their hearts, to be the rule of their actions, and is of great use as a glorious pattern to all mankind whereby their common happiness would be most effectually secured. But if we do not know what the justice of God is, only have this confused general notion, that it is a high transcendent excellence of his nature which we cannot comprehend, nor understand how it will be manifested, and what measures in his final distribution to moral agents the supreme ruler will observe, what influence can this have on our tempers or behaviour?

SERM.

V.

appears, that God is, and necessarily must be just, or that justice inseparably belongs to his character, and is an essential perfection of his nature. If it be included in goodness, as it seems to be, the same arguments which prove him to be good, prove him also to be just. Indeed it cannot be supposed with any pretence of reason, that those two qualities are separable in any wise agent. If he is good, and disposed to promote the happiness of others as far as possibly he can, his understanding must be very defective not to know, that the impartial distribution of justice is the most effectual means of securing the peace, and the happiness of societies. On the other hand, if he is thoroughly and universally righteous, he must be good; for without *goodness*, what is called *justice*, degenerates into tyranny. 'Tis true there may be supposed a difference between a *righteous* and a *good* man, but in that supposition the former is a very imperfect character, and therefore the distinction cannot take place in the Deity, whose attributes *moral*, as well as *natural*, are all absolutely perfect. But it was never supposed, or can be supposed, that a man can be good with any tolerable degree

gree of understanding, without being at the same righteous, the connexion is so apparent between righteousness and the most universal happiness of rational beings, which is the supreme object of goodness.

But if we should allow all the distinction between justice and goodness, which can be allowed with any pretence of reason, still we have certain evidence that God is a just being. It must be acknowledg'd, otherwise, all religion and virtue are no more than insignificant words, it must be acknowledg'd, I say, that there is a real and essential difference between right and wrong, or moral good and evil: the sense of this is so deeply engraven on our hearts, that it is impossible for us not to discern it, and not to esteem the intelligent being who acts according to that difference, and disapprove the contrary character. Is it then possible for us to doubt whether the most perfect of all intelligent beings is just or unjust? Whether he, who discerns all things, and all their differences and relations, *sees* that *right* is preferable, and in it self more excellent than *wrong*, and will act accordingly? Is it possible for us, when any moral agent deviates from the rule of righteousness, not to impute it either  
to


SERM.

V.



to a defect of understanding or of power, or to some corrupt affection? But none of these causes of error can be imagin'd to affect the supreme Being, perfect in knowledge, infinite in power, and incapable of being misled by any temptation. He has no interest of his own to serve by iniquity, his authority is derived from no superior, nor is he accountable to any; of whom can he be *afraid* that *he should pervert judgment*, or whom can he be studious to please, that he should be bias'd by partial affection, since all are equally his creatures and subject to his disposal? He has laid us under the strictest obligations to righteousness, how then can we imagine that he is unrighteous himself? To this purpose is the reasoning of *Elibu*, on the subject of divine justice, and it seems to have great force, \* *Who hath given him a charge over the earth, or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. Shall even he that hateth right govern, and wilt thou condemn him that is most just? Is it fit to say to a King thou art wicked, and to Princes ye*

\* Job xxxiv. 13, 14, 15, 17, 18.

*are ungodly? How much less to him that ac-* SERM.  
*cepteth not the persons of Princes, nor regard-* V.  
*eth the rich more than the poor, for they all*   
*are the work of his hands? I come in the*

Second Place, to show more particularly, in what instances the divine justice is exercised. And here we must consider the true character of the Deity, which is that of the supreme moral governor of the world. Supposing the idea of justice in general to be settled, that it is rendering to all their due, the practice of it must be different, according to the different relations and conditions of the persons between whom it takes place. It requires a man to preserve unviolated the rights of another man, over which he has no authority, to render a suitable recompence for services, to fulfil contracts, and to make restitution for wrongs. But the righteousness of a ruler consists in distributing to all subjects rewards and punishments, according to the known, at least sufficiently promulged laws of the society. And the righteousness of God, who can be considered in no other capacity than that of the supreme universal ruler of all moral agents, consists in rendering to them according to their works, including their affections, intentions, motives,

SERM. V. tives, and every circumstance necessary to a true estimate of their moral rectitude or evil, which are all perfectly known to him.

In the divine administration, which comprehends the whole extent of created existence, and the entire series of events, there is a visible relation between life and the course of inanimate nature, the latter being so directed as to answer the purposes of the other, by impressions on its organs of perception, and by exciting its active powers, so that there is apparent œconomy in the conduct of the animal state; and superintending providence by the discipline of pleasure and pain arising from sensible objects, determines living creatures to pursue the ends for which they were made; but in the government of moral agents, whose life is capable of greater variety, as well as superior kinds of enjoyment, and of opposite unhappiness, the like discipline being applied to higher purposes, that is, pleasure being connected with virtue, and pain with moral evil, obtains the character of righteous. Upon this view, we may consider as included in the exercise of divine justice, all the instances in which, whether by extraordinary interposition, or by the establishment of nature

nature in its ordinary course, providence SERM. testifies an approbation of moral rectitude, V. causing natural good to follow it, and disapprobation of vice and iniquity, by making pain of any kind the consequence of it. But these are so various that they cannot be enumerated. Not to mention *surprising events*, which have been before observed to carry in the judgment of all men, who own a superintending providence, the visible marks of rewards and punishment, there are undeniable tendencies and effects in the ordinary administration, and resulting from the present constitution of things, which favor virtue and discountenance wickedness. Who that attentively considers the general condition of mankind in this world, can question the truth of *Solomon's* observation, || *That length of days is in the right hand of wisdom, or religious virtue, and in her left hand are riches and honor.* Temperance, industry, and the social virtues, are naturally productive of health, reputation, and riches, which contribute to the long and easy enjoyment of life; whereas sickness, poverty, infamy, and sometimes untimely death, are the apparent effects of luxury, idleness, fraud, and vio-

|| Prov. iii. 16.

lence.

SERM. V. lence. If there is an intelligent being at the head of nature, who guides all the motions and operations of inferior causes, who framed the human constitution, and preserves its powers in their natural exercise, who formed men into societies, induing them with social dispositions, and directing the exertion of them to their proper ends, can it be doubted but he is a friend to virtue, and an adversary to moral evil? Or that these are indications of *righteousness*, as the character of his government? Again, if we look into the interior part of the human frame, and observe how its powers operate, considering it as the workmanship of God, we shall see yet clearer manifestations of his justice, in the stricter and more necessary connection which there is between virtue and pleasure, and between moral evil and pain. No sooner we are conscious of any good affection exerting itself, than a pleasing sensation arises in the self-approving mind, even before the compleated virtuous action, which increases the pleasure, because the good affection then has its full effect. On the other hand, inward shame, and self-tormenting reflections necessarily accompany a consciousness of immoral dispositions, and grow with them in every step of their



their progress, and all their bad effects. For S E R M. proof of this, the proper appeal is to experience, and every man's heart will witness V. to him that it is true, unless a long course of profligate wickedness has destroyed his natural sense of right and wrong, in which case human nature is visibly depraved, and lost to all rational self-enjoyment. The ways therefore of *wisdom*, are, by the unalterable appointment of God, *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace*, the contrary, are ways of sorrow and misery; and here is a farther instance of a just moral government in nature, or of the divine righteousness, adding a sanction of rewards and punishments, which executes itself, to the law which is written in the hearts of men.

But still it must be acknowledged, that tho' these are instances of the divine justice, and particular methods by which it is exercised, yet is it not fully manifested in them. The observations which have been made on the common course of providence, do not hold universally; the best men are not always the most prosperous in the world, tho' virtue tends to prosperity. Sickness, poverty, and reproach happen often to the good and to the bad promiscuously, nay sometimes


SERM. times true religion is the very cause of grievous suffering from the hands of wicked men. And even what may more properly be called the sanction of the law of nature, the inward satisfaction and peace which accompanies a consciousness of virtuous integrity as its reward, and the anguish which attends men's self-accusing thoughts as the present punishment of their sins, even this does not appear as one would expect the result of a judicial proceeding should do; it rises and falls, not always in exact proportion to merit and demerit, but men have it in their power to make it more or less sensibly felt. Sometimes good men thro' their own weakness and inattention, have not all the enjoyment of their own sincerity which they might have, and bad men, by increasing their wickedness, harden themselves into an insensibility, and lessen the feeling of their own sufferings for it. We must therefore conclude, that the present state of this world, tho' it is not without strong intimations of the divine justice, yet is not the proper scene for that attribute to display it self fully in, and that God has appointed a future time wherein he will judge men, and all other  
moral

moral agents, in righteousness, rendering to SERM.  
 them all according to their works.

V.  


From what has been last observed, we have a satisfactory answer to the objections which are commonly made against the equity of the divine government. Some dispensations of providence carry, at first view, an appearance of being favorable to the wickedness of men, and of severity against true piety and virtue. The covetous, and ambitious prosper in wicked devices, for increasing their wealth and power, by methods of deceit and cruelty, while the innocent are caught in their snares, and fall a prey to them ; sometimes the most eminently virtuous are the most barbarously used. The answer to all which is, that we ought not to make a judgment concerning the divine administration by single *unconnected* events, for it is an intire scheme comprehending the whole series of events, and therefore, as in other obvious cases, a system is not rightly understood, nor a true judgment pronounced upon it, merely by seeing and considering its unrelated parts, but by discerning their mutual relations ; so to a right judgment of this moral scheme, it would be necessary to see the remotest issue of things comprehended

SERM. in it, which being above the reach of human  
 V. understanding, particular dispensations, which  
 are only parts of the great design, must be  
 but very imperfectly understood by us, and  
 it would be extremely rash to pronounce  
 them inconsistent with wisdom, equity, and  
 goodness. We know by experience that some  
 events which at first were shocking, and  
 seemed to be very grievous, have afterwards  
 appeared in a quite different light, not only  
 just, but wisely meant for good. We may  
 well suppose it to be so in other cases, to the  
 end of which our knowledge does not reach.  
 But when the mystery of God shall be finish-  
 ed, when the great plan of his providence  
 shall have its full accomplishment, then, and  
 not till then, shall the divine moral attributes  
 be perfectly vindicated, to the conviction of  
 all rational beings, all difficulties relating to  
 this subject cleared up, and the objections  
 silenced which short-sighted mortals now  
 make, but which really have no other foun-  
 dation than in their own ignorance : At pre-  
 sent the ways of God are to us *unsearchable,*  
*and his judgments past finding out.* This how-  
 ever we know, and it ought to satisfy us,  
 that since there are plain discoveries of a ru-  
 ling intelligence in the universe, which  
 formed

formed and disposes all things in it, since the SERM.  
 supreme Being is the natural governor of all V.  
 his creatures, and the moral governor of all   
 rational agents, since from the constitution  
 of our own nature, and by convincing argu-  
 ments drawn even from the present admini-  
 stration, it appears that he is on the side of  
 virtue, and that he is just and good, since  
 these things are so, his justice shall *finally*,  
 and in the *whole*, be fully manifested for the  
 good of his creation. Let us, next, suppose  
 that mankind are now in a state of proba-  
 tion, which is a supposition in all respects  
 worthy of the wisdom of God, and not in-  
 consistent with any of his perfections, and  
 we have great reason to believe it is fact, when  
 we consider the weakness and imperfection  
 of the human capacity, both intellectual and  
 moral, and the surprising improvement it  
 makes by due application and exercise, which  
 depends principally on the mind itself, and  
 when we consider the circumstances of our  
 state exactly fitted to the design of trying us,  
 and giving the opportunities of making pro-  
 gress in knowledge and virtue; allowing this  
 supposition, I say, it is evident that the ap-  
 pearances of our present condition are just  
 such as they ought, or as in reason they could

SERM. V. be expected to be, that is, it was not reasonable to think that divine providence should interpose any otherwise than it now actually does, not by dispensing to all men enjoyment and happiness of all kinds, or pain and misery in exact proportion to the good and evil of their dispositions and behavior, for then their state would not be probationary ; but by affording them sufficient means of virtue, yet leaving them at liberty to use them or not, and giving strong intimations, but not an intuitive knowledge such as should necessitate their assent or attention, that God is a lover of moral rectitude in his creatures, and will support its interest. If it be so, and the principles before mentioned be true, the consequence, I think, is very plain, that God will distribute rewards and punishments to every one of mankind, and the justice of his government requires him to do so.

This is all the length that our *unassisted* reason can carry us in the knowledge of a *future* divine retribution. In what manner, at what time, and with what solemnity God will *judge the world in righteousness*, must be unknown to us without a revelation ; and so must the nature and circumstances of that state to which men shall be adjudg'd,  
any



any farther, than that it shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked, or that in general, the former shall be happy, and the other unhappy. As the human mind is naturally capable of great variety in its condition, and of passing thro' (and we have reason to believe, nay certainly that it actually does pass thro') several stages of existence; during it's continuance in one stage, the knowledge it has of another is very imperfect. Some have imagined that the appearances of our present situation could not be accounted for, any other way so well, as by the supposing a pre-existence of our souls, and those appearances to be the consequences of their behaviour in that state; but this is only conjecture, the supposition appears to reason possible, and but barely so. We have a very familiar instance, known to every one, of an important change in the state of the mind, tho' it is only a gradual and progressive change, that is from infancy to mature age. How different are the notions, the exercises, and enjoyments of a child, and a grown man? And how imperfect are the views which the mind in its first mature condition, has of manly, that is, of rational and virtuous employments and pleasures? Like

SERM. this is the difference (and so St. *Paul* very  
 V. fitly makes the comparison \*) between the  
 present and the future state, with respect to  
 the sentiments and improvements of the  
 mind, tho' the essential powers are the same,  
 and will remain for ever; and it is but a  
 very imperfect notion we have *now*, of what  
 we our selves shall be *hereafter*; we think,  
 and reason, and speak but like children con-  
 cerning the affairs and entertainments of that  
 vastly superior life to come, in comparison  
 with which the present is only an infancy  
 of being. This however, which is direct-  
 ly to the present purpose, we must conclude,  
 and our idea of the divine justice necessarily  
 leads us to it, that the condition of every  
 particular person shall be according to his  
 works or moral improvement in the proba-  
 tion-state, without excepting one individual,  
 and without regard to any other consideration:  
 And not only so in general, but the measure or  
 degree of future happiness shall bear an exact  
 proportion to the degree of virtue attained  
 in this world, and the measure of punish-  
 ment will bear an exact proportion to the  
 degree of moral evil in the temper and prac-  
 tice of men here; in other words, the last

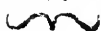
\* 1 Cor. xiii. 11.



and decisive judgment of God, and every particular sentence pronounced by him, will be impartial and equitable. Both these characters are included in the very notion of justice, and must be understood to be meant when we attribute that perfection to the Deity. *Impartiality* is so essential to righteousness in judicature, that *respect of persons* is the very thing meant by corrupting or perverting judgment. And for *equity*, consisting in the proportion of degrees determined by the sentence of a judge, between merit and rewards, and between guilt and punishment, this is so far implied in the idea of justice, that every instance of deviation from it must be imputed to a defect of that quality, or else to a defect of wisdom or power. Now it is certain, that with God there can be no partiality, for as all creatures originally derive their being from him, every capacity in their nature, and every good in their condition is his gift, there could be no regard to one more than another, and thro' all the periods of their duration nothing can be done by any of them, no use made of the powers he bestow'd on them, which can alter his dispositions and purposes towards them, none indeed which can please him except

SERM. the improvement of those powers to the proper ends appointed by himself, that is, nothing which can mislead him from the rule of right or absolute impartiality, and no causes can be imagin'd which should render the divine judicial proceedings unequal or deficient in the proportion of justice; for as he has no unequal partial affection towards his creatures, and there can be no suspicion of his departing from unbiass'd integrity, so it is impossible any the least circumstance which enters into the merit of moral actions, should be hid from his understanding, or that he should not exactly discern the precise degree of goodness or evil which is in them, and in the whole moral state of every individual agent it is equally absurd to suppose, that his adjudging and effectually applying a proportionable reward or a proportionable degree of punishment, should be hindered thro' his own impotence, or by the resistance of any opposite power.

As I have taken notice before, that the doctrine of the scriptures concerning the divine moral attributes is perfectly agreeable to the dictates of reason, we may make the same observation here. The declarations of the sacred writings importing that God is no  
respec-



respector of persons, are so many and so express, they are delivered with such clearness, and inculcated with such earnestness, it is so much insisted on as a foundation never to be departed from in our judging the divine proceedings, and in forming our expectations from his supreme tribunal, that no Christian can have any doubt concerning this truth, or the least reason to imagine that his own, and every other person's final condition, will not be determin'd according to it. The righteous judge of the world will have no consideration in judgment of any man's person or outward state and character, of his nation, family, or religious profession, whether he were beautiful or deform'd, noble or ignoble, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, whether he were *Jew*, or *Gentile*, profess'd *Christian*, *Mahometan*, or *Pagan*; but *he that feared him and wrought righteousness in his state of trial, shall be accepted with him.* He that did his will *sincerely*, according to the knowledge he had of it, or might have had by a due improvement of the opportunities afforded him, shall be approved; he that occupied faithfully and diligently the talents committed to his trust whether they were more or fewer, shall be proportionably rewarded;

SERM. rewarded ; but all the workers of iniquity,  
 V. of whatever denomination they were, shall  
 be finally rejected. Again, the scripture as  
 constantly teaches, that not only rewards and  
 punishments shall be impartially distributed  
 in the future state, as men were good or bad,  
 but that their condition of happiness and mi-  
 sery in the other world, will be in exact pro-  
 portion to the degree of their sincerity, zeal,  
 and diligence in well doing here, and to the  
 measure of their sinfulness. There shall be  
 a difference between the reward of a pro-  
 phet and a righteous man, and he that sin-  
 cerely does the very lowest offices of charity  
 to good men, shall not lose his reward ; and  
 he that *soweth sparingly*, in works of virtue  
 and charity, *shall reap sparingly*, but *he that*  
*soweth bountifully, shall reap also boun-*  
*tifully.* \* In proportion to the improvement  
 which every one makes of his talents, so  
 shall his recompence be. As the celestial bo-  
 dies shine with an unequal splendor, for *one*  
*star differs from another in glory, so also is*  
*the resurrection of the dead.* † On the other  
 hand, the punishment of sinners shall be une-  
 qual, that degree of unhappiness, and no more,  
 being allotted to every one which bears an ex-

\* 2 Cor. ix. 6.

† 2 Cor. xv. 41, 42.

act proportion to their offences. *That* \* *servant* SERM.  
*which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not* V.  
*himself, neither did according to his will, shall*  
*be beaten with many stripes, but he that knew*  
*not, and did commit things worthy of stripes,*  
*shall be beaten with few stripes; for unto whom-*  
*soever much is given, of him shall much be re-*  
*quired, and to whom men have committed much,*  
*of him they will ask the more.* Here, indeed,  
 there is a difference between the justice and  
 goodness of God, not with respect to the  
 principal and the ultimate end, but the man-  
 ner of exercise and manifestation, he com-  
 municates good very liberally to his creatures,  
 but unequally, his manifold wisdom, and  
 manifold bounty are manifested in the varie-  
 ty of his gifts, which he bestows with sove-  
 reign freedom; who can pretend to call him  
 to account for the unequal distribution of that  
 whereof he is, and can only be considered as  
 the absolute Lord and Proprietor? There is  
 no pretence of injustice, but a great discovery  
 of wisdom, power, and goodness, in his  
 creating various kinds of beings, with diffe-  
 rent degrees of perfection, and capacity of  
 happiness; and parallel to that is his making  
 distinctions among individuals of the same

\* Luke xii. 44, 48.

SERM. kind, suppose men, by giving to some greater, and to others lesser abilities of various sorts, which are the foundation of unequal happiness ; so he distinguishes men by the gifts of nature, the outward favors of providence, and religious privileges, so he made a difference between the posterity of *Jacob* and *Esau*, calling the former to the privileges of his peculiar people, from which the other were excluded. But the exercise of divine justice is directed by another rule, its allotments of natural good and evil always bear a proportion to the moral quality of the dispositions and works of men, exactly estimated by infinite wisdom, and renders to them according to what is properly their own, whether it be good or evil. To represent God as acting arbitrarily in his government of mankind, using such power as the *potter does over the clay*, making one vessel to honor, and another to dishonor, merely because he will, that is using *such power* in awarding, or in appointing and determining to award to them final happiness and misery, this is to destroy the true notion of his justice, in effect to deny it, and thereby weaken the security of religious virtue.

Let

Let us now consider what is the proper S E R M.  
 application to be made of this important V.  
 principle both of natural and revealed religion. First, as the final issues of the divine judgment are of all events the most momentous to us, for it ascertains our greatest happiness or misery, so as no power can prevent it, no wisdom can provide against it, this doctrine teaching us by what rule that judgment will proceed, and what measures will be observed in it, at the same time teaches us how to form our expectations from it. Men are naturally anxious about their condition hereafter, nothing can afford greater contentment to their minds at present, than the well-grounded hope of future happiness; but how is that to be attained? Our state is to be determined by the sentence of a righteous judge, according as our works are good or bad; and therefore it must be the greatest vanity, and the highest presumption, for men to expect happiness hereafter, whose hearts accuse them of wickedness deliberately committed and obstinately continued in. Surely the state of that creature must be very desperate, and very deplorable, whose hope depends on the Almighty's *perverting* judgment in its favor. But men deceive themselves by fondly imagining

SERM. gining that something *else* will be accepted  
 V. instead of integrity of heart and purity of  
 hands; that an external denomination, a religious profession, a partial obedience, or a purpose of future amendment, will recommend them to the favor of God, which is really to suppose that he is not a righteous judge.

On the other hand, the man whose heart does not condemn him, has confidence towards God, because he is a perfectly just governor, by whom no service sincerely performed to him, nor instance of respect to his commandments, will ever be forgotten. Unless this were known to be the character of the judge, and that the measures of righteousness will be observed by him in judgment, no man could have any rational confidence; he might take his chance in a capricious administration, but the only foundation of reasonable hope is, that distribution will be made with impartial equity. It is certainly becoming frail creatures, and whose hearts accuse them of many moral defects, to stand in awe of the divine justice, and, as St. *Peter* exhorts, *to pass the time of their sojourning in fear, if they call on the father who without respect*



*respect of persons judgeth all men* \*. But still SERM.

a self-approving mind is naturally secure, supported by this persuasion, that right shall finally prevail in the universe, and therefore looks forward, without consternation, to the last result of things, when all irregularities shall be rectified, when the proud shall be no more prosperous, nor innocence oppressed, but all men shall receive according to their deeds done in the body, and not according to their outward actions only, but the prevalent affections and purposes of their hearts, for † *every secret thing shall be brought into judgment, whether it be good or bad.*

V.  
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Secondly, The consideration of God's justice to be finally manifested in appointing the condition of all men according to their works, should teach us patience under the difficulties of our present state. Though the ways of providence are now involved in obscurity which is impenetrable to human knowledge, and in our broken view of its all-wise proceedings, some events have an appearance quite contrary to righteousness, the last judgment will set all these seeming inequalities right; and to them who endure persecution for conscience sake, this is a great support of


\* Eph. i. 17.

† Ecc. xii. 14.


patience,

SERM. V. patience, that it is, \* as St. Paul speaks, *a righteous thing with God to recompence tribulation to those who trouble them, and to them who are troubled a final happy rest, when he shall be glorified in the salvation of his saints, and take vengeance on them who knew him not, nor obeyed his laws.* It is often grievous to good men, that their characters, which may be numbered among their most important interests in this world, suffer by wrong human judgment, both in the forms of public authority and private censure, but there lies on appeal to a superior righteous tribunal, and with minds supported by a consciousness of their own sincerity, it may well be accounted a very small thing ‡ *to be judged by men,* seeing he that finally judgeth is the supreme, infallible, and just Lord. This consideration, however, should prevent the rash judgments of men, should make them cautious in their proceedings even where they have a right to judge, and restrain the liberties they too often take of reproaching their neighbours, especially of judging the motives and intentions of their hearts, which is God's prerogative, for he only || *will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make mani-*

\* 2 Thess. i. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. iv. 3. || 1 Cor. iv. 5.

*fest the counsels of the heart, that every one* SERM. I  
*may have that praise and recompence which is* V.  
*justly due to him.* 

Thirdly, God in his justice, as well as his other moral perfections, is the best example for us to imitate, as far as the frailty of our nature will al'ow. It is our glory as reasonable creatures to be capable of imitating him, and as our consciences bear as full testimony to the rectitude of this, as any other part of his law written in our hearts, we must be self-condemned, and therefore unhappy, in acting contrary to it. It is true, our fellow-creatures have demands of right upon us which no other beings can have upon the almighty maker of all things, and therefore our satisfying those demands, is a doing justice which cannot properly be called an imitation of him; but since there is an apparent equity resulting from the relations of persons and things, to which the supreme Ruler has a regard in his administration, this is a strong motive to our governing our conduct by a regard to the same equity, even where our condition being essentially different, our acts of justice are no way parallel to his. And especially, the exercise of human authority, should, as exactly as possible, follow the pat-

SERM. V.  tern of that perfect righteousness which governs the world. Princes are called Gods upon earth, their power duly exercised being the nearest resemblance of the divine universal dominion; but if their power degenerates into tyranny, if under the colour of authority they oppress their fellow-creatures, they are then guilty, not only of the greatest injustice to men, but the highest dishonor to God the fountain of all lawful authority, \* *by whom kings reign righteously, and princes decree justice*, and to whom human usurpations, the perverting of judgment, and violence, are no otherwise to be attributed, than the most malicious acts of the wickedest beings, the devils themselves; that is, they are permitted by his providence for the trial of men's virtues, or for the punishment of their transgressions. Since he who is the absolute sovereign of the whole world, accountable to none, never acts arbitrarily in the government of his creatures, but always with perfect equity, how dare ambitious mortals, who † *shall die like men, and fall like the tyrannical princes* which have gone before them, enslave and oppress their fellow-mortals, who in the main privileges of human

\* Prov. viii. 15.      † Psal. lxxxii. 7.

nature are equal with them, and shall stand S E R M.  
upon a level with them before the supreme V.  
tribunal? Shall they govern by arbitrary  
will, or by caprice and passion, instead of  
justice? Surely such encroachments on the  
rights of humanity, which are under his pro-  
tection, and such indignity to his own go-  
vernment, cries aloud to the righteous God  
for vengeance; and to resist its destructive  
exorbitances by reason, and force under the  
conduct of reason, is not only justified but  
laudable, nay strictly required by the prin-  
ciple of piety towards God, as well as bene-  
volence to mankind.

I have now finished my intended explica-  
tion of the divine moral attributes. They  
might indeed have been considered much  
more largely, and distinguished into a great-  
er variety. Mercy, and grace, and patience  
are sometimes represented, and very usefully,  
to practical purposes, as distinct perfections of  
the Deity; but if we consider them as pro-  
perties of the divine nature, analogous to the  
different springs of moral action in the hu-  
man mind, which is the only way we have  
of forming our most accurate notions concern-  
ing them, it is plain those last mentioned,  
are really the same, diversified only by the

SERM. manner of exercise or manifestation, and by  
 V. the condition of the objects. The grace of  
 God is his favor to the undeserving, to reasonable creatures who were obnoxious to his displeasure by their offences, or favor manifested beyond what they could have had any assurance of according to the original discovery of his will, and terms of their acceptance. To his goodness they owe their being, the continuance of it, and whatever happiness they possess or hope for, but as their reason must teach them to expect future blessings from him upon the condition of sincere and persevering obedience to the law of their nature, a sense of guilt shakes the foundations of their confidence. In this case favor continued or offered, is *grace*, for that supposes the object to be both sinful and miserable to such a degree, as greatly to magnify the compassion which interposes for its relief. And the *patience* of God, is the lenity of his government manifested in his suspending the execution of judgment, that sinners may have the opportunity of repentance, thereby to prevent their destruction. But in all this variety of operation, the principle is the same, *divine benevolence*, which shines the more gloriously (because it appears most pure  
 and

and disinterested) in the miseries and distresses, the guilt and obstinacy, of the creatures towards whom it is exercised. SERM.  
V.

In like manner the *truth of God* in the moral sense, comprehending veracity or sincerity in his communication with other intelligent beings, so as not to deceive them, and fidelity in fulfilling his promises, this does not appear strictly speaking to be a distinct attribute. Indeed as veracity is to the human mind a beautiful moral object, (we cannot but approve it, and disapprove the contrary as odious and deformed) it is very natural to ascribe it to the Deity as a branch of his perfect moral character; which is not to be understood in this sense, that in all the knowledge we derive from him, and it is all the knowledge we have, things are still represented as they really are in themselves, and as he sees them. The contrary is evident. The ideas we have by our external senses, of which God is the original author, are not complete representations of the nature of material objects, nor do our faculties seem to be fitted for comprehending the essences of any beings, and consequently, the knowledge which God communicates does not reach so far. But it is obvious, that sin-

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cerity does not require any person to make known to others all the truth which he himself knows (it were impossible that an infinitely intelligent being should do it) only to discover the truth which they have a right to know in pursuance of their mutual relation, or to prevent their falling into errors which may be hurtful to them. Now God can be under no previous obligation to his creatures, all the good they possess and the farther good they hope for, proceeds solely from his bounty ; and therefore their reasonable expectations that he will not mislead them to their hurt, or so as to frustrate the design of his own beneficence, however just these expectations be, and indeed they are more just and certain than those which are founded on the demands of strictest right from their fellow-creatures, yet really they have no other foundation than this, that his favor will be manifested to such beings consistently and uniformly, in carrying on his original kind intentions concerning them ; in other words, the truth of God is nothing else but his goodness exercised towards intelligent beings of imperfect understandings, in a way suitable to their nature and condition. After the same manner must be understood that



*explained and proved.*

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that other branch of his truth, *faithfulness*; S E R M.  
which really means no more than the im- V.  
mutability of his goodness, or else it may be  
considered as included in justice; so fidelity  
is commonly understood as included in the  
righteousness of men; and according to either  
of these views, it is comprehended in the di-  
vine attributes already explained.

## SERMON VI.

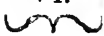
The Divine Perfections incomprehensible.

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Job xi. 17.

*Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to Perfection?*

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 **O**F all objects to which the human mind can engage its attention, the Deity, his being and attributes, justly claims the first place; there is no other so excellent, none so important to the highest purposes of our existence and our happiness. We cannot avoid observing, that of things which occur to our thoughts, the idea of superior excellence accompanies some upon a comparison with others. As the external senses distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant in their objects, and the internal sense perceives a difference between the beautiful and deformed, so the understanding,  
not

not only separates truth from falshood, but SERM.  
discerns a dignity in some beings and some VI.  
qualities beyond others. It is not possible  
for a man to consider inanimate nature and  
life, the brutal and the rational powers, or  
virtue and vice, with a perfect indifference,  
or without preferring one before the other  
in his esteem; and the idea of a difference  
in the degrees of their perfection, as necessarily  
arises in his mind, as that of a difference  
in their being. The objects or properties to  
which we naturally attribute excellence, have  
been just now hinted, they are intelligence,  
active power, and moral rectitude, the being  
to which these characters belong, is preferred  
to another supposed to be without them;  
and as they admit of various degrees, our  
esteem rises in proportion to the measure in  
which we conceive any being to be indued  
with them. Now these are characters of  
the divine nature in the highest perfection.  
God is not only intelligent, active, holy and  
good, but he is infinitely so, and he is the  
original cause of all the affections, whereby  
these characters are formed in any degree,  
or may be attained, in every other being.  
Besides, we distinguish the objects of our  
knowledge and attention, by the relation  
they

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they have to our selves, and their connexion with our happiness. However entertaining speculation may be to some minds, every one must acknowledge, that those things are the most worthy of our inquiry, and our rational powers are the most properly employed about them, which nearly affect our own interest, and we cannot be ignorant of or unattentive to them without great disadvantage and danger to our highest enjoyment. But if the doctrine concerning God and his perfections be true, if there is such a being, omnipotent, perfectly wise, our maker, preserver, and supreme Lord, if we have to do with him in so many ways, and there arises such a variety of obligations to him running thro' the whole compass of our being and its affairs, in order to attain its true ends and our greatest happiness, nothing can be more manifest, than, that this claims our regard preferably to all other subjects which we can turn our thoughts to; and for these reasons it is most justly recommended to our most serious and affectionate meditation.

But there is an objection, or a prejudice, against the truth of this first and fundamental principle of religion, at least against our allowing it that room which is pleaded for in

in our careful inquiry and consideration, taken from the difficulty, indeed incomprehensibility of it. The object, 'tis alledged, is too big for our faculties; our minds lose themselves in the contemplation of it, and, instead of having clear ideas and certain knowledge, are involved in the utmost obscurity and confusion. How can we affirm any thing to be true which we do not comprehend, or as some affect to speak, not at all understand? Human reason is so unequal to the comprehension of the Deity, or even forming any right judgment concerning him, that where by strong prepossession the belief of his existence has obtained, men's notions of his nature and attributes have been monstrously absurd, destructive of all religion and virtue, which is the professed practical use and improvement of that belief: This was evidently the case of the heathen world; but some of the more inquisitive utterly denied the principle itself as unintelligible. Is it not wisdom then to employ our intellectual powers in inquiries more level to their capacity, rather than embarrass them in perplexing intricacies, by aspiring to the knowledge of abstruse points quite out of our depth, and perhaps deceive ourselves into a conceit

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SERM. conceit of knowing what we really do not  
 VI. know, that is, have no distinct ideas of, the  
 consequence of which may be disturbing fears and scruples, with other unhappy effects of superstition? To set this matter in a clear light, and remove the objection or prejudice which has been mentioned against men's believing or attending to the foundations of religion, I will, first, consider how far and in what sense the divine nature and perfections surpass our understanding. And Secondly, offer some considerations to show that their incomprehensibleness is no just reason against our believing and attending to them, so as to influence our affections and direct our practice.

First, let us consider how far, and in what sense, the divine nature and perfections surpass our understanding. The meaning is not, that we can have no idea at all of the supreme absolutely perfect and independent being; such an assertion as that differs nothing from atheism. It is impossible we should believe the existence of any thing whereof we can have no idea, or, which amounts to the same thing, we are not to imagine there are contradictions in the notion of a Deity, which we are notwithstanding to admit

admit, or our inquiries into them must be silenced, under the pretence of his being incomprehensible. For a notion which includes a real contradiction in it, is indeed a notion of nothing at all; which however men may give it a name, yet it is without any signification of truth, which the human understanding, upon examining it, can possibly give an assent to. But this is far from being the real case with respect to the important subject of our present consideration; for surely no creature that has the idea of perfection, and is capable of abstract thinking, can be incapable of forming the idea of absolute perfection, or of an absolutely perfect Being, which is what we mean by the Deity. What is there in it shocking to human understanding? What, indeed, that the weakest of men, if he attends, cannot easily perceive, or that the severest inquirer can possibly apprehend to be inconsistent? It is certain, some very confused notions, nay gross absurdities, have been put into the definition of God, and received by the unthinking generality of mankind in many successive generations; but it may be safely submitted to the unprejudiced reason of every man, whether the idea of a being absolutely

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ly perfect, and altogether free from any thing which can be truly called an imperfection, be not as natural and intelligible, and as far from the least appearance of contradiction, as the idea of a being whose powers and perfection are limited, which we are sure actually exists, for we are conscious that it is our own condition. Indeed, the idea of absolute perfection seems to be original in our minds, and prior to that of any lower measures, it is the standard to which we, at least tacitly, refer, when we estimate the various degrees of perfection and imperfection in inferior beings. I do not mean the particular and relative perfections of individuals, belonging to the several species, every one of which has its own standard, but there is a gradation of the kinds themselves, the inanimate, the vegetable, the sensitive, and the rational, one still rising above another in the scale of being; and our thoughts naturally ascend to, or rather seem to have pre-conceived absolute perfection at the top of all, by comparison with which, and in gradual abatement of it, we judge other things to have their different measures of perfection and imperfection.

But,



But, when we say God is incomprehensible, the meaning is, that though we have a clear and distinct idea of an absolutely perfect being, so far, that there appears no contradiction in it, and we have satisfying proof of his existence, yet we do not fully understand his nature and the extent of his perfections. Experience has taught us to make a difference between discerning the existence and some properties of things, so as to apply them to use, and comprehending their natures. One instance of this, is in the curious productions of human art, the external appearances and effects of which are seen by the most ignorant person, and perhaps fill him with amazement; but the inward composition, the situation, and movements of the parts, the causes of those appearances, and the essence of the work, are intirely unknown to him. Another instance, common to all mankind, is in our knowledge of nature. Our senses perceive the exterior face of corporeal beings, our reason and observation enable us to understand many of their properties, relations, and uses; but there is an internal constitution upon which those properties, and relations, and uses depend, which no human understanding is able by searching to

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SERM. to find out ; the most learned philosopher,  
 VI. any more than the unskilful vulgar, cannot  
 penetrate into the secret nature and causes of  
 the life, the sensation, and self-moving power  
 of animals, the growth, the various beauty,  
 and fruitfulness of plants ; nay, nor into the  
 essence of the plainest inanimate body, or  
 into the causes of its cohesion, and its gravi-  
 ty. In like manner, we may easily appre-  
 hend the difference between understanding  
*that which may be known of God*, because he  
 has manifested it to us, his existence, and  
 his perfections, discovered by their effects,  
 in the creation, preservation, and govern-  
 ment of the world ; between this, I say, and  
 comprehending his essence, his eternity, im-  
 mensity, and the infinity of his power, know-  
 ledge, and other attributes.

I proposed, in the next place, to shew,  
 that the incomprehensibleness of the divine  
 nature and perfections, is no just reason a-  
 gainst our believing and attending to them,  
 so as to influence our affections, and direct  
 our practice. And one important considera-  
 tion to this purpose, has been already infi-  
 nuated, namely, that we do not comprehend  
 the essences, nor consequently all the pro-  
 perties of other beings, concerning the exis-  
 tence

tence of which, and some of their properties, <sup>SERM.</sup>  
powers, and uses, we can have no doubt, <sup>VI.</sup>  
and which we regard as real, and, in various  
degrees, important to the ends of life. If  
our faculties do not enable us to know the  
intimate nature of any thing, not even of  
the meanest insect, or of the most con-  
temptible pebble, how can we pretend by  
searching to find out the original cause of  
all things, and understand the Almighty to  
perfection? And if we cannot comprehend  
the essences of those beings which we are  
best acquainted with, and whose existence  
is matter of the utmost certainty, which is  
really the case of the human understanding  
with respect to man himself, for we are  
conscious that we do exist, that we perceive,  
remember, desire, will, and begin motion,  
but what the nature of that perceiving, ac-  
tive, self-conscious thing in us is, we do not  
know; if it be so, how can we comprehend  
God our maker?

There are certain bounds set to our know-  
ledge beyond which it cannot pass; as it is  
derived from a superior intelligent cause, the  
capacity and means of attaining it, are li-  
mited to the particular purposes for which  
he has appointed them. Of this we may

SERM. be convinced by attending to our own ideas,  
 VI. and the manner in which they are excited ;  
 they reach no farther than the sensible qualities of objects without us, and the transient perceptions and acts of our own minds. Of the external objects themselves we have no other notion, but this confused general one, that they are something, we do not know what, called substances, and supposed to be the subject of the qualities we perceive, or which have the power of exciting sensations in us ; and of the mind itself, by reflecting on which we have ideas of another kind, our notion is, that it is a different being or substance, as little understood as bodies are, which is the subject of the perceptions, and has the power of producing the actions, which we are conscious of. Thus, the real intimate nature of beings, material and immaterial, is alike unknown to us. The wise author of our intellectual powers has formed them to answer the ends to which our constitution is adapted, he has given us such a knowledge of corporal beings as may render them useful to us in life, and he has given such a capacity of knowing himself, and of knowing ourselves, as may direct us to act the part assigned to us in the creation, and  
 attain


attain our proper perfection and happiness; SER M.  
but our understandings are not fitted, at least VI.  
in their present state, for a full and thorough  
comprehension of any thing, not even the  
least of God's works, far less of God himself.   
By men's not considering duly these narrow  
limits within which their intellectual ac-  
quirements are confined, and not being con-  
tented with them, but aspiring to a com-  
prehension of the essences and causes of  
things, they have betrayed themselves into  
errors, the more difficult to be removed,  
because they put on the appearance of sub-  
lime knowledge. 'Tis this which has pro-  
duced such confusion and absurdity in some  
of the natural sciences, or rather the systems,  
which have passed under that name: Some  
high pretenders to learning, not satisfied  
with observing the plain appearances of the  
objects of their inquiry, and those obvious  
properties of which they had clear and dis-  
tinct perceptions, and from thence taking  
their rise to investigate their various relations  
and effects, in which method they might  
have proceeded safely, and others have pro-  
ceeded successfully, to very useful and enter-  
taining discoveries; they fondly imagined  
that they were able to penetrate into hidden

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essences, and so going out of their depth in that misguided search, they bewildered themselves, and misled others, bringing forth unintelligent jargon instead of science, and a heap of words without meaning. I mention this only to shew, that if the human understanding is so baffled in its attempts to explain the nature of created beings, the existence and the uses of which are more familiar to us, and level to our capacity, we need not think it strange that the knowledge of the uncreated essence and perfections is too high for us, nor should on that account be discouraged in our diligent, but modest inquires into that which may be known of the supreme Being. And as thus it appears that in a multitude of instances, indeed the whole extent of being, our knowledge is but partial, we understand a little, a great deal is hid from us, this should teach us, being humbly contented with the appointed imperfection of our minds, to employ them within their proper sphere, not in curious disquisitions above their reach, but in comparing and reasoning upon the clear and distinct ideas we have, in order to improve them to their true end in practice, and not to argue against the existence and importance

tance of things, merely, because we cannot SERM.  
comprehend their essences and all their at- VI.  
tributes ; so, 

Secondly, There are peculiar reasons why the Deity should be acknowledged to be by us unsearchable, and his attributes to surpass our comprehension. When men insist on this pretence against believing, or applying their minds to the study of any principle, that it is dark, incomprehensible, unintelligible, the meaning may be, that there is some ground to suspect a design to impose upon them, perhaps it is imagined that the religionists artfully represent the objects of their belief as abstruse and mysterious in their nature, on purpose to make them venerable, which to inquisitive and conscious minds is rather a prejudice against them. To be satisfied concerning this, the best way we can take is to look into the inseparable characters of the subjects themselves ; if they obviously appear too high for our understanding, there is then no cause of suspicion, and if difficulty necessarily attends our conceptions of such sublime subjects, that is no objection at all either against their reality or importance, nor consequently against our inquiring into, and believing that which may

SERM. be known concerning them. Now, there  
 VI. are certain characters of the Deity and all his  
 ~~~~~~ perfections, inseparably belonging to his condition of being as the original cause of all things, our ideas of which must be necessarily inadequate, such as eternity, immensity, and self-existence, and infinity which is the character of all his attributes, but at the same time these characters force themselves upon our minds, so that we cannot possibly avoid them, or they are rendered intelligible by an analogy to other cases which are more familiar to us, as will appear by reflecting but very briefly on what has been already said concerning them.

First, eternity and immensity are essential attributes of the supreme Being, incomprehensible by the human understanding. Whenever we attempt to comprehend them we find ourselves involved in insuperable difficulties. How can we conceive an eternal duration now actually past? How can we form an idea of being no where included, no where excluded? And when men have reasoned upon these points, and endeavoured to explain them, their notions have been full of confusion and absurdity. Eternity has been represented as a *standing now* or *permanent*



*nent instant*, coexisting with all parts of du-SERM.

ration, because we cannot conceive succession VI.

without a beginning, nor infinity unequal

and capable of addition or diminution : And

immensity has been imagined as an *indivi-*

*sible point*, coextended with infinite space.

It is not to be wondered at that our concep-

tions of both these subjects are so imperfect,

if we consider how we come by them. The

idea of duration arises from observing a suc-

cession in our own thoughts, it is enlarged

by attending to the regular motion of some

bodies ; but imagination carries it beyond the

limits of our own existence, or any know-

ledge we have of actual motion, still with an

apprehended possibility of a farther addition,

so that by this means our notion of eternity

is only negative, that it is a duration unde-

terminable, or to which no bounds can be

set ; in like manner having by our senses the

idea of corporeal distances, the fancy extends

it beyond the utmost limits of material exis-

tence, till it runs us up to a negative infinity

of space, that is, to which there may be an

addition without end ; so inadequate are our

ideas of eternity and immensity, and there-

fore we reason upon them in the dark, and

when we form hypotheses to explain them,

SERM. from which we draw inferences, we present-  
 VI. ly run into contradictions, which only shew  
 the weakness of our understandings. But  
 surely this is no argument against the di-  
 vine eternity and omnipresence, or any pre-  
 tence for neglecting them as unintelligible;  
 for no scheme, not even atheism, can deli-  
 ver us from the difficulty; still we must be-  
 lieve something has existed from eternity, or  
 if we should abstract from any particular be-  
 ing, nay from all being as actually existing,  
 the idea of eternal duration will remain in  
 our minds; and the train of our own thoughts  
 will as naturally run us up to infinity of space,  
 if we should imagine it to be only an infinite  
 void unpossessed by any being; and therefore  
 the incomprehensibleness of these divine per-  
 fections is no just objection against their rea-  
 lity or importance as articles of our faith.

Secondly, Another character of the divine  
 Being, imported in, or necessarily inferred  
 from those just now mentioned, is self-exis-  
 tence, the most obvious notion of which is,  
 that he is unoriginated, and derives his being  
 from no other; and though that be only ne-  
 gative, yet our reason convinces us that it in-  
 cludes a positive, most perfect, and peculiar  
 manner of existence, of which no appear-  
 ances


ances in ourselves, or in the world about us, can furnish us with any idea. By reflecting on the limited nature, duration, extent and power of the being we are conscious of, and of other things which we discern, our thoughts are naturally led to a commencement of our and their existence, and consequently, to a cause of it upon which it absolutely depends; from whence it plainly follows, that such things might not have been, and that they may cease to be, or that their manner and condition of being is derived and contingent, essentially different from necessary self-existence. Now as consciousness, and the observation of things without us, by their sensible properties and effects, are the fountains of all our knowledge, how is it possible that they, conveying only the notices of things which have all of them the characters of derivation and dependence, should give us any idea of a manner or condition of being intirely different, that is, unoriginated, uncaused, self-sufficient, and independent. But that something has existed from eternity, and therefore necessarily and independently on any other cause, is what all men must agree in acknowledging, and they do acknowledge it; consequently, upon all suppositions our minds

SERM. minds must be alike embarrass'd with this  
 VI. idea, and the incomprehensible self-existence  
 of the Deity cannot reasonably be urged against our belief of his being, or the improvement of that belief to practical purposes.

Thirdly, If we consider the attributes of God which are exercised in his works, and whereof we find some imperfect image in ourselves and other inferior beings, though they are much more clearly understood than those already mentioned, eternity, immensity, and self-existence, which are the characters of his being ; yet in some respects the same judgment is to be made of them, namely, that they are incomprehensible. Power is the first of this kind that occurs to our thoughts : We are naturally led to it by the consideration of visible appearances in the world which must be attributed to a cause ; we find also an activity in ourselves, whereby we are able, not only to produce some effects within our minds, but also to move the members of our own bodies, and by them some other bodies. But by none of these methods can we form an adequate notion of infinite power, that is, which reaches to the utmost extent of possibility, or whatever does not imply a contradiction in itself, or an

an imperfection in the agent, which is what SERM.  
we mean by the divine omnipotence. We VI.

know that the active principle in our own nature is limited, but that in the perfection of being it transcends all its effects, not communicating an activity, which is its excellence, equal to its own, nor being exhausted by its operations; for whatever we have done, the power remains, and we can do more; but many things we cannot do, which may be, and are effected by superior agents. And when we contemplate the variety of beings in heaven and earth, some of them vastly great, which are all the works of God, they give us a very magnificent idea of his power, which is heightened by reasoning, as we always do on the subject of power, that it exceeds the effects, and is still capable of producing more; and if the effects themselves transcend our knowledge, as they evidently do, how can we comprehend the power of the cause? This is excellently represented by *Job* in these words: *Dead things are formed from under the earth, and the inhabitants thereof.* (Vast creatures, of gigantick bulk, are fashioned in the dark recesses of the terraqueous globe.) *Hell is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering. He stretcheth out the north over the*  
the

SERM. *the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon*  
 VI. *nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his*  
 *thick cloud, and the cloud is not rent under*  
*them. He holdeth back the face of his throne,*  
*(or of heaven) and spreadeth his cloud upon*  
*it. He hath compassed the water with bounds*  
*until the day and night come to an end. The*  
*pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at*  
*his reproof, he divideth the sea with his power,*  
*and by his understanding smiteth through the*  
*proud* (The mountains, which seem to be  
 the pillars and supporters of heaven, shake by  
 his lightening and thunder, and he raiseth  
 such tempests as divide the waters of the sea,  
 making deep furrows in it, yet he knows  
 how to depress its proud waves, reducing  
 them to a dead calm.) *By his spirit he hath*  
*garnished the heavens, his hand hath formed*  
*the crooked serpent.* (He hath adorned the  
 heavens with the stars which make the milky  
 way, and other beautiful constellations, with  
 all their admirable windings.) *Lo these are*  
*part of his ways, but how little a portion is*  
*heard of him, the thunder of his power who*  
*can understand.* But the power of God, as  
 high as it is above our understandings, and  
 incomprehensible by them, does not for that  
 reason appear so shocking as to give any oc-  
 casion

caſion for doubting its reality, or any pretence SERM.  
for not making it the object of our careful VI.  
and affectionate attention. Shall we be so  
vain as to imagine that there is not, nor can  
be, any power greater than our own, or even  
than we can comprehend? By instances which  
continually occur to us, we know there is a  
great diversity of operation in nature, and of  
operating power, and that the perceptions we  
have of operations and powers of one kind,  
can give us no idea of operations and powers  
of another kind. For example, the opera-  
tions of material causes has no manner of af-  
finity with the activity of our minds. Does  
the clearest apprehension of the force of  
weights and springs give us any notion of sen-  
timents arising, and dispositions exerting  
themselves, in a spirit, and its giving a new  
determination to the exercise of its own fa-  
culties, and raising a new motion in bodies?  
Supposing an intelligent being to have no  
idea of any powers but those of mechanism,  
(which is not an impossible supposition, for  
there does not appear to us any such connexi-  
on between the ideas of passive perception  
and mental activity, but that they may be  
separated) but supposing this, would not  
spontaneous action be perfectly incomprehen-  
sible

SERM. fible to fuch an intelligent being? Yet we  
 VI. know that it exists. Why then fhould a  
 ~~~~~ power different from, and fuperior to any  
 we are confcious of, or can have the adequate idea of by the ordinary operations of nature, be imagined an abfurdity, or be difregarded under the pretence of its being unintelligible, when we have convincing proof of its exiftence.

Again, the knowledge of God furpaffes our comprehension, as well as his power, extending to all things knowable, as the other does to all things poffible. I have already had occafion, more than once, of obferving the narrownefs and weaknefs of the human mind, which by its faculties and ways of perceiving, at leaft in the prefent ftate, is not fitted for great proficiency in fpeculative knowledge; but only is furnifhed, by the means of fenfation and reflection, with fuch perceptions as may anfwer the end of directing its practice in order to the attaining fuch happinefs as it is capable of. It is no wonder then, that the knowledge of the moft comprehensive views which the great maker of all things has of his own works, and all the powers (with all the poffible exertions of them) which he has

com-





communicated to any of those his creatures, that, I say, the knowledge of this should be too high for us to understand, and that we cannot find it out to perfection: He must know the inmost essences of things, for he has made them; he must know the utmost effects of nature, and the utmost activity and operation of all inferior beings, for they all necessarily depend upon him. This meditation is very rationally, as well as devoutly, pursued by the Psalmist, particularly in the instance of God's knowing the hearts, the thoughts, the words, and actions of men, and the same reflections made upon it which I now propose. He insists on God's having contrived, ordered and brought to perfection, the whole frame of our nature \* *Thou hast possessed my reins, thou hast covered me in my mother's womb, my substance was not hid from thee when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth. Thine eye did see my substance yet being imperfect, and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.* This is an argument to prove what he before asserted, in a solemn ac-

\* Psal. cxxxix. from ver. 13 to 17.

know-

SERM. knowledgment to God, † *O Lord thou hast  
 VI. searched me and known me, thou knowest my  
 down-sitting and my up-rising, thou understandest my thoughts afar off, thou compassist my path and my lying down, thou art acquainted with all my ways, for there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me before and behind, and laid thine hand upon me.*

Which words import a plain acknowledgment of this as a most certain truth, that God sees not only all the outward actions of men, but even the most secret thoughts and purposes of their hearts, nay, that he has a prescience of them. What finite mind can form a distinct idea of this infinite knowledge, particularly the instance last mentioned, the seeing of men's hearts, and their most secret thoughts, and even a prescience of their future free actions? How to understand it, and reconcile it to that liberty in the exercise of our self-determining powers which we are conscious of, is a difficulty, I doubt, too great for us to explain. The sacred writer, in the psalm referred to, makes this reflection upon it, which is the point I aim at, and we have reason to join with him,

† Psal. cxxxix. ver. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

\* *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high I cannot attain to it.* But though the divine knowledge is wonderful, it is not therefore incredible; we are convinced by examples very familiar to us, that one mind may have powers of perception which another can form no idea of. The lowest of our perceptive faculties, the senses, no one can have a notion of, who is himself without the organs of them. A man born blind can no more comprehend vision, than a finite mind can comprehend omniscience; no more understand how sight discerns and distinguishes colors in the surface of a body, than how God sees the hearts and thoughts of his creatures. A being which is only sensitive can have no idea of pure abstract intelligence, and an understanding which by laborious reasoning discovers some truths and believes others upon very slender grounds, must conceive very imperfectly of that superior capacity by which the same objects are discerned intuitively and with the greatest certainty. The power of judging the hearts of men, and fore-knowing future contingencies is, properly speaking, peculiar to the supreme mind; yet there is a very low

SERM.  
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\* Ver. 6.

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R

and

SERM. and imperfect resemblance of it in the  
 VI. shrewd conjectures some men will make of  
 the dispositions and the conduct of others, with whose tempers they are well acquainted, and whose circumstances are known to them. Is there any absurdity in believing that an infinite understanding may know certainly what a weak man can guess at? But if we had no such assistance in apprehending it, this branch of the divine knowledge, implying no contradiction, and being otherwise sufficiently evident, ought to be admitted without any scruple; and surely, in the whole compass of religious principles, there is not any which should more deeply affect the human heart.

Lastly, if we consider the moral perfections of the Deity in this view, we shall find that here also our thoughts are embarrassed with difficulties, which, in our present state at least, do not admit of full solution. We seem indeed to proceed upon very clear grounds in our inquiries, and to have more distinct and determinate ideas than we have of the natural attributes; God having himself shewed us that which is good, and written the work of the law upon our hearts, the bright image of his own moral rectitude.

The

The mind of man does as plainly discern SERM.  
justice and goodness, and can as well distin- VI.  
guish between them and the contrary dispo-  
sitions and characters in a free agent, as be-  
tween the sensible qualities of material ob-  
jects by the external senses.

It should seem then, that to form a complete notion of the divine moral perfections, we have no more to do than to remove all the infirmities which we find cleaving to virtue in ourselves, and that thus we shall fully understand them; and yet if we look into this great subject attentively, and consider God as a moral agent, acting with most perfect freedom, and yet acting immutably according to one invariable Rule, our thoughts will naturally lead us into many speculations concerning liberty and necessity, and into controversies which have long, but to little purpose indeed, exercised the minds of the learned and curious, and in which they find no end. And even with respect to goodness itself, by which we understand an affectionate disposition to make others happy, and of which we seem to have the clearest idea, what difference must there be between this in us, and that original benevolence which must necessarily be acknowledged essential to the divine mind,

SERM. *prior* to the existence of all beings, and the  
 VI. first cause or spring of existence to them all.

Upon the whole then, we may conclude, that the objection or prejudice against the truth or importance, and application to practical purposes, of the first principles of religion, the being and perfections of God, is a weak, indeed an absurd one, not having any foundation in reason, but proceeding from the narrowness of the human understanding, rather from the pride of men's hearts, and the depravity of their affections. Must our weak understandings, baffled in such a multitude of instances, unable to comprehend the essences of the lowest being in the world, must they be made the standard of the being and reality of things without us, in this sense, that nothing shall be allowed to have an existence, or any truth or importance which we do not comprehend? We have no clear and distinct ideas of substances material or immaterial, shall we therefore discard them all from existence itself, and reduce all our knowledge of things, of the affairs of life, and the whole world about us, to a dream or a phantastic vision of our own imaginations? Shall we deny the eternity, immensity, and self-existence of the supreme  
 Being,

Being, because we cannot comprehend them, S E R M. VI.  
when after our utmost endeavors to banish  
them, the ideas of incomprehensible eternity,  
immensity, and self-existence, must remain  
in our minds? Shall we say that God is not  
almighty and omniscient, because we cannot  
comprehend his power to perfection, and be-  
cause his knowledge is too wonderful for us,  
we cannot attain to it, when we are convin-  
ced by plain familiar examples, that the ideas  
of one kind of power can furnish us with no  
idea of another kind of power as really exist-  
ing, and when we are sensible that the clear-  
est perceptions by one perceptive faculty,  
cannot give us the least notion of the percep-  
tions of another faculty? Or shall we disbe-  
lieve the divine moral character merely be-  
cause in thinking of it our minds are invol-  
ved in difficulties, these above-mentioned, or  
any others, which we cannot fully solve?  
Or can we justify ourselves in the negligence  
of principles, of the truth of which we have  
the clearest and most satisfying evidence, and  
are capable of being improved to the most  
important practical purposes, only because  
we cannot fully comprehend every thing re-  
lating to them?

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The incomprehensibleness of this subject is no more a just pretence for our disregarding or neglecting to apply our minds to the serious and affectionate consideration of it, than for denying it. The affections of men to things, and their thoughtfulness about them, are not governed by the knowledge of their natures, but by a sense of their importance and usefulness. The covetous man does not cease to think of his gold, because he does not understand its essence and its specific attributes, nor will the voluptuous quit the thoughts of sensual pleasures because the natural philosophy of it is above his reach, nor is a more moderate and reasonable regard to those, and such like lower objects which are useful in life, abandoned, because we do not fully comprehend their nature. By a parity of reason, rather a vast superiority, the case being of infinitely greater moment, a pious well-disposed mind will not abandon its affectionate meditations on God, because it cannot by searching find him out; he has shewed us that which may be known of himself, his eternal power and God-head, his wisdom, his goodness, and rightful dominion over us, which are the immediate and just foundations of our dutiful respect to him,

and



and we are without excuse if we do not glorify him as God, and if we be not thankful, but become vain in our imaginations, neglecting his service and giving ourselves up to vile affections. St. Paul observes very justly, that \* *the world by wisdom knew not God*, meaning the *Greek Philosophers* who sought after wisdom; they pretended to, at least aimed at a comprehensive knowledge of every thing, but by a fond conceit of their own abilities, they were misled in their curious ill-conducted inquiries into dangerous errors, some of them into atheism itself. The same author directs us to a safer and more successful method of inquiry, when he says, || *If any man love God, the same is known of him*, rather it should be translated, *he is made to know him*; by a sincere attention to the discoveries God has made of himself to men, with good dispositions, such knowledge may be attained as is sufficient to excite devout affections, which is the true end of knowledge.

If we proceed farther in the consideration of this point, we shall find that the incomprehensibleness of God is, not only no reason for our having any doubts concerning his

\* 1 Cor. i. 21. || Chr. viii. 4.

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being and attributes, or for our neglecting to think of him, but that on the contrary, it contains powerful motives to pious affections, and meditations. I do not say that ignorance can produce devotion, its only genuine offspring is blind superstition. We read \* that St. *Paul* observing at Athens the devotion of the people, saw an altar inscribed to the *unknown God*, which gave him an occasion to instruct them, by declaring to them the God whom they worshipped ignorantly, not by describing his metaphysical essence, but representing him under the plain character of the maker of the world and all things that are therein. But there is a great difference between ignorance of God, that is of what may be known of him, which is perfectly inconsistent with true piety, taking away the very foundation of it, between that, I say, and an inability to comprehend him fully, which is acknowledged to be the condition of the most enlarged human understanding; the former must render men incapable of any rational worship, the latter should only check vain presumption, but not hinder humble and sober inquiries into, and affectionate meditations upon, what so near-

\* Acts xvii.

ly concerns us, indeed is of the greatest possible importance both to our duty and our interest. SERM.  
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Let us therefore consider, that the difficulty of this subject, so far as it is peculiar, (for the essences of all things are above our comprehension) arises from its peculiar excellency, and the very reason why we cannot comprehend it, is its transcendent perfection, which, instead of abating, should increase our affectionate regards. Admiration is natural to the mind of man, and accompanies its most delightful entertainments. The objects of affection which are thoroughly understood, and we are sure every thing in them that can excite desire is completely known, become familiar even to satiety; the mind regards them with indifference, nay some degree of contempt, as imagining it self to have a kind of superiority over them, but its naturally aspiring powers apply themselves with fresh vigor, and still with fresh pleasure, to the contemplation of excellence, which 'tis sensible is an overmatch for its capacity, and still the more it is considered, the more it appears to have a dignity and beauty in it which surpasses our thoughts. This shews that God has made  
the

SERM. VI. the soul for himself, and for beholding his glory, having given it such a constitution that no perfection less than infinite, that is none but his own, can fully satisfy it. For, whereas our lower appetites and passions, and the pleasure that attends the gratification of them, are limited as the objects are, so that when they exceed the proper limits which are fixed to their natural state, they become hurtful and uneasy instead of pleasant, there are no bounds to our best affections (affections to rational and moral excellence, which is the divine excellence) nor to the most agreeable sensations wherewith they are accompanied; reverence, esteem, love, desire, delight, can never be raised, even in our imagination, to such a height, but that they are capable of increase, and the reason is, because the proper object of them is infinite and incomprehensible. Why should we then stain the glory of our nature? Why should we abuse our noble powers to unworthy purposes and prostitute them to mean enjoyments? Let us follow the directions of the law of our nature, and attend those lower affairs which the condition of the present life requires, as it is the will of God we should, but not make them our prin-

principal business and our highest enjoyment. SERM.

Let our chief care be to know God, and VI.

our chief delight to converse with him in the manner we are now capable of, that we may be fitted for that happy state in which we shall see him as he is, more directly and immediately than we do at present, yet not so as to comprehend him; but our knowledge shall be always increasing, and with it our happiness, for no finite mind can understand *the Almighty to perfection.*

## SERMON VII.

The Divine Perfections incomprehensible.

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Job. xi. 7.

*Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?*

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**I**N the foregoing discourse, from these words, I endeavored to shew, that the nature and perfections of God are, and necessarily must be, to us, incomprehensible. I design at this time to consider them in a different sense, but which they will as well bear, namely, as importing the unsearchableness of the divine counsels and administration of providence. This seems, indeed, to be directly the design of the text, for the occasion of it being a warm debate between *Job* and his friends upon the subject of his extraordinary afflictions, and he having, in the preceding chapter, uttered some very passionate

fionate complaints, *Zophar*, much to the SERM. purpose, puts him in mind of the depth of VII. God's judgments, that is, providential dispensations, and that the reasons of them lie out of the reach of human understanding. Upon a like occasion, I mean, an event of providence very difficult to be explained, and which was extremely shocking to some who were immediately affected by it, that is, the rejection of the *Jews* from their national and religious privileges as God's peculiar people, the calling of the *Gentiles*, the apostle *Paul* falls into this exclamation, \* *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

I will endeavor in this discourse to fix the true meaning of the doctrine, and to shew in what sense, and for what reasons, the counsels of God, and the administration of his providence are inscrutable by us; and then I will consider what influence it ought to have upon our minds, in directing our sentiments, and governing our dispositions and behavior.

First, To fix the true meaning of this doctrine, and shew in what sense, and for

\* Rom. xi. 33.

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what reasons, the counsels of God, and the administration of his providence are inscrutable by us. Here is an essential difference between atheism and religious principles, and upon this one point the debate chiefly turns, whether there be any such thing as a wise scheme of providence? Whether the world be governed by an intelligent and good being, or by blind chance, or fatal undefining necessity, rather, if there be no such thing in it as order and government at all? It is acknowledged, on both sides, that particular events are to us unaccountable; the sceptic says so, and triumphs in it, as the ground of his arguments and the strength of his cause; the religious confesses it. But the question is, whether this acknowledged unaccountableness proceeds from the want of wisdom in the disposer of all things, or from the abundance of it? Whether there be no counsel and no wise disposition in the affairs of the world, or if because of the weakness of our understandings, and the very nature and reason of things, that wise disposition only lies beyond our reach, and cannot in many instances be discerned by us.

My present intention is not to enter into this debate; the great principle of religion  
referred





referred to, being, I think, established with sufficient evidence in the preceding discourses.

For the providence of God signifies the exercise of his perfections in the preservation and government of the world ; if then he is every where present, every where active and intelligent, and all his creatures, their beings, powers, and operations necessarily depend upon him, hence arises the idea of his supreme universal dominion, our conceptions of which must be formed according to the notion we have of his character. Now if it be proved that he is perfectly wise, righteous, and good, it follows, that his whole administration is agreeable to these attributes ; whatever variety there is in it arising from the difference of the beings over which it is exercised, and the different ends they are capable of serving ; inanimate things are governed by irresistible will, sensitive creatures by instincts planted in them, and moral agents by rational motives fit to influence their self-determining powers : Still, however, from the perfect intelligence of the Deity, and his moral character, we cannot avoid inferring, that there is an uniformity in his whole conduct ; for wisdom, equity, and goodness, are always consistent, and invariably pursue one end.


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end. And indeed the appearances plainly lead us to conclude unity of design, and that as the world in its original composition, as various as it is, consisting of numberless parts and numberless kinds of beings, is a regular system, so it is still under the direction of one counsel, which continually inspects every part of it, and cares for the whole.

It is therefore to be supposed as the foundation upon which we proceed, that all the divine dispensations are conducted with wisdom, and with an inviolable regard to moral rectitude and goodness. When *St. Paul*, in the passage before referred to, declares that the judgments of God are unsearchable, he, first, asserts that there is a depth of wisdom and knowledge at the bottom, which is the very reason of their unsearchableness, and not, on the contrary, an undesigning ignorance and want of counsel in them. Indeed without this supposition, the subject of our inquiry would be lost; if there were no wisdom and goodness in the government of the world, the judgments of God, if they might be so called, would be unsearchable and past finding out; but that would amount to no more than this, that neither ours nor any other understanding could find out the reason

son or the wisdom and goodness of them, SERM.  
because there would be no wisdom and good- VII.  
ness in them: 

Let it be farther observed, that the principal evidence we have of the wisdom and moral perfections of God is by the manifestations of them in the methods of his providence; therefore we conclude that he is wise, righteous, and good, because we see the marks of wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, in his works and ways. Some attentive persons perhaps see the force of the arguments which are called *a priori* for the perfections of the Deity. This sort of proof, however, is not easily apprehended by every one; the reasoning is more obvious from effects to their causes, from operation to power, from the marks of contrivance to wisdom, and from the fruits of bounty to a beneficent principle. Now, in order to our conviction in that way, we must be able to discern the characters of wisdom and prevailing goodness in a system which falls under our observation, that is, we must see more regularity than disorder, and more of a tendency to good than evil. It will not be sufficient to say, that whatever prevalence of confusion and evil there may be in the present state of things, the wise and

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good governor can set all right hereafter, for we want first to be satisfied in point of reason by some positive evidence, that wisdom does direct his counsels, and that goodness is the principle of his actions, which evidence cannot be fetched from unknown futurity. It is true, when once we have attained to full satisfaction on this head, partial and particular disorders will not appear shocking, and the permission of some evil, because we can easily suppose it may be over-ruled for greater good, and whatever seems amiss now, it may be hoped, will be rectified in a future state : But here is the foundation on which the mind reasonably rests ; it traces the footsteps of wise design, and perceives a prevailing tendency to happiness in the constitution and government of the world, so far as it comes within our knowledge, from whence it justly infers, that it must be so throughout, since he appears to be a wise and benevolent being, who rules over all. I conclude, the defence of providence is not wholly to be rested on a future state, nor this world to be represented so extremely bad, as if nothing but confusion and evil reigned in it, for there is sufficient evidence to an impartial considerate mind from the present constitution

tion of things, and the general providential direction of worldly affairs and events, from the adjustment of inanimate things, their powers and effects, to the living, the sensitive, and rational part of the creation, the powers and instincts whereby these latter are furnished, fitting them for their proper ends and uses, which ends are in a great measure answered, there is, I say, sufficient evidence for these, and such like considerations, of ruling wisdom and goodness in our world.

But others run into an opposite, more unreasonable, and dangerous extreme; they imagine, that if wisdom and moral goodness direct the divine counsels, this should be manifest to their understandings in every thing, and they will not acknowledge it to be where they do not see it; their own knowledge is to be the standard of right and wrong, even in judging of the works and ways of God; and unless the characters of divine perfection appear upon every one of them apart, so as their own minds can discern them, they are to be condemned. Our answer here is, that the ways of God are unsearchable, and his judgments past finding out, that though he has made all his works in number, weight, and measure, with the exactest skill, yet the nar-

SERM. row human understanding is unequal to the  
 VII. comprehension of it in every particular part;  
 though all the appointments of providence are according to truth, equity, and goodness, yet our weak minds cannot trace the marks of these perfections on every one of them singly. This is the point I am to illustrate, and to account for in general, so far as to shew we have abundant reason to acquiesce in the divine dispositions of things, and to maintain a dutiful respect to the wise and good author, notwithstanding the incomprehensibleness of his ways.

Let us, in order to this, only at present suppose, what we firmly believe to be true, and seems to be proved by fully convincing arguments, that there is such a visible and mutual dependence in the several parts of the world as necessarily leads us to acknowledge an intended harmony, and unity of design in the frame and government of it, that one supreme mind or active intelligence has made the vast fabric, contrived and fitted to each other all the parts so as to compose an intire regular system; and the same mind has formed the plan of providence, comprehending the whole series of events which have been, are, and shall be; that as the wisdom  
 of

of God is manifested in the vast variety of SERM.  
his works, with different degrees of perfec- VII.  
tion, and a capacity of serving different pur- 

poses, and in the numberless multitude of individuals belonging to the several kinds, so the same wisdom is manifested in making provision for them suitable to their several natures and uses, none of them is forgotten before God, but he cares for them as related to each other and parts of the whole, not for each singly, as having a separate interest and divided from the rest. Upon these suppositions, it follows that the scheme of providence cannot be comprehended by the human understanding, and it is impossible but that God's judgments must be to us unsearchable; what understanding can reach to such numberless relations and remote issues as are contained in so vast a scheme, except his, to whom all his works are known from the beginning, and who sees the end of them? And consequently some particular dispensations, though in themselves and as they relate to the whole plan, necessary, serving excellent purposes, must yet upon our partial view of them, have a contrary appearance. If it be so, the objection against the wisdom and goodness of providence, taken from the

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darkness and mysteriousness of its ways, quite  
 evanishes, amounting to no proof of any  
 thing but our ignorance, or rather the utter  
 inability of our minds to comprehend it; and  
 the appearances of disorder in the world are,  
 with respect to the supreme government, no  
 more than appearances, not real disorder and  
 evil; nor have we any reason to judge so  
 concerning them, since supposing that infi-  
 nite wisdom, moral rectitude, and goodness,  
 governs the world, it is impossible, in the  
 nature of things, that our imperfect under-  
 standings should be able to discern this fully  
 in every particular instance, and things must  
 necessarily appear to us just as in fact they do.  
 In this light let us consider those incidents in  
 human life which seem to be the most grie-  
 vous, and the most difficultly reconciled to  
 the wisdom and the moral character of the  
 supreme Ruler; the difficulty, upon calm  
 reflection, will disappear, as meaning no  
 more than the shortness of our views, and  
 we shall cease to censure the ways of provi-  
 dence as unequal. If wickedness be prospe-  
 rous for some time, and *sentence against evil*  
*works be not speedily executed*, on the contra-  
 ry the wicked, persecuting men of the world,



as the *Psalmist* calls them \*, *are filled with* S E R M. VII.  
*hid treasure*, and by the methods of violence and cruelty acquire a large portion in this life, which they continue possessed of till death, and leave a plentiful inheritance to their children; in such a case weak rash minds may imagine that justice has forsaken the earth, and the affairs of mankind are lost in the utmost confusion, but who can tell what good purposes such a disposition may serve? And why may not a future time for punishment be more properly chosen than the present, by a governor who has all times equally in his power? If a good man suffers grievous afflictions, who knows the antecedent causes or consequent effects of such an event, and what important ends in the universe, or in the divine government of moral agents it may answer? God never does any thing contrary to justice or to goodness, but he may do, and actually does many things, the justice and goodness whereof, more than the wisdom of them, we cannot at present discern. Some antient writers have not inelegantly compared the plan of providence to a dramatic composition, wherein there ought to be one main design pursued, but there may be a considerable

\* Psal. xvii. 14.

SERM.

VII.

diversity of parts and characters, every one of which it should be the author's care to conduct properly, but they are not to be judged of each by itself, without reference to the main end, and therefore cannot be rightly judged till the winding up of the whole.

This may be illustrated by the familiar example of human governments, which do not, nor can properly communicate the secret of all their counsels to their subjects : they may have important designs for the public good not fit to be made public in every step of their progress. Hence arise difficulties in the administration, and some of the measures appear wrong and improper to those who are not let into the knowledge of the true and intire design ; but while the rules of justice and clemency are throughout the whole empire steddily observed in the main, it is not reasonably complained of that some affairs of state are not fully understood, because every considerate person knows that this is unavoidable. In like manner the administration of the Almighty, whose kingdom ruleth over all, has its secrets, which his frail creatures ought not to pry into, nor have they any reason to complain that they cannot comprehend them. Thus *Elibu* answers *Job's* complaint  
against

against divine providence chastening him, and reduced him to silence from this consideration, \* *that God is greater than men, and giveth not any account of his matters*; we have sufficient discoveries of his wisdom and moral perfections so far as to lay a just foundation for our duty, but is it to be expected or demanded, further, that he should bring down every one of his works and ways to the level of our understandings? What obligations is he under to open the springs of all his counsels to us, and shew us the reason of all his dispensations? If it should appear congruous to his wisdom and goodness as our law-giver not to require any thing of us as duty, merely, in the way of sovereign dominion, without affording us means of knowing the grounds of those actions he enjoins us to do, which is, at least, his ordinary way of dealing with mankind, does it therefore follow, that he must explain to us the grounds of his own actions too? Shall weak mortals, living in a remote obscure part of the world, pretend to fathom the administration of the universal Monarch, and that the secret of all his counsels should be communicated to them? No certainly, it becomes us to rest contented

\* Job xxxiii. 12, 13.

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with those things which he has been pleased to reveal to men, and to their children, *that they may do his commandments*, without inquiring into secret things which belong to him; and to be satisfied with the clear evidence we have, that *judgment and justice are the habitation of his throne, mercy and faithfulness are ever before him, though clouds and darkness are round about him*, and we cannot penetrate into those secret counsels which are the reserved rights of his supreme Majesty.

That the unsearchableness of God's judgments, or of his dispensations and appointments, that is, of the wisdom and goodness of them, does not proceed from the want of clear enough characters of those perfections in the sovereign disposer, but merely from the scantiness of our knowledge, or of our intellectual capacity, may appear from this consideration, that still the better they are understood, the greater beauty, order, and usefulness, are discerned in them. As in the formation of nature many things have been censured as blemishes by men of little learning and a high conceit of themselves, which later discoveries and improvements of science have set in quite another light, shewing them

to

to be very useful, such as wide seas, barren SERM. deserts, great rocks, and tracts of mountains, VII. so these events have been rashly judged to be foolish or evil, the result of no contrivance, or evil design, which time has discovered to be real beauties, and to have carried on important good ends, quite contrary to what men could have apprehended from them. When some scenes of providence are taken apart, which relate to particular persons, families, and nations, the event shews such wise and good designs intended and gradually accomplished in them, as no mortal could have found out by the first appearances, but rather would have expected the contrary. Many instances of this kind we have in the sacred history, as in the case of *Job*, in the families of *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, and their descendants, where we cannot but observe that in the inscrutable judgments of God, many things which the best of men thought to be against them, have in the issue turned out to their great advantage, nay, and to a more extensive good than they could have imagined. So would the whole mysterious plot of providence, of which these and such like examples are but short imperfect sketches, yet profitably ob-  
served

SERM. served for the confirmation of our faith in  
 VII. him who is invisible, so, I say, would the  
 whole appear, beautiful, wise, and good, if we had capacities large enough to discern it, and still the more we know of it, the more we shall be convinced of and admire its beauty, wisdom, and goodness; in the meantime, many of its particular ways must, for the reasons already given, be hid from us in impenetrable obscurity. I come,

Secondly, To consider what influence this doctrine concerning the unsearchableness of God's judgments, ought to have on our minds, in directing our sentiments, and governing our dispositions and behavior. What I have all along aimed at in this discourse, is, to prevent our rash censures of the works and ways of God from their incomprehensibleness, or presuming to call in question his wisdom, and his moral perfections. *Vain man would be wise*; in the pride of his heart, and a fond conceit of his own knowledge, he makes it the standard whereby to judge of the truth and reason of things, so far, as that not any thing shall have a being which is too high for his understanding, and all those measures must be pronounced wrong which he cannot comprehend. Now, since  
 it

it is allowed that the conduct of providence S E R M.  
is above our comprehension, and many of VII.  
its dispensations we cannot account for, not  
discerning the reason and the good design of  
them; if it is therefore not to be believed  
that they are under the direction of wise and  
good counsel, the unhappy consequence is,  
that the world is, at least in part, governed  
by mere chance, or an independent ill prin-  
ciple, than which nothing can be imagined  
more melancholy and destructive to all true  
religion; as on the contrary no persuasion  
can be of greater importance to our comfort,  
and to the preserving a pious and virtuous  
temper of mind, than this, that one supreme,  
independent, perfectly wise, and good Be-  
ing, is the cause of all things, continually  
presiding over the universe, and directing all  
its affairs for the best.

The human mind is made with a pleasing  
sense of regularity as the effect of wisdom,  
and nothing can be more disagreeable to it  
than the contrary. It is no more in our  
power not to admire a beautiful contrivance  
which discovers wise design in the author,  
and not to be displeased with a thoughtless  
tumultuous jumble of things, than not to feel  
bodily pain and pleasure from the objects  
which

SERM. VII. which raise these sensations in us. At the same time, we as necessarily approve moral goodness, and whenever that is not acknowledged in the conduct of any agent, we can have no pleasure in it ; without this, wisdom itself degenerates into base abhorred cunning, and power becomes the most frightful of all things. Thus the case stands between atheistical and religious opinions with respect to the government of the universe, and they have a directly opposite influence on the mind. The belief of a God, at the head of nature, guiding its course, superintending the world, and disposing all events in it with perfect wisdom and goodness, raises an idea of the most exact universal order, which is the noblest and most delightful subject of contemplation ; it sets every thing in a fair and amiable light, it diffuses peace and serenity through the soul, soothes its disagreeable uneasy passions, disposes it to bear its proper part in the universal harmony, and to imitate the ruling wisdom and benignity which governs the whole : But the thought of living in a distracted universe, where confusion reigns, good and evil happen promiscuously, without any intelligent direction, at least there is no prevailing good design which overrules



rules all for the best, this must have the quite SERMON.  
contrary effect upon the mind ; it raises hor- VII.  
ror, contempt, and dislike, it naturally sours  
the temper, rendering it displeased with it-  
self and every thing about it, disinclined ei-  
ther to receive or communicate pleasure. So  
fatal is the tendency of disbelieving that great  
article, the supreme, constant, unerring go-  
vernment of an infinitely wise and good, as  
well as powerful, divine providence ; it is ever-  
five not only of piety, but of virtue likewise,  
abating and hindering the proper effect of  
the generous and kind affections ; it destroys  
the very foundation of all rational confidence,  
and indeed all rational enjoyment ; it takes  
away the principal and only effectual support  
of patience and contentment under misfor-  
tunes, which experience shews that our state  
in this world is always liable to. It is there-  
fore above all things necessary that we endea-  
vor to establish our hearts in an affectionate  
persuasion of this most important truth, and  
apply it on all proper occasions as a powerful  
preservative of virtue, and a never-failing  
spring of consolation in the vicissitudes of  
life.

The Gospel represents faith, and very rea-  
sonably, as a principle of religion, absolute-  
ly

SERM. ly necessary, and of the utmost importance,  
 VII. without which it is impossible to please God,  
 for it is the main spring of sincere obedience to his laws, and it imports that confidence in his wisdom and paternal care for us which claims an essential part of our dutiful respect for him. Faith is not merely a naked assent to religious truths, such as the being of God, his attributes, or any other points which he has manifested to us ; in that alone there is no virtue ; for it does not depend on good affections, but clear evidence, which the mind however disinclined cannot resist. St. *James* teaches us, \* that the devils, the most wicked and abandoned of all intelligent creatures, believe and tremble. But faith imports an affectionate trust in God's wisdom, his fatherly compassion to us, and his constant care for all his creatures, as a most righteous and beneficent ruler over them. The great comprehensive object of this faith, the animating principle of a religious life, and the chief support of our comfort and security of mind, is that unsearchable wisdom and goodness of divine providence which I have endeavored to explain and to justify : And as it is a main part of our fealty to our supreme

\* James ii. 19.

Lord, he tries it by various, to us unac-  
countable events, in our state of probation,  
and when it is approved, it is more precious  
than gold as *St. Peter* speaks\*, and *found unto*  
*praise, and honor, and glory*, they are his fa-  
vorite servants in whom it is the most sincere  
and the most firm. Therefore was *Abraham*  
honored with the character of the friend of  
God, and the *father of the faithful*, because  
he believed God, and *it was accounted to*  
*him for righteousness* ; he *hoped against hope*,  
and retained his confidence in the divine  
mercy and truth when seemingly contrary  
appearances put it to the severest trial.  
If we suppose a future state of complete hap-  
piness to good men, and that the present is  
a state of trial, of discipline, and improve-  
ment, which is the foundation of the chris-  
tian scheme, nothing can appear more ra-  
tional than that we should be tried in this  
manner, and that the principal duty required  
of us should be an implicit confidence in  
God, with absolute submission to his will.  
Our condition is like that of children, im-  
perfect in knowledge, and unfit to have the  
disposing of themselves, or even to be let  
into the secret of the measures that are taken

\* 1 Peter i. 17.

SERM. with them. There is nothing more becoming that tender age than an intire trust in, and unrepining submission to those who have the direction of its affairs. Thus it is that God deals with us, he leads us thro' the mazes of life unknowing of our way, he gives us such instructions as our capacity will bear, contained in short and easy precepts; but to reveal the secret of his counsels concerning us, would only confound our weak understandings, and instead of being useful for our direction, so perplex and embarrass our minds, as to render us wholly unfit for the part he has appointed us to act. In such a case there is no qualification or disposition in us more pleasing to him, and more suitable to our state, than a perfect confidence in his wisdom and his love, with absolute resignation.

But it must be acknowledged there are very few of mankind who constantly and uniformly maintain this good temper of mind, or this faith in prevailing exercise; there are times when even the best men can hardly support themselves in the steady affectionate belief of the supreme, all wise, and gracious governing providence. Especially, in cases which very nearly concern  
our-

ourselves, and most sensibly affect our own interest, we are apt peevishly to arraign the conduct of the almighty towards us, and enter into judgment with him, or perhaps, in a confusion of thought to quarrel with the order of the world, without attending to the sovereign disposing cause of all events in it. So good a man as *Job* presumed in a very harsh unbecoming manner to expostulate with the great ruler of the world upon his dispensations, even to blame them as unkind and scarcely righteous; because the trial he met with was not according to the ordinary methods of providence, and seemed to be very severe, considering the goodness of his character and the uprightness of his own heart, of which he was conscious, and that he could not accuse himself of any secret wickedness. How usual are bitter complaints of hard fortune, ill usage, and a bad state of things in the world, as if order were violated, and at least perfect goodness did not irresistibly govern! But sincerely religious minds strive to preserve a good affection to the laws and government of the universe, against all temptations, and even to reconcile themselves to some hardships which ruling wisdom sees fit to impose upon them at

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S E R M. present, believing that they are intended for,  
 VII. and shall terminate in good. To which  
 purpose nothing can be so effectual as a constant and careful attention to the evidences we have of the divine absolute supremacy, infinite wisdom, moral rectitude, and goodness, from whence we reasonably infer, that all things are ordered for the greatest absolute good, which the moral perfections of the Deity determine him to pursue as his ultimate end, and his infallible understanding directs him to do it in the properest manner. And tho' present appearances, to our broken and partial view of things, may seem to contradict this principle, we should not on that account suffer ourselves to be shocked in the belief of it; for the satisfying answer to all objections of that sort is, that we are not competent judges of the ways of God, because we cannot see them perfectly. The very argument which fastened a conviction on the mind of *Job* and silenced all his complaints (and it will have the same effect on all who seriously and deliberately attend to it) was the incomprehensibleness of the divine perfections exercised in his providence, for from that topic *Elibu* drew his reasoning with him to which he made no  
 reply,

reply, and afterwards God himself, when <sup>SERM.</sup> he vouchsafed to speak to him immediately, <sup>VII.</sup> urged it upon him in a more powerful and effectual manner, so that it produced an humble and thorough submission.

In the next place, it follows, that human projects and schemes of action, are liable to great uncertainties, since the scheme of providence comprehending all events is to us unsearchable. It pleases God to govern the world by general laws, which establish an ordinary course of events open to the observation of every one. This is the foundation upon which we form our designs, and employ our active powers in executing them; but though it be sufficient to the purposes of life under the care of all-ruling providence, yet so far from being absolutely certain, it amounts only to a low degree of probability. The husbandman prepares his ground and sows his seed in the proper season, upon the prospect of a plentiful harvest; the merchant lays out his trading stock in expectation of a profitable return, but the event is utterly unknown, there being no necessary connexion in the reason of things between the means and the end; and the purposes of the supreme disposing power are hid from

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our understandings. So it is in all the affairs of human life, for as *Solomon* teaches us, \* *there are many devices in a man's heart,* but they cannot ascertain the event, *the counsel of the Lord that only shall stand.* The same author justly observes, † that as no one can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun, so none knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow. Our judgment concerning things under the sun, or temporal events, what is really and absolutely good for ourselves, or what is best in the whole, is as uncertain as our knowledge of what shall come to pass in any future time; they are equally concealed from our view in the secret counsels of that sovereign mind which sees all things and the remotest issues of them.

The proper use to be made of this observation is, not that we should abandon ourselves to a supine negligence of worldly concerns, because the event of them is involved in such uncertainty, or so much as abate a moderate industry in the prosecution of them; every man who attentively considers the human constitution, and the whole of

\* Prov. xix. 21.

† Eccles. vi. 12.



our present condition of being, must be convinced that it is the will of God and the law of our nature, that we should employ our thoughts and our labor in providing for the comfortable enjoyment of life, and the advantage of our fellow creatures, but it should abate our solicitude about such events, and all the passions which terminate on them. It does not become a wise man to let loose his eager desires to objects which he has not a reasonable hope of obtaining, to indulge himself profusely in the enjoyment of that which he holds by very uncertain tenure, or to fear immoderately what he does not know shall ever happen, and if it should, is as capable of being advantageous to him as hurtful, nor ought he to grieve excessively when it comes to pass. These are the passions most dangerous to our virtue, and destructive of our tranquility, and if we cannot root them out of our nature, as indeed we cannot, nor should we attempt it, for they are an useful part of our constitution, if duly governed, yet this consideration ought to check their exorbitancies, and will have that effect if we carefully attend to it, that the objects of them are covered from our knowledge, they are out of our power and

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SERM. our foresight, we neither know their futurity,  
 VII. nor how they will affect us, for God has reserved the absolute uncontrouled direction of them in his own hands, and his judgments are unsearchable.

There is one kind of human action not affected by this argument, that is, the last event of it is not subject to uncertainty, and God has intimated with sufficient clearness, that he will distinguish it with his favor, when the mystery of providence shall be fulfilled; I mean the practice of virtue, which we are sure is *good for man under the sun*, and we have the greatest reason to believe, will make him happy in another world. Though the judgments of God are unsearchable with respect to the things of this world, no man knows what shall befall him in this life, and when the end of it shall be, nor does he know whether prosperity or adversity, poverty or riches, sickness or health, honor or dishonor, is good for him, yet we know what is morally good, for *God hath shewed it to us, and what he hath required*, and we know it has an established inseparable connexion with our happiness. *Solomon* observes, *that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to*

to the strong \*, we cannot be assured of suc-  
cess in any of our present undertakings, let  
the designs be ever so well laid, and the ap-  
pearances promising as far as human skill  
and abilities can reach, but in the religious  
and virtuous course we run *not uncertainly*, and  
in that war we fight *not as those that beat the  
air* §, *for it shall be well with the righteous* †,  
*the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the  
effect of it quietness and assurance for ever* ||.  
If wisdom, rectitude, and goodness, govern  
the world, and the administration, however  
perplexed it may appear at present, be under  
the direction of these principles, order and  
good must prevail ; and they cannot be fi-  
nally unhappy who steddily adhere to its in-  
terests, and conduct themselves by the same  
principles. And,

Lastly, This important instruction arises  
from the doctrine of the text, that we should  
fear God. The proper objects of fear or re-  
verence, are wisdom, righteousness, and  
goodness ; in the degree wherein those attri-  
butes belong to any character, it attracts our  
veneration : Among men, the wisest and the  
best are the most esteemed, not that the

\* Eccles. ix. 11.

† James iii. 10.

§ 1 Cor. ix. 28.

|| Isa. xxxii. 17.

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greatest outward respect is paid to them, for that generally follows the outward circumstances of worldly condition, power, and riches, but they have the largest share in the inward affection of those to whom their worth is known. Now, these perfections are in the Deity absolute and infinite, so that we cannot by searching find them out, it is not any defect, but the plenitude of them which is incomprehensible, therefore do they justly claim our humblest reverence. This argument very sensibly affected the mind of Job, and produced in him a religious dread of the divine Majesty, \* *Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him, on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him, he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.* I am sensible that his providence, though invisible, is continually active in all the quarters of the world, guiding the motions of all the creatures, and doing whatever pleaseth him. And though the good man could assure his heart, his conscience witnessing his integrity, *He knoweth, says he, the way that I take, my foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept and not declined, neither have I*

\* Chap. xxiii. 8.

*gone back from the commandments of his lips.* SERM.

*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more* VII.  
*than my necessary food.* But there are secrets

in his dispensations which our short and limited understandings cannot account for, nor make any certain judgment concerning the design and the event of them. For he adds,


*\* He is in one mind, and who can turn him?*

*And what his soul desireth, that he doth, for he performeth the thing that is appointed for me, and many such things are with him.* He

governs the world with steady counsel, and pursues his designs independently on those things that would influence and alter feeble human resolution, so that his measures are to us impenetrable, being conducted with infinitely superior wisdom, as well as irresistible power. The conclusion is, *therefore am I troubled at his presence, when I consider, I am afraid of him.* My inmost soul stands in awe of his transcendent greatness, and the unfathomable depth of his administration, which is not at a distance, but intimately present, taking all my concerns within its care. The same pious person having † elsewhere described the utmost efforts of human skill and industry, shews how weak they are, and de-

\* Job xxiii. 13, 14.      † Chap. xxiii.

fective,

SERM. feſtive, when compared with the infinitely  
VII. more extenſive knowledge of God, who  
 only knoweth the ways of wiſdom, and the  
place of underſtanding, from whence he  
infers, that to man *the fear of the Lord is  
the beginning of wiſdom, and to depart from  
evil is underſtanding.*


# SERMON VIII.

Religion distinguished from Superstition, and shewn to be true Wisdom.

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Job. xxviii. 28.

*And unto Man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is understanding.*

**W**ISDOM is naturally agreeable to SERMON.  
 the human mind, and indeed can- VIII.  
 not but be agreeable to an intelli-   
 gent nature, because it is the best use of understanding, and the proper improvement of reason. What is it that makes confusion and disorder so distasteful, as in an irregular jumble of things and heaps of materials casually thrown together ; and on the contrary, regularity in any work or system, an exact proportion and relation in the parts, and harmony in the whole, appear so beautiful ?  
 Certainly,

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Certainly it is because counsel and contrivance, that is, wisdom, is apprehended in the latter, and the want of it in the other. But applying this to ourselves, and to the direction of our own affairs, we shall be yet more sensible how much wisdom is necessarily in our esteem; and of how great importance to our happiness; for, as we are inwardly conscious of an intelligent principle, our satisfaction in the part we act, always depends upon our knowing that we are governed by it. Events which have no dependence on our own choice or intention may affect us very sensibly, whether they be supposed to come by chance, or necessity, or by the will of another agent; they may, I say, affect us, but in a manner very different from our own actions with the foreseen necessary consequences of them, which are directly the objects of the mind's approbation or disapprobation, and give us pleasure upon the review of them, only so far as we appear to ourselves to have acted wisely.

Nay so true are mankind universally to this rule of conduct, however they may be mistaken in the application of it, that in all their divided opinions and pursuits, most directly contradictory to each other, every one flatters



flatters himself, that he has reason on his SERM.  
side. The religious man, the philosopher, VIII.  
the politician, the œconomist, and even the  
sordid miser, and the luxurious, such, at  
least, of these several sects as are the most  
fixed in their opposite courses, and thorough-  
ly governed by their denominating principle  
(and in them the case is fairly stated) ima-  
gine that their choice is, all circumstances  
considered, the best, and their behavior the  
wisest. The men of pleasure and gayety  
who seem professedly to despise wisdom, it  
is only what they fancy to be the outward  
appearances and affectation of it that is the  
object of their ridicule, they think that good  
sense and reason is with them, which is but  
another name for wisdom, that the end of  
their prosecutions is something real, a sensi-  
ble pleasure, (and there is no arguing against  
experience) and that the superior enjoyments  
which others talk of are but visionary. The  
more grave and sober man, who is wholly  
devoted to his worldly interest, which he de-  
cently and skilfully pursues, imagines he  
knows the world well, which he reckons a  
point of great wisdom, and the designs he  
carries on are well concerted, solid, and sub-  
stantial, leaving spiritual and intellectual  
pleasures,

pleasures, so called, which he despises in his heart, to the religionists and virtuosi, as well as the madness of licentious and expensive mirth to the prodigal. I observe this only to shew that there must be some appearance of wisdom in our conduct to justify it to ourselves, and that we necessarily have such a regard to reason, that we cannot knowingly and deliberately act against its dictates with any contentment in our own minds; so that lusts and passions, let them be ever so strong, in order to their having a settled dominion in the heart, must silence understanding, or rather bring it over to their side; for supposing a man's choice, and the course he follows, to be never so foolish in itself, and in the judgment of others, he cannot be easy in it without, at least, a conceit of wisdom to countenance it, which is apparent in the case of the sluggard (one of the lowest and most contemptible of all characters) who, as *Solomon* observes, *\* is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.*

Since it is so, this is one principal point which all our deliberations ought to aim at; and the question, by the decision whereof, we should be determined in our designs and

\* Prov. xxvi. 16.

courses of action, is, whether they be wise SER M.  
 or not, that is becoming rational agents in VIII.  
 our circumstances? And then it evidently  
 follows, that we ought to examine, there  
 being no other way by which we can come  
 to a rational judgment. Let it not be object-  
 ed that examination is difficult, and we are  
 in danger of mistaking; difficulty should ne-  
 ver be objected against absolute necessity;  
 and for the danger of a wrong judgment  
 whether is it greater in the way of a diligent  
 enquiry, or of negligence? The question is  
 not, whether we shall be directed by the ap-  
 pearance of wisdom, or not? that is una-  
 voidable; but whether we are more likely  
 to escape being misled by false appearances,  
 and attain to the knowledge of the truth, and  
 to satisfaction in our own minds, as acting a  
 rational part, by examining or not examin-  
 ing, by exercising our own reason, or not  
 exercising it?

Let the most important of all causes, that  
 of religion itself, be determined this way; and  
 the more important it is, the greater attention  
 it deserves. My text says it is wisdom, and  
 it represents God as saying so unto man, he  
 said, *behold the fear of the Lord, that is wis-  
 dom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*

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In the preceding verse it is shewn that man cannot penetrate into the counsels of God, his contrivances in the formation of the world and in the government of it, they are too deep for his understanding: *God's ways are unsearchable, and his judgments past finding out*, but the truest wisdom for him, and the most suitable to his nature, that he may attain the highest perfection it is capable of, is religion, or the fear of the Lord. This God himself has taught us, and since he has condescended to set it in that light; he has thereby subjected it to our own enquiry and consideration, it being impossible we should see any thing to be wisdom, and rationally pronounce it so, without examining it. Religion is not, under the pretence of its being sacred and too sublime for the human understanding, to be taken upon trust without enquiring into the grounds of it; for thus we should expose ourselves a prey to every imposture, and have no means left of distinguishing between truth and falsehood, in a matter which of all others is the most important. Let every man's reason be judge for himself what he shall believe as truth, and what he shall embrace as wisdom, for we have no other faculty by which we can discern

cern either, to give an assent upon other terms, is what our minds are not capable of.

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Now though the assertion of the text, that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, generally passes for true among christians, however it may be too little considered, and have too little influence on men's practice, yet it is avowedly opposed by some who represent all religion as unreasonable, both in its foundation, and its tendency. They pretend, first of all, that there is at bottom nothing in it but what is commonly called superstition, a blind and irrational dread of we don't know what, founded on foolish unexamined notions, originally invented, and still cherished by artful designing men, to keep the bulk of mankind in a state of servile subjection, handed down by tradition, and imbibed by the prejudices of education, which are known to be often so strongly impressed on tender minds, that it is extremely difficult to throw them off, even when reason has arrived to its maturity; and the generality of men are too easily inclined to receive these religious errors through the weakness of their understandings and the timorousness of their tempers. To state this matter fairly, it must be acknowledged that it is too often the reproach-

SERM. ful infirmity of men, utterly inconsistent  
 VIII. with wisdom and the impartial use of reason,  
 to be led by prejudice ; they receive opinions  
 and take the measures of their conduct without  
 examining upon what grounds ; their passions,  
 their selfish affections, custom, and the authority  
 and example of others, have an influence which  
 they ought not to have on their judgments,  
 and stand in the place of reasons. How many  
 instances are there of notions generally prevailing  
 in whole ages and nations, which have no other  
 foundation than unexamined customary tradition.  
 But this is not to be carried so far as to an  
 universal conclusion that men are always mistaken  
 in the opinions commonly received by them.  
 There is such a thing as truth and certainty,  
 which every human mind is capable of discerning ;  
 and there are some points in which all men are  
 agreed, having an intuitive perception of them,  
 without any reasoning at all, or the evidence is  
 so clear and so strong, that no one can help  
 seeing it whenever it is intelligibly proposed.

Particularly, it is to be acknowledged that many  
 very absurd opinions have obtained in the world  
 under the name of religious principles, the  
 propagation and reception where-  
 of

of is to be accounted for in the manner al-  
ledged, by the subtle artifices of some men,  
and the weak credulity of others, by tradi-  
tion and prejudice; and that there has been,  
and there is in many of mankind such a  
thing as superstition, an unreasonable ground-  
less fear of some unseen and unknown agent  
or agents governing the world, particularly  
human affairs, by measures which have no  
foundation any where, but in the imagina-  
tions of men, which arising from confused  
and mistaken notions concerning the Deity,  
and concerning virtue, and being conducted  
by the foolish fancies of the weak, or by  
the cunning arts of ill designing men, has  
produced false religion, and done infinite  
mischief in the world. It has produced the  
worship of fictitious Deities, which by nature  
are no Gods, but the work of men's hands;  
or of inanimate beings, which can do no good  
nor evil, as the prophet speaks \* of the hea-  
then idols, of imaginary beings formed by  
the fancies of men according to the ruling  
lusts and passions of their own hearts, lascivious,  
cruel, covetous and revengeful, wor-  
shipped therefore in an impure and brutal  
manner, and in consequence of that, tending

\* Isa. xli. 23.

SERM. to confirm and increase all kinds of wicked-  
 VIII. ness, debauchery, lewdness, and cruelty, in  
 the worshippers : It has produced a causeless  
 fearfulness in the tempers of men, dispiriting  
 and rendering them unfit for pursuing the  
 true ends, and applying themselves to the  
 proper business of life : It has produced a  
 vain ceremonious devotion, and a foolish  
 pageantry of idle unprofitable rites : nay so  
 prone are many of mankind to superstition,  
 that even the wisest religious institutions have  
 not been able to preserve them from it, for  
 when in these institutions external observances  
 were appointed, yet expressly declared to be  
 only instrumental, and intended as means in  
 order to moral piety and virtue as the end,  
 the original design of such appointments has  
 been perverted, by laying an undue stress on  
 the outward performance of them, placing  
 the whole of religion in them, and substituting  
 them in the room of substantial purity  
 and righteousness, which was the superstition  
 of the *Jews*, often inveighed against  
 by their prophets, and is still the prevailing  
 superstition among many christians : And  
 lastly, superstition has produced uncharita-  
 bleness and discords, nay fierce contentions,  
 wars, persecutions, and every evil work.

But

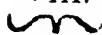


But when all this is granted, it does not follow, that there is no difference between religion and superstition, and that the former is wholly to be resolved into the latter, or any of its causes, into the natural timorousness of men's tempers or the weakness of their understandings, into customary tradition or political fiction. To bring this matter to a trial by fair and impartial reason, we ought to consider the main grounds of religion, together with its direct and immediate tendency; if it be founded on certain facts or principles which the mind upon calm and attentive consideration must assent to, and if, considered as a practical principle, it points to a course of action, and prescribes a conduct, which we necessarily approve as most worthy of intelligent agents, it is then essentially distinguished from superstition, which is a blind and irrational persuasion, and directs to practices which have no intrinsic excellency or fitness in themselves whereby they are recommended to the human mind.

Now the great principles upon which religion rests, are, the existence, the perfections, and providence of God, or that there is an eternal supreme intelligent being, infinitely powerful, wise, just, and good, who

SERM. made all things, and who continually preserves and governs them. These principles, we think, are sufficiently proved by clear and convincing arguments, which must occur to every one who diligently inquires into this subject, and we desire no more than a calm and unprejudiced attention to them. It is true, the Deity is not an object of sense, no man hath seen him at any time, nor can see him, and we cannot find him by feeling after him in the gross corporeal way. But is any man sunk so low in reasoning, or rather altogether lost to it, as to make sense the sole measure of his belief and knowledge? Did he ever see that thing within himself, which thinks, perceives, believes, and argues? Yet he is as sure of its existence, nay more sure, than of any thing he sees. In like manner, *the invisible things of the supreme Being from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* If we cannot account for the existence of any thing without supposing his, nor for understanding, which we are conscious of in ourselves, without supposing him intelligent, nor for regularity and beauty in the universe, without wisdom and design in the great disposing

posing cause, nor morality, which is of so great importance to the order and happiness of all intelligent creatures, without allowing his moral attributes, one would think the evidence of his being, and consequently of his providence, which is really no more than his acting suitably to his character, that, I say, the evidence of this is very strong, and the belief of it not fairly liable to the imputation of weak credulity and superstition. Set against this the atheistical scheme, which in whatever shape it appears, excludes a supreme directing and governing intelligence out of the universe, substituting in the place of it chance or necessity, the meaning of which words, if they have any, as expressing casualty, let him tell who can ; they should, however, have a great deal of significance, for mighty things are attributed to them ; chance or necessity produce the motion of bodies, and therefore must be something different from bodies which plainly have no power to move themselves ; nay they produce the most rapid, the constant, and regular motion of vast bodies, upon which the most important effects to innumerable beings and to a great united whole depend ; chance or necessity produce various beauty in the world, a regular

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lar uniformity of appearances, amidst an infinite variety of things ; not only numberless individuals, but almost numberless kinds of vegetables and animals in our earth itself, preserved and propagated in an orderly and constant succession ; and lastly, chance or necessity produce thought, self-determination, liberty, and virtue, with all its amiable fruits, yet without thinking, willing, or designing any thing ; let any man in his calm deliberate thoughts set this scheme against the other, that of Deity and providence which is the foundation of religion, and let him judge which of the two is the more rational.

I cannot propose at this time to insist on the argument largely, it has been the principal subject of the foregoing discourses ; but I may safely assert that all who seriously consider it, will agree in this observation, which is directly to the present purpose, namely, that the belief of a Deity and providence has no affinity with superstition ; it is not taken up by tradition, education, or the influence of human authority, but grounded upon what we think the clearest evidence, and is the result of the strictest and most impartial search we are capable of making. It is not by a vain curiosity to know the reason of every



every thing, joyned with ignorance of true natural causes, that we are led to acknowledge a God, the powerful and wise maker and contriver of the frame of nature, but it is because we see every other hypothesis not only insufficient to account for the appearances, but utterly absurd and impossible. For when the wisdom and energy of an intelligent agent is taken out of the universe, and denied to have any share in the origin of things, which is done and must be done by atheism, what is there left but dead and senseless matter? And what is its force upon the strictest philosophical examination? Nothing at all but a power of inactivity (*vis inertiae*, as it is called) or of resisting a change of its state; a goodly foundation to build such a fabric upon, without the interposition of any designing agent, as the world must appear to be, even to the slightest observer; but the more accurate searcher into nature, who has carried the power of matter and motion as far as it can go, finds the belief of a divine agency and counsel forced upon his mind in every step of his progress, and by every object he turns his thoughts to.

But least of all can our belief of God and providence be, with any colour of reason, attributed

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tributed to a natural timorousness of temper, or the passion of fear ; for there is nothing in it frightful or shocking to the mind, at least to a well-disposed mind, which having its affections duly balanced, and the best use of all its powers, enjoys itself with the greatest inward rational satisfaction. The fear of God is not accompanied with such confusion and uneasiness as a superstitious dread is, which keeps the unhappy persons possessed with it in a perpetual panic, and thereby sours their tempers, setting every thing about them in an uncomfortable light, and takes away the very relish of life. On the contrary, let the religious man be called to witness, and he speaks the language of his heart, when he declares that there is nothing which sits so easy upon his mind as a true reverence for the Deity, that in the whole circle of known being, or the yet greater variety which his imagination can frame, there is no object which yields so much pleasure to his thoughts; it is the very central point of his soul's rest, which no where else can find equal satisfaction, nor indeed without this any satisfaction at all ; it diffuses in his thoughts, a pleasing harmony over the whole universe, and sets every thing in a fair amiable light, as being directed

directed by the most perfect reason and goodness; the affections it raises in him have these plain characters of natural and rational, that they preserve to him the freest exercise of his intellectual powers, they soothe and calm all his disturbing passions (so far is the fear of God from being a disturbing passion itself) and they yield him the truest and most solid self-enjoyment, indeed the enjoyment of the whole world with delight. If it be otherwise, I mean, if the idea of God produces terror and consternation in the human mind, this certainly proceeds either from a fault within itself, from a consciousness of guilt, or a corrupt, vicious, perverse, or malevolent disposition, to which perfect purity, righteousness, and goodness, cannot but be disagreeable and cause uneasiness; or else it must proceed from wrong notions of the supreme Being, as if he were an arbitrary ruler in a bad sense, possessed of absolute power, but not of moral perfections, and governing the world in the way only of sovereign dominion, without regard to justice and goodness. But to a well-disposed mind, a sincere lover of virtue, which considers God as he truly is, perfectly wise, righteous, and benevolent, nothing can appear more rational,

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nal, nor indeed more delightful, than the fear of him, that is an awful sense of, and deep reverence, with the greatest and most affectionate esteem for his majesty, and all his glorious perfections in conjunction, together with a constant care to please him by the regular practice of virtue, and to avoid offending him by any thing contrary to it; which leads us,

Secondly, To compare religion and superstition as practical principles, and to consider their opposite tendencies. As they have been shewn to differ widely in their foundation, the one being founded on the clearest rational evidence, the other only on prejudice, they differ as much in the dispositions and practice which they produce. The constant uniform effect of a superstitious belief, are a multitude of merely external acts, which have no antecedent goodness in themselves; sometimes it puts men upon inventing and using obscene and impure rites, which would be shocking to the human mind not misled by the name and false colour of devotion; very often it excites furious passions, which disturb the peace of societies, and is the occasion of fierce and cruel animosities among men; whereas the natural fruit of the fear of God is  
the



the practice of virtue, the doing of those things which are pure, and just, and honest, and lovely, and praise-worthy, which the mind necessarily approves as having an intrinsic excellence.

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One principle on which we rest the defence of religion, receiving it as most certainly true, is the real essential difference between moral good and evil, or virtue and vice. There is no debate at all concerning the signification of these words, we know what is meant by cruelty and mercy, by temperance and luxury, and other moral differences are as easily understood. We alledge that these differences have a necessary unchangeable foundation in nature and reason, and for determining it to be so or not, appeal to the common sense of mankind; not merely to the general opinion which has prevailed in all nations of the world, but to a more certain standard, a sense which every single man, who has the exercise of his reason, will find indelibly engraven on his own heart, so that it is not in his power to erase it if he would. If a clear and distinct perception of the agreement and disagreement of our own ideas be the certain distinguishing mark of truth and falsehood in points of speculation, which the mind

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mind rests in, and can go no farther, and if a clear and distinct perception of sensible qualities by our eternal senses be the foundation of all the knowledge we have of material objects, and we find ourselves obliged to acquiesce in it, why should not as clear and distinct a perception of honesty and turpitude in human dispositions and actions, which is uniform in the mind whenever the object is intelligibly proposed, be equally satisfying to us as a foundation of knowledge and reasoning in morals? If you insinuate to any man, that he may be mistaken in assenting to an axiom, or in judging of the distinction of colours, or between light and darkness, by his eyesight, he looks upon the suspicion as absurd, and it is as much so in the other case: For that there is a real and necessary difference between moral good and evil, any one who calmly reflects can no more doubt, than that there is a difference between truth and falsehood in the plainest propositions which his mind discerns, or between light and darkness which he perceives by his eyes, between sweet and bitter which he perceives by his taste, or between harmony and discord which he distinguishes by his ear. It is true, the speculations and  
reason-

reasonings of men improving their understandings may enable them to discern this difference more clearly (as we know by experience that use makes some of our senses more exquisite) and they may discover additional motives to the practice of virtue, especially its conduciveness to the common good of mankind, and the happiness of every individual, but the original ideas of right and wrong in morals, directly opposite to each other, are as natural, and their opposition as apparent to the mind, as any we have by our external senses or by reflection.


In vain do the adversaries of morality, as founded in nature, here pretend to derive its origin from human laws, as if being bred up under political constitutions, we had from them learned our notions of just and unjust; for as every one who attends must see, that the difference reaches much farther than the laws of men, and we discern it as plainly in cases where they have not at all interposed, as in those which are expressly determined by them, so he will find a necessary regard to it in his own heart prior to the consideration of human, or indeed any positive appointments or decisions, and independently on them; nay that he has in

SERM. himself a certain measure of right and  
 VIII. wrong, whereby to examine and to judge of  
 all institutions and ordinances, so far from  
 having learned the notion itself wholly from  
 them.

Nor is there any weight in the objection, that a great many of mankind, perhaps whole nations, are ignorant of what others account important points of virtue, for in like manner the generality of men are ignorant of many propositions from which no man can withhold his assent when they are so proposed that he can understand them, so that the reality of virtue stands in this respect on the same foot with the most certain truths. And altho' we add, what is true in fact, that the prejudices of education, custom, and especially false religion, may in some cases have corrupted and obscured the knowledge of good and evil, and occasioned mistakes concerning them, just as an accidental indisposition in the organs of sense, may, in some particular cases, hinder the right perception of external objects, yet this can never affect the whole of morality, nor destroy the agreeableness of it, so far as it is understood, and the disagreeableness of the contrary, to the human heart. And,

Lastly,

Lastly, that the sentiments of men concerning moral good and evil are not intirely owing to tradition, custom, and education, is evident from their constancy and uniformity. In things which have a foundation in nature which is stable and always consistent, all men agree. In things which take their rise from fancy and caprice, or depend on particular circumstances and private views, their traditions and customs are variable. What can be more different than the fashions which obtain in nations, their manner of living, their forms of policy, their laws and their religion, I mean the positive part of it, or the rites of devotion and divine service? and if their notions of morality were wholly derived from the same origin, we should see the same variety in them. Upon that supposition the notions of virtue might in some places be the reverse of what they now universally are; the things which are unjust, impure, and dishonest, might be lovely and praise worthy; it might be as reputable to murder a kind indulgent father in cold blood and without any provocation, as now it is to punish the murderer, or to kill an assassin or a robber in one's own defence. But this is so apparently absurd you will

SERM. scarcely imagine human nature capable of it;  
VIII. nay farther, I believe none of us can doubt  
 but, if you propose to the most uninstructed savage in the world, so as he can understand it, a compleat moral character, consisting of undissembled piety, justice, fidelity, and beneficence, it will appear to him beautiful, and his soul will inwardly applaud it; whereas the contrary, profaneness, fraud, perfidiousness, ingratitude, and cruelty, he can consider no otherwise than as abominable.

Now the fear of God considered as a practical principle has a necessary relation to these moral differences, and the proper immediate use of it in the conduct of life is to direct men in doing good and eschewing evil, which evidently appears to be a wise and just design, most worthy of intelligent beings, and which 'tis impossible for us not to approve unless we be divested of humanity. But how unlike superstition, which always prescribes weak and fanciful usages, without any foundation in the reason of things, and without any connexion with the general good of mankind, or the rational happiness of any man, sometimes barbarities which are abhorrent to nature, destructive of order and peace, and contrary to the best senti-

sentiments of the human mind? 'Tis true, religion has been often mixed with superstition, the fear of God has been taught by arbitrary precepts of men, and been abused to the promoting and establishing idle speculations, unprofitable ceremonies, and even uncharitableness and other immoralities; indeed very few public religious constitutions, not excepting those in christian countries, even tho' settled on the best foundation, and professing to be directed by the best rule, have been altogether free from this fault; some of them are incumbered with such a multitude of human inventions as to enervate true moral piety and virtue, the only valuable end of all religious constitutions. But surely it is unreasonable on that account to reject all religion in the lump, as if there were nothing in it but superstition, and to do so shews a rash and undistinguishing judgment, when the difference is so apparent, and every man's reason, if he deliberately attends to its voice, will lead him to discern it. What can be more rational and becoming intelligent creatures than that being convinced by innumerable instances of wise and good design in the order of the world and in the frame of their own nature, they should inwardly ac-

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knowledge with affectionate reverence the one supreme maker and ruler of all, clearly proved by his works and the whole of his administration, to be perfectly wise, righteous, and benevolent, and from that principle to practise the virtues of justice and charity to their fellow creatures, the obligation to which he has deeply engraved on their hearts, and shewn the inseparable connexion of them with the most universal good of all rational beings! what affinity has superstition with this, or can it pretend to any such evidence for its doctrines, or any such excellence and usefulness in its precepts? For the honor of christianity, let it be observed, that it never represents the fear of God in any other view, than as inseparably connected with the essential duties of morality, nor applies to any other purpose than enforcing them. When the sacred writers teach men the fear of the Lord, they never explain it as consisting in the observance of positive rites even of divine appointment, though that is also an inferior part of our homage to him, but in keeping his commandments, that is, his immutable precepts of eternal righteousness, by living soberly and righteously, by departing from evil and doing good,  
seeking



seeking peace and pursuing it; duties to SERM.  
which we have a perpetual monitor in our VIII.  
own breasts, and we cannot help seeing their  
tendency to the greatest happiness of the  
human nature. Let every man then judge  
for himself, whether religion be not our true  
wisdom, and perfectly rational, while we ap-  
ply it to these purposes and regularly pursue  
them.

Having thus endeavoured to refute the  
pretence against religion or the fear of God,  
that it is the same with superstition, an irra-  
tional unmanly thing, founded in the fear-  
fulness of men's tempers and the weakness  
of their understandings, and to shew on the  
contrary, that it really deserves the charac-  
ter given it in my text, namely, that it is  
wisdom; let us see now whether the charge  
of weakness and folly, in taking up opinions  
by prejudice and without an impartial exa-  
mination, may not be fairly turned upon the  
professed adversaries of religion themselves.  
Here I do not insist on the apparent supe-  
riority of reason, as we think, on our  
side; tho' in so plain a case, where strong,  
we must even believe, irrefragable argu-  
ments are intelligibly proposed, one can-  
not help suspecting that it is prepossession

SERM. only which hinders men, otherwise of tolerable understanding, to see the force of them.

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But I will directly point out the particular prejudice which they give too evident cause to charge them with, and it is the viciousness and depravity of their own hearts and lives. Every one who has seriously considered the infirmity of human nature, must be sensible that the affections very often bias and mislead the judgment, and where a selfish interest or a passion opposite to any truth prevails, that truth is difficultly discerned and frequently denied, let the evidence of it be ever so strong. This is the case of the unhappy men who have arrived at such thorough infidelity as to be enemies to moral goodness even in speculation ; by indulging habitually their sensual desires and passions, they become insensible of the beauty of virtue, that divine form which strikes every uncorrupted human heart with the highest veneration and esteem, and at last persuade themselves that it is no more than an empty shadow. Was there ever any undebauched mind brought by cool reasoning to a contempt of temperance, righteousness, sincerity, and benevolence ? And what is there opposite to these qualities but passions of the most unmanly kind, passions

sions for brutal pleasures, and for the basest selfishness, terminating in dishonesty and ill nature? If these may not be called prejudices, humanity must be given up with religion, and the principal glory of our nature abandoned, that we may become free reasoners.

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This is the root of irreligion, and the greatest height of it is avowed atheism. When men are enemies to virtue in their hearts, the next step is to cast off the fear of God and faith in him, to deny his being and his attributes, and to argue against them. Where is the man that ever heartily loved moral rectitude, sincerely practised it, and affectionately pleaded its cause, and at the same time was a professed opposer of the Deity and providence? The moral system of the universe, and the moral perfections of God manifested in his administration, and which it is apprehended will be yet more awfully displayed hereafter, these, I say, are the points which the adversaries of piety and virtue quarrel with. Indeed it is no wonder that the obstinate haters of justice and goodness, cannot look upon infinite goodness and justice otherwise than with terror and aversion, and therefore to get rid of the uneasy apprehensions which arise from

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from that view, they with such disagreeable principles were not, and at last, under the color of some trifling pretences, bring themselves to imagine they are not true. Let unbiassed reason determine where truth lies, and on which side there is the fairest occasion for an imputation of unmanly prejudice and weak credulity.

To conclude my discourse on this subject by applying it to ourselves, to professed believers in God and fearers of his name, particularly to christians, let us do all the honor we can to our religious profession by the purity and simplicity of a reasonable worship, and especially by the innocence and virtuous integrity of our lives. It must be acknowledged that the most rational principles of religion, founded on the clearest and most satisfying evidence, have been in many nations of the world, and are now in many christian countries, where they are openly maintained and gloried in, they have been, I say, dishonored by a mixture of unreasonable opinions and superstitious rites, which some, pretending a great zeal for religion, have laid a mighty stress upon, as if the whole of piety consisted in them. This has given men of corrupt minds, and disinclined to the fear of God,

God, an occasion of blaspheming it, as alto-  
 together a weak and fanciful thing, which is  
 indeed on their part unjustifiable, and disco-  
 vers great weakness of understanding as well  
 as depravity of affections; but at the same  
 time it is extremely to be regretted, that the  
 friends of religion should give its enemies  
 such a handle against it. It should be our  
 principal care always to offer unto God a  
*reasonable service*; that only is becoming us  
 as intelligent creatures, and only will be ac-  
 ceptable to him who is a pure and perfectly  
 intelligent spirit, and is to be worshipped in  
 spirit and truth. Especially the christian in-  
 stitution does not place piety in external acts.  
 The kingdom of God, \**St. Paul* teaches us, *is*  
*not meat and drink*, not any thing of an in-  
 different nature, which *neither if we use it,*  
*are we the better*, nor *if we forbear it are we*  
*the worse*, as he elsewhere speaks, || *but it*  
*is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy*  
*Ghost*. The end of the § commandment  
 which Jesus Christ gave to the world is not  
 ritual observances, *but charity, out of a pure*  
*heart, and a good conscience, and faith un-*  
*feigned*, and it is the constant doctrine of the

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\* Rom. xiv. 17. || 1 Cor. viii. 8. § 1 Tim. i. 5.

SERM. apostles, agreeable to the original instruction  
 VIII. of their master, § that *pure religion, and un-*  
 defiled, before God the Father, is this, *to visit*  
*the fatherless and widows in their affliction,*  
*and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.*

If true piety or the fear of God be wisdom at all, it is certainly practical wisdom, which, as Solomon observes, *\* is profitable to direct.* Let the influence of it, then, appear in our lives, let it govern the dispositions of our minds and our whole behavior, otherwise the best opinions we can have concerning God and religion are but idle and useless speculations. The proper direction of this principle is to the practice of righteousness and goodness; and so far only can we be said consistently to receive it, as it has that effect upon us. Judging by this rule, I am afraid irreligion still governs the hearts of many who make a contrary profession, and though they may applaud the wisdom of piety or the fear of God, there is another sort of wisdom which has a great share in their counsels, and in directing their conduct, that wisdom which the apostle Paul ‡ calls *fleshly*, and St. James || says, *it descendeth not*

§ James i. 27.

\* Eccles. x. 10.

‡ 2 Cor. i. 12.

|| James iii. 15.

*from above, but is earthly and sensual.* How little is simplicity and godly sincerity regarded by men in their conversations, nay is it not thought low and despicable? How visibly do many, even professing godliness, form their schemes of life, and carry them on, wholly by the maxims of worldly policy? Do not we see that devout persons in whom religious sentiments habitually prevail, have difficulty enough to support themselves in a pious temper of mind and course of life upon the principles of religion and morality, certain and important as they are, in opposition to the too common and often prosperous impiety of multitudes in the world, which is one of the strongest temptations good men meet with? It will therefore require our utmost care and attention to cherish and strengthen in our hearts a serious sense of the supreme Being, and of his attributes, as exercised in the government of the world, with a high affectionate esteem for him, producing a constant endeavor to imitate his moral perfections, to keep his commandments, and to depart from evil, which is understanding. Then shall we have an experimental conviction in our own minds, impregnable against all impious cavils,

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SERM. vils, that the fear of the Lord is true wisdom,  
VIII. essentially different from weak and foolish  
superstition, and by the apparent fruits of  
religion in our lives, we shall be the most  
useful in promoting its interests, to the glory  
of God our heavenly Father, our own comfort,  
and the good of mankind.



## S E R M O N IX.

Religion shewn to be perfectly consistent with the true Interest of Mankind.

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Job. xxviii. 28.

*And unto Man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil is understanding.*

**I**N the foregoing discourse, from these S E R M. IX. words, I endeavored to vindicate true piety, or the fear of God, from the imputation of weakness and folly, in the principles on which it rests, and the practice which it prescribes, and to shew that it is essentially different from superstition, and not to be accounted for by any of its causes, by the timorousness of men's tempers, or the weakness of their understandings, by political fiction, or customary tradition. There is another charge brought against religion, by

SERM. by its adversaries, directly opposite to the  
 IX. character given it in the text, namely, it is  
 ~~~~~ alledged to be contrary to the true interest of  
 mankind, of every individual, and of the  
 united bodies of men, or civil associations  
 into which they have been obliged to form  
 themselves for their common safety and ad-  
 vantage. Now, it is said, wisdom consists  
 in pursuing the ends of our nature, and our  
 happiness, by the best and most effectual  
 methods we can devise in the circumstances  
 wherein we are placed; how then can any  
 institution or discipline be accounted wise,  
 which restrains us in the use of that liberty,  
 as certainly religion does in many instances,  
 and abridges us of such enjoyment as our na-  
 ture is capable of, nay prompts us to pursue?

If what has been already said to shew that  
 the fear of the Lord is wisdom, be true, it  
 can hardly be imagined that there is any  
 force in this objection. If religion be per-  
 fectly agreeable to the rational human nature,  
 if the main principles of it be so clear that  
 we cannot resist the evidence of them, and  
 we cannot possibly act in contradiction to its  
 laws without the inward disapprobation and  
 reproaches of our own hearts, and if there be  
 a supreme wise and good governor of the  
 universe

universe, to whom this is to be attributed, as SERM.  
being the necessary result of his constitution, IX.  
if, I say, these things be true, one would  
think it impossible there should be such an  
inconsistency in nature as that religion in the  
whole should be really hurtful to us, in other  
words, that it should be at the same time  
reasonable and unreasonable; for truth and  
reason, if any thing, is consistent and uni-  
form. Some lesser present inconveniences  
may indeed attend a wise constitution, they  
may even necessarily arise from the nature  
and condition of things, as it is true in fact  
that the practice of virtue is attended with  
some difficulty and uneasiness in our present  
imperfect probationary state, but considering  
how clearly it is taught and strongly enforced  
by reason, it cannot be imagined to be con-  
trary, in the main, to our true happiness, if  
wisdom and goodness be manifested in the  
frame of our nature and the appointment of  
our condition.

But if we examine this pretence by itself  
more particularly, we shall find that it is ill  
grounded, and that, on the contrary, there  
is a strict connexion between our duty and  
our true interest, whereby the arguments  
proving that the fear of the Lord is wisdom,

SERM. will receive a great addition of force, and it  
IX. will appear reasonable in every view. First,  
it is alleged that religion lays severe restraints on men, forbidding the gratification of their natural appetites and passions, it requires them to deny themselves, and to mortify those affections which are the growth of nature, the tendency whereof is to set them at odds with themselves, and create a continual uneasiness in their breasts. Now, is it to be thought that the author of nature, if he is so beneficent as religion represents him, has given us desires which at the same time he has not allowed us to gratify, and even mocked us by placing enjoyment within our reach to which we are solicited by a craving appetite, yet made it our duty to abstain with pain to ourselves? To make this argument conclusive, it would be necessary to prove that the highest felicity of man consists in the unrestrained gratification of every appetite and desire in his nature, which is so far from being true, that nothing is more certain than the contrary. If we will at all attend to our own constitution, and what we cannot help observing in ourselves, we must be convinced that the demands of our lower appetites and passions often interfere even among themselves,

selves, so that it is not in our power to com-  
 ply with every one of them; besides their  
 thwarting and contradicting the higher affec-  
 tions, in the immediate vigorous operation  
 of which and the natural effects of them, the  
 noblest enjoyment consists. The sensual in-  
 clinations, the desire of wealth and honor,  
 and the multitude of passions which conti-  
 nually excite us to actions of different kinds,  
 all of them under proper regulations useful,  
 tending to our safety and to the promoting of  
 our interest, these can none of them be in-  
 dulg'd without controul; they must give  
 place in their turns to each other, they must  
 be at some times retrenched, and there must  
 be an œconomy in the direction and govern-  
 ment of them, that the ends and business of  
 life may be pursued with any regularity, or  
 tolerable degree of success. Now, what is the  
 liberty that religion restrains, and which are  
 the gratifications it forbids? It does not re-  
 quire men to root out, or to deny, at all times,  
 and in every degree, any one affection which  
 is the growth of nature, it only prohibits the  
 exorbitances of passion, and that excessive in-  
 dulgence of some appetites which is really  
 hurtful to nature, and tends to embitter and  
 to shorten life. Are luxury and debauchery,

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SERM. and the outrages of anger and revenge, such  
 IX. goodly pleasures and high enjoyments to a  
 rational being, that the fear of God is to be censured as unfriendly to human nature for retrenching them, when indeed any one who will allow himself to think calmly, must see that these extravagancies are the violent symptoms of an unnatural distempered state, necessary to be removed in order to a sound inward constitution, and to the true enjoyment of life? As there are not wanting examples in every age, and among ourselves, of the effects of temperance, contentment, meekness, and other private virtues, and of the contrary passions and vices, upon human life, let any one who will consider impartially, judge, which are the most conducive to what a wise man would chiefly value even in this world, and render our present condition of being the most easy and happy. It is to be hoped, in deciding this question, we shall have some consideration of a mind which every one is conscious of in himself, and sensible that by its self-reflections it has a great share in his happiness or misery; if a man's passions are so vehement that they hurry him away against the admonitions of his conscience, it will at some times break in  
 upon

upon his vicious enjoyments in spite of all SERM.  
 his endeavors to silence its clamor, and make IX.  
 him feel the smart of its severe reproof for his  
 folly and wickedness; or if he should be able  
 to get the better of it, and harden his heart  
 into insensibility by a long course of stupify-  
 ing vice, it is at such an expence of under-  
 standing, and studied impairment of his rea-  
 son, as would seem very reproachful to an  
 intelligent creature. Upon the whole then,  
 the precepts of religion which relate to self-  
 government, are no dishonor to it, they do  
 not lay it open to the charge of unreasonable  
 severity, nor the conduct they prescribe, to  
 the imputation of weakness and folly, as ne-  
 glecting the true interest and happiness of the  
 human nature, even in its present state of  
 existence; rather, on the other hand, the  
 fear of God justly deserves the character of  
 wisdom, for the reason why *Solomon* often so  
 celebrates it in his *Proverbs*, namely, because  
 it contributes above all things to the satisfac-  
 tion and prosperity of life, to health, length  
 of days, riches, and honor, and especially to  
 an easy, contented, self-approving mind, a  
 principal ingredient in the happy state of  
 every rational being.

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Another important branch of religion or the fear of God (for it comprehends the whole of morality) are the virtues of the social and benevolent kind, and they, as well as those which terminated directly in ourselves, instead of being disadvantageous, are eminently useful for promoting all the happiness which we are capable of enjoying in this world. A peaceable temper, charity, fidelity, and justice, are qualities which procure a man such esteem and confidence from those who are acquainted with him, as tend greatly to secure life, and enlarge the enjoyments of it; whereas the angry and malevolent passions not only *trouble a man's own flesh*, as *Solomon* speaks\*, that is, makes his own life uneasy, but produce great disorders in the world, strife and confusion, wars and desolations, with continual dangers, distress and perplexity to the authors of them. All this is so evident, even without any consideration of the fear or awe of God, which is the greatest security of every virtue, that an avowed unbeliever, consistently with his principles, might acknowledge it. *Epicurus* is said to have professed it as his opinion, that virtue is the greatest good of man, and to have placed the

\* Prov. xi. 17.



highest happiness in pleasures of the rational and moral kind, tho' vices of the most infamous sort are still called by his name, and were patronised, at least the strongest barriers against them were certainly broken down, by his tenets; but this is a fair testimony from an atheist, that religion, so far as it restrains our appetites and passions, and confines them within the bounds of virtue, of temperance, justice, and mercy, is not deservedly liable to the censure of folly, or an unreasonable encroachment on the rights of human nature. But,

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In the next place, let us consider piety itself in the strictest sense, or the sentiments and affections which it imports, and we shall find that they are the only solid foundation upon which we can enjoy any true satisfaction and tranquility of mind, so far it is from being injurious to our interest. Upon the slightest view we can take of man, of his natural powers and affections, and of the condition in which he finds himself, it will most obviously occur to our thoughts, that he is an intelligent weak being, furnished indeed with noble powers, and which point to high attainments, both in the way of understanding and fruition, but dependent and

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frail, liable to inconveniences from a multitude of things about him, as well as possessed of many enjoyments and advantages which cannot be attributed to his own power and providence, more than his avoiding of evils and dangers; sensible from his own consciousness that his existence has not been of a long duration, and necessarily presaging the speedy dissolution of his life, by the examples of those of his own kind whom he sees every day dying, from the brittleness of his own outward frame, and numberless events he finds himself liable to, which are, in respect to his knowledge, perfect casualties, and he has in himself no defence against them; with all this so naturally anxious about futurity, that he cannot enjoy himself or any thing else, at present, with full contentedness of mind, unless he has hope concerning it.

I believe it will be allowed, that this is a just and fair view of the present state of man, though but an imperfect one to my purpose, and a more full representation would make the argument appear stronger. Now let us apply it to the religious and the infidel scheme, as set against each other, that we may see which is the most comfortable and  
advan-

advantageous, in other words, which is the best calculated to promote the true interest of mankind. The religious scheme teaches us, that the whole world and every part of it is filled with intelligence and goodness, that we ourselves, and all things about us, which are capable of affecting us in any manner, derive our and their being and powers of every kind from an infinitely wise and good cause, upon which we and all things depend, and which still governs the whole irresistibly, but with the most perfect wisdom and benevolence, extending its care and providence to all, even the minutest affairs of the world. From this what may not be hoped for that is truly desirable to a rational nature? There is ground to expect that every thing shall be ordered in the best manner, and though we ourselves cannot comprehend the intire reason of things, and the design of particular events, yet every thing really is just as it should be, that is, ordered according to the highest reason and the most perfect equity, for the greatest absolute good, or the greatest happiness of the whole intellectual system. Is not this what a man's heart would wish to be so, and if he finds it to be true, must it not yield him solid joy, as a foundation upon which  
he

SERM. he can rest with pleasure, support his mind  
 IX. in all events, and look to futurity with com-  
 fort?

But, on the other hand, the atheistical scheme spreads horror and confusion over the whole face of nature: According to it, the world is, as *Job* speaks of death, *\* like a land of darkness, without any order, where the light is as darkness*. If we inquire concerning ourselves, our constitution, or our state present or future, as how came we into being, distinguished from many other kinds by peculiar powers and privileges? The answer is, by the fortuitous concourse of senseless atoms, or by a blind undesigning fatality. How do we live? How are we preserved? To what cause can we assign the good we enjoy, that we may make the proper acknowledgments to which the affections of our nature prompt us? And how shall the evils we fear be prevented? The answer still is nothing but chance or necessity, which leaves no room for the exercise of hope or gratitude, our most delightful affections, and is at least a mighty discouragement to the use of our intellectual powers, in forming and pursuing any laudable designs in life, the most agree-

\* *Job. x. 22.*

able employment which the mind is capable S E R M.  
of, this, I say, is greatly discouraged by the IX.  
principles of irreligion, there being according  
to them, no superior power, wisdom, and  
goodness, to whose approbation and protec-  
tion we should endeavor to recommend our-  
selves and our works; and with what pleasure  
could any man apply his mind to the con-  
templation of order, or the study of promot-  
ing it, if he believed that infinite confusion  
prevails in the universe? Again, if we ask  
what shall become of us when we die? All  
the answer, and all the hope upon this hypo-  
thesis, is, that our very being shall be utterly  
extinguished, and cease for ever. But how  
are we secured even of that? Have we not a  
chance for a future existence as well as anni-  
hilation, or if the event is determined by ne-  
cessity, who can tell which of the two is ne-  
cessary?

The point last mentioned deserves the par-  
ticular attention of all unbelievers; every one  
will acknowledge that if the principles of re-  
ligion be true, concerning the state of man-  
kind, both present and future, that they are  
all now under trial and discipline, and here-  
after to be rewarded or punished according as  
their works have been good or evil, if, I say,  
these

SERM. these principles be true, they are of the greatest importance, and determine what is our highest interest. Surely it can never be accounted wisdom to run the hazard of inexpressible future misery, for the pleasures here to be enjoyed in a vicious course of life, above what the virtuous mind is capable of, or to avoid some present uneasiness, such as accompanies the resisting of temptations, religious self-denial, or even the enduring of persecution, to avoid this, I say, at the expence of a future perfect and eternal happiness. All the consolation of the infidel, and that only whereby he can pretend to justify his conduct, is, that future rewards or punishments are no more than political fictions, or enthusiastic dreams, and there is no rational ground to expect them. But what assurance has he of this, to make him easy on a reasonable foundation? He should have demonstration which excludes the possibility of a mistake; or if the subject is not capable of that, at least, such certainty as leaves no room to doubt. But this can never be attained. Does there appear to the human mind any contradiction in the idea of a future existence? Is not the continuance of our being as conceivable as the commencement of it? Indeed it

is much more easily apprehended. Some SERM.  
have imagined an absurdity in a transition IX.  
from nothing to being, or the production of  
a new real entity, however every mortal  
knows his consciousness had a beginning,  
and by consciousness alone he knows his  
personal existence, or the being of himself,  
than which nothing can be to him a more  
certain reality.

But the continuance of being is familiar  
to our thoughts, we know it experimentally,  
nor can any man be assured that it shall cease  
when he dies ; we know not what death is, any  
further than that we see that the body ceases  
to be animated ; but it does not necessarily  
follow that there shall be an utter cessation  
of thought and all its modes. Experience  
shows that the thinking power remains undi-  
minished when a limb is lost which once  
was animated, and what certainty can there  
be that it shall not remain still in its vigor,  
when by the dissolution of what is called  
life, the body shall change its form and turn  
to common earth ?

To argue against the justice of future pu-  
nishments, or their consistency with good-  
ness, is to acknowledge a moral system and  
ruling righteousness and goodness in the uni-  
verse,

SERM. verse, from which the generality of mankind have thought the highest probability arises of recompences hereafter, considering the apparently promiscuous administration here, or rather that those divine perfections are but imperfectly, tho' really in a degree discernible by every attentive mind, manifested in this state, which has the plain characters of a probation-state. But it is not my design at present to establish that great principle of religion, all I aim at, is to show that there is no possible security against it, and we have no sufficient evidence from any principle, or fact which falls within human knowledge, that it cannot be, which, I think, is undeniably clear; and therefore all which any unbeliever can pretend to in this matter is uncertainty.

Now supposing it to be the case that a future state is to any man uncertain, he does not believe it, because he does not see reasons sufficient so to determine his judgment, at the same time he is not, nor can possibly be sure of the contrary, the question is, how does wisdom require him to conduct himself with respect to it upon this supposition? And here, the importance of that future condition of being, supposed doubtful, is to be



be taken into consideration, and it must be SERM.  
allowed to be very great; the principles of IX.

religion represent it so, and the objections of the infidels are not against this, but against the truth or the credibility of a future existence. What can the mind think of so awful, as that an omniscient, infinitely powerful, and righteous being, will bring every work of man into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil; that rewards and punishments shall be distributed in exact proportion to the moral rectitude and viciousness of all human actions? Who can comprehend the issues of that judgment, or imagine in what manner and to what degree they will affect him? It must be, as the scripture represents it, *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*, the hands of his avenging justice. And who in this imperfect state can form an adequate idea of that exceeding great and eternal weight of glory which shall be the recompence of sincere and persevering religion? If these events appear to the mind, not certain, but possible, and there is no convincing evidence against them; at the same time, we know, that if they come to pass, they have a necessary connexion with our moral character

SERM. character and behaviour (which is not at all a point in question, this being the very reason why a future state is believed on the one side, and denied on the other) but, if it be so, what influence should a doubt or uncertainty so circumstanced have upon our present temper and conduct? Here let men put parallel cases in their temporal affairs, let them suppose, for example, a very great but uncertain danger to their lives, their reputation, or worldly interest, which they have in their power to prevent, and a very eminent, but uncertain advantage, to be obtained, which however, depends on some practicable, indeed not extremely difficult conditions, let them ask themselves what prudence would direct them to do in a case so stated? I believe it will be agreed that a wise man would, for avoiding such an extreme even tho' doubtful danger, forego a present small gratification, and submit to a small present inconvenience, and that he would be at some pains to secure his title to a great happiness, tho' it were uncertain; especially if it appeared that the pains so bestowed would not be very hurtful to his present interests: And let any man judge whether the practice of virtue, which is the only condition required, be so pre-  
preju-

prejudicial to the interests of the present life, SER M.  
that he ought to risque an uncertain prospect of perfect happiness hereafter, rather IX.  
than submit to it? All men find themselves obliged to form their schemes of life upon great uncertainties, and our principles of action are influenced by low degrees of probability, very often by presumptions which do not amount to any probability at all; and if this be the rule of conduct in some cases, why not in all? or can any reason be assigned why we should not have a regard to futurity, supposed doubtful, beyond death, as well as to uncertain futurity within the limits of the present life?

Thus it appears that the reasoning of some sceptics, from the alleged doubtfulness of religious principles, particularly that concerning a future state, to the purposes of irreligion, and to countenance an impious and immoral practice, is false and ill grounded, contrary to the maxims by which all considerate persons govern themselves in like cases. Their argument is, that if a state of retributions hereafter be uncertain, men are under no obligation to act with regard to it, or to deny themselves any gratification on that account, whereas the directly contrary reasoning is just,

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*viz.* that if it be only uncertain, which is all that can be pretended, there being no positive evidence against it, it becomes wise men to provide against a doubtful danger, and pursue the measures whereby they may be safe in all events, since by these measures they lose nothing, and they are not, in the main, detrimental to any valuable interest. But the truth is, as in the common affairs of life men are often blind to their own true interest, or diverted from the prosecution of it by prejudices and prepossessions, especially by vicious habits, still covering their self-deceit under some weak pretences of reason; health, and reputation, and worldly prosperity, are sacrificed to a foolish passion, yet they who are so unhappily deceived, hide their folly from their own sight under false colors and palliating excuses: So it is in this concern of infinitely greater importance; men by a customary indulgence in the gratification of their lower appetites and selfish desires, have contracted strong immoral habits, which have great power over their minds, corrupting their affections, misleading their judgments, so that they cannot discern the truth which is very clear to an unprejudiced understanding, and rendering them insensible of

of their own real advantage. Can it be thought that without an inward unfairness and dishonesty of heart, biaſſed by violent prejudices, any man would judge it wisdom to run the hazard of loſing an endless perfect felicity, and incurring a grievous future puniſhment, even ſuppoſed uncertain (for that is the ſuppoſition I am at preſent arguing upon) rather than live ſoberly, righteouſly, and Godly in this world, for the ſhort and evidently uncertain time in which he can with any color of reaſon hope to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin. Upon the whole then, let every man judge for himſelf, but let him ſeriouſly conſider, and judge impartially, the matter being of the laſt moment, whether practical religion or the fear of God be contrary to his true intereſt, taking into the account whatever he knows certainly will, or poſſibly may affect him, in every part and every ſtate of his exiſtence; or if, on the contrary, it be not the ſureſt and moſt effectual way to make him as happy as he is capable of being, and to provide for his ſafety in all events, in other words, whether it be not wiſdom.

Laſtly, We may conſider men in their ſocial capacity, as united together in political

SERM. bodies or civil associations, and it is pretended that religion is inconsistent with their interest, nay subversive of their very foundations. At our entrance on this subject, one observation occurs very obviously, that the objections raised by infidels against religion are directly contradictory to each other, which makes them the less formidable; sometimes it is represented as a political fiction, an engine invented for the service of civil governors, to keep the people in a thorough subjection to them; at other times it is, very inconsistently, alledged to be utterly destructive of civil policy. But as the former pretence has been found weak and ill supported, so, upon inquiry, this will appear to be without any just foundation.

Let it be remembered, that the fear of God takes in the social affections of men, and not only allows them their full scope and free exercise, but strongly enforces it. The first commandment of religion is, *\* to love the Lord God with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the mind*; and the second is like unto it, *thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self*, that is, be ready to do good, as far as you have power and opportunity,

\* Matt. xxii. 37, 39,

to every one of mankind ; never violate any of his rights, but do to them as you would expect or desire they should do to you in like circumstances. Between these two there is a necessary inseparable connexion, so that the profession of the former, the love of God, passes for nothing, unless it produces the other, righteousness, kind affections, and kind offices to men ; for 'tis certain, the genuine principles of piety are not at all understood, nor have their due influence, if they are not thus applied, and bring not forth the fruits of justice, charity, and a peaceable disposition. This, one would think, is a firm cement of society, holding it together by the strongest bonds of sincere undissembled love to mankind, and a pious regard to the deity ; whereas, by the opposite scheme, these obligations are made void, every single man is to be considered as an intire little whole by himself, unrelated to any system, possessed of existence however he came by it, and a capacity of some enjoyments which he is to pursue independently on any other being ; generosity, universal benevolence, public affections, patriotism, sincerity, gratitude, and especially the fear of God, the principal security of them all, these are accounted

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chimeras, the visionary productions of dis-tempered brains, without any real foundation in nature, or the cunning contrivance of artful men. It will be very strange, if such opinions shall appear to have a more favorable aspect on civil society and government, than the contrary ones of religion ; and if a rational consistent scheme can be formed upon them, which will more effectually secure the just authority of rulers and the liberty of subjects.

What I have said, is not an unfair invidious representation of atheistical principles, however shocking it may seem to be ; the men in that way of thinking openly profess what amounts to it, and from their own writings the following seems to be a just account of their scheme so far as it relates to the present subject. That the true original liberty of man consists in an unrestrained licence to do whatever his inclinations prompt him to do, without any consideration of the interests or supposed privileges of any other beings ; and the only measure of right is power ; if one man could tyrannize over all the rest of his kind, and thought it for his happiness, that is, that it would give him pleasure, there is nothing to hinder him,  
the



the restraints of equity and conscience being only imaginary. But in fact this is impracticable, because men are pretty nearly equal in force, at least any number of men find themselves sufficiently able to resist one, and therefore may refuse to submit to his lust of domination, which is as much their natural right as his. The case being so, the state of nature is the worst of all states, and men found themselves under a necessity of getting out of it as fast as they could. For what could it produce but perpetual discord and confusion? Every man's hand was against his fellow, and nothing so formidable as those of his own species, from whom no good was to be expected, unless it appeared to be for their own private advantage, and all kinds of mischief of fraud and cruelty to be feared: Therefore their weakness, and dangers which they were all sensible of, put them upon a voluntary agreement for terminating their differences, or rather their wars, by relinquishing each his private rights, and uniting their force in civil government, which being vested with all the rights that originally belonged to its constituents, has an infinite right as they call it, that is, an unlimited power over every individual, their

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SERM. properties, their lives, and their consciences,  
 IX. being all put in absolute subjection to it.

Let us enquire a little into these principles, which are even boasted of by the abettors of them, as the greatest security of civil power, and thereby of public peace. First, we may observe that these authors, in raising their fabric of civil authority, find themselves under a necessity of having recourse to something like moral obligations, tho' as explained by them, they are really but trifling, the foundation of them being first sapped by their own hypothesis. It is pretended, that rights once abandoned cannot be justly resumed, that contracts and covenants formally entered into, bind men so that they cannot be violated without injustice, and here is one security of a common wealth, which having received the surrender of private rights, must continue possess'd of them unalienably. But let any one show, if he can, how a man is bound by his own acts or words, the mere arbitrary declarations of his own will, how, I say, he can be bound by these, if he is under no precedent natural obligation. In the state of nature he has a right to every thing, and against every man, no otherwise limited than by the bounds of  
 his

his power, he has not only a right of self-SERM.  
defence against the invader of his property,IX.

his liberty, or his life, but by way of prevention, to invade, to oppress, to rob, to enslave, and murder, as supposing the person so used to be actually his enemy, who would treat him the same way if he could be before hand with him. This right is under no restraint in its exercise by justice, charity, honesty, or conscience, but all kinds of deceit and violence are lawful till civil power is introduced. Now, what if compacts to form and establish the rights of sovereignty are not sincerely meant for that end, but the real design of those who enter into them is only to amuse and deceive others by this artifice, intending that the state of nature which is a state of hostility shall continue, and that they will exert all the power and privileges of it when a fair opportunity shall offer? There is nothing in all this wrong upon the principles I am considering, which center in this, that every man has an original right to use his reason and his active force in the way which he thinks most for his private advantage.

But there is no need of taking this so deep as the very beginning of civil constitutions,

SERM. tutions, for at whatever time we consider  
 IX. them, and in whatever state, even when they  
 are formed and settled in the best manner possible, if the support of them be derived wholly from the will of the members, each renouncing his private right and transferring it, and conveying his force to the political body, without supposing any antecedent obligation in nature to give strength to this act, then it may be revoked by the same will at any time; for what the will can do, it can also undo, when there appears reason for undoing it.

But the writers in this controversy against religion, against natural morality, and the social affections of mankind, seem to be diffident of that basis upon which they place civil government, and which has been already considered, namely contracts and covenants, and therefore they have their recourse to another, which they hope will be more stable, having strength enough to secure itself, that is, the force of the magistrate, to which all must submit. Sometimes they deduce from this alone the very nature and the measures of right and wrong in the whole extent of them, for they say that justice and injustice are determined by a law, and a law is nothing else  
 but

but the declared will of a superior with a SERM.  
sanction added to it. Let us see now upon IX.  
what foot authority stands according to this  
account of it, and it is plainly no other than  
superior power causing terror, or the weak-  
ness and fear of its subjects. This does it no  
great honor, nor will make it appear amia-  
ble to men, so long as the generous affecti-  
ons and a sense of liberty have any place in  
their hearts; but especially it is to be observed  
in opposition to these writers, that the secu-  
rity of civil government is hereby rendered  
precarious. There is nothing to hinder at-  
tempts against the public tranquility, and the  
power which is raised to preserve it, but the  
danger of miscarrying in them; whenever  
treasonable conspiracies can be formed, and  
rebellions raised with a fair probability of  
prevailing, all scruples vanish, and the ac-  
tual success makes them actually just; the  
restraints of honor and conscience, and a re-  
gard to the public, are mere bugbears which  
keep fools in awe, but men of sense despise  
them. Let any one judge, who knows at  
all the state of mankind, whether these are  
principles which have a tendency to secure  
civil authority, and thereby to preserve peace  
and order among men.

But

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objection lies in this, that religion tends to weaken, and even to subvert civil government, by setting up private judgment or conscience as a superior tribunal in the breast of every subject, which claims a right of examining the acts of the highest human authority, and refusing obedience to them when it judges them to be wrong; whereas their principles vest the civil sovereign with an absolute supremacy which no one has a right to dispute, but must implicitly yield, even an actual obedience to all its commands. I shall not insist on the abject condition to which this reduces the whole of mankind, except the few who have the supreme magistracy in their hands, because the men we have to do with in the present debate, avow no feeling of it, having professedly abandoned all sense of honor, liberty, and virtue, unless so far as they are subservient to private interest: But with respect to the security of government itself, though we grant it is true that the principles of religion establish in every man a supremacy for himself, so that his conscience must be the last judge of his own actions, yet this supremacy does not make void the proper exercise of civil authority,

city, nor hinder its effects. For the right of conscience importing not merely a liberty, but an obligation to do what is right and fit, is the greatest security of just obedience to the powers ordained of God, as well as of every thing else morally good that the human nature is capable of. But the question is, what advantage will be gained to the civil power if conscience be displaced? Does the atheistical scheme substitute nothing in its room which may be equally dangerous? Yes, certainly, for it transfers the supremacy to arbitrary will, lust, and passion, all summ'd up in self-love, or the desire of private happiness, that is, pleasure, which of right is the absolute ruler in every human heart, and reason is intended not to controul, but to minister to it. Is this more friendly to civil sovereignty than conscience, which is founded on the notion of a real and essential difference in the nature of things, between just and unjust, moral good and evil, and therefore must tie up men's hands from public mischiefs, though they might gratify their own humors and inclinations.

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that the fear of God or sincere religion is wisdom in every view we can take of it, is founded, not on prejudice, but reason and truth, the highest reason and the most evident truth, and the tendency of it is to the greatest happiness both private and public which men can enjoy in this world, as well as to provide in the best manner we can for a future state of existence.

Upon that part of the subject which has been chiefly insisted on in this discourse, I shall only make two reflections, and conclude. First, we may see the true cause of so much unhappiness as there is in the world. The present state of mankind is generally apprehended to be bad, misfortunes are loudly complained of, sickness, poverty, disappointments, injuries, public calamities, all concluded to be, because they are seen and felt, infelicities to which our condition is liable, and attributed to different causes according to mens different ways of thinking, either to the immediate external occasions of them, without looking any farther, or to the appointment of providence, not without secret murmuring and discontent. But if we inquire wisely concerning



cerning this matter, we shall find that the most universal cause of natural evil is moral evil, and the true reason why there is so much misery in the earth, is because there is so much wickedness. The ordinary afflictions of human life are often the natural consequences of mens vices. Whence proceed sickness, poverty, and disgrace? For the most part, and visibly, from debauchery, injustice and sloth. Whence wars and desolations? As plainly, from pride and ambition, or as St. *James* speaks, *from the lusts of men that war in their members*. Not that we should imagine there is always a strict and immediate connexion in particular instances between irreligion and distress by the interposition of divine providence, as if they were to be reputed void of the fear of God, and sinners above all others, on whom the heaviest calamities fall, as in the example our Saviour mentions \* of those on whom the tower of *Siloam* fell, and those whose blood *Pilate* mingled with their sacrifices; to judge after that manner, is to judge foolishly and uncharitably, for least of all are the extraordinary sufferings wherein God seems most apparently to interpose to

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\* Luke xiii.

SERM. be interpreted as a strict retribution, bearing  
 IX. exact proportion to the demerit of men's  
 personal crimes; but as the natural tendency of sin is to unhappiness, it has actually introduced a great deal of unhappiness into the world, which the wise God dispenses among the individuals of mankind as he sees fit, accommodating it to the purposes of his government in our state of probation; and in this his judgments are unsearchable and his ways past finding out.

Secondly, we may observe with pleasure, that the declarations of scripture on this head, are perfectly agreeable to the reason and truth of things, and to experience; they inculcate not only in general this doctrine, that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, the beginning and the perfection of it, that to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty, and whole happiness of man, but particularly, that it is the surest way to present tranquility, to long life, health, honor, and riches, so far as they are truly useful, and that godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is, and that which is to come. And to the public good of societies nothing can contribute so much as religion; when it prevails,

prevails, *nation shall not rise up against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*; men shall not hurt or destroy one another, *when the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea.* Upon the whole then, the lovers of mankind, who are most desirous of their happiness, have nothing so much to wish and to endeavor, as that piety may flourish among them; and for every one of ourselves in particular, the best way to be as happy as we can be, even here, besides our hopes in a future state, is to amend the faults of our tempers and our lives by the rules of religion; for it will be found, bad as the world is, *that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.*

## S E R M O N X.

The Love of God explained and recommended.

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Matthew xxii. 37.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind.*

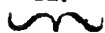
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**I**F we have clear and satisfying evidence of the being of God, of his perfections natural and moral, of his having created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all things which are in them, and of his providence preserving them all, disposing the whole series of events in them with the most perfect wisdom, and for the greatest good, we can scarcely avoid this important inquiry, what regards are due to him from us his reasonable creatures? By looking into our minds we will perceive that they are differently affected with the objects that are presented

sented to them ; some excite desire, some joy, S E R M.  
and others horror and aversion, and these X.  
different affections to different objects are  
subdivided into various kinds ; though they  
come under the same common denomination  
of desire and aversion, yet the inward per-  
ceptions of them have very little affinity with  
each other ; for example, the desire of meat  
and the desire of virtue, the aversion to bodi-  
ly pain, and the aversion to moral turpitude.  
But whatever variety there is in them, they  
all originally belong to our nature, and result  
from our constitution, we cannot make, and  
we cannot destroy them ; it may be in our  
power, by an habitual attention to some ob-  
jects, to strengthen the affections of the mind  
to them, and by diverting their attention  
from other objects, to weaken its affection to  
them, whereby the one obtains a prevalence  
over the other, forming our temper and en-  
gaging our pursuit : But the original affec-  
tions themselves are constituted by nature the  
same and invariable, no more in the power  
of the mind, and dependent on its choice, as  
to their being or not being, than simple ideas  
are. Here we shall find ourselves obliged to  
rest ; as the materials of our knowledge are  
limited, the imagination and the understand-  
ing

SERM.

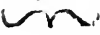
X.



ing may variously compound, associate, and distinguish them, but can create us no new ones, so are our affections: When any object is proposed to the perceiving faculty (perhaps before it is proposed, as in the case of bodily appetites) whether it be by sense, by reflection, or in whatever manner, a certain propension towards it naturally arises, which we cannot hinder, nor alter, nor transfer to a different kind of objects; for instance, the desire of food prevents any reasoning, deliberation, or choice, and we cannot possibly excite it to any other object; there is an approbation and esteem of moral excellence, as natural to the human soul, which we cannot apply to any thing which is not apprehended to be moral excellence; and the same may be said concerning all our other affections, the objects are limited, and the movements of the mind towards them depend solely on the constitution of our nature. It is in vain therefore to call in the assistance of foreign motives, such as those taken from interest, from the hope of happiness, or the fear of misery; these may strongly affect the mind, and operate on the springs of action, producing an earnest pursuit, but the discerned qualities of objects themselves can only excite

cite affections to them : A man may be con- SERM.  
vinced that it is for his interest to have a par- X.  
ticular affection, but this cannot immediately  
produce it, nor have any other effect towards  
it, than to engage his earnest attention to the  
object till the exciting qualities are apprehend-  
ed, and as soon as they appear, the affection  
naturally arises of itself.

It is farther to be observed, that as objects  
are introduced into the mind by various ways,  
some by sense, and others by reflection, at  
the first discernment of certain material be-  
ings, there is raised a desire or aversion to  
them ; and by attending to the voluntary o-  
perations of our minds, and to the external  
actions of other moral agents, the evidence  
of their inward dispositions, nay to imaginary  
characters considered under the distinction of  
morally right and wrong, there arise direct-  
ly opposite affections, the difference of which  
we see as plainly and necessarily as we do the  
difference between desire and aversion to sen-  
sible things. All these equally belong to our  
nature, but are not of equal importance to  
the principal ends of it. Hunger and thirst  
are the appetites of man, bodily pleasure and  
pain are his natural sensations, of which he  
cannot divest himself, but when he delibe-

SERM. X.  rately attends to honesty, benevolence, and fidelity, an affection to these qualities is as natural to him, and a dislike of the contrary. To confine real affections to the objects of sense, and treat all others as imaginary, must proceed from the most stupid inconsideration: We know with the greatest certainty, because we are intimately conscious of it, that something exists which cannot be perceived by our eyes, nor ears, nor any other corporal organs, which is the object of our most intense love: We know that we have as distinct ideas of reason, wisdom, order, goodness, and justice, as of any sensible qualities, and that they as really affect our minds, tho' in a different manner; and that as these kinds of ideas are the principal subjects of our speculation, so our principal happiness depends upon them, indeed without them humanity would be degraded to a level with the brutal nature, and its enjoyments confined within a very narrow circle. Now if there are other beings, not perceived by the external senses, but whose existence is fully proved, to whom intellectual and moral qualities or perfections belong, which qualities in the degree wherein we discern them are highly esteemed by us, and the matter of  
our



our enjoyment; these beings are also the SERM.  
 objects of affections which are natural to the X.  
 human mind; especially the most excellent  
 of all beings, who is absolutely perfect in  
 knowledge, wisdom, rectitude, and good-  
 ness, justly challenges our highest esteem and  
 most affectionate regards; nay, they will  
 naturally and ultimately, of their own accord,  
 terminate upon him, if we have a firm per-  
 suasion of his being, and of those his attri-  
 butes, and if we carefully attend to them.  
 Perhaps some men having first formed their  
 idea of love by, and accustoming themselves to  
 appropriate the word to that emotion or  
 passion they feel, and which they call love  
 towards other objects, have but a confused  
 notion of the love of God, and even think  
 it mere enthusiasm: But let us seriously con-  
 sider the several obvious characters of the  
 Deity, as they are manifested to us by his  
 works, and observe the impressions they  
 make, and cannot but make on a calm un-  
 prejudiced mind, we shall then understand  
 the affections to him which naturally arise  
 in every human heart not sunk in stupid in-  
 sensibility and viciousness, and which are  
 comprehended in this sum of piety, *Thou  
 shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy  
 heart,*


SERM. *heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy*  
 X. *strength, and with all thy mind.*

First, The mind of man cannot avoid distinguishing in things which are presented to it, between beauty and deformity, regularity and confusion, being pleased with the one, and displeased with the other. A careful attention improves this sense, and makes the difference more discernible and more affecting, but it has a foundation in nature; scarcely any one is so ignorant and so unaccustomed to observe the diversity of forms, as not to see a superior excellence in some above others, consisting in order, proportion, and harmony, and to men of more enlarged understanding, and a more exquisite taste, the love of such beauty rises to a greater height, and gives a pleasure far exceeding all sensual gratifications. Whence does this proceed? And to what cause shall it be attributed? Surely it proceeds from our frame, and we are so constituted by nature; but yet if we observe how such beauty strikes our minds, we shall perceive in it a reference to an original, a designing intelligence, which produced it, and which is apprehended to be more excellent. When a man views attentively any curious production of human art, immediately it occurs

curs to his thoughts, that this is not the effect S E R M.  
of chance, which can never be the cause of X.

order, nor give any pleasure to the mind, but that it is the result of contrivance; and it is his discerning the characters of understanding in the exact adjustment of the several parts, with their various relations, and the harmony of the whole, that gives him the agreeable entertainment: Without this, if there be any affection excited, it is but low, of a quite different kind from that which we are now considering, and still in proportion as the marks of wisdom are discovered in any work, so is our sense of its beauty and the pleasure of contemplating it; the materials are capable of any form, the most disagreeable as well as the most pleasing, and they are never apprehended to have formed themselves, it is the disposing intelligence which attracts the affection, and gives delight.

If from the low efforts of human skill and genius we take our rise to the works of nature, we shall see vastly more exquisite beauty, a more exact proportion, and perfect uniformity, amidst an infinitely greater variety of parts. Take any piece of inanimate nature diversified as we see it, the visible heavens, the wide seas, huge tracts of mountains,  
large

SERM. large forests, or any other which fills the  
X. sight, these strike the contemplative mind  
 with a delightful sensation, abstracting from  
all regard to the usefulness of them ; but if  
we examine the sensations narrowly, it will  
appear to arise from the discerned regularity  
of the object, in other words, the manifesta-  
tion of wise design in framing it : Add these  
works one to another, considering at the  
same time their mutual relations, the ever-  
lasting hills settled on their unmoveable foun-  
dations ; the tall trees waving their slender  
tops in the fluid air, and sheltering a multi-  
tude of feeble inhabitants, yet safe ; the val-  
leys overspread with herbage and corn, for  
the sustenance of man and beast ; the vast  
ocean circumscribed by limits, which its  
waves in the greatest fury of them cannot pass  
over ; the celestial orbs preserving their ori-  
ginal distances from, and shedding upon  
earth their benign influences ; in this view  
the idea of order grows upon us, that is of  
grand design, which is the just and the na-  
tural object of affectionate admiration. But  
all this is only an imperfect sketch of that  
stupendous fabric, the universe, in every  
part of which, that falls under our observa-  
tion, the same regularity appears, and a per-  
fect



fect harmony in the whole. If we descend to a particular survey of nature's works, the variety is surprising, the curious frame of every individual is astonishing, and the convenient disposal of them all, is amazing. What a numberless multitude of living forms do we behold on this earth itself, the very lowest of them inimitable by art, the structure of each so nice that no human understanding can discern; nor penetrate into the secret springs of its movements, and all so properly placed as to have the best means of preservation, and a full opportunity of exerting their vital powers? If we carry our inquiries into the extent of created existence, beyond the reach of sense, the modern improvements which have been made in speculative knowledge, will lead our reason to apprehend worlds above worlds, the limits of which we cannot so much as conjecture, and where the like order prevails as in our globe. So that the effect surpasses our imagination, much more the cause: Yet still the affection is a real natural affection, and the object is a really existing object, though incomprehensible; for let any man deny if he can, that his mind loves and is pleased with order, as the effect of wise design, and the more exact the order

is,

SERM. is, and the more comprehensive the design,  
 X. the greater pleasure it yields, and the higher  
 esteem it raises of the author; nor shall I  
 endeavor to prove, but suppose it as what  
 you are fully convinced of, that there is one  
 supreme, eternal, all comprehending mind,  
 the fountain of being, and parent of the uni-  
 verse, who stretched out the heavens by his  
 wisdom, and established the earth by his  
 discretion, the original source of all beauty,  
 harmony, and wisdom, and therefore the  
 adequate object of our highest esteem and  
 affection.

The intellectual and moral world contains  
 a yet more wonderful and glorious display  
 of the divine wisdom, than the corporeal  
 system and the animal kingdom. A mul-  
 titude of derived and dependent beings,  
 indued with understanding and self-deter-  
 mining powers, the image of the author's  
 self original spiritual nature and attributes,  
 each a distinct conscious self, possessed of a  
 dignity and perfection which we cannot  
 help thinking superior to the whole of inani-  
 mate nature, all disposed of in the best  
 manner, the most suitable to their capaci-  
 ties, and united in one society by the com-  
 mon bond of benevolence, every individual  
 directed

directed by the instincts of its nature, so far SERM.  
as a voluntary agent in such circumstances X.  
could be so directed, to promote the common  
good. How glorious is this great family in  
heaven and earth, under a wise and beautiful  
œconomy, all cared for by the providence of  
its father! How amiable is he! I do not  
speak of moral qualities, and dispositions in  
them, a faint similitude of his perfect moral  
character, which is the object of another af-  
fection, but considering the whole system of  
rational creatures placed in such order as  
they are, and under an administration suit-  
able to their nature, it appears to be an a-  
mazing production of power, and a wonder-  
ful manifestation of wisdom, which perfec-  
tions concurring in one agent are the objects  
of our esteem and reverence in the degree  
wherein they are discerned. And as it is in  
contemplating the fabric of the material  
world, our idea of the creator's understand-  
ing and greatness, and our admiration rises  
in proportion to our knowledge of his work,  
the more accurately we examine its parts, and  
the farther we enlarge our considerations of  
its unmeasurable magnitude, the more curi-  
ous and the more magnificent it appears; so  
it is here; if we study the constitution of a  
single

SERM. single intelligent creature, its various powers  
 X. and affections as they are related to each o-  
 ~~~~~ ther, and all harmoniously conspiring to an-  
 swer the ends of its being, it is an astonishing  
 contrivance; and if we consider the diversity  
 of degrees in mental accomplishment which  
 appear among the individuals of our own  
 species, all under the direction of the father  
 of lights, and the vastly more enlarged capa-  
 cities with which superior orders, we know  
 not how many of them, nor with what dis-  
 tinctions, are indued, all of them in diffe-  
 rent ways fulfilling the law of their creation,  
 and having different enjoyment suitable to  
 their several capacities; who can think of  
 the great author without admiration, or for-  
 bear praising him with the most affectionate  
 esteem?

Lastly, If we consider all these works, each  
 of them apart so marvelous, their number  
 incomprehensible, their extent prodigious,  
 their order so exquisite, all, I say, derived  
 from one mind, a single agent, how wonder-  
 ful is he! All the beauties shared among the  
 numberless beings in heaven and earth, and  
 the harmony of the whole, are the effects of  
 his skill and contrivance, and all the scattered  
 rays of understanding which in different de-  
 grees




grees are to be found in the several orders of SER M.  
intelligent creatures, are emanations from X.  
this one pure eternal fountain of intellectual  
light; can the human heart be indifferent to  
such a being? No surely, the attentive un-  
prejudiced mind will find a respect to him a-  
rise in it which is unparallel'd in the whole  
compass of its affections, as the dignity and  
excellence of the object is without any paral-  
lel. The objects which are limited, and  
which it can thoroughly comprehend, are  
not adequate to its aspiring desires, it still  
seeks something beyond them, but it loses  
itself delightfully in the contemplation of in-  
finite incomprehensible excellence, in the  
present case infinite wisdom, which necessa-  
rily attracts the highest veneration of an in-  
telligent nature.

Secondly, Another essential perfection of  
the Deity is goodness, which naturally ap-  
pears to our minds amiable, and is the object  
of love in the strictest sense; indeed without  
this, God himself could not be the complete  
object of our highest desires and most perfect  
enjoyment; for however venerable wisdom  
may appear, and the contemplation of it en-  
tertaining, it is not the only, nor the chief  
good of man; we have other affections which  
must

SERM. must have their suitable objects, and they appear in a different light from that of meer speculation, to make the mind happy. Of goodness we have a very distinct idea; every man understands by it a disposition to communicate happiness; we are conscious of some degree of it in ourselves, and we are convinced of it in others by its genuine fruits; but wherever it appears, and whenever the mind reflects upon it, it appears lovely, the object not only of approbation as some other qualities are, but of a strong affection. Let any man set against each other in his own thoughts these opposite characters, one benevolent and kind, ready to do good as far as it is in his power, and uniformly acting from that principle; the other malicious, endeavoring the destruction and misery of all within his reach, or even perfectly selfish, intent wholly on the pursuit of private enjoyment, without the least regard to the happiness of other beings, nay, distressing them in the greatest degree, and in their highest interests, if they stand in the way of his own satisfaction in any respect, and let him try if he can preserve a perfect indifference of heart towards these characters, without preferring the former to the latter. The truth is, they must be

be creatures otherwise made than we are, to whom disinterested goodness is not an object of love, and who find no pleasure in the contemplation of it.

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I shall not insist on the evidences of God's goodness; they are the same with the evidences of his being: His works have the characters of beneficence as well as of power and wisdom; and a benevolent principle, as truly as eternal power and godhead, is an invisible excellence of his nature, which *from the creation of the world is clearly seen, being understood by the things which he has made.* What an amazing variety of enjoyment belongs to the sensitive and the rational life, all derived from the divine bounty? How wonderfully is dead nature accommodated to the uses of living things? And as the supreme Being, the creator of the world, has filled it with the fruits of his liberality, that which raises our idea of this principle in him as an object of affection, is, the freeness and disinterestedness of it: Every inferior agent depending on another for the preservation of his being and for his happiness, must be supposed to need something from without, and to have particular desires which ultimately terminate in himself: But how can we conceive of any

SERM. other spring of action than benevolence in  
 X. the absolutely self-sufficient and independent  
 being? There is therefore none good but one,  
 that is God, none essentially and immutably  
 good, none besides him, who acts always solely  
 from that principle. Here is goodness in per-  
 fection, which must appear amiable to every  
 mind that bears any resemblance of it, and  
 be the subject of delightful meditation.

If these are our apprehensions concerning  
 the Deity, one can hardly conceive what  
 should stop the course of our love to him: It  
 is true, there are other parts of his character,  
 to be afterwards observed, which when com-  
 pared with our own, may damp our hopes  
 from him, and produce fear; but since even  
 imperfect kind dispositions necessarily attract  
 our affection, the idea of perfect supreme  
 goodness, abstracting from all other conside-  
 rations, would seem to be an object which  
 must have irresistible charms for the human  
 heart, and that we should not be able to  
 consider it without a sensible pleasure. It  
 may therefore justly be feared, that as some  
 men's habitual impressions of God, particu-  
 larly in their devotion, have more of a joy-  
 less awe, and servile dread, than a delightful  
 complacency, this proceeds from their mis-  
 representing

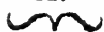
representing him to themselves, as a being who acts towards his creatures merely in the way of arbitrary dominion, appointing them to happiness or misery only because he will:

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X.  


Whereas the true notion of infinite goodness, directed in its exercise by the most perfect wisdom, and having always for its object the greatest and most extensive happiness, would inspire the mind with sentiments of ingenuous gratitude, and thereby be the best security of our sincere obedience: At the same time, there is no reason to allege that the tendency of this is to encourage a presumptuous confidence in sinners, as imagining they may go on securely in their trespasses with hopes of impunity, which can only proceed from a wretched depravity of heart, and a wrong notion of the divine goodness, as if it were a blind undistinguishing proneness to the communication of happiness; for besides that every considerate person must see that supreme goodness itself has established an inviolable connexion between virtue and felicity, the true sense of that glorious amiable perfection, even naturally and immediately begets an inward shame and remorse for having dishonored it, and some degree of hope is absolutely necessary to repentance.

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But let us consider ourselves as the particular objects of the divine favour, that whatever good we possess of any kind, whatever excellence we are conscious of in the frame of our nature, and its preeminence above other kinds of creatures in the world about us, that largeness of understanding whereby we are entertained with an infinite diversity of objects, those natural affections which yield us a great variety of pleasure, our moral capacities and improvement which are accompanied with a high sense of worth, the privileges of our condition, that provision which is made for our easy enjoyment of life, whether by the means of our own invention and industry and the assistance of our fellow creatures or without them, and the greater happiness we hope for hereafter, all these and all other good things, however conveyed, are originally owing to the bounty of God. Now, the affection of gratitude is so natural to the mind of man, that we will scarcely allow him to be reckoned one of the species who is altogether void of it; at least, to be ungrateful is universally accounted one of the most abandoned and profligate characters; but surely this principle ought to operate most vigorously towards the  
greatest

greatest beneficence, and there is none that may be compared with that which God has shewn to us. Shall we be much affected with the kindness of our fellow creatures, and disposed to make thankful acknowledgments for their favors? And shall we be insensible of that goodness to which we owe our being and our very capacity of happiness, as well as the materials of it? This is the noblest object of human affection, in which the mind, firmly persuaded and steadily contemplating it, rests fully satisfied; and though the exercise and manifestation of this divine principle towards ourselves, gives us the most convincing proof of it, and a very lively sense of its amiable excellence, yet does not the affection ultimately terminate in our own happiness, so that we should be justly said to love God for our own sakes, but in supreme Goodness itself, which must appear the most complete and worthy object of love to every intelligent and moral being whose judgment is not misled by prejudices or inattention, and which is not deeply corrupted in its moral affections.

Thirdly, we may consider the intire moral character of the Deity. All his moral attributes may be summed up in goodness,

SERM.

X.  


which is probably the justest way we can conceive of them as active principles in him. Perhaps in inferior characters benevolence may be rightly called the sum of virtue, but of the supreme independent being we cannot think more becomingly than that this solely is the spring of his actions ; yet considering the variety of its exercise according to the different condition of rational creatures, and how variously individuals are affected with those very measures which they steddily pursue as their great end the universal good, hence arises a diversity in our conceptions concerning that most simple uniform principle which is without variableness or shadow of turning. We know how to distinguish in imperfect human characters between the righteous and the good ; the last is the finishing quality, yet others are necessary ; and applying this to God, we have somewhat different notions of his goodness abstractly considered, and of the rectitude or holiness of his nature, his justice, and his truth, all which in conjunction with unchangeable goodness make up his true moral character, and are the intire object of our affection.

Now




Now, let any man calmly consider how his mind is affected towards these qualities in a limited degree of perfection; let him try what a difference his heart naturally makes between the generous patriot, the faithful friend, the inflexibly righteous judge, the kind benefactor, and the directly opposite characters as they are represented in history: Whether the one does not necessarily attract his veneration and esteem, and the other beget his contempt and aversion, tho' they are supposed to be at the remotest distance from his personal knowledge, and without a possibility of having any effect on his own interest. Let him place these contrary objects in a nearer point of view, applying the characters so far as they may be justly applied, within his particular acquaintance (for the condition of the world is not at any time either so good or so bad, but that this distinction is manifest) still it will evidently appear that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour, and that unblemished integrity, with all the public and private virtues, command a peculiar respect, shining through all the obscurity which superstition and a party spirit have been able to throw upon them, and still as the moral character

SERM. racter rises in perfection, our esteem for it  
 X. proportionably increaseth.



But let us suppose a being of the most perfect rectitude, goodness, and all other moral excellencies, in the nearest situation, and most intimately related to ourselves; that there is a constant intercourse between him and us, we have daily opportunities of observing his conduct, the manifestations of his amiable attributes, and on the other hand, our behavior is continually in his view; that we have received innumerable benefits, indeed our all from his bounty, and constantly depend upon him for every thing we need; that he is our supreme immediate governor, and that our present and future state, with all the changes in them, are absolutely under his disposal; surely, we cannot doubt but this being is the proper object of our highest affection: And if far inferior degrees of moral goodness in our fellow-creatures, necessarily attract veneration and esteem, even though beheld at a distance, and our interest is not concerned in the effects of it, such absolute perfection placed in the strongest point of light, being exerted upon ourselves, must raise in every attentive mind a superlative reverence and love.

But

But let us observe the natural workings of S E R M.  
the human heart towards such a perfect mo- X.  
ral character, so manifested, and falling   
within our knowledge, whereby we shall  
understand the genuin operations of the love  
of God, and be able to discern them in our  
own minds. First, it is accompanied with  
a desire of imitation. Since we ourselves are  
indued with a moral capacity, it seems to be  
utterly inconsistent, and what human nature  
is not capable of, that moral excellence should  
be an object of affectionate esteem, yet with-  
out a desire of resembling it. Let any man  
fix his attention to the amiable ideas of ho-  
nesty, justice, mercy, and fidelity, as ex-  
emplified in a particular moral agent, well  
known to him, and try whether he does not  
find secret earnest wishes in his own soul,  
that he were possessed of the same qualities?  
Indeed this principle seems to have a very  
great influence on the generality of mankind,  
whose tempers and behavior are in a great  
measure formed by example, never without  
the appearance of some moral species to re-  
commend it; and it is the great practical  
principle of religion; for according to men's  
notions of the Deity, so are their dispositions  
and their moral conduct; of which the his-  
tory

SERM. tory of all ages, and all religions, afford us  
 X. very plain instances. Just sentiments concerning the supreme being, as perfectly holy, righteous, and good, naturally tend to produce, and when seriously considered with hearty and pure affection, actually have produced the like tempers and manners in men, carrying human virtue to its greatest height of perfection ; whereas the erroneous opinions of many concerning the dispositions of their Gods, still retaining an idea of their dominion, have, above all things, corrupted their morals by the desire of imitation, and added the strongest sanction to their vices. Such is the force and the natural operation of love to moral agents, those especially who are supposed to be in a superior condition, and above all, the acknowledged object of religious respect. And by this clear evidence we may try the sincerity of our professed love to the true God, nor can any attentive mind that would not wilfully deceive itself, beat a loss in judging by these plain scripture rules, \* *Be ye followers of God as dear children. || And if ye call on the father, who without respect of persons judgeth all men, be ye holy in all manner of conversation, as he who hath called you is holy.*

\* Eph. v. 1.

|| 1 Pet. i. 17—15.

Secondly, sincere love to the Deity, considered SER W.  
as a being of the most perfect moral character, X.  
with whom we have to do in such a variety of  
important relations, and in whose presence  
we are continually, is always accompanied  
with an earnest desire of his approbation.

If we look carefully into our own hearts,  
we shall find that this never is, nor can be  
separated from an affectionate esteem; and  
that the love of any person naturally directs  
us to form our conduct to his liking, and  
make it our constant study to please him. So  
it is in inferior instances; children make it  
their principal endeavor to please their pa-  
rents, servants their masters, and subjects  
their sovereigns; not only so, but they who  
live together upon terms of the most perfect  
equality, are determined by their social af-  
fections, to render themselves agreeable to  
each other. It is thus that the desire of ho-  
nor, and the fear of disgrace, powerful prin-  
ciples of action in the human nature, are to  
be accounted for: Our mutual affections  
strongly engage us to seek mutual esteem, and  
while we love mankind, it is impossible to  
be wholly indifferent whether we have their  
approbation or not. But as this principle  
makes a distinction among men, for a well-  
disposed

SER M. disposed mind values the approbation of others in proportion to their wisdom and virtue, so it operates in the same manner towards beings of different orders. Intelligent agents of other species are the objects of our esteem as well as mankind, and if we suppose ourselves under their observation, it will naturally be our desire to approve our conduct to them according to the degree of their apprehended wisdom and superior moral excellence; especially the sincere love of that being who is so intimately present with us as to know the secrets of our hearts, and who is unparallel'd in all moral perfections, our gracious father, guardian, and governor, will determine us to make it the principal aim of our lives, and of all our deliberate designs and actions, that we may be approved of him. If therefore God has made his will known to us, if he has directed us after what manner we shall act so as to please him, our obedience is the natural expression of our love to him, and in vain shall we pretend to have that affection in our hearts, while we do not keep his commandments: But every man has the work of the divine law written in his heart: By a fair and unprejudiced attention to the first dictates of his own mind upon every

very

very question relating to his moral conduct, SERM.  
without entering into perplexing debates, X.  
which generally take their rise from some degree of inward dishonesty, and tend to error rather than the knowledge of the truth, he knows what will be acceptable to his great ruler and judge, so far as to assure his heart, and have confidence towards him; which by the unalterable appointment of supreme goodness is the genuine result of integrity in all good affections, comprehended in loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.

The same practical principle of love to God, which is manifested by obedience to his precepts as its inseparable effect, will also produce an absolute submission to the appointments of his providence, with intire confidence in him. For if we have habitually upon our minds an affectionate sense of his supreme dominion, exercised with the most perfect wisdom, and constantly and invariably pursuing, as its chief end, the greatest good, what can follow more naturally than that we should be satisfied in all events, and wholly resigned to his will? These two, a sincere uniform disposition exerted in practice to keep his commandments, and a chearful unrepining

SERM. repining submission to his providence, constitute that temper of mind in which true  
 X. piety consists, and which is the perpetual  
 source of inward serenity and joy ; so far as we deviate from them, and are conscious of rebellious inclinations and of unsubmitive discontent, misgiving fears arise in our minds of his disapprobation ; because then it appears that we are not made perfect in love, for love made perfect by the fruits of obedience and resignation, only, *casteth out fear*.

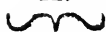
The supreme Being, whose glorious character justly claims our highest affection and most devout regards, is not indeed intuitively discerned by us, he is not the immediate object either of our external or internal senses. \* Behold (says Job) *I go forward but he is not there, (visible) and backward, but I cannot perceive him, on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him, he hideth himself on the right hand that I cannot see him.* It is by our reason we are convinced of his existence and his perfections ; but if we are thoroughly convinced, and if his being, as he is in himself absolutely perfect, righteous, and good, be the real object of our understandings, nature directs

\* Job xxiii. 8, 9.



the exercise of our affections to him, which SERM.  
do not wholly depend on our manner of X.  
apprehending their objects, but our perswa-  
sion concerning the reality of them. Suppose a person of eminent worth in a situation remote from our acquaintance, and we have no other knowledge of his being and virtues than we have of other distant facts, this character will attract our veneration, tho' it may not affect our minds so sensibly as immediate conversation would do; and suppose us to have only rational, not sensible evidence, that a friend is so near as to remark our words and actions, we should surely have a regard to his presence suitable to our esteem of his character: In like manner, if we believe that the invisible God is intimately present with us, that in him we live and move and have our being, and that he is acquainted, not only with our outward actions, but our most secret thoughts, what can be more rational than that we should form our conduct with an eye to his approbation? That we should *walk before him*, (as the scripture expresses a religious course of life) and be *perfect*, that is, sincerely righteous and good as *he is*; this, one would think, must be inseparable from a firm persuasion,

SERM. swasion, and a high esteem of his absolutely  
 X. perfect moral character.



There may be, and very probably will be an intirely different manner of apprehending the divine Being and perfections in the future state. There is no difficulty in conceiving that the human mind may have faculties and ways of perceiving objects wholly new, and of which we can now form no idea, as we know that various intelligent creatures are indued with various capacities, whereby are conveyed to them ideas peculiar to themselves. Why may we not suppose that the supreme Being himself, and his glorious attributes, shall be the immediate object of the mind's intuition, discerned not by the distant and unaffecting way of reasoning from effects to their causes, but as clearly and directly as we now perceive the objects of sense, or even our own powers and operations; which the sacred writers describe by *seeing him face to face*, and *knowing as we are known*, and illustrate the superior excellence of it above our present manner of conceiving the sublime subject, by an allusion to the difference between the knowledge of children and of grown men. The affections then will operate according to the clearer  
 views

views of the understanding, in a manner of S E R M.  
which we have not now a distinct notion ; X.  
but since we find by experience that sensible  
things, low as they are in their nature, and  
of little importance to the main ends of our  
being, yet do by their immediate presence,  
and the strong impression they make upon  
our minds, excite vehement desires, and raise  
sensations of pleasure, which the cool and ra-  
tional consideration of the same objects could  
never produce ; and moral qualities, even im-  
perfect in their kind, and but imperfectly un-  
derstood, yet attract very intense affection,  
and are contemplated with great delight ; we  
must conclude that infinite power, wisdom,  
and goodness, in conjunction, which gave  
birth to the universe, and is the sole cause of  
all created being, and all felicity, seen not  
darkly and through a glass, but shining upon  
the soul in its full unclouded splendor, will  
fill it with joy unspeakable and full of glory,  
be the adequate object of its highest affections,  
the center of rest, its last end, and most com-  
plete happiness.

In the mean time, obscure knowledge,  
cold and languid affections, and imperfect  
enjoyment, belong to our present state of pro-  
bation and discipline, through which we are

SERM.

X.  


passing to a more exalted condition of existence: Our business therefore is, without repining at the appointments of providence, to improve the capacities and advantages we now enjoy, so as the proper end of them may be attained. Particularly, since our knowledge of God is not by intuition, but by reflection and reasoning, which are the proper exercises of our own powers, we ought to employ ourselves actively in them. We know that the mind can turn its thoughts and attention to particular objects, and use other means which by observation and experience appear conducive to its improvement in the knowledge of them: In the present case, this seems to be the principal duty which the supreme Being requires of us. For since by the constitution of our nature, we have affections which will of themselves arise towards him when known, and since we are endued with a capacity, and furnished with the means of knowing, rather than with the actual knowledge of him, the most obvious obligation on creatures in such a state, and the most important part of their trial is, to improve that capacity by deliberate attention and reasoning, and to apply themselves diligently to the use of those means.

It

It follows, that the exercises of sincere piety, <sup>S E R M.</sup>  
all summ'd up in the love of God, are al- <sup>X.</sup>  
ways proportionable to our clear and distinct  
perceptions of his nature and attributes, in  
a rational way, and therefore it is necessary  
to religion that we preserve the free and un-  
disturbed use of our intellectual powers. Our  
affections to other objects are excited by sense  
without consideration ; the imagination,  
which often misleads the judgment, height-  
ens their fervor, and the passions which vio-  
lently agitate the soul, and always need to  
be restrained rather than inflamed, seem, in  
their original intention, and within their pro-  
per bounds, rather designed to serve the pur-  
poses of the animal life, and our condition  
in this world, than the sublime exercises of  
the mind, and the highest ends of our being :  
But true devotion, which is wholly founded  
in the understanding, always keeps pace with  
its calm and deliberate exercise, and the rule  
by which we ought to judge of its sincerity,  
is not extatic rapture and vehement emotion  
of mind, but a constant resignation to the  
will of God, and a steady purpose of approv-  
ing ourselves to him in the whole course of  
our actions ; *for this is the love of God, that  
we keep his commandments.*

# S E R M O N XI.

Of Trust in God, and Praying  
to him.

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Pſalm lxii. 8.

*Trust in him at all Times ye People, pour out  
your Heart before him.*

SERM.  
XI.

**A**S all the creatures derive their being, and whatever degree of power, perfection, and happiness they possess, from the goodness of God, the sole principle which, we can conceive, could determine him, infinitely perfect and self sufficient, to create any thing ; so the continuance of their being, and every degree of created power, perfection and happiness, depends solely on his good pleasure ; for it is impossible that such an effect should not depend absolutely on the cause ; that any thing which exists merely by the will of another, should not exist just so long as, and cease to exist when-  
ever

ever that other pleases, and that all the cir-  
cumstances of its condition, ordered by his  
free appointment, should not be always sub-  
ject to his disposal. The rational creatures

S E R M.  
XI.

whom God has indued with a capacity of discerning this, will find that as, when they seriously and deliberately attend to it, the affection of gratitude will naturally arise in their minds for the favors they have received, so with respect to futurity, to which they cannot help looking with an earnest and solicitous expectation, they have no solid ground of inward tranquility and hope but in an affectionate reliance on the same immutable divine bounty, to which they owe their being and all the good already in their possession. This then, as well as love, is an eminent branch of that natural homage which intelligent creatures owe to the Deity. Especially we who find ourselves in an imperfect and indigent state, having weaknesses in every part of our constitution, frail bodies and feeble minds, narrow understandings, vexatious desires, and perplexing fears, who are always liable to changes, to pains and troubles of various kinds, and the whole of our condition here but a kind of infancy of being, naturally capable of being raised to a much

SERM. higher degree of perfection hereafter, and  
 XI. capable likewise of a change for the worse,  
 when this state of probation and discipline is over, for of that future existence there is at least a high probability, which must sensibly affect an attentive mind, we, I say, who find ourselves in this situation, whose all is in God's hands, and depends on his pleasure, who have so little in actual possession, and so much in prospect, we especially, live by faith in God, and it is a most important part of our duty, as well as the only sure foundation of inward peace and security of mind, to *trust in him at all times.*

I will endeavor in this discourse to explain confidence in God, by shewing the true principles on which it rests, together with the sentiments and dispositions imported in it; and then, I will consider what the Psalmist recommends in pursuance of it, namely, pouring out our hearts before him, or praying to him.

To trust in any person or intelligent agent, is to expect good from his benevolence or kind affections; in order to which there must not only be a persuasion of his good dispositions, but of his power as superior to ours, at least as sufficient for effecting  
 some-



something to our advantage, which we SERM. could not effect without him, and of his XI. knowledge and wisdom extending to the affairs wherein we trust him. The least attention will satisfy us that the knowledge of all these qualifications in the agent, is necessary to lay a foundation for our confidence. If a person in power is ill disposed towards us, we dread him in proportion to the apprehensions we have of his power; if he is indifferent, there may be fear but very little hope; if we are secure of any one's good will, but believe him to be weak or ignorant, this may give some pleasure, yet no expectation of advantage; but kindness in conjunction with ability and wisdom make the complete character which is the object of confidence. Now all these properties belong to the Deity in an infinite degree of perfection; as with the *Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength*, a power extending to the utmost bounds of possibility, to do in heaven and earth whatsoever pleases him; and unlimited knowledge comprehending all things, with all their circumstances and relations, nay, and all future events; so *he is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* That variety of happiness

SFRM. which there is in the world, and can be attributed to no other cause than his good pleasure, abundantly proves this; there is provision made for all the kinds of living creatures which we see in the earth, the air, and the waters; their infinitely various necessities are supplied, and they have enjoyments suitable to their several capacities and desires; the human constitution carries the plainest marks of its author's goodness, and so does the daily care which providence takes of mankind; these things must convince every considerate mind that the maker and disposer of all things is a most benevolent Being, indeed, deserves to be called supreme goodness itself. This being the general and most evidently demonstrated character of the Deity, it must be manifested towards every proper object, that is, all who need and are capable of receiving any good from him; for it is utterly unworthy of, and inconsistent with supreme goodness, to be partial or capricious in its exercise, to be beneficent to one, or to some, and not to others, who are in parallel circumstances of want, and equally capable of receiving. Every man who seriously reflects on the whole of his own state, will find himself such a monument of the divine liber-

liberality and paternal care, that he will be SERM.  
 thereby encouraged to depend on the bounty XI.  
 of providence for the future. The Apostle

*Peter* therefore, justly exhorts christians in a suffering condition, \* *to commit the keeping of their souls to God as unto a faithful creator*; his having made us, not we our selves, to which nothing can be supposed to have moved him but his own goodness, is a reasonable foundation of hope in him, for *he has a desire to the work of his hands*.

But the goodness of God extending to all his creatures, and being so exercised towards every one, as not to neglect any; the whole system is at once the object of his care, which comprehending a vast variety of individuals, the good of many, and indeed of the whole, may be attended with particular inconveniencies to some. This, we know, is in fact the case of human governments, the end of which being the benefit of intire societies put under their care, and of every single subject so far only as it is consistent with that, they necessarily and laudably pursue the measures which tend to the common safety, though the interfering interests of a few may suffer by them. Who would reproach a prince for

\* 1 Peter iv. 19.

destroying

SERM. destroying the properties or the lives of a few  
 XI. subjects, suppose rebels or traytors, when  
 the interest of the whole kingdom indispen-  
 sably requires it ? This is so far from being  
 any just ground of impeaching his goodness,  
 that goodness itself, directed by wisdom, is  
 the very motive to it. From this low and  
 imperfect image we may take our rise to the  
 consideration of the divine universal govern-  
 ment, the true character whereof is supreme  
 goodness, which being conducted by the  
 most perfect wisdom, steddily and constant-  
 ly pursues as its end the good of the whole,  
 that is, the universal happiness of intelligent  
 beings ; though in a perfect consistency with  
 that, nay, as absolutely necessary to it, some  
 individuals may suffer. It is impossible in-  
 deed for a finite understanding to discern all  
 the relations of things, and to see their re-  
 moteſt iſſues, which are fully known to infi-  
 nite wiſdom, and therefore it is impossible  
 for us to comprehend the whole of the divine  
 adminiſtration, and to diſcern the goodness  
 of it in ſome particular inſtances which to  
 our narrow minds may have a contrary ap-  
 pearance, when ſome of his creatures ſuffer  
 by his appointment ; but this does not pro-  
 ceed from a defect of benevolence towards  
 any

any of them, but from the abundance of it SERM.  
towards the whole, which always intends, XI.  
and being joyned with infinite power and  
wisdom, irresistibly effects the most extensive  
good. For I think it must appear a most e-  
vident truth, that a Being who is infinitely  
good, at the same time so powerful as to do  
whatever he pleases, nothing can resist him,  
and so wise as to have all possible connexions,  
dependencies, and events of things at once  
in his view, that, I say, such a being always  
does what is best in the whole.

This is the first principle upon which our  
trusting in God rests, that he is infinitely  
good, wise, and powerful, and his whole  
conduct is suitable to that character, that is,  
he always pursues, as the end of his actions,  
the greatest absolute good; and the senti-  
ments and dispositions agreeable to it which  
our confidence in him imports, are, that our  
minds should be fully satisfied with the di-  
vine administration, and make that good  
which is its ultimate end, the matter of our  
joyful hope. It is true, this does not ascer-  
tain to us the fulfilling and gratifying our  
own particular desires; nor is the object of  
hope, in this view, private happiness, as se-  
parated from the order of the world and  
the

SERM. the common good of intelligent beings;  
 XI. yet this, the greatest good, is the fit ob-  
 ject of earnest desire, and the prospect of  
 it gives pleasure, with a high esteem of the  
 person by whom it is accomplished, which  
 are the principal affections included in trust,  
 as we are now considering it. Would not  
 a wise and good man earnestly desire, and  
 joyfully hope for the common safety and hap-  
 piness of his country, and make the person  
 from whose favor and prudence it was to be  
 expected, the object of his trust, though his  
 own private interest were only attended to  
 in subordination to the public utility: For  
 there are public affections planted in the hu-  
 man mind, as well as self-love, and it is not  
 only the gratifying of the latter, but the for-  
 mer, that yields true enjoyment. Now we  
 are members not of a particular society  
 only, but of the whole moral world, of God's  
 great family in heaven and earth, and this  
 should give us the greatest delight, and we  
 ought to acquiesce in it with the highest satis-  
 faction and contentedness of mind, that he  
 is at the head of the universe, superintend-  
 ing all affairs, and directing them so, as ef-  
 fectually to promote the greatest good of the  
 intire


intire intelligent system. \* *The Lord reign-* SERM.  
*eth, let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of* XI.  
*isles be glad thereof. § The world shall be esta-*  
*blished, that it shall not be moved. || He is*  
*the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and*  
*of them that are afar off on the sea.* And if  
 he be the common confidence of all his crea-  
 tures, it can only be understood in this sense,  
 not that he takes care of every individual se-  
 parately, and independently on the rest, as  
 if it were the sole object of his attention, but  
 that having every one in the view of his all-  
 comprehending mind, he promotes the good  
 of the universal system, and communicates  
 the greatest measure of happiness to the  
 whole, which he certainly and invariably  
 does, and a well-disposed mind rejoices in it.  
 This is what our hearts, when we calmly re-  
 flect on it, must necessarily approve, as in  
 itself reasonable, and most worthy of God,  
 the wise and good governor of the world.  
 We should certainly think it becoming the  
 father of a family, or the ruler of a civil so-  
 ciety, to employ his care for the benefit of  
 the whole, and not confine it to a few favo-  
 rites, neglecting the rest; and shall we not be  
 fully satisfied with the same conduct of the

\* Psal xvii. 1.    § Psal. xciii. 1.    || Psal. lxxv. 5.  
 Deity,

SERM. Deity, the great parent of the universe. Thus  
 XI. far then, and with these dispositions, we, and  
 all reasonable creatures may and ought to  
 trust in God.

The second principle is, that in the government of his reasonable creatures, God has a regard to their moral dispositions and behavior, and that there is by his appointment a certain established connexion between happiness and virtue. He is a lover of rectitude, and hates vice, a perfectly holy being himself, free from every kind and degree of moral evil, *a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he*, and he approves righteousness and goodness wherever it is found, and will reward it, but wickedness is an abomination to him. I will not now enter on the proof of a truth, which has been before insisted on, and must appear so evident to every man who has employed his mind in the consideration of it, and which by all who have any regard to religion, must be acknowledged to be its main foundation. There may be difference of opinions concerning this point, if we confine our thoughts to the present state of things, and it may be a question, whether in this world virtue be its own reward? Though, I think, even in that  
 view,



view, the evidence is on the side of virtue, SERM.  
 and God has not in any part of his admini- XI.  
 stration left himself without witness of its   
 excellency and eligibleness, and of his ap-  
 proving it; but if we take in the whole of  
 men's existence, and of the divine govern-  
 ment over them, all that are not atheists  
 must agree, that to be good is the sure way  
 to be happy, and that, sooner or later, God  
 will reward all those that diligently seek  
 him. Indeed, as our state here is imperfect  
 in virtue, so it is in happiness; not that in  
 all respects there is between these two an ex-  
 act proportion, that is, we do not find in  
 experience, that the outward condition of  
 men is easy and prosperous according to the  
 measure of their real worth; the contrary is  
 apparent; for sometimes, as the prophet  
 speaks, \* *the proud are called happy, yea they  
 that work wickedness are set up, yea they that  
 tempt God are even delivered*; which often  
 proves a snare to bad men, and a strong  
 temptation to the good. But, not to speak  
 of the counterbalance on the side of inno-  
 cence and integrity in inward self-enjoyment  
 and the approbation of conscience, a greater  
 and more substantial felicity than any out-

\* Mal. iii. 15.

SERM. ward state in this world can afford, and such  
 XI. *peace is only the effect of righteousness, and the fruit of it is quietness and assurance for ever ;*  
 besides this, I say, it is to be considered, that the external state of things here, as irregular as it seems to be, and unfavorable to virtue, is yet under the direction of divine providence ; God does not leave the world to chance, or to the arbitrary will of inferior agents ; he continually presides over them all, and by his own interposition orders the whole series of events, adjusting them so as to answer the ends of his moral government. The true answer, therefore, to all the difficulties arising from the dispensations of providence, and the objections taken from the prosperity of the wicked and the calamities of good men, against the equity and goodness of the divine administration, its impartial regard to virtue, and therefore against the reasonableness of trusting in the Lord at all times, the answer, I say, is furnished by these considerations, that this is a state of probation ; that it is in love God chastens his children, and for their profit ; that he appoints afflictions and trials to men, particularly to his most faithful servants, to humble and prove them, and do them good in their  
 latter

latter end; the most illustrious exercise of S E R M.  
virtue is occasioned by these trials, and so XI.  
good is brought out of evil, to the praise of  
the divine goodness and wisdom; that God  
very often interposes by his providence to de-  
liver the righteous out of their troubles, and  
at length he will deliver them out of them  
all; and therefore, finally, that the partial  
and temporary sufferings of good men are no  
argument against God's having a regard, in  
his government, to the natural dispositions and  
behavior of his reasonable creatures, and his  
having established a connexion between hap-  
piness and virtue.

Hence it follows, that with respect to our-  
selves and our own happiness, our confidence  
in God ought to be directed by a regard to  
his character as the wise moral governor of  
the world, and therefore implies a conformity  
to his laws; we may entertain high expecta-  
tions from his goodness, and rely upon his  
favor, only upon condition of the sincere and  
faithful performance of our duty, and imi-  
tating his holiness. Since, by the established  
rules of his administration, the happiness of  
moral agents is inseparably connected with  
virtue, what reasonable prospect can there be  
of the former without the testimony of our

SERM. own consciences concerning our sincerity in  
 XI. the other? The sacred writers, agreeable to  
 the first principles of natural religion, thus  
 limit our trust in God; they represent it as  
 having a necessary connexion with doing  
 good; they exhort them *that fear the Lord,*  
*to trust in him, for he is their help and shield;*  
*and him that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth*  
*the voice of his servant, though he walk in*  
*darkness and hath no light, yet to trust in the*  
*name of the Lord, and to stay upon his God.*  
 The deepest distress, and most dismal con-  
 juncture of afflicting circumstances ought  
 not to weaken our confidence in the divine  
 mercy, provided always that our minds be  
 supported by an inward consciousness of in-  
 tegrity; but when the hearts of men reproach  
 them for their crimes, and they have the  
 galling remembrance of guilt unrepented of,  
 this naturally produces distrust; in this case  
 to expect the approbation of God, and such  
 favor as he shews to his sincere servants, is  
 presumptuously to affront the judge of the  
 whole earth, as supposing him not to do  
 right; that he is a party to the wickedness  
 of his creatures, and will indulge them in it.  
 Which is not to be understood in so strict  
 a sense, as if a consciousness of the least  
 moral

moral imperfection did destroy our hope in SERM.  
 God : For if he should enter judgment with XI.  
 his servants, and strictly mark all their fail-  
 ures, no man living could be justified in his  
 sight ; but when our hearts do not condemn  
 us for wilfully indulging ourselves in any  
 evil way, or for any deliberate transgression  
 of God's law unrepented of and unreformed,  
 or *committing sin so as to be the servants of*  
*sin* ; on the contrary, they witness an habi-  
 tual sincerity of intention and integrity of  
 life, though not without some defects in the  
 performance of our duty, and some infirmi-  
 ties which strictly speaking may be called  
 sinful, but not to be wholly avoided by any  
 mortal in this imperfect state, and we are al-  
 ways watching against them, and endeavor-  
 ing to amend them, then we have confidence  
 towards God, believing that as the righteous  
 and good judge, he will make a difference  
 between such a character, and impenitent  
 workers of iniquity, of which christianity  
 gives us a full and express assurance.

If men will form their desires and hopes  
 of happiness wholly by sense, and by the  
 present external appearance of things, the  
 favor of God will be little in their esteem,  
 far from being acknowledged a sufficient

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portion; for as he is himself invisible, the distinguishing effects of his loving kindness are not the object of outward observation; but to the mind which believes his being, and that he is a rewarder of all them that diligently seek him, things appear in a quite different light: There is an important reality in the divine approbation which will some time or other produce great and substantial effects, consummating the felicity of the human nature; and the expectation of them is a mighty support to the mind against present griefs and fears. For inferior enjoyments in this life, of which there is a great variety, all of them the fruits of the divine bounty, but dispensed promiscuously to outward appearance, yet under the direction of wise providence, none of them ascertained to particular persons, nor annexed to any peculiar moral character, for them, I say, a religious confidence ought always to be accompanied with submission to the sovereign and gracious will of God; for this reason, because we *know not what is good for us all the days of this vain life which passeth as a shadow*; but he is the perfect judge, and therefore it should be referred intirely to him; which the heart conscious of its own integrity

rity may do with full satisfaction, secure of S E R M.  
that truth which the *Psalmist* declares, \* *that* XI.

*the Lord God is a sun and shield, the Lord will give grace and glory, no good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly.*

Upon which he adds, in the following words, *O Lord of hosts blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.* No man can rationally assure himself of particular future events in this world (which depend on the sovereign counsels of God and are known only to him) of particular enjoyments to be obtained, or dangers to be avoided, because we cannot be sure that such particular events are for the best, or have a necessary connexion with our own greatest happiness, which is all that our confidence ought regularly to terminate upon. It is enough † *that there is no want to them that fear God, the young lions lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not lack any good thing,* that is, which God infinitely wise, as well as kind and compassionate, knows to be good for them, and necessary to their greatest happiness.

The regular and religious confidence in God which I have explained, ought to have, and indeed is naturally apt to produce this

\* Psal. lxxxiv. 11, 12.

† Psal. xxxiv. 9, 10.

SERM. effect in the minds of good men, to establish  
 XI. them, and preserve an inward tranquillity  
 and peace, free from those vexing disquieting passions, those tormenting and overwhelming *sorrows of the world that work death*, and those dispiriting fears and discouragements which are the most unhappy as well as undutiful state we can be in; and therefore not only with respect to the other world, when the full reward shall be enjoyed, and the end of faith completely obtained, which is the salvation of the soul, but even with respect to this life, they may be pronounced truly blessed who put their trust in God; for having a firm well-grounded persuasion of all the great principles of religion, particularly of the perfect felicity reserved for the righteous hereafter, which they themselves hope for from the testimony of their own consciences concerning their sincerity; and acquiescing with pleasure in that order and disposition of things which the wise and good governor of the world has appointed as the best, however uneasy some events may be to themselves for a time, they enjoy stable equanimity in all the vicissitudes of time, and possess their souls in patience without outrageous impotent



tent anger or gnawing discontent. This SERM.  
 happy fruit of trusting in God, the prophet XI.

*Isaiab mentions : \* Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.* And thus the devout *Psalmist* reasons with himself against the immoderate griefs and the distracting fears of his own mind : § *Why art thou cast down, O my soul, why art thou disquieted in me ? Hope thou in God, for thou shalt yet praise him who is the health of thy countenance and thy God.* Or, as the same pious author more generally speaks concerning the good man : || *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord, his heart is established, surely he shall not be moved for ever.*

It remains now only, to the end we may see the full effect of confidence in God, that we consider the influence which it has upon the principles of human action. Considering the life of man as a pursuit of his interest, not yet fully possessed or secured; which is a very comprehensive, I do not say, a complete view of it ; there must be some evidence of futurity to excite and direct the active principles in our nature ; every one

\* Isa. xxvi. 3. § Psal. xlii. 5, 11. || Psal. cxii. 10.

SERM. knows by experience, that it is this, in some  
XI. degree or other, which does set him at work,  
and engage his affections. Now, abstracting from the notion of ruling intelligence in the world, disposing all events, there seems to arise some probability from the common established course of things, or what we usually call the general laws of nature, such as the interchangeable variation of the seasons, the fertility of the earth, the ordinary necessities and conveniencies of mankind provided for by human art and industry, the maxims whereby they conduct themselves towards each other, founded on social affections, equity, fidelity, and benevolence, principles which have a considerable influence on their mutual communication, though the operation of them is but imperfect in its degree, and not universal; upon which observations of fact, and others of a parallel nature, men form their particular scheme, every one for his own interest; but the probability is often very low. This general course of things, as applied by particular persons in the direction of their measures, being subject to great uncertainties, and especially the continuance of life, on which they all depend; yet it is sufficient to animate men in their pursuits,  
it

it actually does so, and reasonably, since no higher evidence can be attained. But if we alter the supposition, and consider a benevolent being, infinitely powerful, and perfectly wise, presiding over the world and directing its course, whose care extends to every individual creature, and who orders the minutest circumstances of things, with all the consequences of them, there arises in the mind an affectionate confidence, not a certainty with respect to particular events which God has reserved to himself, giving us no other evidence than the probability already mentioned; but it adds cheerfulness and vigor to the heart in acting, as well as fills it with reverence, to know that we are under the observation and the guidance of a perfectly righteous, wise and good being, who orders all things for the best in the whole, and makes all things work together for good to them that love him. As to the hopes of men engaged in the affairs of life, the object of which hope is future good, we must distinguish between the immediate view, that is, the expectation of success directly aimed at by the means used, suppose the acquisition of riches, honor, or any other temporal advantage, we must, I say, distinguish between this and the ultimate design,

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design, which is happiness ; the former rests on the one common foundation of prudence and industry, \*as *Solomon* observes, *all things here come alike to all*, they have no necessary connexion with any moral character, nor are ascertained by trusting in the Lord : *There is one event to the righteous and the wicked*. But the other more remote intention of happiness in general, which every man aims at, and which does not depend on particular events, is sure only to them who sincerely fear God, who keep his commandments, and confidently rely on his goodness.

I proceed now to consider the duty of prayer, which being principally intended as an expression of confidence in God, the explication of it will be a proper sequel of what has been already said. All nations of men whom God has made to dwell upon the earth, have constantly agreed in acknowledging that he is to be worshipped, and by the same general consent, prayer appears to be one act of homage which the indigent and frail condition of human nature has always directed them to pay him; though many of them, having grossly erred in their notions of the Deity and his attributes, have dishonoured in-

\* Ecc. ix. 2.

stead of glorifying him by their pretended S E R M.  
services, which were unworthy of reason- XI.

able creatures to present, and unworthy of a pure spirit, the supreme infinitely powerful, wise, and good governor of the world, to accept; particularly, there have been great mistakes concerning the nature and design of prayer, and the right manner of performing it, insomuch that this important part of worship has been turned, not only into a mere insignificancy, but a perfect absurdity, by a mixture of ridiculous and immoral rites, at least tending to impiety, vice, and uncharitableness, and by a most stupid inattention to the sentiments, the qualifications, and dispositions of mind, with which our petitions should be address'd to the supreme Being; which may be too plainly discerned even among some of those who have enjoyed the best opportunities of instruction. It may therefore be necessary to observe,

First, that the intention of prayer is not to inform God of any thing he was supposed to be before unacquainted with, which is the professed design of petitions to men. It is no affront to the understanding of the wisest mortal to avow the intention of representing to him what he did not know, since a finite mind

SERM. mind cannot possibly comprehend all things ;  
 XI. and particularly, the wants and desires of  
 men are secrets in their own hearts which no  
 one knows but *the spirit of man which is  
 within him* until they are expressed. But  
 God is omniscient, his understanding is infi-  
 nite, he searcheth the hearts and tries the  
 reins of the children of men, he is thorough-  
 ly acquainted with all our ways, \* *not a word  
 can be in our tongue but he knows it alto-  
 gether, yea he understands our thoughts afar  
 off.* Let it never be imagined then, that we  
 pretend by prayer to tell God what was un-  
 known to him, or to engage his attention.  
 Such stupid notions the worshippers of idols  
 may have, and the prophet *Elijah* in an ele-  
 gant sarcastic way upbraids the priests of  
*Baal* with them, † *cry aloud, for he is a  
 God, either he is pursuing, or in a journey, or  
 peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked.*  
 One cannot conceive upon what other  
 grounds than such absurd fancies of the  
 Deity, the heathens used their foolish rites  
 of invocation and their vain repetitions.  
 The blessed author of christianity insinuates  
 this, in warning his disciples against imitating  
 the manner of the heathens when they

\* Psal. cxxxix.

† 1 Kings xviii. 27.

pray, for says he, \* *they think they shall be* SERM.  
*heard for much speaking*; they have some XI.

such weak and irrational imagination, as if the Deity were to be roused out of a careless inattention, or called off from other affairs by loud cries and many words. So would not our Saviour have his followers to think concerning the God and Father whom they worship, and therefore not to pray with any such intention: He adds in the verse immediately following, *be not ye like unto them*; † let not the labour of your lips in a multiplicity of expressions, or the same often repeated, be your study, or the business of your prayers, as if you were to inform God of what he did not know, or persuade him and prevail upon him to take notice of you which without that kind of importunity he would not do, for your Father knoweth what you have need of before you ask him. We ought to have it expressly in our consideration when we pray, that God already knows all our wants, every circumstance in our condition, and every thought in our hearts.

Secondly, Is it the design of prayer to move the goodness of God, in this sense, to

\* Matth. vi. 7.

† Matth. vi. 8.

SERM. excite in him a compassion for us, or any of  
 XI. his creatures, which he had not before, and  
 so induce him to alter his counsels, and do  
 in compliance with our requests what otherwise he was not inclined to? This is the end, and often the event of earnest and importunate applications to men; their bowels are moved by intreaties, and tender compassion raised by an affectionate representation of a pitiable object; they are disposed to confer benefits to which they had no previous inclination, or prevailed with to abate of their severity against an offender, and instead of the resentment which they had conceived, to entertain sentiments of kindness. But tho' this be in men not only innocent but honest and praise worthy, yet it implies an imperfection, which let it be far from us to impute to the most glorious of all beings, who is absolutely perfect in his wisdom, and all the other excellencies of his nature, without variableness or shadow of turning. And tho' the common language of men, and even the scriptures represent the goodness of God in very strong expressions, by a resemblance to human pity; for it is said that *his bowels are moved*, he is *afflicted in the afflictions of his creatures*, and *his repentings are kindled*



led for them : These are figurative forms of SERM.  
speaking, not to be taken in a strict and XI.

proper sense; as if he were liable to any sudden passions or emotions of mind which attend pity in us, and to a change in his measures and his conduct by their influence, so as there should be any ground to expect such effects from prayer as there is among men, who often are induced by the supplications of others to alter their course, and take new resolutions: Known to the Lord are *all his works from the beginning, his counsel stands for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations*, being formed with perfect understanding and foresight, and not depending on variable events in time. God is indeed infinitely good, but goodness in him is not a passion, or a sudden indeliberate propensity excited by external occasions, but a calm and dispassionate principle, directed always in its exercise by the highest reason, which appears to his all comprehending mind, and therefore immutable in its measures as is the reason and fitness of things.

Hence it appears that there is a great difference between prayer to God and prayers to men, in the meaning and design of them. The very intention of the latter is to persuade  
swade

SERM. swade them to change their mind and their  
 XI. course of action; and if we were perfectly as-  
 ~~~~~sured that their purposes were fixed with  
 respect to the matter of our petitions, it  
 would be in vain to pray to them at all.  
 But prayer to God is of quite another na-  
 ture, since *he is of one mind and we cannot*  
*pretend to turn him.* It is to be understood  
 in the same manner as trusting in him, being  
 properly no more than an explicit declara-  
 tion of it; that is, it should be our principal  
 design in our prayers to express our firm  
 belief, our hearty consent, and our assured  
 hopes, that God will always do what is for  
 the best in the whole, always what is most  
 reasonable and fit to be done, and what  
 tends to the greatest good and happiness of  
 the whole system of intelligent beings, suit-  
 ably to his character, of their wise and gra-  
 cious father and ruler: And with respect to  
 the case of individual moral Agents, that he  
 will constantly and universally observe the  
 rule of connecting felicity with virtue, so  
 that in proportion as men are penitent, sin-  
 cere, pious, sober, and righteous, and chari-  
 table, they shall be happy sooner or later,  
 and in proportion to their consciousness of  
 these qualities in themselves, so is their con-  
 fidence

fidence in his favour, and they by prayer S E R M O N  
 exprefs their expectations of good from him. XI.

It is not meant, however, that our prayers should be confined to what has been now mentioned; we may descend to a great many particulars in our addreffes to God, and as the fcripture fpeaks, *\* in every thing by prayer and fupplication with thanksgiving, make our requests known to him*; but this is the general rule we fhould follow, and the design we fhould purfue, in that part of worship; which may be applied more particularly to thofe cafes wherein God has made his will known, either by the light of nature and by juft inference from his moral attributes, or by plain declarations of his word, which are intended to direct us in prayer as well as other duties: But certainly our prayers cannot be acceptable to God or fuccefsful, unlefs they be agreeable to his will; for *this is the reasonable confidence we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he heareth us, we know that we have the petitions that we defired of him.* It is by no means reasonable to think that we have an unbounded liberty to addrefs the defires which proceed from our own irregular

SERM. passions and corrupt affections as petitions to  
 XI. God, or that we can have any hopes of acceptance in doing so; nor is it to be thought too great a restraint upon us that we should be thus limited; since from the infinite perfections of God's nature, we are assured, that what he wills is not only in it self, and with respect to the intire state of things fittest to be done, in which therefore we ought to acquiesce, but best in particular for them that love him.

If it be alledged, that prayer thus explained seems to have very little meaning in it, and scarcely to answer any valuable purpose; what does it signify for us solemnly to desire that God may do what he pleases, or what his wisdom sees best and fittest, which we are sure he will do, whether we desire it or not? I think it is a very important meaning in prayer, which has been mentioned, namely, that it expresses our confidence in God, our assured expectation, with a sincere consent on our part, that he will do what is best, and by the properest and most effectual means promote the greatest good; and that he will deal with every one of his reasonable creatures according to equity, that is, goodness and wisdom, making them happy in  
 propor-

proportion to the measure of their virtue. Now, this carries in it the best sentiments we can have, and the best dispositions, the most dutiful to God, and which are the solid foundation of the truest present pleasure, and of lasting happiness hereafter. It is wise and it is useful to express these sentiments in prayer, whereby they are strengthened; and this duty, when sincerely performed, becomes an excellent means of virtue, which is its principal design. The vigorous exercise of good affections naturally tends to confirm and increase them, and a profession made in the presence of God, and solemnly addressed to him, lays the mind under a strict obligation to pursue the good inclinations and purposes it has declared. The great motives of religion and universal righteousness are taken from the consideration of God, of his perfections, of his intimate presence with us, of his providence directing all our affairs, and governing the world with the most perfect equity, and of his being the righteous judge who will render to every man according to his works. Now, all these motives are supposed to be expressly in our thoughts when we call on the name of the Lord; and indeed considering how many things occur in

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the ordinary course of human life to divert our attention from them, so that they often slip out of our thoughts, it is necessary that on some special occasions, and in a stated solemn manner, they should be brought to our remembrance, which is done by prayer. Besides, if we pray with understanding for ourselves, or for others, the principal subject and aim of our petitions will be the attainment of religious integrity, as the true glory and perfection of our nature; to have our minds formed to the love of moral rectitude and benevolence, and our ways directed to the practice of righteousness and goodness. Nothing appears so desirable to a well disposed mind; and as we are sure such desires are agreeable to the will of God, we may trust in him, that he will do whatever is necessary on his part, that we may be assisted in prosecution of them. And tho' we should in every thing make our requests known to God, and descend in our supplications to the various events and affairs of life, yet as they are all capable of being directed by divine providence to the purposes of our improvement in knowledge and religious virtue, that ought to be our principal view in our prayers concerning them; by which means such

prayers

prayers become useful for preserving our SERM. minds in a right temper; and acceptable to XI. God, because *we do not ask amiss, to consume the gifts of his bounty upon our lusts,* or for the gratification of our low and corrupt desires, but with an intention, in all events, to grow in piety and goodness, which we are assured God is well pleased with, and will promote by the means which his infinite wisdom sees fittest; and then *we know we have our petitions that we desire of him.*

What has been said on this subject contains, I think, a just and full answer to the common objection against prayer as unnecessary, because of the omniscience of God, his perfect wisdom and unalterable counsels in governing the world: The design of informing him of our wants, of affecting his mind in the same manner as the minds of men are affected with the distresses of others, and persuading him to alter his measures, are not the proper designs of prayer, and if it can serve no other, it ought to be given up as useless; but, I hope, it appears that other valuable ends are to be answered by it. It is in itself a very reasonable service, as being an intended deliberate acknowledgment of the divine perfections, power, wisdom, and good-

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goodness, in ruling the world, and an expression of our confidence in God, which is an eminent branch of piety, the foundation of our present peace, and our expectation of a happy event, whatever circumstances we may be in ; and it is an excellent means of virtue, consequently, of the highest perfection and happiness of human nature ; it tends to render us more and more the qualified objects of the divine favor, by increasing and strengthening those good qualities and dispositions to which it is annexed.

The immutability of the divine counsels does not destroy all free-agency in inferior beings, nor the proper use of their powers in order to accomplish the ends for which they were appointed. No man reasons after this manner, that because the issues of things are under the dominion of providence, therefore we need to do nothing ourselves, but abide the event of an irresistible decree ; because the fertility of the earth depends on the will of the supreme cause, therefore we need use no labor that it may yield its increase ; because there is an appointed time for man upon earth, and our days are determined, therefore all means and care on our part, for health and the preservation of life, are unnecessary.



cessary. The wisdom of God governs the S E R M.  
creatures according to the several powers and XI.

capacities he has given them; inanimate things are moved according to the direction of his sovereign all-powerful will; and the determinations which are planted in voluntary agents are as truly the means of providence for accomplishing their proper ends as the necessary motions of the other: The liberty of man in the exercise of his faculties, according to the direction of his instincts and his reason, is as necessary to the happiness and the beauty of the moral world, as the constant revolution of the heavenly orbs is to the order of the visible system. Tho' piety and virtue are practised by men freely and of their own choice, yet by the divine constitution and the unalterable nature of things, the ends of our beings and our happiness can no more be attained without them, than the vegetables of the earth can be brought to perfection without the heat of the sun. 'Tis true, God is willing to make men happy, but to their enjoyment of happiness moral qualifications in them are required, and for the want of them they are unavoidably unhappy, which qualifications depend on the exercise of their own powers. Now, if the  
necessity

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necessity of piety and virtue, of the love and fear of God, of trusting in him and doing good, if, I say, the necessity of these, notwithstanding the unchangeableness of the divine counsels and purposes, be once established, it will appear that the means of piety and virtue are, I do not say equally, but in proportion to the degree of their influence and usefulness, also necessary and fit to be used, and I have shewn that prayer is such a means. In one word, God will always do what is most fit and reasonable whether we ask it or not, indeed whether we perform any part of our duty or not; but the fitness of our obtaining his favor, and the happiness which is most suitable to our nature, depends chiefly upon our qualifications, and they are summed up in that temper and those dispositions of mind which are expressed in, and increased by fervent prayer, from a pure and upright heart, with understanding.

*F I N I S.*

