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Number

DISCOURSES

ON

the Philonians

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

OF

NATURAL RELIGION

AND THE

Christian Revelation.

BY SAMUEL BOURN.

VOLUME II.

Σοφίαν δὲ λαλῶμεν ἐν τοῖς τελείαις. I Cor. ii. 6.

Non enim temerè nec fortuitò facti & creati sumus: sed profecto fuit quædam vis, quæ generi consuleret humano: nec id gigneret, aut aleret, quod cùm exantlavisset omnes labores, tum incideret in mortis malum sempiternum: portum potius portum nobis & refugium putemus; quò utinam velis passis per-vehi liceat. CIC. Tusc. Quæst. Lib. 1.

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D I S-



DISCOURSE I.

On the Providence of GOD in the
Preservation of his living Creatures.



VOL. II.

B



P S A L M XXXVI. 6.

O Lord, thou preservest man and beast:

THE general design of this *Psalms*, is to assert the moral perfections and providence of GOD, against that disregard and contempt, which wicked men discover in their conversation and actions.

FROM observing the careless and profligate lives of some men, the *Psalmist* draws this conclusion; That *they had no fear of GOD before their eyes*, no regard to the divine government and providence: that however they might in words own GOD the maker of all things; their actions were a denial of his *righteous judgment*, his care over his creatures, and his inspection into the affairs of mankind. This he expressly

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asserts,

asserts, here and in other places, to be the true language of an immoral and vitious course: *the transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, there is no fear of GOD before his eyes.* Then follows a general character of such persons: they are negligent of GOD and abandoned to falshood and wickedness. After which, instead of directly reproving their impiety, and detecting the false ground of their vitious practices; the *Psalmist* (by an elegant Apostrophe, frequent in poetical writings, and especially proper to a Psalm or Ode) addresseth himself immediately to GOD: *Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds— Thy righteousness is like the great mountains— Thy judgments are a great deep.—O Lord, thou preservest man and beast.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the negligence and contempt, which sinners discover of the justice and mercy of GOD, and his providential regard to his creatures; notwithstanding

standing the suspicious and uneasy reflections, which may possibly arise in the minds of some good men, concerning the divine conduct and administration; yet according to the pious *Psalmist*, his universal providence, and all his moral attributes, remain perfect and unalterable. The extent of them is not abridged, nor the certainty and stability of them shaken, by the strongest efforts of human wickedness: they are high as the heavens, deep as the ocean, firm and durable as the great mountains, and extensive as the creation. And tho' the ways of God are mysterious, and his counsels and schemes above our comprehension, *as the heavens are above the earth*; tho' all his operations are conducted by a judgment profound and unfathomable, as the great depth of the sea; yet the sensible effects of his beneficence, and instances of his providence, are so many and great, so constant and universal, as to remove all just ground of distrust, and afford us rational satisfaction and confidence. So that

the children of men have the greatest reason to own his preserving goodness, to fly to his protection, and *put their trust under the shadow of his wings.* The *Psalmist* then concludes with intimating, that in the direction even of present affairs, how promiscuous and undistinguishing soever it may seem, GOD hath a peculiar regard to good and upright men, and in the issue will make it apparent, in their preservation, and in the destruction of the wicked.

FROM the words of the text, *O Lord, thou preservest man and beast,* we are led to take a general view of the providence of GOD, in the preservation of his living creatures.

GOD is elegantly stiled by the Apostle, *The blessed and only potentate, who alone hath immortality:* he alone existeth of himself, and the manner of his being is peculiar to himself: all other things are by derivation from him, owe their existence to his will,
and

Preservation of his Living Creatures. 7

and have an absolute dependence upon him: the world is supported by his power, and universal life, in its various degrees and progressions, sustained by his providence. As he made all living creatures, they are the objects of his continual care. He hath replenished the universe with innumerable animals in a vast variety of different species; and all partake of his universal regard, and live upon the provision of his bounty. As he made the world with astonishing magnificence; he presides over and governs it for the purposes for which it was made: his eye surveys the scenes his wisdom hath displayed; his hand supports the fabric his power hath raised. He at first endowed matter with its various properties, arranged the elements of the world, fixed the glorious lights of heaven, lodged the seeds of all plants and herbs in the bosom of the earth; and it is owing to his providence alone, that the state of the universe remains unchanged, that the powers and productions of nature never

fail, that the regularity of seasons, the influence of the sun, and fruitfulness of the earth, are preserved, and the supplies by which all life is supported, are derived in a continual succession.

DIVINE providence hath furnished the brute-creatures with those various senses, instincts and powers, fitted to their different ranks and conditions of life, which serve to warn them of things noxious and dangerous; which enable them to seek, distinguish and prepare proper aliments and habitations; and which determine them to provide with admirable care for the increase of their own species: these senses and affections do not proceed from their own consideration or choice, but are wholly involuntary, and implanted in them by a superior power, for the purpose of preserving animal life. They find suitable matter of sustenance, situated within the reach of their natural sagacity and industry, and convenient places of refuge and habitation :

tation: so that no species are left destitute of the means of life, or of such a situation and nourishment as are agreeable to their nature, as well as necessary to their wants.

MANKIND are born into the world with a more excellent nature, but in a more helpless and infirm condition, than most other animals: their wants, capacities and desires are more numerous and extensive, and require a more ample fund of provision. Accordingly, they are distinguished, not only by their superior nature, but by the greater care and more liberal supplies of divine providence. Earth, air, and sea, the clouds and lights of heaven, yield a larger tribute, and in more various ways, to their support. The brute-creatures are made subject to their dominion, and spend their labours and lives for human preservation and benefit. Men themselves are also made one for another, and designed and prompted in their own nature, not each to his own preservation only, but to
a more

a more public interest and service. And it is admirable to contemplate the correspondency between the human senses and faculties, and external objects; the co-operation of the different and contrary elements of the world in the accommodation of human life; and the mutual dependence and subserviency of the several creatures, to each other's use and benefit; especially in the various relations of human society, in which every individual is not only endowed with the principle of self-preservation, but obliged also, by affection, convenience, or interest, to serve and support his fellow-creatures.

THE fertility likewise of every part of the inhabited world, from which all animals draw their sustenance, deserves our attentive observation. Astonishing effect of divine providence! That not only the rich bosom of the fruitful earth, but the waste fields of empty air, and the wide desert of the ocean, afford a proper and plentiful

plentiful nourishment, for the various innumerable creatures, which live and move in those fluids!—The stores of divine bounty are likewise inexhaustible: God hath established a fund in nature equal to all demands, and never to be drained by consumption: there is no apparent decay in the universe: the powers of the world retain their vigour perfect: the sun always shines with its wonted heat and splendor: *the clouds still return after the rain*: the fruitfulness of the soil is not abated: the seasons constantly succeed each other, and the earth fails not to pay an annual tribute of provision for the support of its numberless inhabitants. Whether we consider the constancy, the largeness, or the variety of the supplies furnished in nature for the preservation of life; we discover in all, the wondrous effects of a most wide and liberal providence. All things around us, which contribute to our subsistence and welfare, are only the visible means, instruments, or channels, by which our invisible
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preserver and benefactor conveys his beneficence to us. The powers of nature are his agents, to execute the purposes of his providence. The world is his magazine from which we draw all supplies; and all that we receive is to be ascribed to his original bounty, who is the one Lord and proprietor of all things.

THE Holy Scriptures contain many excellent descriptions on this subject. *In him we live, move, and have our being. All souls are his; and in his hand is the breath of every living thing. He holdeth our souls in life, and his visitation preserveth our spirits.* He is represented as Lord of the world and all its inhabitants, and claiming them as his property: *every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains, and the wild beasts of the field are mine. The world is mine, and the fulness thereof.* And all living creatures are elegantly described as expecting sustenance at his hands: *the eyes of all wait*
upon

upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thy hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. And those continual supplies which are immediately produced by the operation of the elements, are in Scripture properly ascribed to the providence of God. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine which maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man's heart.—And whereas formerly many nations, struck with the glory and beauty of the heavenly bodies, and admiring their fruitful influence, worshipped the whole host of heaven, especially the sun; we may observe the propriety of our Saviour's sentiment and expression, when he saith, *GOD causeth his sun to shine, and his rain to descend.* And in another place he beautifully represents the divine care and providence, as extended, not only to mankind, but to *the fowls of the air, which nei-*
ther

ther sow, nor reap, nor gather into stores; and further, even to the *grass and flowers of the field*, which he hath clothed with richness and beauty above all human art.

SOME have imagined it inconsistent with the *greatness* of the Supreme and all-perfect Being, to extend his providential care to creatures so *minute* and insignificant, as some of the inferior animals: not considering, that mankind themselves, and even the angels of heaven, are in comparison infinitely beneath him, and in this view, unworthy of his regard. As the production of the meanest living creatures is the work of divine power and wisdom, so their preservation in life is the effect of his providence: and it results from the *perfection* of the divine nature and providence, that *he is unmindful of nothing which he hath made*; and that notwithstanding the immense grandeur and multiplicity of his works, and the superior dignity and importance of some creatures in comparison

rison of others, no part tho' ever so minute is overlooked; no creature tho' ever so insignificant is forgot; but all have a proportionable share of his regard, and are objects of his all-comprehensive providence. And on the other hand, it proceeds from the *imperfection* and narrow limits of the human mind, that men cannot attend to a multiplicity of things at the same time, but while they are employed about what is of greater importance, are under a necessity of overlooking and neglecting other things which are of inferior consequence. There is indeed a kind of presumption, in pretending to know, *what is* of great importance, and asserting that the preservation of any creature *is so*, in the eye of sovereign and perfect wisdom: yet we are foolishly apt to impute our limited and partial ideas of *great* and *little*, of *valuable* and *worthless*, to the unlimited mind of God, who certainly *doth not see as man seeth*, and whose judgment infinitely excels all human estimation. But thus far
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our Blessed *Saviour* confirmeth our natural reasoning on this subject: that if the inferior animals partake of the bountiful regards of providence, and *a sparrow falls not to the ground without him*; how much more are mankind the objects of his care?

VULGAR minds are most apt to be affected with a sense of divine providence, when they see something extraordinary and wonderful, and, as they imagine, beyond, or contrary to, the usual course of nature. But this is the effect of their weakness and ignorance. The constant operations and uniform course of nature are to be considered as the great proof and effect of a divine providence, much more than any seeming deviations. And there are perpetually occurring to us, in the natural course of things, numberless events as truly miraculous, as those, which from their rarity and singularity, have obtained, in a more strict sense, the name of miracles. That the sun or the earth moves

continually, is as truly marvellous, as if we suppose that the motion was once suspended. The formation of every infant in the womb, is as wonderful an effect, and argues divine power and wisdom as much as the original formation of *Adam* from *the dust of the earth*. And the preservation of every single person in life, considering the various and unaccountable causes and operations which must concur to that end, is as real and great a miracle, or in other words, as manifest an effect and demonstration of the power and providence of GOD, as the raising him to life again from the dead. The only difference is, that the one kind of events have occurred very seldom, and to very few witnesses; whereas the other are repeated daily to every man's observation, and therefore excite little admiration or attention.

INDEED our own experience is abundantly sufficient to convince us of the providence of GOD in our preservation. No

person can absolutely assure himself of one moment's continuance in life or in existence. Every one who reflects will be sensible of his own insufficiency to uphold his own being, or supply his own wants. We *feel* our dependence upon something above us, and are as it were *conscious* of a superior power which sustains and preserves us: Our very frame and constitution is a mystery to us; the vital union of soul and body, their mutual influences and incessant operations are unaccountable, and produced not by any design or power of our own, but by something independent of our will. The beating pulse, and the internal motions of the various fluids of the body, continue uninterrupted, without any thought or design of our own to that end: nor are we able to supply any thing that is wanting, either in the frame of our bodies, or in the faculties of our minds; or finish what is defective; or make that which is *crooked, straight: we cannot add to our stature one cubit, nor make*

one hair of our head white or black. And in the narrow course of our actions or attempts, how often do we meet with a superior power which checks and controuls us, baffles our designs, and disposes of us quite contrary to our strongest inclinations, and most confident hopes? In a word, we find experimentally, that we are not our own masters; and that it is not in us to fix our own capacity, condition, or duration; but that our measures of strength, understanding, and time, are assigned to us by a secret and soveraign power, which bears an irresistable sway over us, allots our state and duration, and preserves or destroys us. So that without having recourse to any remote or abstruse arguments, every person may find sufficient ground, in his own frame and constitution, and from his own sense and experience, to believe and acknowledge an all-governing providence, on which he depends, and to which he owes life and preservation.

FROM the whole preceding discourse we may observe, in the first place, GOD's right of dominion over his creatures ; which is founded not only on his creative power, but on his governing wisdom and preserving providence. He is alone equal to the infinite charge, superintends the whole world, sustains all life, and incessantly gives to his creatures all they have and all they are : and hence hath an absolute right to dispose of them according to his own sovereign will ; that is, in such a manner, as he alone, independent of all other will and opinion, shall judge most conducive to those ends, which his perfect wisdom and goodness approve. To him it belongs to assign to every being throughout the universe its respective rank and sphere of activity, its degrees of capacity and strength, and compass of supply ; to contract or enlarge them ; to exalt one and depress another ; *to kill and to make alive ; to wound and to heal.* The times of all animals are in his hand ; and he prolongs or cuts them
short

short as he pleases; to one he grants a longer, to another a shorter space of existence; some he ordains mortal, others immortal; to some he appoints but a momentary, to others an everlasting duration. And in all these instances he acts by a prerogative, which must belong to him both of necessity and right. And no creature can justly murmur and complain against God; “Why is my time so short or so precarious? Why is my *age but a hand’s breadth*? Why am I liable to perish so soon, or so suddenly? Why am not I made immortal? Why is my rank or nature so mean in comparison of others far superior? my powers so limited and defective? Why are not my supports more sure; my talents more considerable; my influence more extensive; my circumstances in these and other respects more advantageous.”

THERE is no room for such complaints; since no creature can claim of right one moment's continuance of existence or support, which are owing to, and constantly derived from the free bounty and providence of GOD: and if he abridges our days or our supplies, he doth no more than resume what he at first gave, and what he hath so long, without the least obligation, suffered us to enjoy. And we ought to acquiesce in the many undeniable and signal marks of his providential care and kindness; and attribute his other more mysterious and unaccountable proceedings to a wisdom, which far surpasses the bounds of our comprehension, and say with the *Psalmist*, *Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds: thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep. O Lord, thou preservest man and beast.*

SECONDLY: Let us hence entertain admiring and grateful thoughts of the divine
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care and goodness in our preservation. How extensive and wonderful is that providence of God, which comprehends in one view the whole boundless creation, and the support of every living creature! How shall an infinite number and variety of still-returning wants be duly supplied? What stores of provision can suffice to such an immense and endless consumption? What proportion or comparison is there, between the utmost abilities or conceptions of men, and the extent of divine wisdom and providence? And when we contract our reflexions to a narrower sphere, to our own private experience; when we consider our own preservation amidst all the dangers our frail nature is liable to, *the arrow that flieth by day, and the pestilence that walketh in darkness*, the inward diseases and outward violences; whilst all nature around administers to our support, and our various wants have been regularly satisfied; and the curious internal structure of our bodily frame, and system of our mental

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faculties,

faculties, have continued for so long a time unimpaired; when we reflect upon all the evils we have escaped, the successes we have obtained, and the blessings we have enjoyed;—we cannot but be struck with a lively and grateful sense of divine favour and protection, and shall naturally adopt the language of the *Psalmist*, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who healeth thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies.*

THIRDLY: Let us imitate, according to our capacity, the divine providence and goodness, by extending our care and contributing our part to the support and welfare of our fellow-creatures. God hath not only formed mankind for society and mutual assistance, but hath established in some measure a connexion and dependence between the human species and those inferior animals which are made serviceable to man, and put in subjection to him.

And

And the same divine law of nature and reason, which hath subjected them to our use, equally binds us to use them with moderation and mercy, and to provide due sustenance for them. Cruelty towards the brute-creatures is surely contrary to the will of that Almighty Creator, whose kind providence and *tender mercies are over all his works.* *A righteous man, saith Solomon, regardeth the life of his beast.* To defend the brute-creatures from the outrage and oppression of mankind, is the spirit and design of several precepts in the *Mosaic Law.* And it is alledged as a reason of the divine mercy in sparing *Nineveh,* not only that there were *six-score thousand persons in that great city, who could not discern between the right hand and the left; but also much cattle.*

IF now the inferior creatures have a just claim to our merciful regard; and if the Creator and Lord of the universe extends his providence to them; how strong obligations

gations of humanity and mercy are mankind under to one another; who are made of the same species, and connected together in rational society? And how different is our temper from the divine disposition, if we are regardless of the life and safety, and inattentive to the wants and miseries of our fellow-men? if we neglect to *provide for those of our own household thro' idleness, or rob them of a due support, to spend it in riot and excess; or grind the face of the poor, and starve those who depend upon us for subsistence, to gratify a miserable and insatiable avarice?* How opposite is this conduct to the goodness and providence of GOD; and how odious in his sight?—Such persons, the *Apostle* justly declares, *are worse than infidels.* Let us cherish a liberal and communicative disposition, desirous that others partake with us of the supports of life, and unwilling that any should perish, or be reduced to misery, for want of that sustenance which we might afford. Doth GOD exercise a

constant providence over mankind, and make heaven and earth and sea contribute, in a wonderful manner, to furnish us with the necessaries and conveniencies of life? And doth he moreover *give to the beast his food, and to the fowls that cry?* Doth he open his stores, and distribute with an un- envious hand to the whole living creation? —How ill does it become us niggardly to hoard up, or wastefully consume upon ourselves, that which the preservation and welfare of our fellow-creatures demand from us? A consideration of the all- preserving providence of God, certainly ought not to end in a barren speculation; but to produce in our minds a similar disposition, and teach us not to confine *our providence* to our own wants and desires; but to extend our care and liberality, in due proportion, to all within the reach of our influence and acquaintance.

LASTLY: Let us rely upon the divine protection for the future: the providence
of

of God has hitherto been our support, and is equally able to sustain us for the future. And therefore timid and anxious cares and an extreme sollicitude about our own preservation, are inconsistent with true piety or a just confidence in the divine care and goodness. To live in continual dread of poverty and calamity, or even death itself, is vain and unreasonable, and implies an unbecoming distrust of the providence of God; which is always equally attentive to the preservation of his creatures, and which is never wanting to good men, who put their trust in him. Much less does it become us to be always taking thought *what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed*, or to be swallowed up with care about the securing and encreasing our worldly substance. They who know not God, or have no just apprehensions of his providence, may seek after these things with great anxiety and uneasiness: but let us, according to our Saviour's exhortation, *seek in the first place*

place the kingdom of GOD, and his righteousness; and for the rest, after using our diligent endeavour, commit ourselves to the providence of our heavenly Father, who knoweth what things we have need of, and is ever ready to supply his servants with what is convenient for them. Let us banish all vain anxiety and excessive solicitude about our future condition in life, and cast our care upon him, whose care extends to the whole world of living creatures.





DISCOURSE II.

On the Justice of Divine Providence.



EZEK. xviii. 29.

Are not my ways equal; are not your ways unequal?

TO believe that the world is under a most just government, and the affairs of it administered with perfect equity, by that almighty being who made it; is a principal foundation of religion, and support of the piety and hope of good men. And the wisest and best men in all ages have embraced this persuasion, having sought for and discovered arguments sufficient to satisfy their own minds.

BUT tho' this hath been the general belief of good men, especially those who have examined carefully, and without

prejudice, the grounds of religion; yet many have been disturbed with difficulties, some have been tempted to doubt of divine justice, and others have unwarily entertained notions directly *contrary* to it. This hath proceeded, either from the natural weakness of their judgment; or their being too much affected with some appearances of inequality in the conduct of God's providence; or from the influence of education and false instruction; by which they have imbibed a system of faith in regard to the divine dispensations, containing things irreconcilable to our natural notions of justice and equity.

THE former seems to have been the case of the psalmist, when he tells us, *That his feet were almost gone, and his steps had well-nigh slipt: for he was envious at the foolish, when he saw the prosperity of the wicked: and because he saw the ungodly prosper in the world and increase in riches, was tempted to question, how GOD knows; and whether*

Whether there be knowledge in the most high? i. e. whether GOD takes any cognizance of men's actions and behaviour: and because he himself had met with many troubles and great afflictions in life, fell into a suspicion, that he had cleansed his heart in vain, and washed his hands in innocence, to no purpose. But it is to be observed, that he afterwards corrects himself, and condemns his own folly and ignorance, in entertaining such groundless and impious doubts: so ignorant was I, and as a beast before thee.

As to the people of *Israel* in the *Prophet's* time, it is evident from this chapter, they had fallen into notions which derogated from the divine justice and impartiality: and whether their error was founded on their own supposed experience of the methods of divine providence; or on a misconstruction of a clause in the fourth commandment, *That GOD would visit the iniquities of the parents upon the children*

unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him;—or whether it sprung from some other cause; it was grown so popular as to pass into a proverb among them; at least, they applied a common proverb to this meaning and purport. They said, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the childrens teeth are set on edge*: By which they meant, that children are punished for the crimes of their parents, and suffer the effects of divine displeasure in their stead: and that this was the usual method in which the divine providence chose to proceed; transferring the punishment due to the actual transgressors upon their offspring and posterity, even tho' they should be innocent of the like crimes, and refuse to follow the wicked steps of their ancestors. In this sense, it is plain, the prophet understood them, and accordingly resented it, as an injurious reflection upon the justice of God and the equity of his proceedings. And we find him, throughout this chapter, expostulating with them,

reproving them in the name of God, and vindicating the divine justice with a particular earnestness, in opposition to this charge. He asserts, that it is not the method of God's providence to punish the innocent instead of the guilty, or to impute the sins of parents to their posterity : but on the contrary, *if the son sees the iniquity of his father and forsakes it, and refuseth to follow his wicked example ; he shall not die, he shall surely live ; and the soul that sinneth it shall die : i. e. the guilty person alone shall undergo the punishment due to his own crimes. And he adds this general exhortation, Are not my ways equal, saith the Lord ; are not your ways unequal ?*

THE ways of GOD are all perfectly just, equitable and impartial : and if men are led to doubt of his justice, or attribute iniquity to him ; it proceeds chiefly from the iniquity of their own ways, and the unjust disposition of their own hearts. If they were more disposed to govern their

own actions according to reason and equity, they would be under less temptation to question *those* of the supreme governor of the world, and better qualified to form a right judgment of them. An honest and unprejudiced mind is the best qualification for judging of the perfections and providence of God, and for embracing all the doctrines of true religion.

IN the following discourse, we shall (1.) shew the evidences of divine justice and equity in the constitution and government of the world. (2.) Shall obviate the principal objections. (3.) Shall inquire into the causes of men's errors and doubts on this subject.

(1.) WE are to shew the evidences of divine justice and equity in the constitution and government of the world.—In conceiving of God, we naturally attribute to him the highest excellence. For as he is
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the author of all that is good, amiable, and useful in the whole creation, he must be more excellent and perfect than all; and no creature can in any quality, or attribute, be equal to the Creator. As justice then is a quality, which men are in some degree possessed of, and esteemed by them as excellent and honourable; it must be ascribed to GOD in the highest degree. So the author of the book of *Job* argues, *Can mortal man be more just than God? can man be more just than his Maker?*—From the practice of this virtue among men, and the universal sense and esteem they have of it, we naturally conclude, that *it is far from GOD that he should pervert justice, and from the Almighty that he should do iniquity.* And to imagine any degree of injustice or partiality in the supreme being, is not only derogating from the excellence of his nature, but attributing to him what men condemn and abhor in one another.

FURTHER; the justice of GOD results from his absolute perfection: as he is incapable of error or evil affection; as no temptation can approach him; as no event can disturb his designs who foresees all things; as no passion can alter the disposition of his mind, which is unchangeable; as he can have no private view or interest separate from the good of the whole creation, who is possessed of all things, and infinitely happy in his own nature; as he hath unerring wisdom to discern, perfect goodness to intend, and almighty power to execute, whatsoever is best and conducive to the universal good; —Hence we conclude, that in the universal plan of divine providence and government over the world, there is nothing can be altered or amended, nothing made more just or equal or happy in the whole. The justice of GOD in all the exertions of it, in the distributions of punishments as well as rewards, is wholly included in his wisdom and goodness. He is just
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because he is wise and good. He punishes the wicked, in order to maintain the good order and happiness of the whole world. And therefore to deny his justice in any respect, and especially by supposing that he punishes beyond what the ends of perfect wisdom and goodness require, is defaming his whole moral character.

IF we consult the Heathen writers, we shall find what information the light of nature gave them: and the sentiments which their own reason and reflection suggested, were such as may serve to convince us, that God hath implanted in all men some natural apprehensions of his governing justice. For they generally agree in attributing this perfection to their supreme Deity, and in describing him as offended at the crimes, and pleased with the piety and good actions of men. They supposed a divine vengeance to be in pursuit of every criminal, slow indeed in its motion, and travelling as it were with
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leadens feet, but sure to overtake the offender at last, wheresoever he might fly to avoid it. And the doctrine also of a future state of rewards and punishments was generally believed, tho' clogged with a multitude of absurd fictions. Some indeed express great doubts of its reality: because they found themselves pressed with great difficulties and objections on both sides. The strength of their own reason enabled them to conceive hopes, that the world was under a wise and just providence: yet the many examples occurring to their observation, of wickedness prospering, and virtue suffering, perplexed their minds; as they seemed to overthrow the supposition of a perfect distributive justice according to men's deserts in this world. And on the other hand, the invisible unknown nature of a future state, together with the absurd and chimerical fictions attending the vulgar belief, tempted them to question, if not altogether reject the doctrine itself. And

it seems, as if human reason never could have attained to a solid foundation of believing a life to come, without the aid of a divine revelation.—How much then are we indebted to the Gospel of Christ, which *both brought immortality to light*, and established our belief of the divine justice and goodness, and our hope of an eternal life, on more sure and satisfactory grounds!

THE *Gospel* solves all present appearances of inequality in the conduct of providence, by giving us a full assurance of a final distinction and separation which will be made in another world between the righteous and the wicked; when the one shall be rewarded, and the other punished, according to the measure of good or evil they have done in this world. By thus discovering and ascertaining the relation of the *present* to a *future* state, it reconciles all events to a perfect administration of divine government. In the writings

writings of the Old Testament, the justice of GOD is acknowledged and celebrated, as dispensed at present in the distinction which is made between the virtuous and the wicked in this life: the protection, the inward peace and comfort, the reputation, and other advantages, which good men generally obtain; and the perplexities and miseries which wicked men generally experience, or the punishments which usually overtake them in the course of GOD's providence in this world.—But in the New Testament, wherein *immortality is brought to light*, our views are principally directed to a *future* state, and a period of universal judgment and recompence. And that great person who appeared in our nature, and in obedience to the will of GOD, died for our salvation, is appointed to be the minister and dispenser of the divine justice and mercy to mankind, according to their deserts. When the divine purposes in the present constitution of things are accomplished, there will be

a revolution, when the distributive justice of God shall be fully revealed to the conviction and approbation of all men, by the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ, who will come at the appointed time to judge the world in righteousness, to separate the good and bad, to place the one in proper habitations of everlasting bliss, and to make an utter destruction of the other.—This great office and dignity of our Redeemer is sublimely described by his forerunner *John the Baptist*. *There cometh one after me, who is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear;—whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather his wheat into the garner, and will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* Our blessed Saviour describes his own office by a like just and beautiful comparison. He compares the good and bad among mankind to *wheat and tares growing together in the field: and when the time of harvest is come, he will send forth his angels, and they shall separate*
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the tares from amongst the wheat, and bind them in bundles to burn them; and the wheat he will gather into his barn. He is then the chief minister of the divine justice, goodness and mercy to mankind, who will come at last to purge the creation, and to *collect together all things that offend, and them that do iniquity,* and throw them into a *furnace of inextinguishable fire*: i. e. to consume and make an utter end of every thing unprofitable, offensive, and prejudicial, and to establish for ever the virtue, peace and happiness of mankind.—

This account is so reasonable in itself, and so agreeable to our best ideas of the perfection and government of God, that there can be no difficulty in giving our hearty assent and belief to it. It ought to give us entire satisfaction; especially when we observe how perfectly and harmoniously, according to the Gospel-scheme, the justice of God in punishing the wicked and incorrigible, coincides with his mercy in forgiving the penitent, and
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his goodness in rewarding the virtuous: all equally conspiring to one end, the greatest good and happiness of the whole world.

Now tho' the arguments already acknowledged in proof of the perfect justice of God, drawn from the existence, exercise, and esteem of justice among men; and from the other attributes of the divine nature, as incapable of error, and exempt from temptation, from his perfect goodness to intend, wisdom to discern, and power to execute whatsoever is best in his government over the universe; and also from the general apprehension of mankind, not excepting the heathen world; and finally from the doctrine and authority of the holy scriptures;—tho' these arguments may be thought sufficient; yet it may add great satisfaction to thoughtful and inquisitive persons, to point out the experimental evidences which occur of the justice of divine providence in the present state of human affairs, and to shew the differ-

difference which it actually makes between the virtuous and the wicked in this world: that good men enjoy very manifest and sensible effects of the divine favour, which the vitious are deprived of; and that the latter undergo many troubles and miseries in consequence of the divine displeasure, from which the former are exempt.

THIS is a point of the greatest importance.—For, if it shall clearly appear, that according to the general course of things, virtue and goodness are encouraged and rewarded in some degree in this life, and wickedness punished; that the distributive justice of God's providence actually begins and visibly discovers itself *here*, in protecting and favouring the good, and punishing the bad;—we have then a solid ground to believe and confide in it, and to expect that it will be carried on and perfected *hereafter*. But to suppose that the state of this world is in utter confusion; that the best comforts
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and felicities, and the greatest pains and miseries of this life, are thrown promiscuously on the good and the bad without any difference; this subverts the best evidence we can have of the divine justice. And to represent things in blacker colours, as if wickedness generally flourished, and virtue suffered; this instead of strengthening our faith in an invisible world and the rewards of it, would fill the mind of a considerate person with diffidence and despair. It would destroy all reasonable belief of a divine revelation. For how shall we confide in the promises of the Gospel, if we do not *first* believe that God is a being of truth? how shall we dread the threatenings of it, if we are not *first* convinced that he is just to punish iniquity? or how shall we live in hope of a state of immortal happiness, if we are not *first* persuaded of his mercy and goodness? —But being *previously* convinced of the perfections of God, and his regard to the piety and virtue of his creatures, by the

marks we see, and the effects we experience in this world; we shall then be easily disposed and duly prepared to believe a future world; where the distinguishing providence and rewarding justice of God will be continued and compleated. “ Having this foundation visibly laid here, we may easily and reasonably conclude that the superstructure will be finished hereafter. From that degree of order and measure of distributive justice which we see takes place in this world, we naturally apprehend a larger scheme; and may resolve ourselves by a satisfactory account, why things are not compleated in this state, but their accomplishment reserved to some further period*.”

LET us then enquire, what effects may be discovered of a distributive justice in this world; what marks of divine favour to the righteous, and displeasure against

* Shaftsbury.

the wicked. Let us consider whether the law of our nature, and the general course of things, under the providence of God, be not manifestly in favour of virtue and goodness, and an enemy to vice.—The holy scriptures plainly represent *this* as the real state of things; and constantly assert, that God exerciseth his justice in this world, in protecting and blessing good men, and punishing the wicked. They always give the advantage to the righteous, and describe them as in a happy state, enjoying great comforts and blessings, under the divine protection and favour; and the wicked, as harrassed with fears, troubles, and dangers, and living under the frowns of the Almighty. There are innumerable declarations in the *Psalms* and *Proverbs*, which point out the advantages of virtue, and the unhappy consequences of vice. Our *Saviour* in the beginning of his discourse in the fifth of *Matthew*, recommends the several virtues from their excellent nature, and happy effects; and

affureth his disciples, that tho' they should be *persecuted for righteousness sake*, and obliged to abandon all their possessions, yet they would be amply recompensed in this present world. And the Apostle Paul asserts that *godliness with contentment* is to be considered as *great gain* at present: *For it bath the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come.*—In order then to verify the sentiments of holy scripture, as well as to satisfy the reason of our own minds, in building our faith on a certain foundation; we must attend to the general procedure of GOD's providence over mankind in this world. And the more extensive and accurate our observations are, the more we shall be convinced, that how *unequal soever the ways of men are, the ways of GOD are equal*, and the course of his providence just and right.

BUT in order to obtain the requisite satisfaction, we ought to be cautious of selecting and dwelling upon particular cases;

cases; which would be reasoning from a partial view, and building upon an *unequal foundation*: on the contrary, we should rather proceed upon the most general and comprehensive view of the world, and the course of affairs in it. Mankind are to be considered at large, and a prospect taken of the state of good and bad men upon the whole, in order to discover the indications of a providence and the strokes of divine justice, in distributing blessings to the one and punishment to the other.

THE subject is resolvable into this general inquiry: whether upon the whole, virtuous and good men, or the unjust and profligate, enjoy more happiness in life, and suffer less inconveniences and evils? For if good and pious men derive any advantage and satisfaction from their own virtue, superior to wicked men, or are exempted from any evils to which the latter are subject; this effect our reason will teach us to ascribe to the intention of

the divine wisdom and justice, in making the constitution of the world such as we find it to be, and in directing the series of events as they actually take place. The natural connexion of causes and effects, is owing to a presiding mind, who designed that plan of things which actually exists, and in which we are daily conversant. And therefore, our judgment of the divine temper and disposition is to be rationally founded on our experience of the nature of things, and the different effects of different conduct. Nor need we be afraid of resting the cause of God and religion on this foundation of evidence, to which the holy scriptures themselves appeal, and to which in all our reasonings we must necessarily have recourse at last.

FOR the point of enquiry concerning the preference of virtue or vice in respect to the happiness of life, and for which we appeal to experience of facts, is so far from being difficult to be decided, that nothing

thing is more easy and certain, or so universally allowed. For how much soever men are influenced by various passions and appetites to evil actions; yet their general, I may say, universal judgment, is, that virtue, and not vice, is the means of happiness: that the habits of sobriety and goodness conduce to the enjoyment of life, and not those of debauchery and wickedness. And tho' we set aside all consideration of another world, and regard this life and world only; yet it is far better and happier for men to live in sobriety, peace, honesty, and charity, than to be abandoned to excess, to fraud, rapine, treachery, and malice: and nothing could be more absurd and shocking to any person of common understanding and experience, than to maintain the contrary. For what is vice and wickedness, but men's abusing themselves, or one another? or what is virtue and religion, but men's improving themselves, and doing good to others?

And whence do the greatest plagues and miseries of life proceed, but from men's abuse of themselves, or of one another?-- From riot and excess, from treachery and dishonesty, from envy and malice, in a word, from the wickedness of mankind? Insomuch, that if vice was to prevail universally, and all piety, justice, humanity and sobriety were extinguished in the hearts of men; the world would be a scene of horrible disorder, and human life become so miserable, that we scarcely need to suppose a worse hell for the punishment of so wicked a race of beings. And on the other hand, how small a proportion soever of virtue and piety there is thought to be in the world; yet it is owing to that proportion, whether greater or less, that mankind are so happy as they are, and human life so comfortable and agreeable as it is found to be: and it is from the goodness of men's hearts, and from their actually practising in a considerable degree the duties of temperance,
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of public and private justice, of piety to GOD, of sincerity, humanity and kind affection to each other; that the peace and order of the world, and the best entertainments and pleasures of life are derived.

AND if this be the real state of things, as every man must be sensible it is; if mankind are more or less happy, as there is more or less virtue and goodness in the world; and if the greatest comforts and enjoyments of life proceed from men's sobriety, prudence, piety, just treatment of, and kind affection to one another; and the greatest miseries from intemperance, injustice, mutual oppression, and other vices;—need we any stronger proof of the justice of GOD?—Especially if we consider, that this is an *universal effect*, not peculiar to any one place or country; but that in all nations, communities, and societies throughout the whole world, the more sincerely virtuous and religious men are, and the more mutual confidence and good-will subsist among them, the happier that

that nation or society becomes; can we resolve this *universal effect* into any other cause, than the providence of God governing the world by an universal law and constitution, which is perfectly just and right? For there cannot be a more clear and certain demonstration of the disposition of the almighty Maker and governor of the world than this is, or a plainer indication which side he espouses; and that he is not a patron or favourer of wickedness, or an indifferent spectator; but is *the righteous Lord who loveth righteousness, and whose countenance beholds the upright*. For if making mankind more happy or more miserable, in proportion to the degrees of virtue or vice which prevail in the world, be not an actual distribution of divine justice in this world; what can we mean by the Justice of God? Or what stronger proof can we have of it?—If it be said, that this universal effect is owing to the nature of mankind, or the constitution of the world; this is

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all the concession we desire. For it follows undeniably, that the nature and constitution of things is in the whole just and right: and what is that constitution but the scheme and intention of the wisdom and justice of God.

It is unreasonable that we should be so much affected with some apparent *exceptions*, and lay great stress upon *them*; as if the argument rested on *a few particular instances*; without attending to what is the real state of things in the whole, or taking any view of the general effect and influence of divine providence: whereas the great weight of the argument lies upon *the general state* of things. For if we suppose the lot and condition of good men put into one scale, and that of wicked men into the other; it is evident that a few single instances are comparatively of very little weight. The great and main question is, whether the state of good or of bad men is in general happier? Which

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fort of persons enjoy more satisfaction, more ease and contentment in their own minds, and are better pleased with themselves, and their own conduct and condition? And if we were to consult upon the means of a happy life, and to direct and advise any person according to our best judgment, how he might enjoy life the longest, with the greatest security, with the fewest troubles, and the most satisfactions; which course should we advise him to take?—The ways of villany and debauchery?—Or the straight road that religion points out? The way of honesty and virtue?—What method do parents, who are exceedingly desirous of the welfare and happiness of their children in this world, usually take in order to that end? Do they indeed instruct them in the ways of vice, and train them up to habits of wickedness? Or do they desire to make them sober, virtuous, and religious, as the way to do well and to be happy in the world?—These are ques-

questions which admit of no debate, and which all men will sufficiently agree in determining.

AND thus the argument is brought to a short issue and certain conclusion. For if vitious men do in general suffer for their wickedness; and if virtuous and good men are in general happier by the practice of virtue;—if such is the prevailing effect and general consequence; whether we ascribe it to the constitution of the world, to the nature of society, to the order of civil government, or to the frame of the human mind, or to all of these in conjunction, as the immediate causes; the argument is established, and cannot be overthrown: we need no further witness in the cause. Human experience, and the common sense of mankind, vindicate and prove the justice of GOD, as rewarding virtue and punishing vice in the present state.

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HAVING represented this great evidence of the Justice of GOD, arising from the general order and series of effects, which is the plan of divine wisdom in the construction and government of this world; we shall proceed in the following discourse, to consider the objections which may seem to arise opposite to the foregoing evidence. For tho' no objections arising from particular instances can destroy a proof founded on general and constant experience; yet as all objections relate to the present posture and scene of things in this world, and may *weaken*, tho' not *destroy*, the general evidence, and are apt to make a great impression on minds not accustomed to a larger and more comprehensive view of things;—it will not be useless to consider and obviate them, as far as we are able to give a just solution.



DISCOURSE III.

On the Justice of Divine Providence.



Ezek. xviii, 29.

Are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal?

IN discoursing upon the divine justice, we shall now proceed to the objections, arising from the apparent inequality of divine providence in the present scene of things:

“ FOR tho’ the providence of God has
“ so constituted the world, the frame of
“ human nature, and the connection of
“ causes and effects both natural and
“ moral, that a general distinction is
“ preserved, and preference given to vir-
“ tue in opposition to vice, in respect to
“ the enjoyment and happiness of life;--
“ yet this distinction and preference are
“ not so visible, so constant, or so exten-

“ five, as seems requisite to the absolute
“ perfection of the divine government.
“ For it might be expected, at first view,
“ from perfect justice and an infallible
“ providence, not only that mankind in
“ general should become more or less
“ happy in proportion to their practice
“ of virtue or vice ; but that every single
“ person should be rewarded or punished
“ in exact proportion to his deserts ; and
“ that God would extend his justice to
“ every individual and every action equal-
“ ly and at all times. Whereas this does
“ not appear to be the real state of things.
“ The guilty are known sometimes to es-
“ cape punishment, and the innocent to
“ suffer : and there are many examples
“ of good men involved in troubles and
“ miseries, and wicked men flourishing
“ in ease and prosperity.”

To this it may be replied, in the *first*
place, that we are not competent judges
of the real condition or happiness of other
men.

men. We are so apt to judge from appearances and external circumstances, and with so many prejudices, and so imperfect a knowledge; that we are as liable to make a false estimate as a true one. And the real happiness or misery of every particular person depends so much on the temper and situation of his mind, and so little on his outward estate, that we have no sufficient evidence on which to give judgment. For tho' we are conscious of what passeth in our own minds, we cannot enter into those of other men, and know all that passes there. And therefore the justice of GOD may extend itself with respect to individuals much further than we are acquainted with, or are apt to imagine. And that it does *thus* extend itself in a *very sensible degree*, we are taught by experience. For it is certain, that if men are uneasy and tormented in their minds for any actions they have done, it is not for their *good* actions, but their *evil* ones; that it is hardly possible for any man to

commit any great act of wickedness, without suffering for it in this world; in his own mind at least, if in no other respect; and that men usually feel a painful disgust and dissatisfaction after doing what they know to be wrong; and on the contrary, are never more easy and satisfied with themselves than when they have done worthy and commendable actions. And therefore, the less we consult appearances, and the more we penetrate into the real state of things, *inequalities* will be found in a great measure to *vanish*, and the ways of providence appear *more equal*, than at a *superficial* view we are tempted to imagine.

SECONDLY; admitting that good and bad men are not always rewarded at present exactly in proportion to their deserts: this difficulty we may solve, by a knowledge founded on constant experience, which teacheth us that mankind are under a constitution or system of nature; and
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that GOD does not govern the world by particular acts of power, or by *special interpositions*, but by *general laws*; which cannot *possibly* be exempt from all exception, or be so formed as to effect *equally* every subject comprehended under them. And all men good and bad partake of the same nature, live in the same elements, and are members of the same society, or in a word, are subject to the same constitution of the world; they must all be necessarily subject to the like wants, diseases, injuries, oppressions, or other natural incidents and calamities. Nor can the apparent defects and irregularities arising from hence be remedied or removed, except by the power of GOD *interposing* in a supernatural or miraculous manner.— It remains then to inquire, whether such *miraculous interpositions* are requisite to vindicate the divine justice? Or in other words, whether it is reasonable in us to expect them? And whether they would not be attended with greater inconveni-

ences upon the whole; and so the *only present remedy* become much *worse* than what we *vainly* imagine to be the great *disease* of nature, or *defect* in the providence and justice of God?

IT may seem agreeable to our kind affections and desires, to wish that God would make use of his sovereign power, and by a special interposition save a good man whom we see exposed to some terrible calamity, and which is inevitable in the natural course of things. But if such particular exertions of divine power are reasonably expected in favour of *any* single person, on the sole account of his virtue and goodness; must they not for the same reason be extended to *every* person who is equally qualified and deserving?—But this is introducing such an *endless train* of miraculous interpositions as would *subvert* the present constitution of things and the established connexion of causes and effects. And if we consider that all human prudence

dence, designs, and actions, depend upon a knowledge of the fixed properties of things and connexion of natural causes with their effects; we shall see that frequent and continual interruptions would be so far from contributing to order and good upon the whole, that they would introduce confusion and uncertainty, subvert the foundations of human care, prudence, and activity; and instead of promoting virtue, encourage negligence and presumption. An expectation, therefore, of supernatural interventions to preserve us from those evils of life to which the natural state of the world renders us liable, and which it is the business of human prudence to guard against, by the use of those lawful means which providence hath put in our power; is unjust, and carries in it something of absurdity and impiety. How great soever the evil is, or whatever degree of virtue or merit belongs to the person incident to that evil; we cannot rationally presume, that the laws and

operations of nature will be suspended on his behalf. *Shall the earth be forsaken for thee? Shall the rock be removed out of its place?* Shall the most wise and admirable constitution of things be infringed, and those important laws of nature, on which the whole order and harmony of the universe depend, be interrupted, for thy preservation? What pride and presumption is this, to imagine ourselves and our own poor stock of virtue of such immense value and importance in the eye of the almighty Governor of the universe!

WHEN the Devil tempted our Saviour, he placed him, it is said, upon a pinnacle of the temple, and persuaded him to cast himself headlong, quoting that prophetic expression in the psalms, that *GOD would give his Angels charge concerning him, lest he should dash his foot against a stone.* This passage is apposite to our present subject, was written for our instruction, and contains a sublime sense. The Devil grounds
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his temptation on our Saviour's conscious knowledge of his own dignity, and of the importance of that business for which he was sent into the world: as if, considering his own importance, he could not presume too much on the divine care; and had a right to trust his preservation to the *special power* of GOD, in any manner, or on any occasion. And if a miraculous interposition can be reasonably expected in behalf of *any* single person, it certainly might for *his* preservation. But our Saviour stiles this, not *trusting in*, but *tempting GOD*; i. e. vainly presuming upon his particular interposition, contrary to the known laws of nature, and rules of human prudence and self preservation. And we may observe hence, how sacred and important the established orders and laws of nature are: and that to expect that God will infringe them by special acts of his power, to answer private ends and little purposes, is derogating from the honour of the divine government and the
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excellency of those general laws by which he governs the world. It is in fact expecting, that he will abuse his own power, by subjecting it to the caprice, folly, imprudence, and presumption of his creatures.—But it may be proper to observe, that this argument does not diminish the credibility of the miracles wrought by our Saviour and his apostles, but rather serves to establish our belief of them. For these miracles were evidently wrought, not for any little, private, or unworthy purposes; not for the deliverance or preservation of particular persons from temporal calamities and evils: for tho' they were apparently beneficent in this respect, *this* was not the great *end* and intention of them; which was of the most *general* and *extensive* nature, coincident with the great designs of the divine wisdom, and subservient to those universal ends, for which he constituted the world and the laws and orders of nature.

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To proceed in the *third* place: that we may more effectually remove from our minds all objections against the justice of God, and mistrust of the designs of his providence, on account of those temporal evils to which good men are naturally exposed, as well as wicked men; let us attend more closely to the nature and consequences of them: and perhaps we shall find such advantages, and so much good resulting from those very evils, as we were not apprized of; and which may amount in the whole to an over-ballance.—For instance, does not the experience of some bodily fatigues and pains, serve to quicken our taste and heighten our enjoyment of health, ease, and pleasure? Do they not prevent that stagnation and feebleness of mind, which is the greatest enemy to the enjoyment, as well as activity of life, and which renders us insensible even to the greatest comforts and blessings?—Are not the evils of life the proper subject and exercise of human prudence and diligence?

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—Do not some of our *greatest virtues* and *most agreeable dispositions* of mind result from them?—Did no one suffer; where would be *compassion*? Was nothing to be endured; what exercise of *patience*? Were there no dangers; what room for either *courage* or *conduct*? Was no one wronged; where would be *publick justice* or *private forgiveness*? Were there no faults, follies, or vices in the world; where would be that amiable and excellent temper of mind called *candor*? If men were not mutually dependent on one another, and mutually subject to one another's powers, wills, and inclinations; whence could *mutual respect* arise? Whence generous sympathy, kind actions, grateful returns, and the *whole social harmony* of life?—Thus we ought *not* to consider the evils of life *separately*; but should attend to connexions and consequences; and estimate together with them the good which redounds from them; which is often more than a compensation.—Besides; those particular

ticular virtues which are peculiar to the present state of mankind, and which arise from the evils of it natural and moral, have a great effect in forming such general habits of piety and social goodness, as are the best qualifications for a higher and more perfect state.

FINALLY: in regard to all seeming inequalities and intricacies of divine providence which may yet remain unsolved and inconsistent with our ideas of justice; it is sufficient to observe, that the justice of a being of absolute perfection, in his government of the universe, must necessarily transcend all our conceptions. For tho' we are capable of conceiving a clear and right apprehension of divine justice in its *general design and end*; or as intending, by a distribution of rewards and punishments, to promote beneficent ends, and the good order and happiness of the intelligent universe; yet the *actual exercise* of it, in an infinite variety of modes, times, and de-

grees, in an unknown connexion of causes and effects, in an endless progression of events, and in attainment of ends, which in grandeur and excellence infinitely surpass our largest comprehension;—the *actual exercise* of it in many instances must necessarily be imperceptible, unintelligible, and even contrary to human apprehensions, or to those *particular* ideas of an administration of justice, which are most familiar to mankind. Such instances then ought not to destroy our confidence in the justice of God. For if the *best* conduct of the *wisest men* is sometimes *unintelligible* to persons of inferior capacity; if we often confide in the good *intentions* of our superiors, tho' we do not understand the *reasons* of their conduct; if those who are most concerned for the welfare of others, as physicians, parents, or governors, often apply means to that end, which are *painful*, laborious, and troublesome, to those whose welfare they are promoting;—why should we imagine, that the mere existence of

any evil in the world, especially of *those* evils which are the proper discipline of human life, and from which we often see much good resulting, is inconsistent with the *justice* or *goodness* of the *all-wise* governor of the world?

HAVING thus far pleaded the cause of the divine justice, against those misapprehensions or objections, which may arise in men's minds from the seeming inequality of the ways of providence in the present scene of affairs; I shall in the last place point out the principal causes of men's errors and doubts on this subject.— And in the first place, they arise from the imperfection of our knowledge. Could we pervade the whole nature and system of things, and discern the infinite connexions and correspondencies, which not only take place in the various parts of the system of mankind, but extend from world to world, and from age to age, how astonishing would our view of things be?
and

and how absolutely perfect would the works of the almighty appear?—But we see nothing beyond the little precinct of our habitation; and do not perfectly understand even that short scene which is presented to our view, but are frequently mistaking one thing for another, and passing a false judgment on human life and the events of the world. The better we understand our own nature and the world around us, the more wisdom, justice, and goodness we shall find in the whole constitution. But our minds are biased by partial views and particular events, tho' they conclude nothing in regard to the whole.

IN the second place, the corruption of men's hearts is a principal cause of error and false judgment concerning the ways of divine providence. Men conscious to themselves of unjust dispositions in their own minds, are most apt to be suspicious of the intentions of other persons and
agents,

agents, even the greatest of beings and sovereign agent of the universe. They are not only willing to believe that other men have no more regard to justice than themselves; but are tempted to apprehend that the divine nature and disposition may be of the same kind. The dispositions of men have a strong influence upon their judgments: and if those are unjust and tyrannical, and tempt them to abuse *their own* powers and faculties; they hence suspect that *others* will do the same; and connect so strongly together the idea of power in any being with a temptation or disposition to abuse that power, that they cannot cordially believe, that a being of almighty power is at the same time perfectly just and beneficent, and employs his power to no other ends than the greatest utility and good of the whole world. At least, they flatter themselves with hopes of impunity, and of escaping the scourge of divine justice; falsely imagining, from a partial view of the state of the world, that cer-

tain advantages or pleasures may be reaped from fraud and wickedness, preferable to those resulting from integrity and virtue.

THIRDLY: another source of misapprehensions and doubts concerning divine providence, is the particular *doctrines* which have sometimes prevailed, and which, *if true*, would actually *derogate* from the divine perfections of justice and equity. For instance; if men believe, that GOD will not *destroy* the wicked in another world, as the Gospel affirms; but will *preserve* them for ever, in order to inflict upon them endless torments, and make their wickedness and misery everlasting;—it is impossible that they can believe, at the same time, his perfect *justice*, much less his infinite *goodness*:—Or if they believe that he *transfers* the punishment due to any crimes from the guilty to the innocent;—if it is an article of their faith, that GOD punisheth all mankind, not for *their own* sins, but for the sin and disobedience

dience of their *first parents*;—This tends to confound their natural ideas of divine providence, and the equity of his government over the world: and if men espouse mistaken principles, and imagine that to be fact and the real state of things, which is not so; it is no wonder they labour under perplexities, and find insuperable difficulty, in attempting to reconcile their imaginary system of things with perfect wisdom and justice; and therefore are ready to conclude, *The ways of GOD are unequal.*

THE *Israelites* in the prophet *Ezekiel's* time said, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.* And many in these latter ages of *christianity* have said, that our *first parents eat the forbidden fruit*, and *all their children and posterity* to the end of the world are *punished* for it. But the words of the prophet in expostulating with, and reproving the *Israelites* for their defaming the divine

character, and misrepresenting the proceedings of his providence, are equally applicable to christians of later times. *As I live, saith the Lord, ye shall not use any more this saying. Behold all souls are mine: As the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. But if a man be just, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, saith the Lord God. If he beget a son that is a robber, a shedder of blood, an oppressor of the poor and needy; he shall not live, he shall surely die, his blood shall be upon him. Now lo, if that person beget a son that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth and doth not such like; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. Yet say ye, What? Doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? "Do not men bear the iniquity of their first parents?" No. When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth it shall die.*

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The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. Yet ye say, the way of the Lord is not equal. Are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you upon every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart and a new spirit. For why will you die? For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God. Wherefore turn yourselves and live.

To conclude; in order to gain clear apprehensions of the governing justice of God, and the intentions of his providence; we must endeavour to understand something of the divine conduct, and beware of mistaking his dispensations, and misrepresenting his actions, or imagining

the constitution of the world and the condition of human life to be different from what it is: lest we foolishly impute to God the defects of our narrow understandings, the unjust imaginations of our hearts, or the groundless suppositions and tenets of weak men; and hence defame the adorable character of the greatest and best of beings. We see manifest symptoms and incontestable evidences of a divine providence, justice and beneficence, in the constitution of this world, and the present scene of human life. And if we cannot resolve all difficulties or dark appearances; we ought to remember, that the schemes of divine wisdom and justice are not bounded by the narrow limits of this world, or confined to any period of time, but are extended throughout the universe and to endless ages. And when the scenes of other worlds and of future ages are disclosed to us, we may become *more competent* judges, and discern those vast effects of a wise contrivance and just disposition
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of all things, of which we have now scarce any conception.

IN the mean time, let present arguments suffice to our satisfaction: and let a deep conviction and constant belief of the universal presiding, perfect and eternal justice of God, disposing affairs, rewarding virtue and punishing wickedness here and hereafter; be our governing principle thro' life, deterring us from vice, and supporting and animating us in the constant practice of all virtue.





DISCOURSE IV.

On Public Calamities.



LUKE xiii. 1, &c.

There were present at that season, some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.-- And Jesus answering said unto them, suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay: but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.—Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

OF all the public events of human life, none raise a greater alarm, or more engage the attention of mankind, than those which involve multitudes in a sudden

sudden calamity or destruction. Devastations occasioned by war, famine, pestilence, or some violent commotion of the elements, are heard of in remote places, and spread a general consternation. Curiosity, compassion, a sense of our liableness to the like disasters, and a regard to our own preservation, concur in exciting our attention to such events: and most men are forward in forming conjectures and conclusions, concerning the cause and end of them. Yet the reasons for which the divine wisdom permits them, are remote from human knowledge. The impressions they make are *violent*, but not *lasting*: men's *passions* are affected, but not their *judgment* convinced: their *fear* is excited, but neither their *faith* strengthened, nor their lives reformed: in the midst of their consternation they are exceedingly devout, without making any improvement in wisdom and virtue. Many are apt to draw false or partial conclusions from them; either impiously distrusting the justice and
goodness

goodness of God, or vainly presuming to know his design, or uncharitably censuring the unhappy sufferers, or flattering themselves with an opinion of their own superior innocence and goodness.—It is a matter of importance then, and will be the care and study of every wise man, on all such occasions, to beware of presumption; and by just and proper reflections, to apply the terrible calamities which befall his fellow-creatures, to his own improvement in piety and virtue.

To this end, let the wisdom of our Saviour direct us; and let us carefully attend to the instructions he hath given us on this subject.—In the words of the text, we find him actually reproofing and rectifying an error, which has been too popular in all ages, and which some of his disciples had adopted. They supposed, that when men suffered any unusual calamities, or perished in any singular manner; it was a proof of their singular guilt; and that

GOD

GOD intended by such events to punish them for their wickedness. With this view they came to our Saviour, and related to him the terrible fate of certain *Galileans*, whom Pilate had surprized and massacred, as they were offering sacrifice. To which he replied: *Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew them; think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

ON this passage we may make the three following observations.—In the first place, that our Saviour admonisheth us, not to flatter ourselves with a vain imagination, that we are more innocent and virtuous than others, because we escape the calamities in which they are involved. Secondly, that he instructs us not to censure the
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the sufferers, or impute their calamities to their guilt. It was only the sudden and singular manner, in which the *Galileans* and the eighteen *Jews* perished, which tempted some of *Christ's* disciples, to interpret that event as a punishment of their wickedness: had they perished in any other manner more common to mankind, no one would have thought of ascribing it to their guilt. Now our Saviour denies the *singularity of the manner* to be any evidence of their *singular* guilt: and consequently it was no mark or *evidence* at all of *any* guilt. Such calamities therefore are not to be considered as punishments, or as judgments of GOD upon men for their wickedness. And in fact, whoever takes a comprehensive view of the state of human life, will be convinced, that the most innocent persons are equally liable to, and as frequently suffer such external calamities, as the most guilty: and that in all public desolations, both are equally involved without distinction: and therefore

that such events have *no relation* to men's respective moral characters and deserts.— Thirdly, we may observe, that our Saviour here predicts the destruction of the *Jewish* nation at the siege of *Jerusalem*: *except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish*: or as it should be rendered, *in like manner*: i. e. in a destruction similar to the calamities, in which the aforementioned sufferers perished: which accordingly came to pass. For as *Pilate* the Roman governor slew those *Jews* as they were offering sacrifices; and as *those eighteen* were crushed to death, by the fall of the tower in *Siloam*;—so the nation in general, being assembled to offer sacrifices at *Jerusalem*, were surrounded and destroyed by the Roman armies, or perished at last in the ruins of the city and temple. So fully were the words of our Saviour verified; *nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all perish in the like manner*. The parable following the text was spoken at the same time, and contains a *prediction* of the *same* event.

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Now from this passage of our Saviour, let us endeavour to make some rational and useful reflections upon those tragical events and public calamities which we see or hear of in the world. And first let us consider them with a view to divine providence.—Secondly, with respect to the sufferers, and to ourselves.

FIRST, we are to consider such tragical events and general calamities with respect to the providence of GOD.—And here it is more curious than useful to endeavour to trace out the immediate causes of them: whether they be owing to the convulsion of the raging elements, and the violent operation of those mighty powers, with which GOD has endued the several parts of the material system; or to those other elements, the violent passions of men, and the operation of a furious ambition and revenge, in the bosoms of mankind:—they are to be considered in the same religious view, as equally related to, and

originally proceeding from that power and providence of God, which disposeth all events, which constituted the powers and passions of human nature, and the properties and operations of the material world; and which can equally over-rule and direct both at his pleasure.—There are two instances, one of each kind, mentioned in the text; and our Saviour makes the same reflection upon both.

To some persons it may seem difficult to reconcile such events, where numbers are promiscuously involved in the same calamity, with the justice and goodness of the supreme Disposer. For however just the calamity and destruction of wicked men may appear; we may put the question with Abraham, *wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?* And, *shall not the judge of the whole earth do right?*

In answer to such kind of objections, we may ask on the other hand; who can

presume upon the score of his singular innocence and virtue, to plead a right of exemption from such calamities? Who is there that does not deserve, in some instance or other, the divine displeasure? At least who can arrogate to himself so much merit, as to say it is unjust in the almighty Disposer, to permit him to fall with others in a common ruin? Are not all *guilty before GOD*? And is there any *that doeth good and sinneth not*?—At least is it not a high degree of presumption and vanity in any mortal, to imagine his own life of so much importance, or his own piety and virtue so meritorious, that God is obliged to interpose miraculously; for his preservation from a destruction, in which others around him are involved? What is man in his best estate, supposing him endued with the highest virtues and accomplishments attainable by human nature, in the eye of the infinite being, but a mean and short-lived reptile in the dust of the earth? —It is true, that *not a sparrow falleth to*

the ground without him : but how small is the difference in his eye, how great soever it may appear to our little minds, between the minutest insect, and the greatest person in the world?—Mankind indeed are of a higher order, and greater value, than the brute-creatures ; as our Saviour beautifully instructs his disciples : *not a sparrow falleth to the ground without him* : and are *not ye much better than they* : ye are of more value : *fear not therefore*, but repose a confidence in the divine care.—Thus he leads us to a just knowledge of ourselves ; and equally guards us, on the one hand, from a false presumption upon the special protection of heaven ; and on the other, from an anxious diffidence and despair, as if our lives were of no moment, or beneath the notice of the all-wise governor of the world.

We ought always to remember, what experience if attended to will sufficiently inform us of, that GOD governs the world,
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by the general powers and properties, which his wisdom has fixed, in the constitution of human nature, and in the various elements, of which the world is composed. And if we consider the immense and unknown powers of nature, acting in a frequent or perpetual opposition to each other; ought we not rather to admire, that providence of the Creator, which has so restrained, tempered and united them, as to produce so much serenity and harmony, to preserve human life in so regular a manner, and to furnish such various and agreeable scenes, as are continually presented to us? Ought we not rather to admire such wisdom and goodness, than to be struck with horror and diffidence, and tempted to impeach divine providence; tho' the elements of matter, or the passions of men, seem sometimes to break thro' the regular and prescribed bounds, and instead of being salutary, become destructive. The usual and regular course of divine providence and beneficence, ought much

more to engage our attention and gratitude, than the unusual calamities move our fear and awe. For it is *by the cords of a man, and the bands of love*, that GOD intends to draw men to himself, and conciliate our esteem affection and obedience, rather than to compel us, by motives of terror and astonishment. And the wisest and most ingenuous minds, will not have recourse to singular events, tragical disasters, and public desolations, in order to see the hand of GOD's providence, and be convinced of his righteous judgment. We may much better learn and understand the wisdom justice and goodness of the divine administration, from the stated œconomy of the world, the regular formation of things in it, and the usual process of events; than from those uncommon and astonishing accidents, where nature seems to be disturbed, and to produce monstrous births, and the world to be unhinged, and thrown into confusion.—And with regard to such events, a wise man will consider,

sider, that as the human body is liable to particular disorders, and the conflict of violent distempers, which is notwithstanding no impeachment of the wisdom of the hand which formed it;—so the world itself may be of a similar constitution, and be subject in like manner, to accidental convulsions of the potent elements: and in both; will admire the wisdom of God, who has given to nature so strong an efficacy, and constant propensity to heal itself, to discharge what is noxious to the constitution, and to recover its usual state of health and vigour: and instead of being tempted to distrust the divine wisdom and goodness, will adore that providence, which binds and unites the whole world together, which reconciles the most discordant things in nature, and so counterpoizes the contrary weights and powers in it, as to preserve *the universal ballance*, to make all things coincide in so much harmony, and jointly produce so beneficial effects.—That havock and desolation

are sometimes occasioned, by hostilities of war, by pestilential distempers, or contending elements, is not a matter of wonder:—the proper subject of our admiration is, that such destructive events happen so seldom, and in so few places; and that upon the whole, human life is maintained in so much security and tranquility, and the order and constitution of the world still preserved; which is owing to the power and goodness of that being, who, in the elegant expression of the *Psalmist*, *stilleth the raging of the sea, and the tumults of the people*. And certainly, had not the world been constituted by infinite wisdom, and was it not superintended by a divine providence; the earth had long since returned to its primitive chaos, and the system of nature fallen into universal desolation.

HAVING considered such events with a view to the providence of God; let us in the next place attend to them, with a view

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to the sufferers, and to ourselves.—With respect to those who unhappily perish, or are otherwise involved in such public calamities; it is extremely rash in us, to make such events a handle to pronounce a sentence of guilt upon the sufferers. For besides the uncharitableness of such censures, do we not hereby presume to understand those ways and judgments of God, which are most unsearchable and past our finding out?—When indeed men bring upon themselves, by their own wickedness, disgrace, diseases, or death, according to the natural and usual course of things, or the justice of human law; it is here no rashness to assert, that they are suffering punishment for their transgressions: but these extraordinary events and public calamities are of a nature totally different, as there is no natural or visible connexion between the sin and the suffering; and consequently no ground on which to form such a conclusion.—Besides, as all mankind must die, of what great importance is the *time*

or

or *manner*? Or why should those that perish suddenly in a common destruction, be thought to bear the marks of divine displeasure, more than others, who tho' they survive such calamities, may linger out life in anxiety and distress, or perish by slow and painful distempers? We are so ignorant and incompetent judges of such events, that it becomes us silently to refer them, to the unsearchable wisdom of that being, *whose judgements are a great deep*, and who is *the preserver of man and beast*, *who wounds and who heals*, *who kills and who makes alive*, *who creates evil as well as good*, and who is not obliged to unfold to us the mysteries of his counsels.

It best becomes us to pursue the wise and salutary instructions of our Saviour, and to apply such events to our own correction and amendment, and as a motive to repentance and reformation. For if we are involved in sin and guilt, and do not repent and become better, we shall certainly, sometime or other, be involved in destruction, and
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in some manner or other, experience the displeasure of almighty God. What if we were absolutely secure from the like calamities, by which others are oppressed or destroyed? Has not the all-wise governor of the world various ways and means, by which to chastise or punish his sinful and rebellious creatures? Or if we could be secure from all temporal calamities; yet is there not a righteous judgment hereafter? And does not an eternal destruction finally await the impenitent and incorrigible?— But where is our security from any evils or calamities, however remote we may seem to be, at present, from danger? No proof can be brought for our security; nor does our *mountain stand so strong* that it cannot be shook. We are surrounded with the same elements, as the rest of mankind. And it is in vain to flatter ourselves with entire safety, either from the sword of our enemies, or the ravages of the pestilence, or the desolations of the tempestuous and warring

elements. For the words of the Apostle are often verified, that *when men say to themselves, peace, and are secure in their own imagination, then sudden destruction cometh upon them.*

It must be confessed, that the terrible calamities, and general desolations, which sometimes befall mankind, do not seem calculated to instruct and reform them: at least they are not to be thought the principal means, which God makes use of, to convert men from their wickedness to the love and practice of virtue. And we may learn from history and observation, that the principal effect of them has been a transient consternation and terror, which is soon worn off: and the elements have no sooner returned to their usual state, than men have returned to their usual vicious courses: they operate for a while violently upon the passions of mankind, and move their fear and horror: but their judgment and conscience, their temper and

conduct have been in the main little altered or amended. It is by a calm and rational attention to the instructions of divine wisdom, to the difference of virtue and vice, and to the motives of the gospel, that the world is to be reformed, and the lives and manners of men corrected and governed; and not by the transient terrors of a sudden calamity, which seldom produce any good and lasting fruits. But notwithstanding this, wise and considerate persons may and will make a good use and just application of such events: and neither on the one hand, give way to superstitious horrors and unreasonable fears; nor on the other, be inattentive to what passes in the world, and negligent of the awful strokes of divine providence. It becomes us to consider in what situation we are placed, to what dangers we are exposed, and on whom our time life and safety depend: and to remember, that as the order of things suffers some casual disturbance and interruption, and nature seems to be thrown

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into tranſient and partial convulſions;— ſo a period of all things will come at laſt, when the world itſelf will labour under mortal agonies, and haſten to a total diſſolution; when the whole fabrick of the world ſhall fall to ruins, and make way for an univerſal renovation.

By ſuch conſiderations we ſhall be powerfully excited, to arm ourſelves with religious faith and fortitude, and with that conſcious integrity, which will be our beſt and only ſupport: and this will be a foundation to ſtand upon, tho' the earth be removed from under us. A ſteady truſt in the wiſdom and goodneſs of the almighty Maker of the world, and the hope of that immortality, which is brought to light by the goſpel, and that reſurrection to life which our Saviour is impowered to beſtow, when the ſoul ſhall triumph over death and the grave, and over the ruins of a diſſolving world;—this faith and hope, joined to a conſcience void of offence,

fence, may banish diffidence and dread, and render us serene and unmoved amidst all events; knowing that no disorder or confusion can arise, no calamity or ruin ensue, which the almighty Disposer will not finally convert into order and peace; that death itself shall be at last changed into life, destruction into salvation, fear and pain into triumph and joy, and the transitory scene of this dissoluble and perishing world, into eternal mansions, and a world wherein righteousness and happiness shall dwell for ever.

LET this mind and this hope be in us; carefully preserving our innocence, and diligently improving in all knowledge and virtue, banishing fear and anxiety, enjoying freedom and peace of mind, and a grateful sense of God's preserving goodness and providence, and a confidence, that *all things shall work together for good to them that love him and keep his commandments.*



DISCOURSE V.

On the right Use of the Understanding
in Religion.



VOL. II.

I

I COR. XIV. 20.

In understanding be men.

TO give attention to things most excellent in their nature, beneficial in their effects, and lasting in their duration, things most requisite to the good of mankind and to our own happiness; is evidently the best employment of the human understanding. On the other hand, To be seriously busy about trifles, and inattentive to things of importance; to bestow much labour and expence upon the body, and to neglect the culture of the mind; to be tenacious of dark opinions and superfluous ceremonies, and regardless of the clearest truths and most useful instructions; to be captivated with an external show which is of no value, and to neglect that virtue and goodness which is of the greatest worth

and the end of all religion ; these are all characteristics of a false judgment and a little understanding.

THE understanding of man, duly cultivated and improved, looks beyond those minute objects which childish weak and superstitious minds lay hold of and dwell upon ; and founds his religion on the most enlarged conceptions he can possibly form of the greatest and best of beings, and of the intentions of his wisdom and goodness in the formation of the world. But a mindcontracted and possessed by little and false ideas, conceives of GOD as being *altogether such a one as himself* ; influenced by particular affections and antipathies, loving this sect and hating the other, requiring the belief of unreasonable doctrines, delighted with outward formalities, easy of access to some, inexorable to others, electing a few to eternal life without reason, and damning all the rest without mercy. Hence his zeal will be all employed

ployed about speculative points, the traditions of the elders, and the externals of worship; and he will seek to gain the divine favour by a false show of devotion, or contending for an unprofitable faith, rather than by the substantial duties of an innocent and beneficent life.—Such errors are best corrected by opening and enlarging the *Understandings* of men, and leading them to distinguish what is most excellent and important from every thing trifling and superficial.

THERE are in reality but *three kinds* of religion in the world, tho' there are numberless different denominations. The first is a religion of the *senses*, when men's minds are awed and captivated by *sensible* objects, by edifices, images, sounds, postures, processions, vestments, &c. in a word, by a pompous *apparatus* of worship: this is the very genius of *Superstition*, and springs from, or produces, the most childish misconceptions of the nature of

GOD and the end of religion. The second is a religion of the *passions*, and consists in certain fervors and transports, in contractions or dilatations of the heart, in elevations or depressions of the spirits: this tends to *Enthusiasm*. The third is a religion of the *Understanding*, when men are duly convinced on rational evidence of the great truths of religion, and deliberately resolve to govern their actions according to them.

IN fact, every religion in the world is a *composition* of these three kinds: but is rational and useful only in proportion as it partakes of the *last* kind; or, as it is adapted to the *understandings* of men, and contributes to preserve and strengthen the judging faculty of the mind, in a due government of the senses and affections. Yet we cannot entirely exclude either of these latter from the service of religion; nor ought this to be attempted under any pretence of shunning superstition or enthusiasm:

thufiafm : mankind are not capable of a religion fo fpiritual and refined. The *fenfes*, and much more the *affections*, are of great ufe in religion, when they are under the government of a good understanding. They belong to the constitution of our nature ; and are neceffary to excite us to activity and diligence. The fpeculations and opinions of the understanding, how juft and important foever, only operate by producing *affection* : and whoever can attentively confider the great doctrines of religion, without being in the leaft *affected*, has good reason to queftion himfelf, whether he has any belief of them.

BUT if the fenfes and affections are not under the government of a found judgment ; they are *blind* guides in *religion*, and may lead us into great abfurdities, into the mean tricks of fuperftition, or the wild reveries of enthufiafm.

THE men who have invented, compiled, propagated and established religions in the world, have adapted their schemes with a principal view either to the understandings, or to the passions, or to the senses of mankind; according to the different ends which they had principally in view, viz. either to rule and enslave the populace by *superstition*; or to excite them to bold and desperate actions by *enthusiasm*; or to inform and improve their minds by that which alone is properly styled *religion*.

WE shall proceed to consider more particularly the right use of the human understanding in matters of religion, in respect to doctrines and opinions; to forms and ceremonies; and to moral practice.

THAT there is an omnipresent, all-powerful, most wise, just, benevolent, and merciful Being; that he rules over the rational world by the most perfect government;

ment; that there is a life to come, in which men shall be rewarded according to their actions; that our Blessed Saviour is appointed the minister of divine justice and goodness to mankind, and the judge of the world: these are truths of moment, the fundamental doctrines of religion in general, and of christianity in particular, which have a direct influence on the morals of men, and a manifest tendency to promote their virtue and happiness. The design of the whole New Testament is to direct and establish the influence of these doctrines upon the minds of men: and every wise man will endeavour to understand the importance and evidence of them, and every good Christian to support the belief and enforce the influence of them in the world.

BUT when Christians, instead of attending to these great and evident principles of the Gospel, and recommending them to others, became studious and zealous only
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in support of obscure and peculiar tenets, disputable as to their foundation either in reason or scripture, and of little or no influence to reform the lives of men, or which tend to perplex their minds or contract their tempers: when instead of evincing the excellence of the laws of God, and the obligations of yielding obedience to them, they were framing and teaching presumptuous notions concerning his secret and eternal ~~degrees~~; whilst instead of supporting the *authority* of *Christ* and the regard due to his precepts, they were endeavouring to define his metaphysical nature and essence; whilst instead of dissuading men from sinful practices, they were contending for *original sin*; and instead of persuading men to do good, endeavouring to prove that it is not in the power of man to do any good; whilst instead of explaining and proving christianity, they were making it improbable and unintelligible; in all this they made a preposterous use of the reason God had given them,

and how wise and learned soever they were thought, departed from the true character of wisdom and understanding. And the misery of the consequences was equal to the folly of such attempts. Instead of knowledge and virtue, ignorance and corruption were largely diffused; the beautiful simplicity of the Gospel was defaced; and a religion of love and charity was perverted into a subject of contention and an engine of oppression. Hence wraths, strifes, seditions, heresies, murders, were propagated in the Christian world. The harvest was answerable to the nature of the seed: *They sowed the wind and reaped the whirlwind.*—The general cause of which hath been this; that men have not made an honest use of their understandings, in distinguishing those doctrines which are of real importance to the reformation and good of mankind, from such as are insignificant or hurtful.

IN like manner the weakness of the human understanding hath appeared in the busy and solemn attention men have paid to the modes and circumstances of worship, instead of regarding principally the moral end and use of it.—It was on occasion of the *Corinthians* affecting some ostentatious appearances in their public worship, instead of conducting it in the most instructive and beneficial manner, that the Apostle gives them the admonition in the text: *Brethren be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children; but in understanding be ye men.*

ALL *superstition* is founded either in absolute ignorance; or in a certain *littleness* of mind, from whence it comes to pass that insignificant objects and affairs *fill up* its capacity, and entirely possess its attention and affections, to the exclusion of things most important and useful. Hence the mere ceremonies of worship have attracted

tracted profound veneration, and have been thought of the greatest moment and efficacy, separate from all moral effects in the practice of virtue and in the good of society. Tho' it is so reasonable and so easy to consider, that if a wise man chiefly values the real esteem and service of others, and despises mere ceremonies and verbal professions in their behaviour to him; how much more will the all-wise governor of the world chiefly regard integrity of heart and a readiness of mind to obey his will, and reject the false signs and superstitious mimicry of devotion to him.

BUT there is danger, on the other hand, of falling into a contrary extreme, in both the foregoing respects, from the same weakness, prejudice and narrow capacity of the human mind. For some men, when they have discovered the falshood of some notions which they once strongly believed, and the folly of some customs for which they

they once had a veneration, are apt to be struck with amazement and perplexity, are at a loss where to fix, and begin to question the certainty or the usefulness of every thing in religion; and because they once believed some things without evidence, now reject things which have sufficient evidence; and because they perceive that many useless and absurd things have been mixed with devotion, throw off all regard to the public worship of God.

Now how much soever such persons may ascribe to their own enlarged understandings, and superiority of mind to vulgar customs and prejudices; yet in fact it is the *same littleness* of mind and precipitance of temper, the *same* want of attention, and of an impartial and comprehensive judgment, which disposes men to reject or despise what is true and useful, as to embrace what is false and hurtful: and it is equally the part of every honest and judicious

cious person to support the true principles of religion and the rational worship of God, as to reject the extravagances of credulity and superstition. Indeed the former is the only effectual means of guarding men against the latter. The passage from infidelity to superstition, from *no* religion to the *worst* religion in the world, is rather easy and natural than difficult. The knowledge and belief of true religion is the only firm barrier against error and superstition. As the only way to avoid corruptions and tyranny in civil government is not to throw off all government and reduce the state to anarchy (which instead of preventing is always found to produce tyranny) but to support a just and legal government: so the only means, of guarding mankind against the corruptions of religion, are to preserve the truth of religion and the purity of worship, according to the genuine instructions of our Saviour and his Apostles.

MEN of shallow capacity and an impetuous temper seldom adhere to a right medium in their judgment and practice; but often run headlong from one extreme to another. They either implicitly reverence and admire whatever comes recommended to them with an appearance of solemnity and religion, and so follow the track of their ancestors and the customs of the age and place they live in; or being once set free from the captivity of such impressions, they fly to the most opposite part, and think nothing can be true against which there lies any objection, nothing useful that is subject to any inconvenience, and disallow the *best use* of things only because they have been abused.

BUT this extreme is as justly entitled to the names of prejudice and folly as the former. To disapprove a revealed religion only because absurd things have been fathered upon it, or because the nature
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and evidence of it is attended with some difficulty; to despise the ministration of the Gospel only because it hath been corrupted; is confounding the most important distinctions, rooting up the wheat with the tares, and making havock and destruction. There is nothing so genuine in its nature, or substantial in its foundation, or beneficial in its effects, that is not liable to be abused and counterfeited, and the *best* things may by an excessive abuse and thorough corruption become the *worst*. But as we should call in question that person's *understanding*, who instead of carefully separating and extirpating the *weeds*, should think the only remedy was to destroy the *soil itself*; so we may with equal reason question the soundness of his *intellects*, who from a violent antipathy to the corruptions of christianity, is for disbanding Christian societies and destroying the foundation of religion in the minds of men.

WE have thus far considered the weakness and misuse of the human understanding in a blind veneration of or attachment to groundless or obscure opinions and useless or superstitious forms, on the one hand; and on the other, in a dislike and rejection of those doctrines and institutions which are founded on truth and useful to mankind, and have considered *both extremes* as proceeding from a *similar* temper and capacity of mind, equally prejudiced, precipitate, and undistinguishing. Every person, of a sedate and manly judgment and honest disposition, will be no less desirous of admitting and supporting whatever hath probable evidence and is beneficial in effect, as of rejecting what hath no sufficient foundation or is prejudicial to mankind.

FINALLY, in regard to *moral practice*, which is of the utmost importance to every man's own welfare and eternal salvation,
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the proof of a *good understanding* consists, in *keeping the commandments of GOD*, in preferring our duty to all other considerations, in knowing and pursuing what is most valuable in itself and most conducive to our happiness.

SHOULD any one seriously own it as his opinion, that wealth is better than honesty, or intemperance better than sobriety, or that this life is preferable to an immortal life, or that it is a wise exchange to gain the world with the loss of his soul; should we not conclude him to be strangely disordered in his *intellects*?—And if men profess the contrary opinions, yet act thus in practice; do they not appear to be equally, or much *more*, void of *Understanding*? For *actions* are of more importance than *words*: the main test of a sound mind is right conduct, and the steady pursuit of what is most valuable to ourselves and beneficial to society. How

ingenious and crafty foever men are in the fetches of policy and in compassing their own by-ends and worldly devices, they are but *Children in understanding*, whilst they aim at nothing truly honourable and useful to themselves and to mankind.

OF all men the covetous and worldly make the strongest pretensions to prudence and a good judgment, and are apt to value themselves for their policy and penetration, in knowing the worth of every thing, and how to draw profit to themselves, from every person and event they are concerned with. To these are opposed the intemperate and the men of gaiety, wit, and pleasure, who despise the maxims on which the former act, and pride themselves in a more lively genius and quicker taste of the enjoyments of life.—But if we could suppose both these characters united in the same person, and the most refined taste in expending wealth
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added to the greatest sagacity in gaining it; would he on account of these qualities be entitled to the high character of wisdom and a good understanding? and ~~is~~ is our Saviour's judgment erroneous, or his language without meaning, when he represents the wisest of beings, saying to such a person, *Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?*

How far soever the prudence and policy of men may extend in the management of their worldly affairs and in estimating the comparative worth of earthly possessions; yet if they have never considered what worldly things in general and *on the whole* are worth, if they know not the value of virtue and of a good conscience, if they have never thought of the end and purpose of life itself, and the importance of the succeeding eternal state; are they to be thought *men in understanding?*

ing? or are they not destitute of the highest wisdom of a reasonable creature? At best they only resemble those *children*, who are acute and ingenious in their childish acquisitions and amusement, whilst they neglect to learn those things which would be of the greatest use to them in future life, and on which their success and happiness will depend when they come to years of maturity.

THERE is nothing men are more ambitious of than to be thought men of sense and judgment, and nothing more offensive to them than a contempt of their understandings. Let us consider then, what is the best proof and effect of a good understanding. And as we are in a state of *minority* and *education*, in respect to a future and eternal life; let us wisely apply our rational faculties to the best improvement of this life: Lest we should discover at last that we have been em-

employed to no valuable purpose; and whilst we have been busy and thoughtful about *trifles*, have neglected things of the greatest value and *moment*, and which, after the proper season of life is over, can never be retrieved.



DISCOURSE VI.

On the Office and Dignity of *Christ*.



ACTS v. 31.

*Him hath GOD exalted to be a Prince and
a Saviour.*

VARIOUS opinions have arisen among christians concerning the power and office of our Blessed Saviour: And this variety hath been a natural consequence of their different understandings and methods of conception, their different means of instruction and information, and the different senses in which they have interpreted the same words of Holy Scripture. Many attempts have been made to remove these differences, to rectify men's opinions, and to promote the knowledge of truth. But such attempts have not only failed of attaining the end proposed; but have been often made with so little judgment, or received with so little candour

candour and impartiality; that instead of remedying that difference of opinion, which, if an evil, is a *very small* one; they have added to it that discord of affection and party-hatred, which is undoubtedly a *very great evil*.

ONE thing which hath contributed to render all such attempts ineffectual, or productive of consequences worse than the disease itself, hath been this. Men have rather studied to divide and multiply the characters ascribed to our Saviour in the New Testament, and consequently to perplex our minds in conceiving of them; than to reduce them to one intelligible meaning: and particularly, have applied those titles to the person of our Lord in a *metaphysical* sense, which are given to him in Scripture solely on account of his *office* and *dominion*.

It will greatly facilitate our conceptions, and strengthen our christian belief, if we
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consider the various eminent titles and characters ascribed to him, as intended, not to signify different properties of his nature, or offices of his mediation; but only, to recommend him to our esteem and veneration, in various allusions to different dignities and offices among men.—For instance, in allusion to the office and dignity of High-Priest among the Jews; he is said to be *our High-Priest*, and to offer his own blood as a sacrifice for us.—In allusion to patrons and intercessors in earthly courts; he is characterized *our advocate with the Father*, and described as *continually making intercession for us*.—In reference to the power and dignity of temporal princes; he is stiled, *A prince mighty to save to the uttermost*, and his government *an everlasting kingdom*.—Compared to generals who fight the battles of their country, and overthrow its enemies; he is denominated *the captain of our salvation*, who subdues our spiritual enemies.—And as angels, and even earthly governors are called Gods

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in Scripture; so He is sometimes in a more eminent sense stiled *a GOD*: not on account of his metaphysical nature or essence (which the Scripture saith not a word of) but on account of the dominion or government, which GOD hath committed to him for the eternal salvation of men.— And finally, as angels, and even good men, on account of their piety and goodness, and the divine favour toward them, are frequently called *the Sons of God*: so He is most frequently, and in the most eminent sense characterized, *the Son of God*: denoting by that title, not the derivation of his essence, but his moral worth and dignity in the divine estimation.— All these titles and characters may be reduced to one and the same meaning: recommending him to our esteem and confidence, as being appointed of GOD the Saviour Governor and judge of mankind in respect to their eternal state; as qualified and empowered to take care of our most important interests, and to bestow the

the rewards of immortality on good men.

IT will confirm this explication, to observe, That the privileges and blessings we derive from his mediation, are described in the same allusions and figurative expressions.—As he was in a most eminent sense *the Son of God*, so it is said, *that he gave his followers a power or privilege to become the Sons of God.*—As he is stiled *the heir of all things*; so his true followers are stiled, *Heirs of God and joint-heirs with himself.*—As he hath the titles of *King* and of *High-Priest*; so he hath made them *to be Kings and Priests to his God and Father.*—As He received from GOD *a kingdom*; so he saith to his disciples, *I appoint unto you a kingdom.*—As he is said to be *one with the Father*; so it is said, that he raiseth his followers *to be partakers of a divine nature, and to be one with him, even as he is one with the Father.*—And further, as he is described *sitting upon a throne of glory*, and
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coming to *judge the world*; so he declares to his Apostles, that *they should sit down with him on his throne*, and that *they should judge the twelve tribes of Israel*.—In a word, as He is stiled *the first born among many brethren*, with whom he *partook* of human infirmity and mortality; so they are described as *partaking* with him in his resurrection, exaltation, dominion, glory, and joy.—All these expressions and figures are reducible to one and the same meaning: describing in various lights the grand effect of our Saviour's enterprize: when all those who have followed his example of virtue and obedience, shall be raised from the dead, in the likeness, and by the power of their *exalted Prince*, be clothed with immortality, and *inherit the kingdom prepared for them*,—where he resides and shall reign for ever.

THE apostle *Peter* in the words of the text represents the dignity of *Christ* in the most easy and intelligible terms; yet such

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as comprehend the greatness of his character, and the end of his office: *Him hath God exalted to be a Prince and a Savior.* The title of *Prince* implies the power or dominion God hath committed to him: and the term *Savior* the end for which that power was given, namely, the salvation of men.—All the titles and attributes, therefore, ascribed to our Saviour in his exalted state, unite in one general idea, which is that of a *benefactor*, from whose power and goodness mankind derive benefits or privileges of the highest, most lasting and extensive nature; namely, a resurrection to a future state, a perfect administration of justice in that state, and to all good men the possession of immortality and endless happiness.—To this dominion or empire our Saviour rose by his virtue, or his most perfect and exemplary obedience to the divine will. For it is said, *That he humbled himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross: and therefore God highly exalted him.* And he himself declares,

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clares, that *God hath committed all judgment to him, because he is the Son of Man.* And for this exaltation, as the reward of his virtue and obedience, he prayed to the Father Almighty, in these words, a little before his departure from this world: *I have glorified thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now Father glorify me with thyself with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

THE author of the epistle to the *Hebrews*, in order to recommend our Saviour and the gospel-religion to the esteem and acceptance of the *Jews*, and obviate their scruples and prejudices, makes frequent allusions to the Temple-service, and to the office and dignity of High-Priest. For the *Jews* were educated in a high veneration for those things; and therefore the author made choice of such allusions and figures as most effectual to answer the end proposed, viz. to make the *Jews* willing

to relinquish the pomp and ceremonies of *Judaism*, which were no better than empty shadows, and entirely embrace the substantial and spiritual religion of the *Gospel*. But our Saviour never describes his own future dignity and office under a *sacerdotal* character, but *always* under that of a *Prince*, a *Sovereign*, and *judge*. And therefore we may conclude, that how proper soever the former allusion might be, as addressed to the *Jews*; yet the latter character is better adapted upon the whole, to give us a just conception of His mediatorial power and office. And it is this latter which the Apostles make use of, in their first delivering the Christian doctrine to the world: saying, *That God had raised up Jesus from the dead, and made him Lord and Christ; exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour; in order that he might give repentance and remission of Sins.*

It is solely or principally in the *kingly* character that the dignity of our Saviour

is prophetically described in the writings of the Old Testament: as particularly in Isaiah, ix. 6. *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, — and of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.* He is represented figuratively as succeeding to the throne of David: and at the same time his kingdom is described in such characters as cannot all agree to any human government.

THE highest dignities and most important offices amongst men are no more than shadows or faint resemblances of the glorious power and office of our Saviour in the redemption of the world: and the Scripture makes use of such sensible allusions to assist our feeble apprehensions of things so sublime and spiritual. But great mistakes and errors have arisen from adhering too much to the letter, without understanding or keeping in view the general meaning and design of all such expressions.

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—When our Saviour spoke to the *Jews* of *eating his flesh* and *drinking his blood*, and they did not understand his meaning; he tells them, that his words were to be taken, not literally, but figuratively or spiritually. *For the letter, saith he, profiteth nothing: but the spirit giveth life. The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life: i. e.* They are not to be understood in a gross and material sense, but moral and spiritual.—So from the titles ascribed to our Saviour in his exalted state, taken from human dignities and offices, we should learn to form the highest and purest conceptions we are able, of His spiritual dignity, and of the great and beneficent end of his office, as far excelling all that is human and temporal.—But as the Jews of old, so christians in later times have been too apt to let their attention be wholly employed about gross and material things, even in their most solemn and religious performances. Hence they have paid a veneration to the very elements of bread

and wine, which they receive in commemoration of our Saviour; or to his body and blood, in a literal carnal sense; while they have neglected to fix their attention on what is rational and spiritual, what is most excellent in itself, and most worthy of our veneration; that perfect virtue of his mind, that unlimited piety and obedience to the will of God, and that most generous and extensive benevolence to mankind, which he exemplified in voluntarily submitting to death, even the death of the cross. So in conceiving of the mediatorial dignity and office of our Saviour, christians are too apt to intermix ideas of a low worldly gross or puerile kind. Nor is this to be wondered at, when they are ready to ascribe, even to the supreme and all-perfect being himself, the weakness and partial affections of human nature.

PARTICULARLY, they fall into two contrary extremes: while some have considered our Saviour as little more than a Prophet

phet of GOD and a preacher of righteousness: not considering, that the salvation, government, and disposal of mankind in a future state is a far higher end of his enterprise and office, than any change or reformation which could take place in this world: and that to raise men from the dead, and to judge them in another world, is far more glorious than to work the greatest miracles, and deliver the best instructions here on earth. Others on the contrary have confounded the power and dignity of our Saviour, with GOD's absolute perfection and boundless dominion: and, as if there could be no intermediate powers or natures between man and the one supreme and infinite being, have supposed the mediator to be equal in all attributes, and the very same in essence, with GOD who appointed him to be mediator; and hence have ascribed such compound and indeed contradictory titles to him, as are no where to be found in the New Testament. Whereas it is ex-

prefly said, that *to us Christians there is but one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ*: and that when we *confess him to be Lord*, it is *to the glory of God*, who constituted him Lord, *exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour, and gave him a name which is above every name*. Our Lord himself ascribes his own power dignity and dominion, and his life also, to the free gift of GOD: and hath taught us no doctrine more plainly than that the redemption and salvation of mankind is owing to the original goodness and mercy of the Father Almighty.

IF we will lay aside all doctrines and traditions of men, and attend closely to the language of the New Testament, and endeavour to understand it in a consistent rational and spiritual sense; we shall not find it so mysterious and difficult, as some have imagined it to be, by various mistakes or misconstructions. — Those frequent allusions to human dignities and offices, which we meet with in the descriptions

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tions of our Saviour's dignity and office, are proper in themselves to give us as clear and rational apprehensions as the human mind is capable of. For as in human society, God hath constituted various *powers and offices* for the protection and *benefit of mankind*; as all the blessings of this life are derived to us, not immediately from the hand of the Almighty, but by the *intervention* of such persons as his wisdom hath appointed; as it is the usual order of his providence, to make the virtues and abilities of *one man* the means of conveying the greatest benefits to *many others*; as the most *public* and extensive *deliverances* in this world are accomplished by such *eminent persons* as divine providence *raiseth up* and qualifies for that end;—So, comparing great things to small, and eternal to temporal deliverances, ascending from low things to high, and raising our ideas above all human power and dignity, we may hence form just and rational con-
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ceptions of the mediatorial character, dominion and office of our Saviour; and may easily apprehend the œconomy of divine wisdom and goodness, in our redemption by him——That the Almighty Father of mankind, moved by his own paternal goodness, was pleased to *send* into the world, *in the fulness of time*, in the sight of men and angels, a person cloathed with flesh and blood, and with external marks of meanness and poverty, appointed to undergo the trials of this life, to sustain a character of perfect virtue and obedience to the divine will, and to suffer death, *even the death of the cross*, and finally *to rise from the dead*;—as a suitable preparation in order to his acquiring the dominion and discharging the office intended for him, and becoming the eternal governor and judge of mankind: that consequently, *GOD hath exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour*; not in any temporal or worldly sense, but in a far more sublime

sublime capacity; and *hath given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life, to all the virtuous and obedient.*

THE great Author and finisher of our Faith underwent the most difficult trials of virtue, and humbled himself to the lowest estate, that he might obtain the high honour and glorious office of raising mankind from the dead, and conferring the rewards of eternal life. By his death he gave the highest instance of his own piety; and by his resurrection, the strongest proof of his own power. By practising every human virtue, he hath most powerfully recommended virtue to us. By appearing alive from the dead, he hath convinced us of a life to come. By sustaining the toils and pains of mortality, he is become the Author of immortality; is gone before into the invisible regions to prepare mansions for those who follow him; and will return again with
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power and glory, to judge the world, and to receive all who shall be found worthy into his everlasting kingdom.

To sum up the whole: as all the temporal benefits of providence are conveyed to us by such persons or *mediums* as divine wisdom hath appointed; so the eternal blessings of divine forgiveness and favour are conveyed to mankind by the intermediate power and goodness of Christ our Saviour.—This doctrine is so clearly revealed and expressed in the Holy Scriptures, that all Christians may easily agree in it. And it is not only intelligible in itself, but sufficient to the faith and practice, comfort and hope of every Christian. Other opinions in regard to our Holy religion are of little moment. For while men believe, that the Gospel teaches the most perfect virtue; and contains the sure promise of *eternal life*, as the reward of virtue; a promise made sure by the resurrection

resurrection and exaltation of our Saviour; and in effect of *this Faith*, live *soberly, righteously, and piously* in the world;—they are beyond all doubt the true *disciples of Christ*; and will be acknowledged by him as such; at the same time when he will declare to others, *I know you not, depart from me, all ye that work iniquity.*—The point of the greatest moment then, is to convince men thoroughly of the truth of this doctrine, separate from all abstract and metaphysical speculations; and to persuade them to live under the constant practical influence of it. And our most earnest application should be, not to those whom we think mistaken in some particular and controverted opinions; but to those who either entirely reject the Christian Faith; or who pretend to believe it, yet pay no regard to it in their life and practice; for such pretended believers are in regard to all the important ends of religion, if not worse, certainly, no better than Infidels.

We have thus far explained the doctrine of the Gospel concerning the power and office of our Saviour; and have endeavoured to make it appear intelligible and rational, that we may the more easily understand and more firmly believe it.—We shall, in a following discourse, endeavour to remove the principal objections and prejudices conceived against it; and at the same time observe the principal evidence for the truth of it.—In the meantime we shall conclude with observing in general, the moral and practical influence of this doctrine.

No means or motives can be applied to the human mind more powerful to correct its vices and disorders, more proper to improve and enoble it with the best sentiments and the most virtuous affections, with the sincerest piety to God, and the most disinterested and extensive benevolence to men, than a faithful attention to the character and example of our Lord in
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his state of trial on earth, and his exaltation to heavenly glory and dominion. Here we see the intention of the supreme Governor of the world to distinguish and reward true virtue and obedience to his will, and the greatest virtue with the highest honour and happiness. For our Saviour, who is advanced in the invisible state to an eternal *dominion over all mankind*, was himself the *best of mankind*, and exhibited, previous to his exaltation, the most perfect example of obedience to the will of God: an example, not only to men among whom he was conversant, but as we may well suppose, to all those superior beings, who have any knowledge of human affairs.

WHAT can so effectually disengage our minds from all sordid cares and passions, and every attachment to worldly possessions and pleasures; what can so powerfully animate them with great and pleasing hopes; as to contemplate our Saviour despising the glory and pleasure of this world, and with

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perfect magnanimity embracing poverty sufferings and death, that so he might sustain the noblest character of virtue, and rise after death to everlasting honour and glory? and to consider ourselves as bound by our holy profession to follow his steps as our leader, and like him, *by a patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory honour and immortality*; that so we may receive from his hand the unspeakable gift of eternal life?

IF this our Christian faith produceth no effect, in reforming and governing our lives, and in purifying our hearts from sinful affections and desires; shall we not be justly pronounced incorrigible, and meet with a heavier condemnation from the righteous judge of the world? Would it not be *better for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us?* — But if in consequence of our Christian Faith and profession, we become

the true followers of Christ, and imitators of his example; we may be assured, that as he was raised from the dead, and exalted to glory and dominion, so all his sincere followers shall in like manner be raised by him, and advanced to proportionate degrees of honour and happiness in his everlasting kingdom.—Which God of his infinite mercy grant, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom be glory in the churches throughout all ages. Amen.



DISCOURSE VII.

Objections against the Gospel and the
Evidence of it, answer'd.



I. COR. i. 22.

The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified; to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness: but to them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of GOD, and the wisdom of GOD.

AS the eye sees only the surface of things, and takes in but a narrow compass; as it cannot discern distinctly objects at a great distance, or penetrate into the substance of what is near; so the human understanding is limited in the like extent and proportion. But mankind being not duly sensible of or attentive to this imperfection in their own understandings, are continually imagining it to

lie elsewhere. And tho' the works and designs of infinite wisdom must *necessarily appear imperfect to us*, in proportion *as our conceptions are limited*, yet *we* are often ready to charge these appearances, as if they were real defects in the constitution of nature and the order of providence.

HENCE the objections which have been made, and the prejudices which have been conceived, against the first principles of religion. And if men have charged the defects of their own minds upon the *universal revelation* of nature; we need not wonder that they have done the same, in regard to the *particular revelation* of the gospel: since no particular revelation can be supported by an evidence equal to that of universal nature. But in both instances, every wise and impartial person, who understands his own weakness and ignorance, will be exceedingly cautious, lest he impute either his own *imperfections*,

or those of other men, to the constitutions of perfect wisdom.

MEN have run into two opposite extremes equally unreasonable and prejudicial: while some have been ready to believe the greatest absurdities, and things contrary to the clearest reason and the evidence of their own senses; others have rejected the most rational and important doctrines, only because they implied something beyond the narrow capacity of their comprehension. As if there was no difference between that which is *above* our capacity, and that which *contradicts* our sense and reason: as if there was no difference between affirming that an object is too great or too distant for our eye-sight to comprehend the whole of it, and affirming it to be, what we clearly see with our own eyes it is not.—And we may here observe, that one extreme hath a tendency in the usual course of things to beget the opposite. Thus, since many follies and superstitions

have been introduced under the name of christianity, tho' in reality tending to subvert and destroy it ; since many christians have substituted the delusions of their own imagination for the doctrines of the gospel ; others being apprized of these absurdities, have not only rejected *them*, but also the *Gospel itself*: not being solicitous to distinguish between the errors of christians and christianity itself, between the inventions of men and the truths of GOD.

IN reality most of the objections which have been offered, and most of the prejudices which have been conceived, by the unbelievers in the present age, have not been against the gospel itself, but against such things as have been added to it, or substituted in the stead of it.—Yet some objections have been made against the real doctrines of the gospel, and the evidence by which it is supported. And it is of the greatest importance to remove

these

these in a satisfactory manner: all *other* objections will fall to the ground of themselves, whenever those corrupt additions, which were the occasion of them, are either abolished, or properly distinguished from genuine christianity.

THE *Apostle*, whose words we have quoted in the text, appears to have been perfectly sensible of the prejudices, which subsisted in the minds of men, against the gospel in his days, and which hindered its success. He understood also the different notions and tempers of the Jews and Greeks, who both rejected the gospel, but from different motives: they had each their peculiar objections and prejudices: *the Jews*, saith he, *require a sign*: they seem to have been chiefly affected with marks of *power*, were desirous above all things of worldly dominion, and impatiently expected to see a mighty prince in their Messiah, who should perform wonders, and subdue the whole world. Therefore,

fore, tho' our Saviour and his apostles wrought many undeniable miracles, yet they were not convinced, because this was not that *kind of power*, which they chiefly admired, and which they expected to see in their *Messiah*: and when they could not deny the reality of the miracles, they evaded the force of the evidence, by demanding still more and more miracles. But unreasonable demands ought not to be gratified, nor would there be any end of complying with them. Thus the Pharisees, after they had seen our Saviour work many miracles on earth, went to him and demanded of him *a sign from heaven*: to which he replied, *a wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign*: and then refers them to his own death and resurrection, as a further evidence, and the strongest that would be afforded them: but intimates in another place, that even that further evidence would be insufficient to convince them.—On the other hand, *the Greeks*, saith the apostle, *seek after wisdom*: they

they were great admirers of *philosophy*, and strongly attached to their several systems, which were taught and propagated with the greatest subtilty art and eloquence. Therefore, tho' the apostles taught the best kind of wisdom, and things agreeable to *true philosophy*; yet they were not convinced, because it was not *that kind* of wisdom, nor delivered with that artificial eloquence, which they admired and sought after.---So then in both instances; if the ministrations of the gospel had been the power of *men*, and the wisdom of *men*, they would have admired it: but as it disappointed their expectations, and contradicted their favorite notions; the *Jews* rejected it with indignation, and the *Greeks* with contempt: it was an *offence* to the bigotted *Jews*, and *folly* to the conceited *Greeks*:—while to the impartial and attentive of every nation, who listened to the *call* of truth, it was *the power of GOD, and the wisdom of GOD.*

WE fhall endeavour then, purfuant to the fenfe of the apoftle in the text, to remove the objections which have been raifed of late againft the gofpel, and to recommend it, in its original nature and evidence, to the rational and cordial belief of all who are defirous of understanding and embracing truth.

IN the firft place, it hath been alledged,
“ That the christian revelation, in its
“ whole fcheme of facts, doctrines, and
“ evidences, is different from or inferior
“ to what we might in reafon expect,
“ from a divine revelation. And tho’ the
“ eternal falvation and happinefs of man-
“ kind be an object worthy of the mira-
“ culous operation of divine power and
“ goodnefs; yet we can fee no fufficient
“ reafons, why the divine wifdom fhould
“ proceed by fuch a fcheme or constitution,
“ as the gofpel fuppofeth, in order to that
“ end.”

THE

THE proper answer seems to be this
 “ That to conclude, from any such objec-
 “ tions, against the truth of christianity,
 “ is arguing from speculations to facts;
 “ and determining what GOD *hath done*,
 “ from what *we think he ought to have done*.
 “ It is no less than *reversing* the just and
 “ natural order of our enquiries; and
 “ instead of examining into *facts*, and
 “ learning from them the actual constitu-
 “ tions of divine wisdom, framing to our-
 “ selves a mere *supposition*, and rejecting
 “ whatever doth not agree with the scheme
 “ which our wisdom hath suggested; as
 “ if it were unworthy of GOD to proceed
 “ in any manner, which our judgment
 “ cannot fully comprehend, or our fancy
 “ approve.”—The words of the *apostle*,
 in the verse following the text, convey a
 most just and rational sentiment, expressed
 in the strongest terms, in opposition to
 this vain conceit and presumption, in
 making our judgment the rule and mea-
 sure of the divine conduct. He says,

That

That the foolishness of GOD excels the wisdom of men, and the weakness of GOD exceeds the power of men. i. e. Those things in the frame of nature, or the conduct of providence, which carry in them the least marks of power and wisdom, or which appear to us the most defective weak and useless; have yet a power in the creation and structure, and a wisdom in the contrivance and use of them excelling all human conception. There are many things in the scheme of creation and providence, for which we can see no sufficient reasons why they should be so constituted, or why they should exist at all; which are notwithstanding (as we may be well assured) the work or appointment of an all-wise being. As such objections, therefore, are of no force to destroy our belief in natural religion; neither ought any of the like kind to prevent our firm belief of the christian revelation.

SECONDLY ; It hath been objected to the gospel doctrine of our Saviour's office and dominion;—" That the almighty power
 " of GOD can raise men from the dead,
 " and confer eternal life upon them, *with-*
 " *out* a Mediator: that he *alone* is an all-
 " sufficient Saviour, without the interven-
 " tion of any *other* power or person in the
 " universe: and that it is more reasonable
 " to suppose, that the future state govern-
 " ment and disposal of mankind should
 " proceed from the *immediate* operation
 " of infinite power and wisdom, than that
 " a power should be committed for that
 " purpose to one who hath existed in hu-
 " man nature, or to any other being in
 " the universe."

To this objection it may be replied:
 " That it is the property of vulgar minds
 " to ascribe every extraordinary and unac-
 " countable event to the *immediate* hand
 " of omnipotence.—That the more we
 " examine into the scheme of divine pro-
 " vidence

“ vidence in the constitution of nature,
“ we shall be the more convinced, that
“ all events proceed from *intermediate*
“ causes or subordinate powers.—That
“ it is more reasonable to question, whe-
“ ther the power of omnipotence be ever ex-
“ erted in the production of any event, to
“ which the powers of created or sub-
“ ordinate beings are equal; than to af-
“ cribe all such events as we cannot ac-
“ count for, to his immediate operation.
“ —That all nature, as far as we can
“ judge of it from observation, is a bound-
“ less scheme of mediation, between the
“ highest of beings and the lowest of his
“ creatures; consisting of an infinite va-
“ riety of powers, states and degrees; the
“ superior governing over the inferior, and
“ every power and part conspiring to the
“ good and perfection of the whole—
“ That the question here, is not concern-
“ ing the *possible* operations of divine
“ power, but the *actual* order and appoint-
“ ment of his *wisdom*.—That we find ex-
“ peri-

“ perimentally the order and constitution
 “ of this world to be such, that all divine
 “ gifts and blessings are conveyed to us by
 “ the virtues and powers of other beings
 “ around us, on which we have a con-
 “ stant dependence.—That in fact, the
 “ providence of God brings men into *this*
 “ *life*, preserves them in it, and supplies
 “ them with every thing requisite to their
 “ wants, not by his own sole immediate
 “ power, but by *means* of the elements of
 “ the world, and of *men themselves*.—That
 “ not only the life and health, support
 “ and happiness, knowledge and virtue
 “ of individuals, are derived from inter-
 “ mediate benefactors; but the most pub-
 “ lic and extensive deliverances, privi-
 “ leges, and blessings, to whole nations,
 “ and to mankind in general, are derived
 “ from the power, wisdom and virtue
 “ of those *eminent persons* whom his pro-
 “ vidence *raiseth up* for such important
 “ services.—And therefore, if any con-
 “ clusion or argument can arise from

“ *hence*, concerning the order of things
 “ and disposal of mankind in a *future*
 “ *state*; it tends rather to confirm than
 “ invalidate our christian faith, con-
 “ cerning the power, agency, jurif-
 “ diction, and office of our blessed Savi-
 “ our, as *raised up* and appointed, by the
 “ wisdom of divine providence, to be the
 “ *Sovereign* of mankind, in *that state or*
 “ *life* which is to come.”

To believe, that amidst the various con-
 stitutions of infinite wisdom throughout
 the unknown and boundless universe, there
 is an invisible and *everlasting kingdom* esta-
 blished for the eternal salvation and hap-
 piness of all good men, and which is ad-
 ministered by a *person*, who underwent the
 most arduous trials of virtue piety and
 humanity, that he might *obtain* this high
 office and dominion; is so far from im-
 plying in it any thing absurd or irrational,
 that it is conformable to the plan of na-
 ture, honorable to the divine perfections,
 and

and at the same time promotive of solid virtue and sublime hope in the heart of man. Was the whole human race assembled together, to frame a petition for themselves, to the supreme ruler and disposer of the universe, with an assurance that it would be granted; what more proper address could they present, what higher privilege to the world in general could the request, of the *Father almighty*; than that in the course of his infinite and eternal providence, he would vouchsafe to confer upon them, the benefit of *such* a constitution, as the Gospel discloses to us; that he would raise up for them *such* a Saviour Governour and Judge, who hath had experience of human infirmity, and discovered so much benevolence and compassion to mankind; and that the sole end of his office and government should be, to deliver good men from all the evils of this life, and raise them to a life incorruptible and eternal; to abolish wickedness and misery, and establish virtue and happiness

for ever. This is the doctrine of the *Gospel*; a doctrine *in itself* worthy of all *acceptation*, adapted to the purest reason and the highest hopes of mankind.

THIRDLY; it hath been further objected, “ That our christian faith, concerning
 “ the sublime dignity and office of our
 “ Saviour, tends to divide our religious
 “ affections, and to weaken our reverence
 “ and allegiance to the one supreme and
 “ all-perfect being; and that the *revealed*
 “ religion of the *Gospel*, is inconsistent
 “ with or prejudicial to *natural* religion.”

IN answer to this it is sufficient to observe; that this is a capital mistake, and directly contrary to the tenor of the new testament. By natural religion we mean the religion of reason and truth; consisting in a sincere reverence of almighty God, and in temperance, justice, and universal goodness. To preserve and extend *this* religion in the world is the design of the
 christian

christian revelation. To this end it applies all its instructions, precepts, promises, and threatnings. Particularly, when as christians we *confess Jesus Christ to be our Lord*, it is always *to the glory of GOD the Father*. When we believe that he is exalted to the high office, and honoured with the divine commission, of judging mankind, and conferring the reward of eternal life on all who shall be found qualified for it; we ascribe the greatest honour to the divine government; as we resolve this constitution, no less than that of the visible creation, into the will and purpose of God's infinite wisdom and goodness, and his paternal benevolence to his creatures of mankind. Instead then of *diminishing* our reverence and gratitude towards the supreme and original giver of all good; it serves to *heighten* it, and to render it a stronger principle of obedience to his will, and a firmer hope of becoming the objects of his everlasting goodness and favour. As our deriving life, knowledge,

and all temporal benefits, from parents, teachers, and governors, does not impair the obligations we are under to the original author of all good, whose instruments they are, and by whom, as a fit medium, his providence confers those benefits; so our derivation of eternal life, and the happiness of it, from the mediatorial power and the office of our Saviour, does not derogate from the obligations we are under, and the returns of gratitude and obedience due to *the GOD and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, by whom he bestows the eternal blessings of his grace upon us. And as in the *former* instance, we acknowledge that divine power and wisdom, which framed this world and the system of human society, with all its connexions and dependencies, with a view to beneficent ends; so in the *latter*, we ascribe to God the glory of that constitution, by which men are saved to eternal life; and esteem the Gospel of our salvation, as a peculiar
ground

ground of our praises and thanksgiving to the eternal fountain of all life and happiness.

FOURTHLY; Another objection which hath been often urged, arises from the *want of universality* in the christian religion. It is said, "If GOD had given a revelation to men, he would undoubtedly have made it *universal*, that all might have enjoyed the benefit of it; and it would not have been *confined* to a corner of the earth, or a few nations in it."

THIS objection is of the like kind with the former: as it is arguing from what they think GOD ought to have done, and hence determining what he hath done. But nothing can be more fallacious, than to frame an hypothesis in our own minds of what appears to us wisest and best, and then conclude that a being of infinite wisdom will act according to it. *His thoughts and ways are above ours, as the heavens are*

above the earth. He distributes his gifts and blessings throughout the world in a vast variety, both in regard to nations and to individuals, affording to some larger, and to others lesser faculties and means of improvement: To one he gives *five*, to another *two*, and to another but *one talent*: and his equity and goodness will appear in demanding from men according to what they have received, and rewarding or punishing them, according to the improvement or abuse of their respective talents: As our *Saviour* hath most justly and beautifully represented. They who are not favoured with the knowledge of the Gospel, shall be accountable only for that light of nature, and those means of instruction and reformation, which they actually enjoy, not for those advantages which they never possessed: Otherwise, the judge of the whole earth would be in reality *the hard master*, who expects to reap where he hath not sown, and gather where he hath not scattered.—If any are disposed to ask, why

GOD hath not made all men equal, either as to their internal faculties, or any other advantages;—the apostle's words are a proper and sufficient answer: *Nay, but who art thou, O man, that repliest against GOD? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?*—

That variety which we see in the moral and religious, as well as in the natural and political state of mankind, by which one nation, or individual, is made superior to others in capacity and advantages; is an effect of the unsearchable wisdom of GOD, who distributes his gifts, in such different kinds and measures, as he sees to be best upon the whole. And as in the same house, there are some vessels formed for more noble, and others for more ignoble uses, yet all answering their proper end; so in the world of mankind, the variety of conditions men are placed in, with respect both to civil and religious advantages, is subservient to the good of the whole: And there are reasons for all the appointments

ments of providence, tho' often such as our ignorance may prevent us from understanding.

WHAT hath given rise to the foregoing objection, hath been the rash and presumptuous error of some christians, in affirming, that all who do not believe the Gospel are excluded from salvation; according to which false supposition, the knowledge of the Gospel becomes absolutely necessary to men's acceptance with GOD: An error, which is confuted, by many express passages in the new testament: which assure us, that the saving power and mercy of *GOD in Christ Jesus our Lord*, is not confined to the professors of christianity; but that *in every nation, he that fearcth GOD and worketh righteousness is accepted of him*: that *all men shall be judged according to their works*: and *all who have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life*. Where men reject the Gospel, or will give no attention to it, thro' the influence of corrupt affections

tions and vicious prejudices, which dispose them *to love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil*; they are accountable for thus rejecting the counsel of God against themselves, and will be found criminal, in proportion to the nature and prevalence of those evil dispositions, which were the cause of their unbelief. But where men have no means of coming at the knowledge of christianity, their ignorance of it, and consequently their unbelief, cannot possibly be imputed to them as a crime, in the judgment of any considerate and impartial person, much less in the judgment of the allwise and most righteous governor of the world. And therefore, men's involuntary ignorance of the Gospel, cannot be the least bar to their acceptance with him, who is *no respecter of persons*; provided they follow the dictates of their own conscience, and practise those duties which are agreeable to the natural reason of mankind. This rule of the divine judgment is clearly stated by the Apostle

pistle

postle, in the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans.

IT may not be useless to observe further, that where there are men of honest minds, and willing to receive and profess the truth, who have notwithstanding contracted such misconceptions of the nature and evidence of the Gospel, as lead them to question the truth of it; the fault is to be principally charged on *those christians* who have corrupted or misrepresented it. Yet on the other hand, sincerity of intention may not *wholly* justify or excuse their unbelief, if they neglect the proper means of information; and judge of christianity, not from a careful attention to the words of *our Saviour and his apostles*, but from the mistakes and misrepresentations of *others*, who have undertaken to defend or propagate it. For it is the unquestionable duty of every person, to make use of the best means providence hath afforded him for
his

his own information in things of so great importance.

FIFTHLY ; The foregoing objection will be more fully answered in passing on to another ; which is, “ That if christianity
 “ be a divine revelation, it would have
 “ been made plainer to the capacities of
 “ men, and not have been left liable to so
 “ much misconstruction and abuse.”

To this, beside the same general answer before given, shewing the fallacy of arguing from speculation to fact ; we may reply more particularly :—“ That the principal difficulties have arisen, not from
 “ *christianity itself*, but from the systems
 “ of doctrine, which have been framed and
 “ propagated by men under the *name* of
 “ christianity.—That the *less* regard men
 “ pay to *these*, and the *more* they attend to
 “ the *original* dictates of the great author
 “ of our holy religion, the more intelligi-
 “ ble they will find it to be.—That the
 “ know-

“ knowledge of christianity, like every
 “ other kind of valuable knowledge, is to
 “ be acquired by honest application and
 “ diligent study.—That it is agreeable
 “ to the wisdom and justice of divine pro-
 “ vidence, to leave things in such a natural
 “ situation, that mankind shall come at the
 “ truth only in proportion to their sincere
 “ and diligent enquiries after it; while the
 “ careless and negligent shall remain igno-
 “ rant of it; and the conceited and pre-
 “ sumptuous shall embrace error in the
 “ stead of it.—That nothing less than a
 “ *perpetual series of miracles* would have
 “ been requisite to secure christianity from
 “ the neglect, abuse and perversion of
 “ men; and it may be doubted, whether
 “ even *that* would have been sufficient.—
 “ That the *great end* of our Saviour’s me-
 “ diation, power and office is the *salvation*
 “ of all righteous and good men in *another*
 “ world; whatever their situation or ad-
 “ vantages have been in *this*; and whether
 “ they have or have not known the Gos-
 “ pel.

“ pel.—That it was *no part* of our Savi-
 “ our’s intention to set up a government on
 “ earth, or to reduce all mankind to an
 “ *uniformity* of religious faith and worship.
 “ —And that the publication of the
 “ Gospel, was only intended to have *such*
 “ *an effect* in the world, as would happen
 “ to it in the natural course of things, and
 “ the usual changes and revolutions in
 “ human society.”

SIXTHLY; The last objection we shall consider, is that which hath been urged against the *evidence* of christianity, as insufficient. It hath been supposed, “ That a divine revelation ought to be attended with an evidence so universal and undeniable, as to overcome all opposition, and gain universal belief.”

To remove this objection, let us observe “ in the first place, “ That if the evidence for the truth of christianity, be *sufficient* to determine the assent of a sincere and
 “ impar-

“ impartial enquirer, it is vain and unrea-
 “ sonable to demand *more*.—That if the
 “ evidence was much greater than it is, the
 “ same objection might still be made, and
 “ the demand might rise to an irresistible
 “ evidence.— That after all, it is not easy
 “ to determine what evidence, or whether
 “ *any* would be irresistible: since the evi-
 “ dence of universal nature for the being
 “ and perfections of God hath been actu-
 “ ally resisted by some men, upon the sole
 “ account of this objection, that the
 “ world and the things in it are not made,
 “ as they in their great wisdom think they
 “ ought to have been made.—And that
 “ the clearest and strictest demonstration
 “ hath often been found insufficient to
 “ convince.” The demand, therefore, of
 an irresistible evidence is in itself absurd.

IN the next place, let us consider further,
 “ That to give attention to things of im-
 “ portance, and to believe them in pro-
 “ portion to the evidence accompanying
 “ them,

“ them, is one principal test of an honest
“ mind and a sincere love of truth. And
“ where men thro’ dishonest prejudices re-
“ ject that evidence which is proper and
“ sufficient; there it is not probable that
“ even a greater would prevail. For if
“ men are previously determined to judge
“ according to other principles and views,
“ instead of the real evidence of the cause;
“ the clearness and strength of proof will
“ have no weight with them, nor so much
“ as enter into their consideration. And
“ therefore the number, or quality, of
“ those who have rejected the Gospel, ei-
“ ther in this or any former age, doth not
“ imply a defect of evidence; while men’s
“ judgments are biassed, and their assent or
“ dissent determined, by many other cir-
“ cumstances and considerations, as much,
“ or *much more* than by the real evidence of
“ things. Especially when we consider,
“ how much the native truth and beauty
“ of the christian revelation, hath been
“ artificially obscured and deformed; it is

“ no-wonder; if some men have conceived
 “ such prejudices against it, as are not easy
 “ to be overcome. And a rational and
 “ firm belief, can only arise from a close
 “ attention, to the whole original connected
 “ scheme and evidence of the Gospel:
 “ A task, which men already prejudiced
 “ against, the belief of it, are not likely to
 “ take upon themselves; but without
 “ which, they must always remain incom-
 “ petent and partial judges.”

FINALLY, let us carefully attend to the
real strength of that *testimony*, which the
apostles have given to the truth of the Gos-
 pel, and in particular, to the *fact* of our
Saviour's resurrection from the dead, which
 is the *corner-stone* of the whole fabrick:
 And we shall find it to be far *superior* to
 the proof of any particular fact recorded
 in all antient history; and to be *adequate*
 to the greatness and importance of that
 event:

“ As

“ As they were so many in number—
“ As they were themselves so strongly pre-
“ judiced against the belief of it, but over-
“ come by the clearest evidence of seeing,
“ handling and conversing with him.—
“ As their testimony was supported by that
“ of many other witnesses.—As it was a
“ fact obvious to their senses, and subject
“ to their closest examination.—As their
“ whole future behaviour and condition in
“ life depended upon it.—As they per-
“ sisted unanimously and invariably in the
“ same report, and at last died in defence
“ of it.”—And further, “ As they disco-
“ vered a wisdom in propagating the chris-
“ tian religion above their birth and edu-
“ cation.—As they have presented us with
“ a history of our Saviour, exhibiting a
“ character so noble, singular and uniform,
“ as they were not capable of imagining ;
“ and such discourses of his, as they were
“ not able to compose.—And as the con-
“ sistency, perfection, and success of the
“ whole scheme and design far exceeded

“ their natural abilities.—And finally as
“ their testimony is strengthened by num-
“ berless collateral circumstances, by pro-
“ phesies preceding, and by events subse-
“ quent to the age they lived in.”

At *Jerusalem itself*, where our Saviour was tried before the supreme court of judicature, condemned and put to death; a numerous church was collected, wholly founded upon the belief of his resurrection: And this was soon after the event, when no opportunities could be wanting for the strictest *examination* into the truth of the fact. The apostles averred the fact in the face of the same great court; who conscious of what they had done, did not think proper to examine any further into the truth of it, but contented themselves with charging them to be silent about Jesus for the future, under penalty of incurring their high displeasure. Here are evident marks of consternation and diffidence in regard to their own proceedings; when
they

they could bear to be told by those apostles, that *the same Jesus of Nazareth*, whom they had lately *crucified*, God had *raised from the dead*; and that by *his power* the miracle, for which they were called to an account, was wrought: and would suffer also one of their own body to intimate a doubt, whether the apostles had not truth on their side, and were not acting under a divine commission. Afterwards, when they found that the belief of Christ's resurrection was spreading fast throughout the nation, they became apprehensive, of sinking themselves into the contempt and odium of the people; and judged, that more violent measures were necessary, to support what they had done, and to preserve their reputation and authority; and therefore began a furious persecution against all the christians, under a false but politic pretence, that they were enemies to the Jewish nation and religion.

THE *Apostles themselves* could neither be *deceived* nor *doubtful*, as to the fact of our Saviour's resurrection. They *must know* with absolute *certainty*, whether they had or had not seen, handled, and conversed with him after his crucifixion. And to suppose that these twelve men, besides many others, conspired in asserting his resurrection, as a matter of fact and of their own experience, when they knew it to be false; is a supposition from which so many improbabilities and absurdities follow, that the more we examine, the more we shall judge it to be impossible. According to this supposition, their whole scheme and purpose was to make *others believe*, what they *themselves knew to be false!* For the sake of gaining this end, they suffered scourging, imprisonment and death; and were unanimous and faithful to each other to the last, without any one of them revealing the conspiracy! To this end they gave up all the prejudices of their education, their country, and their religion!

For

For this purpose they stifled natural affection, abandoned their friends and relations, and wandered into foreign and inhospitable countries! To this end they exalted the honour and memory of that Jesus of Nazareth, by whom they had been wretchedly deceived and disappointed! To this end they pretended to work miracles, and to speak in languages which they had never learned! and had artifice and cunning enough to persuade many people wherever they came, that they really did such things! For the same end of imposing upon others, they taught the best morality that ever was in the world! declaimed against all wickedness, particularly that of falsehood and hypocrisy! inculcated the doctrine of a future judgment, when all the secrets of wickedness shall be detected, hypocrisy punished, and integrity rewarded! appealing to that future judgment for their own sincerity!—They ventured also to foretell future events; the siege and destruction of *Jerusalem*; the dispersion of

the *Jews*; their final restoration; the spread of the Gospel; the corruption of christianity; the rise of an enormous anti-christian power in the church of Christ; the destruction of that power; and a second great spread of the Gospel in the world;—when at the same time they were as ignorant as the rest of mankind, of all the events which would follow after their decease!—Is it credible that such a number of men should act such a part, foretell such events, preach such a doctrine, maintain such a character, give up such prejudices, and expose themselves to such sufferings, for the mere sake of making others believe, what they themselves knew to be false? Is this credible? I should rather ask, is it *possible*?

THERE may perhaps have been some examples of men, who have sacrificed their own ease, liberty, and life itself, to support the belief of false opinions. Such persons notwithstanding gave the most undeni-

able proof of *their own sincerity*, and that they *themselves believed* those opinions. But christianity is not founded on speculation, but fact. And the question here is, were there ever any men who exposed themselves to penalties, imprisonment, and death, for the sake of making *others believe* what they *did not believe themselves*, and to establish the credit of a *fact*, which they *knew to be false*? Or if it be possible that such a set of abandoned wretches could exist in nature; yet were the *Apostles such men*; so destitute of the principles of self-preservation, as well as of all sense of truth, honour, and integrity?—

WE may here leave it to every attentive and impartial person, to determine for himself, whether he will chuse to believe all these improbabilities and absurdities, and many more; or on the other hand, will believe that the apostles were *faithful witnesses*, and that the almighty Father of mankind did actually *raise up Jesus from*
the

the dead, and exalt him to be a Prince and Saviour, and by him confers the reward of eternal life on good men: or in the words of the text, that Christ is the power of GOD and the wisdom of GOD.

WE shall now proceed to observe, whence the chief prejudices against the Gospel arise.—It may be imagined that the chief prejudices conceived in the present age against the *Gospel itself*, are of a different kind from those which subsisted in the time of the apostles. But, exclusive of those which arise from the corruption of christianity, and the folly and wickedness of christians, they are in reality almost if not altogether the same: and they arise from the worldly imaginations and affections of mankind.—To sum up all in a word, and to use the apostles expressive phrase, modern unbelievers, as well as antient ones, *stumble at the cross of Christ*: and the doctrine of *him crucified*, is to some *an offence*, and to others *foolishness*.

To represent this more particularly:— His poverty; the meanness of his appearance; his sufferings; his death upon the cross; the simplicity of his instructions, the spirituality of his religion; the genius and design of christianity, as distinct from and unconnected with all worldly philosophy, science, policy, government, interests, possessions, and pleasures; are circumstances not proper to attract the admiration and affection of the bulk of mankind, of the men of the world, of the great or the small-vulgar; but are apt to out-weigh in their esteem the greatest excellence of instruction, benevolence of intention, and miraculoufness of operation, and all the proofs of a celestial power and wisdom and goodness. Had our blessed Saviour appeared in the world in majesty of person, pomp of retinue, and the ensigns and appendages of worldly dominion; had he displayed a perfect knowledge of the depths of learning and philosophy, and the refinements of human policy and eloquence;

had

had he erected a government and tribunals of justice on earth; had worldly preferments been the sure reward of his followers, and worldly disgrace and punishment, the fate of those who refused submission and obedience; such arguments might have converted the whole world, without the least miracle being wrought for that end: especially if his power had consisted in being invincible in war, his wisdom in outreaching the policy of all other states, and his goodness in pouring the riches and pleasures of the world upon his own subjects;—such a Prince and Saviour would have been highly agreeable to the passions of mankind. Such a Messiah the Jews expected: and because he pretended to be the Messiah, without any such shining and illustrious proofs, and presumed also to convince them of their superstition and wickedness; they *crucified* him, notwithstanding his miracles, under a pretence that he was a promoter of sedition. And we may easily apprehend, that
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if he was to appear a second and a third time, and act in the same character; the same miracles would hardly prevent his being put to death again and again, as long as God left it in the power of man to do it: the same worldly prejudices and passions would operate again, in the like manner, notwithstanding the same evidences of spiritual power wisdom and goodness, above all that is human. This would undoubtedly be the consequence, in all those countries, where superstition and ecclesiastical dominion prevail, and where the christian doctrine would be thought to oppose the public or established religion.

MANKIND in general are willing to pay a tribute of respect to eminent virtue; when it is at a distance, when it does not come too near them, when it does not serve to contrast and expose their vices, when it does not interfere with their pride, passions, or worldly interest: otherwise, there have been many tragical instances to
prove,

prove, that no virtue, no innocence, or goodness of life and conversation, are a protection from envy and calumny, from mortal hatred and persecution. Nor would the best instructions of true wisdom, and the clearest proofs of a miraculous power, added to the most perfect virtue, afford a sufficient security; while these qualities are thought to militate against the inveterate prejudices and passions of the populace, or the pride and ambition of the Great. For had men no other method of evasion, they would have recourse to the same supposition as the *Jews* of old, and ascribe such effects, to the power and art of the Devil, instead of the power and wisdom of God.

THE highest object of human admiration is power. Men reverence the supreme Being himself, chiefly because he is almighty. Yet the power of a victorious and mighty monarch upon earth will draw more attention and admiration, than the infinite power of God display'd throughout

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all nature. Need we wonder then, that our Saviour hath obtained so little influence and authority among men; or that his authority, tho' supported by such evidences of wisdom, virtue, and miraculous power, is so easily controuled or weakened by the opposition of worldly power passion and artifice?

THE men who have been the most highly celebrated, have been such as have attained to worldly grandeur and dominion, by their political conduct and military achievements; who have purchased a crown with the blood of slaughtered armies; and established a vast empire by the policy of human councils and laws. But our blessed Saviour attained to a celestial power and dominion by very different measures; by true virtue, by unwearied fortitude and patience, and by the sacrifice of his own blood. This character and conduct does not equally engage the admiration and applause of mankind.

IT appears from the short account the Evangelists have given us of the temptations which our Saviour withstood when he first appeared publicly and entered upon his office, that the *scheme* of a worldly dominion and government, was *strongly presented to his mind*. And undoubtedly, had he employed his miraculous power, not in healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, restoring the lame, the deaf, and the blind, and raising the dead; but in subserviency to the passions of the multitude and the ambition of the Jews, in conquering his enemies and advancing his friends and followers; he might have risen to the greatest empire that ever was in the world: and had he employed his wisdom, not in delivering those pure and spiritual instructions which we find recorded, but in forming political constitutions and laws; he might have rendered that empire equally durable as extensive: and his wisdom and justice, as well as power, might have been celebrated thro' all ages and nations, as the
most

most excellent of princes, and the greatest reformer and benefactor of mankind. But he rejected this scheme, which mankind would have so highly applauded; and rather chose by sufferings and death to rise to another and superior kind of dominion and glory.

THERE are but two schemes, upon which the reformation of mankind can be attempted, and the practice of virtue in any measure promoted: which are, either by the motives of *this* world, or of *another*. A perfect government on earth would undoubtedly promote the temporal happiness of men, and in some sense their virtue: but the motives being essentially different, the virtue must be of a different kind, and become wholly political and temporary. That virtue, which is promoted by worldly rewards, however wisely dispensed, must of necessity be of the same nature with those rewards: and however such virtue might qualify men for enjoy-

ing the power and riches of *this* world; it might be no qualification for enjoying the happiness of *another*. Indeed, that is *alone* true virtue which is derived from motives purely spiritual, from faith in GOD, and the views and hopes of a life to come: this virtue *alone* rises superior to the worldly prejudices, passions, views and interests of mankind. This virtue our Saviour himself practised and recommended to his followers. By this he rose himself, and sought to raise them, not to wealth and honour in this world, but to true happiness and glory in a world, everlasting. To this end he hath given us the best example and instruction, enforced by that peculiar evidence of a life after death, his own resurrection from the dead.

IF our Saviour hath not reformed the world and established the political virtue and happiness of mankind; it is because *his kingdom is not of this world*, and because

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he would have his followers to be governed, not by worldly affections and views, but by the belief and hope of things unseen and eternal.

IF any are disposed to question, why our Saviour did not reveal to us the things of another world, in a more clear convincing and astonishing manner, that so the motives of it might have operated more strongly on men's minds, and produced a greater change and reformation; — We may justly observe, “ That it is not
“ probable, that the limits of the human
“ understanding would admit of much
“ larger discoveries; and that we are ca-
“ pable of understanding but very little,
“ of things so different and superior in
“ nature, to all our present experience.
“ But if we were capable of receiving fur-
“ ther discoveries; yet it cannot be the
“ intention of a divine revelation to gra-
“ tify the vain curiosity of mankind, and
“ to add scope and heat to the imagination.

“ —That many secrets of the invisible
 “ world may be *unfit*, if not impossible to
 “ be known by us: and that in many
 “ things our ignorance is our advantage.
 “ That those things which astonish and
 “ most strongly amuse the imagination, or
 “ raise the passions, are not always found
 “ to produce the best effects. Violent im-
 “ pressions are never lasting; and seldom
 “ contribute to amend the heart and life.
 “ That the best means of promoting the
 “ greatest good of mankind, is by bring-
 “ ing them to act from a pure and undif-
 “ turbed reason, from a calm attention to
 “ the evidence of things, from a confi-
 “ dence in the power wisdom and goodness
 “ of God, and from the hope not of
 “ worldly rewards, but of a spiritual and
 “ eternal happiness. And this is evidently
 “ the spirit and design of the Gospel.”

It appears then that the great Author
 of our faith and Saviour of the world hath
 done all that was fit in itself, proper to his

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character, and consistent with the plan of nature, in order to the conviction and reformation of mankind in the present state: whilst at the same time he had a far greater end in view: and the principal operations and effects of his power wisdom and goodness, the display of his glory, the exercise of his dominion, the administration of his justice, the establishment of his kingdom in perfect virtue peace and happiness, belong to a superior sphere and an invisible state.

It was foretold of our Saviour, that there should be *no form or comeliness in him*: that *his voice should not be heard in the streets*: that he should appear in the lowest obscurity; be *despised and rejected, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*: that providence would suffer him to be persecuted and *put to death*: yet that he should be a *glorious Prince*, set up an *everlasting kingdom*, and thoroughly establish the virtue peace and happiness of the world. These *seeming*

opposite parts and characters are *united* in our *Saviour*. The *former* is already accomplished; the *latter* is yet to come. Our *Saviour* describes himself in *both* these parts and characters: and he not only predicts and describes himself in the latter character, as coming at last to accomplish a most glorious and happy revolution; but hath given us a proof and specimen of his power and design to effect so great and happy a change, by the miracles he wrought, and especially by his resurrection from the dead, his ascension into heaven, and his sending the holy spirit to assist and comfort his apostles.

IF we understand aright the predictions of the New Testament, there will yet be a time, when the Gospel shall have a greater spread and influence among mankind in the present state; when the antichristian powers shall be destroyed, the Jews converted, and the fulness of the Gentiles come in. But whether we understand these things

things aright or not; we are assured, that the time will at length arrive, when our Saviour will thoroughly reform the whole world, administer full and impartial justice, abolish all evils and establish truth virtue and happiness for ever: when *he will send forth his Angels, and they shall collect out of his kingdom, all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, to be utterly destroyed: and then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*

In forming our judgment and belief then of the christian revelation, and of the character office and dominion of Christ the Son of God, let us divest our minds of all worldly prepossessions, and not confound together the ideas of a *temporal Reformer* and *political Governor*, whose kingdom is of this world, with those of an *immortal Prince* and *Saviour*, whose kingdom is *not* of this world; whose appearance and residence on earth, together

with the exercise of his virtue, and his voluntary submission to the ignominious death of the cross, was only the proper preparatory scene to his resurrection and exaltation, that so by humility he might rise to honour, and by virtue and merit obtain a celestial dominion and glory, the empire of another world, the power of raising mankind from the dead, and of conferring the rewards of immortality on all good men ; and who, by the miracles he wrought, by his resurrection, and by the powers with which he endued his apostles, hath given us a specimen and proof of the future display of his regal power and judgment, when he will *subdue all things to himself*, abolish every grievance, destroy death itself, and establish universal and eternal life virtue and happiness.

To conclude: Let our religious sentiments be formed upon a diligent and impartial examination ; and let no worldly byas draw us aside from the cause of truth.

truth. Let not the integrity of our minds be corrupted by the example or artifice of men. Let us not be struck with admiration at external appearances, or suffer our affections to be captivated with the power and policy, the grandeur and wealth, the fashions and customs of this world; lest *the GOD of this world* should throw such a mist of delusive cares passions and fancies over our minds, that the glorious light of the Gospel cannot shine into them. There is a certain candor simplicity and dignity of spirit, by which men conceive the highest delight in the knowledge of truth and the practice of goodness, and are but little affected with external and worldly things. This let us cultivate, as the genuine spirit of a christian. Let us always remember, that there are things far greater and happier, far more sublime and worthy objects of our admiration and pursuit, than all the power wisdom wealth and pleasure of this world. Let no outward changes that may befall ourselves, no commotions of
men,

men, no alterations of government, no revolutions of states and empires on earth, so much affect and govern our minds, as the more momentous eternal change of this world for another, and that final revolution in the whole state of mankind, when all who have lived wickedly shall perish for ever, and all good men be put into possession of an immortal life; when our Saviour shall reveal his unseen glory, and put forth his regal power, to the confusion and destruction of the workers of iniquity, and the admiration and joy of his sincere followers.—That we may then be approved of him, with *well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the kingdom and joy of your Lord,*—^{there} May God of his infinite mercy grant, ~~tho'~~ Jesus Christ our Lord.



DISCOURSE VIII.

Salvation derived, not from human
merit, but Divine Mercy.





ROM. vii. 24.

O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I thank GOD through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with my mind I myself serve the law of GOD ; but with my flesh, the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and death.

NOTWITHSTANDING the injurious treatment our *Apostle* had met with from his countrymen the *Jews*, he still retained a strong national affection for them, and desire of converting them to the faith of the *Gospel*. This he expresseth in very pathetic terms in several passages of this epistle.

epistle. But their conversion was a work of the greatest difficulty. For the *Jews* were more averse to the reception of the *Gospel* than the *Heathens*: they had some peculiar and obstinate prejudices, arising from the high esteem they conceived of themselves, as the elect and peculiar people of GOD, of the divine authority of their religion, and of the excellence and perpetuity of their *Law*. The Apostle therefore endeavours to abate the excessive opinion they had of themselves and of their law, to shew them the superior excellence of the *Gospel*, and to convince them of the necessity which *they* stood in, no less than the *Heathens*, of the mercy and favour of GOD to mankind *through Jesus Christ our Lord*.

To this end he asserts, “ That how
“ much soever they might be disposed to
“ boast of their law, and arrogate to them-
“ selves the favour of GOD in reward of
“ their obedience to it ; yet in reality, that
“ very

“ very law, instead of delivering them
“ from sin, only served to expose the cri-
“ minality of their actions, and to con-
“ demn them for their disobedience. That
“ such is the weakness of human nature,
“ that no person in the world can be jus-
“ tified before God, in virtue of a perfect
“ obedience to his laws; but only by the
“ mercy and favour of the lawgiver, par-
“ doning transgressions, and accepting of
“ men’s repentance, instead of their entire
“ obedience. And that in respect to the
“ favour of God, the Jews were not at all
“ superior to the Heathens. For tho’
“ the law directed them to that which was
“ right; yet they failed in their observance
“ of it, through the influence of another
“ law, their bodily appetites and passions,
“ which the Apostle styles, *the law of sin*
“ *and of death.*

IN the chapter preceding the text, he describes the moral or spiritual state of the Jews. But as nothing could be more
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offensive to a Jew than this description, and the consequences drawn from it; (because it stripped him of his imaginary prerogatives, and reduced him to a level with the Heathens, whom he had always looked upon with the utmost contempt;) therefore the Apostle, to soften his address, speaks all along in the first person: and having finished his description, and reduced the Jew from his boasted superiority and holiness of character to the miserable condition of a condemned criminal, who has nothing to trust to but the pardoning mercy of the judge; he pathetically exclaims, *O wretched man that I am! who will deliver me from the body of this death?* or, as it might be rendered, *this body of death?*— He uses the phrase, *this body of death*, because he had deduced all disobedience, the penalty of which is death, not from the *mind*, which approves and delights in the law of God, but from the *body*. So then, saith he, *with my mind I myself* (for the mind is properly a man's self) *serve the*
law

law of God; but with my flesh, the law of sin.

IN this description of the moral state of the *Jews*, the *Apostle* represents in strong colours the infirmity and misery of human nature. It may be said of mankind in general, that they are *carnal, sold under sin, and with their flesh serve the law of sin*: yet at the same time *delight in the law of God after the inward man, and with their minds serve it*, i. e. they are inwardly convinced of the reasonableness and excellence of the divine laws; their conscience directs them to that which is right and good, and the judgment of their minds is in favour of virtue: but they find their bodily appetites and passions *warring against this law or judgment of their minds, and bringing them into captivity to sin*, i. e. enslaving them to sinful practices: and hence it follows, that *the good which they would*, which they approve and desire in the judgment of their minds, *they do not*; and *the evil which they*

would not, or which they disapprove and dislike, *that they do.*

THE *Apostles* description is no less applicable to the *Heathens* than to the *Jews*: for it was not his intention to represent the *Jews* as in a worse state than the *Heathens* with respect to the favour of God; but both in an equal condition, *that every mouth might be stopped, and the whole world be found guilty before God.* For all men are subject to a divine law: they who have no revealed or written law, yet are, as the Apostle says, *a law unto themselves, having the work of the law written in their hearts; their consciences either accusing or excusing them for their actions: i. e. they are subject, as rational creatures, to the dictates of reason and conscience, which are the law of God.* They are also subject to what the Apostle styles *the law of sin and of death: i. e. to those animal passions and appetites which frequently oppose the law of God, and tempt them to disobedience, whereby they become liable to the penalty of death.*—

Human

Human nature is evidently compounded ; *one part*, consisting of the propensities and passions of an animal body, *the other* of the principles and desires of a rational mind ; and these are often opposite to each other, and incite to contrary actions : and this inward opposition and contest every person in the world experienceth, either in a greater or less degree. Hence all men are defective in their duty, and fall short of perfect innocence and goodness : and consequently, *all* stand in need of divine clemency pardoning their errors and transgressions : and no person hath ground to expect immortality, or to claim a continuance of life or existence upon the merit of his entire obedience to the will of God ; but, on the contrary, has reason to acknowledge a forfeiture of life and being, and that he hath rendered himself liable to eternal death. And if this be the situation of the *best* of men, much more of the *bulk* of mankind ; who have contracted sinful habits ; and who, tho' they know

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and approve the things that are good, and the judgment of their own minds recommends to them *the law of God*, yet suffer the passions and appetites of a corruptible body to enslave them to *the law of sin*. It is evident, that according to strict justice, exclusive of mercy and pardon, they cannot be *justified*, or obtain eternal salvation; but *only* by the clemency of the Governor and judge of the world, pardoning transgressions and absolving men from the penalty of eternal destruction.

Now tho' this constitution of our nature renders us liable to sin, misery, and death; it does not impeach, but rather illustrate, the wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator. For as the divine wisdom hath wonderfully united the different elements of earth and air, fire and water, in the constitution of the globe, and from this discordant mixture produceth all the beauty, harmony, and fertility of the whole: so with the like admirable
skill

skill, he hath framed human nature, of different and opposite materials and principles; and from this opposition and balance, all the virtue and happiness of human life are derived, as well as the misery and death implied in the text;—all to answer his own most wise and beneficent ends:

IT is this natural opposition between reason and passion, conscience and appetite, which renders this life a state of discipline and trial, and which adapts human nature to this world, as to its proper scene of action; where the thinking, judging, choosing, designing, determining faculties find various suitable objects, and an ample field of exercise. From this moral strife and fermentation arises the noble spirit of true virtue; that *spirit* which the Apostle describes as *mortifying the deeds of the body*, i. e. subduing the opposite animal inclinations, and which, through the mercy and favour of God, produces eternal life.

For if ye live after the Flesh, says the Apostle, ye shall die. But if through the Spirit ye do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

HUMAN virtue is improved by exercise, and fixed by habit. By surmounting difficulties and trials it acquires stability and worth, and is the more deserving of honour and reward. Yet eternal life is the gift of divine mercy and liberality to the best of men, not a reward due to their merit. For such is the infirmity of our nature, that the greatest human virtue is debased with a mixture of error and transgression; and falls short of that perfection, to which *alone* strict justice would annex the reward of immortality. None of the human race ever attained to it, except *the Son of GOD* himself, who thereby became *the first-born from the dead, the Lord of life*, by whom the saving mercy of GOD to eternal life is extended to all good men. Mankind in general therefore are so far from having a
claim

claim to immortality, upon the merit of their own innocence and virtue, that they have much more reason to despair of it, and to cry out in the language of the Apostle, *miserable as we are! who will deliver us from this body of death?*

GOD is the free giver of all life and existence; bestows them on such conditions as his wisdom sees fit; and hath an unquestionable right to resume his own gifts, even tho' they are not abused; much more when they are perverted to any evil purpose: He may without injustice prescribe a period to the existence of any creature, tho' perfectly innocent, and superior in virtue to the best of mankind. How absurd and arrogant then would it be in any man to claim eternal life at the hands of GOD, as a matter of right, or a reward due in justice to the merit of his obedience. It is plainly the effect of infinite *grace* and mercy in the supreme governor of the world, to deliver mankind from

the law of death, and to bestow immortality upon them on the terms of repentance, instead of those of perfect obedience. The Gospel is the authentic declaration of this divine mercy and clemency, which is dispensed to mankind by Jesus Christ the Saviour of the world. For GOD who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, i. e. when we had forfeited life and existence, hath quickened us together with Christ, and raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavenly regions: (For by grace we are saved through faith; and this salvation is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God:) That he might shew in the ages or worlds to come the exceeding riches of his grace in his benevolence towards us in Christ Jesus.

To the question, *Who will deliver me from this body of death?* the Apostle answers, *I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord:* The words understood are, *Who delivers me:* in some manuscripts it is found, *The*
grace

grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord: The same words are still understood, *The grace of God DELIVERS ME through Jesus Christ our Lord.* This deliverance is more largely expressed in the text: *There is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit: for the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and of death.*

By that death, which the Apostle represents as a penalty to which men are subject, he cannot mean a mere dissolution of the body: because it is not true that *the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set any man free from THIS death*, or that *Christ hath abolished IT*, or that good christians *are passed from IT unto life*, or that *he who believeth in Christ shall never see IT*: these and many other assertions in the New Testament would not be true, if by death was meant a mere bodily dissolution. But the language of scripture will be perfectly

fectly consistent and clearly intelligible, if we understand by it, a destruction of the whole man, or a deprivation of being; which is death in the full and proper sense: and the mere dissolution of the body is with great propriety termed *sleep*, by our Saviour and his Apostles.—In the former sense we may understand the threatening to *Adam*, *In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*: i. e. not undergo a mere bodily dissolution, and pass into another kind of life, but die eternally. The Almighty Creator gave him being and life, which he was to hold by the tenure of obedience: consequently, by disobedience he forfeited all that was given him and became liable to a total destruction.—Whether we consider the account of the fall of our first parents as a literal history, or as an oriental allegory; the spirit and meaning of it is the same. The *tree of life* in the midst of *Paradise* denotes the immortality of mankind: the *forbidden fruit* represents all those unlawful objects

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which

which men desire: the *subtlety* of the *serpent*, the pleasantness of the *fruit*, and the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, which was *desirable to make one wise*, represent to us, in admirable figures, the curiosity, vanity, ambition, lusts and appetites of our nature, which tempt us to disobey the will of GOD: these have their source in the *flesh*, as our Apostle observes; and hence it becomes *a body of death*, by seducing us to transgress the law of GOD, and incur the forfeiture of life and being. From *this death, the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, sets us free: this death Christ hath abolished; and they that believe in him shall never see it, but are passed from it unto life.* That immortality which all men forfeit by the terms of sinful obedience, is conferred in *Christ Jesus* on the terms repentance. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. For GOD did not send his son to condemn the*
world,

world, but to save it, and to bestow everlasting life upon all that repent.

HENCE *our Lord* declares of himself: *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me shall never die:—I give my flesh for the life of the world.* And the Apostle says, *our life is hid with Christ in GOD: And when he who is our life shall appear, we shall appear with him: And we know that we are passed from death unto life.*—On the other hand, the wicked and impenitent are represented as remaining still in a state of death: *they shall not see life: and the wrath of GOD abideth on them: i. e. they are under condemnation to eternal destruction.* And to such as abuse the *light*, and reject the divine *grace* offered in the *Gospel*, that condemnation is aggravated: and hence, the *Gospel* itself becomes to them, as the Apostle expresseth it, *a Savour of death unto death.*—It appears then, That the *deliverance, redemption,*

demption, or salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, is from death; i. e. not a bodily dissolution, but a spiritual and eternal destruction. The wages of sin, says the Apostle, is death; but the gift of GOD in Christ Jesus our Lord is eternal life.

LET us acknowledge with the most lively gratitude the inexpressible mercy and goodness of GOD revealed in the Gospel; which saves men from destruction, and confers upon them eternal life. If it be the effect of mere goodness in the Creator to form us for, and continue us in, this life; if we ought gratefully to acknowledge the free mercy and benevolence of GOD for every moment of our preservation from temporal death; what sentiments ought we to conceive of that divine goodness which saves us from death eternal, and raiseth us to the possession of life everlasting?—The soul shrinks back on itself at seeing the precipice of destruction; and prefers conscious existence, tho' intermined

termixed with many pains, to an eternal extinction :

—— “ For who would lose,
 “ Tho’ full of pain, this intellectual being,
 “ Those thoughts that wander through
 eternity,
 “ To perish rather, swallow’d up and lost
 “ In the wide womb of uncreated night,
 “ Devoid of sense and motion ?” ——

THE mind conceives with horror the thought of falling into nothing, of losing for ever the light of heaven, the prospect of the glorious creation, and the delights of social existence ; and longs after immortality. *Life* is the object of our natural and most constant desire ; and *Immortal Life* the most grand and pleasing idea we can entertain. The mind is expanded and elevated to the highest degree with so vast and sublime a hope. The unbounded greatness of the reward, and of the divine mercy and liberality in conferring it,

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surpasses all human language or conception: Our *Apostle* seems to labour for words, to express the grandeur of his ideas on this subject. Tho' he had endured an heavy series of afflictions, yet, saith he, *I count that the light afflictions of the present time, which are but for a moment, are not worthy to be compared to the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* And in another place, *What shall we say then to these things? If GOD be for us, who can be against us?—He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of GOD's elect? It is GOD that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of GOD: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall distress, persecution, famine, or sword?—I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor an-*
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gels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of GOD which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.



DISCOURSE IX.

On the Nature of the Christian Religion.



ROM. xiv. 17.

The kingdom of GOD is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

IN these words the *Apostle* gives us an excellent description of the *kingdom of GOD*, in opposition to the superstitious error of the Jewish converts at Rome; who thought it a duty of religion, and of great importance, to abstain from certain *meats*: and in opposition also to those on the other hand, who despised the Jews for their weakness and groundless scruples; and did not behave to them with due respect and tenderness. The *Apostle* asserts therefore that the *kingdom of GOD*, or true religion, consisteth neither in *eating*, nor in *abstaining* from any kind of food; which is a matter of no moment; but in *righteousness,*

ousness, i. e. in every man's practising that which is right according to his own judgment and conscience; in peace, i. e. in allowing and encouraging others to do the same, and thereby avoiding offences, and preserving the peace of society: and in *joy in the holy spirit*: i. e. in pure and spiritual joy, arising from conscious integrity in our own minds, from peace and friendship with our fellow Christians, and from the hopes which the Gospel affords. It might be translated, *Joy in a holy spirit*, or in a spirit of holiness. And the expression here may be thought equivalent to another of our Apostle, where he saith, *the fruit of the spirit is joy*: meaning by the *spirit*, the principle of true religion in the minds of men, in opposition to the *flesh*; by which he means the principle or root of impiety and wickedness in mankind. Now, saith he, *the works of the flesh are manifest: which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, hatred, contention, emulation, wrath, strife, sedition, heresy,*

heresy, envying, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like. But the fruit of the spirit, is love, joy, peace, long-sufferance, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.

IF any imagine that the expression, *joy in a holy spirit*, or as our translators have rendered it, *in the holy Ghost*, must necessarily have a direct reference to that powerful *spirit of GOD* which assisted and supported the Apostles, imparted gifts to them, and wrought miracles by them; the sense according to this construction will not be entirely different from the former. For as rejoicing *in GOD*, means in his perfections and providence, and the intentions of his goodness and mercy to us; and rejoicing *in Christ*, means in what he hath done and is ready to do for our benefit; so, to have *joy in the holy spirit*, doth not imply any emotions of joy, infused into a man's mind from the immediate agency of a superior spirit; but is, rejoicing in the

faith and hope of that Gospel which was propagated by the operation of the *spirit of GOD*. This sense then is not greatly different from the other. But the former explication seems preferable, as it coheres better with the whole passage. *The kingdom of GOD is not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy*: and to define expressly what *kind of joy* the Apostle meant, he adds, *in a holy spirit*: i. e. not in worldly power, pomp, or pleasure, but in a right spirit and holy temper of mind; a joy springing from innocence, virtue, and goodness; essentially connected with that *righteousness* and *peace* which are before mentioned, and established by the blessed hope, which the Gospel affords to virtuous and good men.

It will be easily understood, that by *the kingdom of GOD* the Apostle means true religion, that religion which the Gospel was intended to promote in the world; and which it actually promotes wherever it is received,

received, in proportion to men's serious and impartial attention to it. Wherever men are *governed* by regard to the authority and *will* of GOD, there is *the kingdom of GOD*; and such men are *his subjects*. *This kingdom* or government of GOD over the hearts and actions of men, our *Saviour* and his Apostles laboured to establish, by publishing the doctrines and precepts of true religion: and He will at last fully and universally establish it, by exertions of his regal and judicial power; *when he shall put down all opposite rule, authority, and power, and subdue all things to himself*. But in the mean time, the Gospel is left to the natural course of things, and the voluntary use or abuse of mankind, without any exertions of power or judgment on the part of *our Blessed Saviour*, to preserve it either from neglect or abuse; because *his kingdom is not of this world*, and it was not his intention to alter the natural course of things, by erecting a government on earth, and judging men in this life; his judgment being

reserved to those times and states which are fore-appointed by the wisdom of GOD.

HENCE it hath come to pass, not only that the Gospel hath been neglected and abused, but that a *strange* kind of government hath been set up in the Christian world (as was indeed *predicted*) under colour and pretence of being the *kingdom of GOD* and of *his Christ*; but in reality, in order to supplant and destroy it; and which in fact, instead of *righteousness* established tyranny and *iniquity*, instead of *peace*, discord and *persecution*, instead of *joy in a holy spirit*, spiritual corruption and *misery*. And such will always be the consequence, whenever the will of ambitious and tyrannical *men* is substituted for the will of *GOD*, and religion is molded according to their arbitrary decrees and superstitious inventions.

BUT with all their endeavours to suppress the Gospel, by hiding it from the
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knowledge of mankind, and by substituting their own traditions and canons in its stead, they were never able to extirpate it, or wholly destroy men's regard to it: and *the kingdom of GOD* still had a being in the minds of men, tho' more confined to obscure parts and corners of the world: As when the Prophet *Elijah* was lamenting before GOD the total apostacy of the *Israelites*, and their incurable attachment to idolatry, in language that spoke despair and weariness of life, and the Almighty, who perfectly knew the real state of things, which the prophet did not, informed him, that there were still *seven thousand in Israel*, who preserved their allegiance and fidelity to the true GOD, and had never *bowed the knee to Baal*; so during the greatest height and extent of the papal tyranny and corruption, there were still numbers of men in different places, who disowned anti-christian authority, preserved their allegiance to *Christ*, and took their religion from the writings of the New Testament: in-

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much that when many princes encouraged the reformation by taking it under their protection, they did little more than make a public discovery of what before lay hid in men's minds. *The kingdom of GOD* therefore has subsisted in the world from the days of our *Saviour* and his Apostles to the present time.

AND now if any are solicitous to know where *this kingdom* is to be found, and by what marks it may be discovered; we may answer from the text, that the effects it produceth, by which it is to be distinguished from all false and deceitful pretensions, are *righteousness, peace, and spiritual joy*. These are the *fruits* by which the *tree* is to be known: fruits so noble and excellent, that nothing in nature can excel them.

IN regard to *ourselves* therefore, if we endeavour to understand and to obey the will of GOD, as declared by the great prophet

prophet of God and Saviour of the world, and in consequence hereof, practise righteousness, live in peace, and enjoy the spiritual comforts and delights of a good conscience and of hope in God, we may be assured that we belong to *the kingdom of GOD*.—And with regard to all *others*, wherever we see men conscientiously practising what they apprehend to be right, cultivating a spirit of peace and good will to their neighbours, and taking a pleasure in religious exercises and good works; we may be certain that there is *the kingdom of GOD*. And such persons, how much soever they may differ from us, in words, or modes, or opinions, are his true and faithful subjects; because they are governed by the will of God, and he rules over them, not only as he rules over all mankind, and the whole material creation, by his irresistible power, but by his free goodness, by his holy precepts, by the motives of his grace, by the hopes of his favour, and of the rewards of his heavenly kingdom.

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HAVING premised thus much in general, concerning the nature of *the kingdom of GOD*, let us return to the particular design of the Apostle in the text; in which he defines true religion or genuine christianity, under the name of *the kingdom of GOD*, by three principal and distinguished qualities, on purpose to rectify some mistaken notions of the Jewish converts: and let us apply in like manner the same definition, in order to detect and confute some false notions of religion, which have prevailed since the Apostle's time, and have continued to this day.

To this end we may justly observe in the first place, That *the kingdom of GOD*, or true religion and christianity, is not confined to any particular territory, or attached to any human constitution, whether civil or ecclesiastical; but is entirely distinct from all human power, and may subsist in any part of the world: because it is the government of God over men, not of
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men over one another ; and the essential properties and marks of it are *righteousness, peace, and joy in a holy spirit* : therefore, wherever these are, there is *the kingdom of GOD*. Men may indeed set up governments, and even tyrannies in the world, and endeavour to support and extend them by a colour and sanction of religion and of christianity. This hath been actually done in the church of Rome : where in order to raise and support the papal power, the authority of *Christ* and of *GOD* hath been expressly assumed, as a foundation of worldly dominion ; and christian names, and titles of *holiness*, have been affixed to the most insolent tyrants, the most unjust wars, and the most iniquitous courts : and *the kingdom of GOD* hath been so confounded according to men's imaginations with the *dominion of the Pope and of his clergy*, that to this day the Roman-Catholics have not been able to separate them in their own minds. But every kind of human power and government, is not only *dijunct* and
separate

separate from *the kingdom of GOD*, but is *opposite* and injurious to it, if instead of promoting, it *binders righteousness, peace, and spiritual joy*: if instead of protecting men in the practice of what they believe to be their duty, it oppresses them for doing it: if instead of encouraging men to live in mutual peace and charity, it cherishes discord: if instead of the happiness, it tends to the misery of mankind.

THE Christian religion does not intermeddle with human government, with the respective prerogatives of princes, or the laws, rights and privileges of nations and communities: it leaves all these as it found them; and contents itself with enjoining subjection to government in general, without regard to the different forms; and at the same time clearly pointing out the end of government, and defining the character and office of a magistrate: that government is *the ordinance*
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of GOD, and the magistrate *the minister of GOD*: for what end? for *the good* of men, by being *a terror to evil-doers*, and *a praise to them that do well*: and assigning this end, character, and office as the ground and reason of all subjection.

THAT Christianity is not of a *local* and external nature, our Saviour plainly declares to the Pharisees. *The kingdom of GOD*, saith he, *cometh not with observation; neither shall men say, Lo here, or lo there*: i. e. its rise and progress is not like that of an earthly conqueror or worldly empire, with a noise of victory and a shew of pomp and triumph; but *the kingdom of GOD is within you*: i. e. it is wholly internal and invisible, and not of a local or visible nature. Yet the advocates of the Church of Rome are continually crying out, *Lo here* is the kingdom of God, within the pale or enclosure of our Church, and no-where else: and the visible head of it is at *Rome* clothed in purple and

scarlet, and possessed of worldly power and grandeur.

IN another place, our Saviour as plainly instructs us, that *his kingdom* doth not consist in any kind of dominion or government which men may obtain over one another. For when there was an ambitious contention among his disciples, which of them should rise to the greatest power and pre-eminence in *his kingdom*, from a false notion that it would be a worldly dominion; he called them unto him and said, *Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them; but it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister: and whosoever will be chief among you let him be your servant: even as the Son of Man came not to be administred unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

SECONDLY: AS the kingdom of GOD doth not consist in any dominion, much less tyranny of men over one another; so neither is it to be supported or propagated by any worldly means, *least of all* by the means of oppression and persecution. So the Apostle Paul declares, that *the weapons of his warfare were not of a carnal or worldly nature, (tho' mighty through GOD, to the pulling down the strong holds of Satan.)* It is indeed a direct contradiction to imagine that *righteousness, peace, and joy in a holy spirit*, can be promoted by mutual contention, abuse, and oppression, by abridging men of their liberty, invading their property, or assaulting their persons, or by any means of hostility and compulsion. These things have indeed been practised in the Church of Rome, under a solemn pretence of advancing *the kingdom of GOD*. But all men of impartial judgment may easily perceive, that the real design and effect of them have been to support a worldly dominion and tyranny, by oppressing

the liberties and enslaving the consciences of mankind. And it is much to be lamented, that any Christians of any Protestant denomination should have so far retained the sentiments and spirit of the Romish Church, as to think that true religion can be promoted by angry disputations, and personal invectives and calumnies. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of GOD: mutual provocations do not promote peace: nor can mutual disgust and hatred produce joy in a holy spirit. The kingdom of GOD therefore is not advanced, but injured, by all such proceedings.*

THIRDLY: 'Tis evident from the definition the Apostle hath given us, that *the kingdom of GOD* doth not consist in speculative opinions, or in modes and circumstances of worship, any further than as these may contribute to righteousness, peace, and true happiness. And if all Christians had paid a due attention and regard

regard to the Apottle's doctrine in the text, it would have prevented or soon put an end to innumerable controversies, which, instead of answering any good purpose, have disturbed men's minds, broke the peace of society, and been productive of many grievous consequences. Such effects in men of honest dispositions and real piety have proceeded from an error in judgment and *a zeal without knowledge*, in imagining those things to be of importance and essential to religion, which are of little moment or entirely foreign to *the kingdom of GOD*. Faith in the Gospel, and the public worship of God, are indeed of great importance, and to be carefully preserved, as the best foundation of the virtue and happiness of men. But it is at the same time incumbent upon every man to try all doctrines, modes, and ceremonies, and to estimate their importance and value, by their moral influence, by their tendency to produce *righteousness, peace, and joy*, or in other words, the virtue and happiness of

men. For it will be found upon impartial examination, that many articles of opinion and ceremonies of worship have been highly exalted in the imaginations of men, and zealously contended for, which have had not the least tendency, either in their own nature, or by actual consequence, to the good of mankind. On the contrary, those things which have most of all engaged the passions of men, and which have been defended and propagated with the greatest violence, have always been things of the least importance in their own nature, or no way conducive to the reformation and good of the world. The very temper and manner, the heat and violence, with which they have been advanced and maintained, instead of implying the truth and moment of the things contended for, are rather proper to create a suspicion of their weakness and insignificance: since men are always most ready to have recourse to passion and violence, when their cause is the weakest

est and most destitute of reason and argument. *Who is a wise man, says the Apostle James, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lye not against the truth.* i. e. Do not vainly presume and boast that you are contending for true religion, the religion which is from heaven. *For this wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.* It hath not been christianity or true religion, but the corrupt inventions and false additions of men, which have been advanced and defended by such unchristian methods.

FOURTHLY: If *the kingdom of GOD is righteousness, peace, and spiritual joy*; then it doth not in the least consist in a melancholy or enthusiastic temper of mind. And we may learn from this definition of the Apostle what judgment to form of those strange and unnatural appearances, which

some Christians have mistaken or misrepresented for signs of grace or marks of conversion: such as, disfigured countenances, bodily commotions, fits of despair, dejection or elevation of spirits, flights of fancy, and fervors of imagination. True religion is of a different genius and complexion from all such frantic and delusive appearances: it is calm and serene, free from turbulent emotions, composed, deliberate, resulting from mature judgment, from cool consideration, and the steady purpose of a well-instructed mind. Like the calm air and unclouded sky, compared to dark and tempestuous seasons; such is the true temper of religion, compared to the gloomy and wild emotions of enthusiasm. Passion and agony of mind, distrust of the divine goodness, terror and despair, are directly contrary to that *joy in a holy spirit*, which is one principal character of true religion. Repentance indeed is attended with sorrow and self-reproach, especially when men have
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committed some flagrant act of wickedness, or have proceeded to a great length in a vitious course: but no sooner have they sincerely repented, by making all possible amends for the evil they have done, and reforming their conduct, than they begin to reap great pleasure and satisfaction from their own wise resolution; they find themselves rescued from slavery and misery, and advanced to a happy state.— Whatever professions therefore men may make of religion, whatever marks of devotion they may exhibit, whatever signs or evidences they may fancy to themselves of their being in a state of salvation; yet if they take no pleasure in the practice of virtue, but have rather an aversion to it; if they are sober, peaceable, and honest, only by compulsion; if they have no love of goodness; if instead of delighting in acts of piety and charity, their devotion is attended with uneasiness, and their charity with reluctance; if they cannot *rejoice* in the testimony of a good conscience; if

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they are intire strangers to that holy and *spiritual joy* which springs from conscous innocence, from benevolent affections, and from the Gospel hopes of divine favour and a blessed immortality; such persons, whatever *other* kingdom, constitution, or church they may belong to, are strangers and foreigners to *the kingdom of GOD*. For, *the kingdom of GOD is righteousness, peace, and joy in a holy spirit.*

WE shall conclude with observing, from this description of the Apostle, that the Christian religion is the most excellent institution in the world, and fitted to promote the greatest benefit and happiness of mankind in the present state as well as in futurity. For nothing can be so absolutely necessary or directly conducive to the happiness of rational beings in any state of society, as rectitude of temper and conduct, mutual peace and charity, and those pure delights which flow from sincere virtue and piety. And such are the
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natural effects flowing from a firm belief of the Gospel, and constant attention to its precepts and motives. The peace and happiness of the world cannot be established on a better foundation, or raised to a greater height, than by the knowledge and practice of genuine christianity.

LET us then adore and praise the Father Almighty, the supreme governor of the universe, for his great goodness, in sending *his Son Jesus Christ our Lord*, to set up a *kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy on earth*, and in bringing us to partake of the privileges of this divine constitution. Let us seek in the first place *this kingdom of GOD and the righteousness thereof*, and endeavour to become faithful subjects of it, by obeying and submitting to the will of God, according to the precepts and example of our Blessed Saviour. Let us bear in our hearts a true allegiance to the invisible head and ruler of it, trust in his protection, and hope for his gracious acceptance
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of our sincere affection and faithful service. Let us banish from our minds all hurtful delusions, superstitious fears, and vain cares and sorrows: and as becomes the happy subjects of the greatest and best of Sovereigns, let us endeavour to practise *righteousness*, live in *peace*, and reap the comforts and *delights* of a good conscience, a holy temper, and virtuous life: That so we may also attain to the blessed and joyful hope, that an entrance shall be administered to us abundantly into *the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour*; where perfect *righteousness*, uninterrupted *peace*, and fullness of *joy* are established for evermore.

WHICH GOD of his infinite mercy grant thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.



DISCOURSE X.

On Religious Joy.



D I S C O U R S E X.

ON THE

PHILIP. IV. 4.

Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.

AMONG the excellent instructions and precepts of our holy religion, we find intermixed many persuasions to *rejoice*; not only to banish care, fear, and sorrow, but to be always joyful; and even in the adversities of life, to be not only patient and contented, but *exceeding glad*. Joy is represented as one of the essential characters of the Christian religion: *For the kingdom of GOD* (says the Apostle) i. e. the Christian religion, *is righteousness, peace, and joy in a holy spirit*, i. e. a holy and spiritual joy. And again, *The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, &c.* And this character of our holy religion may be thought so peculiar, and so strongly descriptive

scriptive of its particular genius and quality, as to distinguish it from all other religious institutions, or schemes of morality, that ever were propagated in the world.

THE *Jewish* religion was not of so liberal and elevated a spirit. It enjoined or permitted a train of servile ceremonies; was enforced only by political and worldly motives, separate from all the encouraging hopes of a life to come; and tended rather to contract the heart of man with superstitious fears, than to dilate it with courage and joy: whence it came to pass that the *Jews* in general were of a narrow selfish and gloomy disposition.

THE *Stoic Philosophy* taught men rather to *extirpate* than to *govern* their passions. And tho' it contained many excellent precepts and arguments to expel fear, grief, and all uneasy and turbulent passions, and to maintain a noble fortitude of mind,

and indifference to pain and danger; yet at the same time, instead of cherishing, it tended to suppress all love hope and joy, to deprive the heart of man of its most natural and pleasing affections, and to fix it in a kind of stupid insensibility. It was in this respect a *senseless* scheme, and the virtue which it taught was that of a *stone* rather than of a *man*: and however it might suit some few persons of a very rigid and obdurate temper, was ill-adapted to human nature in general; and founded upon a proud imaginary idea of a man's self-sufficiency to his own happiness, exclusive of human society, and even independent of the supreme giver of all good: —But an apology may be justly made for these *philosophers*; who were many of them excellent men, and did much good in the world: viz. That they were destitute of those great discoveries of the divine goodness to men, and of a state of immortality, which are the glory of our
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religion, and the principal ground of our hope and joy.

IT will be difficult to find any just apology for those *Christians*, who, notwithstanding the glad tidings of the Gospel, and the sublime and joyful hopes it is proper to inspire, still continue to describe religion and virtue in offensive colours, and to shade the lustre of the gospel, with the dark ideas of their own cloudy imaginations: who have represented faith in unintelligible doctrines, implicit submission to human authority, useless ceremonies, needless austerities, monkish solitude and melancholy, hatred and abuse of our fellow christians, and even grief, horror and despair, as constituent parts, or genuine effects, of the Christian religion; and who have thus endeavoured to pervert that amiable religion, which ought to be the pleasure and joy of our lives, into an object of terror, and an insupportable

portable burden.—No apology can be made for such persons but this: that the gross delusions of antichristianism have so possessed their minds, that the glorious light of the gospel cannot shine into them, to dissipate such collected clouds of ignorance and error.

OUR Blessed *Saviour*, amidst the various trials of his virtue, maintained a constant serenity of mind, together with a sensibility of all the affections belonging to human nature; administered consolation and joy to his disciples, under their greatest fears and troubles; dissuades them from indulging to care and sorrow; and exhorts them, even when they should be persecuted for righteousness sake, to *rejoice and be exceeding glad*. And the *Apostles* preserved this joyful spirit and temper, during the course of their ministry, notwithstanding the adversities and dangers to which they were exposed. Hence the Apostle *Paul* describes himself *as sorrowful* with respect

to his outward circumstances, but in regard to the state and temper of his mind, as *always rejoicing*. And the Apostle *James* persuades the Christians, to whom he wrote, to esteem the very *trials* of their faith and virtue, as a ground of joy. And the Apostle *Peter* represents the Christians, to whom he wrote, as *greatly rejoicing* in their Christian profession; tho' they were in consequence of it afflicted with various trials. And the writer to the Hebrews persuades them *to hold fast the rejoicing of their hope firm unto the end*. And in general, whenever the Apostles speak of their own state and temper of mind, or of that of their Christian converts, as under the influence of the Gospel-principles, they always describe it as happy, or full of consolation, peace, hope, and joy. And whenever occasion led them to mention the Gospel-revelation, and the purpose of divine wisdom and goodness disclosed in it, they frequently break out into expressions of rapture and triumph. *O death, where is*

is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Thanks be to GOD, who hath given us the victory, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.—Behold, says the Apostle John, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us. For now are we the Sons of GOD: not the forlorn out-casts of the creation, exposed to perish for ever at death, but the Sons of GOD. And tho' it doth not yet appear what we shall be, we are assured, that when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him, shall partake of the same life, and state of happiness, which he enjoys: for our life, or future state, is hid with Christ in GOD. And he begins his first Epistle with the most lively air of confidence and satisfaction. What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have viewed, what our hands have handled of the word of life, (referring to the appearance of our Lord after his resurrection) for the life, or the state of immortality, is discovered, and we have seen it, and bear witness of it, and declare to you,

that immortal life, which was with the Father, and which is now discovered to us. What we have seen and have heard therefore we declare to you, that you may hold communion with us: and our communion is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we write these things to you, that your joy may become compleat. In like manner Saint Peter:—*That the trial of your faith, being more precious than of gold, may be found to your praise, honour and glory, at the appearance of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen you love, and in whom, tho' now you see him not, yet believing ye rejoice, with a joy inexpressible and full of glory.* Hence the Apostles elegantly stile themselves *not Lords of the faith* of the Christian converts, but *helpers of their joy.*

It is abundantly evident from these passages, and the whole tenor of the New Testament, that the proper effect of the true principles of the Christian religion, is not to inspire grief or terror, but satisfaction

faction and joy. And we shall proceed in what follows, to explain the ground and reason of the Apostle's exhortation in the text, *Rejoice in the Lord always*; which he repeats with a particular emphasis, *and again I say, Rejoice*.

VIRTUE is undoubtedly in some measure *its own reward*. Innocence and goodness are in themselves a natural ground of satisfaction and pleasure: not only as the mind is preserved from the perplexities and miseries of conscious guilt; but as it becomes possessed of those good dispositions, the exercise of which contributes greatly to the happiness of life. Nothing affords greater delight to a generous mind than the exercise of social and benevolent affections: and there is a satisfaction and joy arising from true virtue, which far excels the pleasures of voluptuousness, ambition, or avarice. But virtue, unsupported by a belief of true religion, is unstable and precarious: and all the courage

and hope it can possibly afford, are liable to be overborn by various accidents. The calamities of life, the fears of death, the wickedness of men, the ingratitude of some, the malice of others, the adversities and oppressions to which it is often exposed in this state of trial, are sufficient to blast it, and prevent all the fruits of peace and joy it might otherwise produce. In such inclement seasons, religion alone is capable of supporting the generous plant, and giving it sufficient strength and warmth, to bring forth fruit to perfection. Exclusive of all confidence in God, and all hope of a life after death, how narrow and circumscribed must our largest views and expectations be! No prospect interrupted by the many unpleasing accidents, which may befall us in life, and shortly terminated by the blank period of death, can afford any solid contentment and hope, to the mind of a wise and good man.

LET us then proceed, in the next place, to the *belief of natural religion*, or a confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of the sovereign disposer of all things : which is a further ground of satisfaction to a good man, and which strengthens virtue, and adds to the happiness arising from it.

THERE is upon the whole so great a prevalence of order and good in the world around us, even within our narrow observation and experience, as affords an undeniable evidence, that the Maker of it is a being of perfect goodness, as well as wisdom and power. It is also reasonable to believe, that the infinite wisdom of GOD may conduct his creatures, to the ends for which he designed them, and to their own greatest happiness, by ways and means mysterious to our apprehension ; that those things may be good in his unerring judgment, which to our partial imaginations appear evil ; and that his infinite power can convert those events, which

seem the most formidable and hurtful, into real advantages, and the means of our happiness. These considerations are sufficient to remove all objections against his government, and enable us to confide in his supreme wisdom and goodness, notwithstanding all the apparent evils of the present state.

THIS *belief of natural religion* is a firm ground of contentment, and is sufficient to dispel anxiety, and to gladden the heart of a good man. Having our minds free from all distrust of the divine justice and goodness, and being thoroughly persuaded, that all things past, present, and to come, are directed by infallible wisdom to the happiest ends; we may rejoice in God, and contemplate his works with admiration and pleasure. The whole creation around us will appear no less delightful, than great and astonishing. We shall contemplate ourselves with a secret satisfaction, as being the creatures of such a being;

being: and our greatest terror will be, lest we should forfeit his protection, and the being he hath given us, and cease to be his creatures any longer.

AND this *faith of natural religion* will afford yet more ample materials of comfort and joy, if, instead of confining our views to present and sensible things, we extend them into remote spaces and ages, and endeavour to enlarge our ideas of the divine intentions and operations: if instead of limiting Almighty power by our narrow faculties and senses, and infinite goodness by our little capacity and experience, we learn to conceive and believe, that all our knowledge of the works of God, is nothing in comparison of what they are in themselves: that infinitely more lies beyond, than within, the compass of our faculties: that the world we inhabit is not the only work of God; but that there are states and worlds innumerable, the produce of infinite wisdom and power: that

that there are creatures of God who excel us in their knowledge, dignity, and happiness, far more than we excel the meanest insect: and that the same power of God, which created us to the enjoyment of this life, can raise us after death to another life, and a state of happiness above our present experience or conception. We are ignorant of those various and superior states of existence, which are in the power of omnipotence to confer, and which some orders of rational beings may actually possess. Instead, therefore, of measuring the effects of infinite power, by our ignorance and inexperience, we ought rather to conclude, that our highest conceptions of the works of God, and the ends of his wisdom and goodness, fall infinitely short of their excellence and perfection; and that the happiness of mankind in this life is indeed an object of the divine intention; but not worthy to be compared to those far more glorious and beneficent ends, which are intended and accomplished,

ed, in God's creation and government of the boundless universe.

THIS world and the state of mankind in it, may not only bear a relation to other states and worlds in the visible creation, as being one proper part of a vast system too great to be comprehended by our imagination: but may also stand connected with an invisible intellectual system, and with future ages, and the distant periods of eternity. And the grand purpose of the Creator in the formation of mankind, may lie far beyond the narrow scope of our present experience and observation: And considering human happiness as *one* object of the divine purpose; yet the situation of mankind on earth, and their enjoyment of this life, may be but a diminutive *part* of *that* divine purpose, introductory to future scenes, and higher spheres of capacity, action and enjoyment.

SUCH

SUCH considerations as these, will not only elevate the mind, with more sublime and pleasing apprehensions, of the works and designs of the all-perfect being; but lead us to place a more entire confidence in his wisdom and goodness; to resign ourselves to his disposal, both in life and at death, with complacency and satisfaction; *not without some probable hope*, that death may not be the *period* of our existence, but a *translation* to some better and happier state.

BUT in the third place, the *largest* and *firmest* foundation of hope and joy, to the mind of a good christian, is the *faith of the Gospel*. As it not only enlarges and confirms our best sentiments, of the power, wisdom, justice, and goodness of the supreme governor of the universe, and the grandeur and benevolence of his designs; but gives us the *joyful assurance*, That the eternal happiness of good men after death
is

is *one special object* of his intention, and the principal *end*, for which our Saviour was sent into the world, and raised after death to power and dominion, in the invisible regions. He is disclosed to us, in a character and office most proper to engage our esteem, to animate our love of virtue, and to encrease our courage and hope. We have in him the most perfect example of every human virtue, and the highest instance and proof of the intention of the Almighty Governor of the world, to raise mankind to another life, and to reward virtue with everlasting honour and happiness. That *life and immortality* which is so clearly *brought to light*, and so fully confirmed to us, by the resurrection of our Saviour, is the most interesting subject to which we can turn our attention, and the highest object of our hopes: nothing greater or happier can enter into human conception: this establisheth our peace and joy on a perfect foundation, and enableth us *to rejoice in the Lord always,*

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even with a joy inexpressible and full of glory.

THERE are two different views of the state of mankind; one exclusive, and the other inclusive of a life to come. Which is the more pleasing and delightful view, can hardly need argument or explication, in order to convince a rational enquirer. Had the Almighty Creator no further design in the formation of mankind than their present subsistence in this world, it would be hard to reconcile this purpose *alone*, with his infinite wisdom and goodness: and was death the period of our existence, and the happiness of this life the ultimate object of our hope, there would be apparent reason to cry out, *All is vanity*. Since all our present enjoyments, hopes and prospects would be diminishing thro' life, and soon terminate in everlasting darkness and insensibility. This view is not only ungrateful to the thoughts of a wise man, but more proper to debase the
mind,

mind, and damp the spirit, than to encourage it in a virtuous pursuit, of any worthy and happy ends. It is hardly credible, that any persons in the world can be sunk into such meanness and folly, as to wish that death may put an end to their being, and to derive ease and contentment from such a miserable expectation.—They are terrified at the apprehensions of that state, which in itself affords the most glorious and delightful prospect; and pervert that into a subject of aversion and horror, which ought in reason to be the delight of their hearts, and the ground of their most grateful praises to God, and most joyful hopes in regard to themselves. They have recourse to that as their last and best refuge, which every sensible mind must naturally abhor, and startle at the thoughts of; even that total and *eternal destruction*, which the *Gospel* denounceth to be the final *punishment* of wicked men; when they shall be extirpated out of the creation, *from the presence of the Lord, and by his glorious*

glorious power. Such a dread at the thought of another world, can be the effect only of conscious guilt, or of false conceptions of God, and a dark distrust of his wisdom and goodness. Such persons labour under most unhappy prejudices, and substitute *fear* instead of *faith*, and horror instead of hope. The face of universal nature is obscured to their eyes, while they are afraid to extend their view beyond the limits of this life, and are struck with terror at the belief of a future existence. The Gospel itself, instead of being *tidings of great joy* to them, is unwelcome news; and they prefer the darkest prospect of an eternal death, to that *day-spring from on high which brings life and immortality to light.*

IN reason all our fears should lie on the *contrary* side: and our most formidable apprehensions ought to be, lest the Gospel should not be true; lest death should be the period of our existence, and prove to

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be in reality, what it is in appearance, a total and *eternal death*: lest all mankind should be involved in *that destruction*, which according to the Gospel-doctrine, is to be the end *only* of the wicked and impenitent. And we ought in reason to desire nothing so earnestly, as to be thoroughly convinced, that the exceeding great and inestimable promises of a resurrection from the dead, and an eternal life, contained in the New Testament, are true.

To the *Atheist*, who denies a God, and believes that mankind are the produce of chance; or to the *Dæmonist*, who apprehends the cause of all things to be a malevolent being; the belief of a future state may indeed be dreadful: and it is no wonder if they are terrified at the thought of an eternal existence; as of an unfathomable Chaos of confusion,—or an endless scene of diabolic tyranny and cruelty. But these are not *Christian*, nor *rational* sentiments. It is *our* happiness to have

juster notions of the all-perfect being, and the excellence of his works and designs, who is known to us in the character of *our Father in heaven*, a being of infinite goodness, as well as Almighty power.

THE *Heathens* were not so happy, either in their conceptions of the divine nature, or their apprehensions of a *future state*. Instead of entertaining *joyful* hopes of a life to come, their notions of it were dark and *fearful*. Even the *Elyzium* which they feigned, as the residence and reward of virtuous souls, was a state so little desirable, that it was much happier in their opinion, to continue in this world, with all its troubles and adversities. Many of them indeed denied a future state: being more willing to believe that death put an end to their existence, than that *such* a state should follow hereafter. This was in reality making a poor retreat, and flying to a desperate refuge, when they preferred the belief of *annihilation* or an *eternal destruction*,

struction, as the best hope of what would befall them at death. One of their *old poets* pathetically laments this view of the state of mankind; and complains, that while the sun and the stars set and rise again, yet when man goes down to the grave, he sinks into everlasting night, and never riseth more: and that while the plants and flowers of the field obtain a kind of *resurrection* in the spring, yet the best of men must perish for ever without the least hope of a restoration to life.

“ * Alas, the tender herbs and flow’ry tribes,
 Tho’ crush’d by winter’s unrelenting hand,
 Revive and rise when vernal zephyrs call.
 But men, the brave, the mighty and the wise,
 Bloom, flourish, fade and fall:—and then
 succeeds
 A long, long silent dark oblivious sleep,
 A sleep which no propitious pow’r dispels,
 Nor changing seasons, nor revolving years.”

BUT the christian revelation gives us the inestimable assurance, That there is a *pro-*

* Mosch. epit. on Bion.

pitious power, able and ready to deliver men from the power of death, and raise them to another life: that there shall be a revolution, when they that sleep in the dust shall awake, and all that are in their graves shall bear the reviving voice of the Son of GOD, and shall live. Ye are not ignorant, says the Apostle, as the Heathens are, concerning them which are asleep: and therefore ye ought not to sorrow, like those that have no hope. For if ye believe that GOD raised up Christ from the dead; even so them that sleep in Christ will GOD bring together with him.

THE nature of a future state cannot but surpass our comprehension. The Apostle compares our present ideas of it to those of an infant in comparison of mature age: and says, that *we now see such things but thro' a glass darkly; i. e. by an obscure and distant reflexion. It doth not yet appear, says the Apostle John, what we shall be: but this we are assured of; that when Christ shall appear we shall be like him; for*

for we shall see him as he is, i. e. our faculties will be then adequate to that exalted state in which he is. Our Blessed Saviour assures us of the same: In my Father's house, saith he to his disciples, are many mansions: i. e. there are various states and regions in the invisible universe. I am going to prepare a place for you: and when I have prepared a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

THUS, as the discoveries of natural philosophy open the minds of the learned, to contemplate the material worlds, in the distant spaces of the skies, and the scenes of divine power and wisdom there displayed; so the christian revelation opens the eyes of our faith, to discern the intellectual worlds, and a future state of glory and immortality. These things are indeed remote from human sense, and the comprehension of them is above our highest faculties. For how is it possible that we

should comprehend the operations and effects of infinite power and wisdom?— And what can be more absurd than to imagine that they are limited by the narrow dimensions of the human understanding?— The future state is revealed to our knowledge, as far as is necessary, and for ought we know, as far as is possible. It may not be in the power of superior beings themselves, to communicate to us a knowledge of their operations, and manner of existence; mankind not having any faculties capable of receiving such information. God may impart to the higher orders of his creatures, various powers of perception and action, not only different from ours, but such as may *singly* comprehend more, than *all our* capacities and senses united; and which may give them an excellence, in comparison of mankind, greater than that which men possess, compared to the meanest living creature on earth: and the happiness, resulting from such superior faculties, may excel in the *same*
pro-

proportion, all the enjoyments which men are capable of in this world.

OUR Saviour and his Apostles represent the happiness of the future state, by such images, as are not only most intelligible, but most apt to please and delight the mind of man: such as, *a treasure*; *an inheritance*; *a kingdom*; a region of *light* and *glory*; *a life* exempt from disease and death; a state of society; a perfect community, consisting only of the wise and good, free from every imperfection which attended them in this world, and from all other infirmities and evils.

SUCH a state is the noblest object of our desire and pursuit; and we have the highest reason *to rejoice* in this expectation. We cannot be more happily employed at present, than in considering the evidence and certainty of this our christian faith: for it naturally tends to fill our minds with *joy*; and we cannot but inwardly exult

and triumph in the *sublimest* hope any mortal creature can conceive, the hope of *immortality*.

WHEN men are deprived of many valuable enjoyments, and reduced to a state of infirmity and confinement; yet they are not willing to part with *life*, but esteem it preferable, even in such a condition, to an utter insensibility or extinction of being. How happy then is it to be persuaded, that death itself shall not put an end to us, but only be a transition to *another* life. How vast and delightful a prospect does the belief of a future state afford! What a constant source of comfort and joy to be assured, that we shall not only be set free by death from the evils of this life, but redeemed as it were from a state of slavery, to the freedom and inheritance of the sons of God: and instead of being reduced to our primæval nothing, shall become possessed of a superior life and nobler faculties; shall be able to extend our progress

gress in the unbounded universe, and to contemplate those wondrous scenes which are continually passing, thro' infinite space and the ages of eternity; and instead of being excluded from human society, shall be joined to a celestial community, to *the spirits of just men made perfect*, and a higher order of beings, amongst whom mutual benevolence and social joy are compleat and uninterrupted.

OUR Blessed Saviour delivered instructions of wisdom, and precepts of morality, adapted to the nature and condition of mankind; and was himself a perfect example of every human virtue. But this was not the most important part of his commission, nor is it the greatest excellence of our religion. The authentic discovery and assurance of a life to come, and of glory and immortality as the reward of virtue, is the perfection and glory of the christian religion: this is properly *the Gospel*: a doctrine of consolation, of

5 hope,

hope, and of joy inexpressible. He came with a certainty and authority which no other person ever had, to assure us of the intentions of divine goodness and mercy to men: to reveal and confirm to us the *happiest tidings* that can arrive to the ears of *mortals*, the promise of *immortality*: that the Almighty Father who made us, and *who hath appointed all men once to die*, doth not intend to destroy us at death, but *hath so loved the world* of mankind, that it hath been his eternal purpose to deliver them from death, and restore them to another life, and to reward virtuous men with endless honour and happiness: and that to this end he hath appointed a person worthy to execute the great design; and hath committed to him the power of raising mankind from the dead, the right of judging them, and the whole disposal and government of them in a future state. The Gospel therefore dispels our most formidable apprehensions, and raiseth us to the highest hopes; by assuring us, that the

total

total and eternal destruction, which all mankind would have had reason to live in fear of, shall be the fate only of the wicked and impenitent: whilst all good men, and even wicked men who sincerely repent, shall be saved; shall *not perish, but have everlasting life.*

THERE are but *two sorts* of persons in the world, who are incapable of deriving any satisfaction and hope from the Gospel; and who, instead of rejoicing in the prospect of a future state, have reason to live in fear of what will follow after death; viz. the *wicked* man, and the *In-fidel*.—The former, during his state of wickedness and impenitence, may and ought to be filled with terrible apprehensions. For the Father Almighty, even *the Father of mercies, the GOD of all consolation and good hope*, will nevertheless, according to the Gospel of our Saviour, be *a consuming fire* to the workers of iniquity: they shall be *burnt up like chaff*, and their
end

end shall be *eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*—The *Infidel* may indeed be in a better situation; as he may, upon the principles of natural religion, live virtuously and piously, and avoid that wickedness and hypocrisy, which will expose the christian to peculiar infamy and punishment. But at the same time, by rejecting the Gospel, tho' it be in the sincerity of his heart, and because he apprehends it to want sufficient proof; he deprives himself of the best evidence of a life to come, and the most delightful ground of hope, as to his own future and eternal condition. He remains in a dark and uncomfortable state, or in the obscure twilight of human reason; which can make no clear and certain discovery of a life hereafter. He must of necessity either believe that he shall perish for ever at death, (a thought abhorrent to the mind of a wise man) or trust entirely to the strength of some feeble probabilities and plausible conjectures, concerning

cerning the purposes of infinite wisdom.

INDEED the ablest * of the Deistical writers has been so honest as to confess all this, and much more; by expressly owning, that the doctrine of a future state is absolutely uncertain and dubious, exclusive of the christian revelation: and that a life to come, however desirable, is what we have no sufficient ground to expect.—It is well that this writer against christianity has been so kind, as to inform us of his real sentiments, in this most momentous article of religion: for we may plainly see whither he would lead us, and to what issue his objections and arguments naturally tend. For having first attempted to deprive us of our christian faith; the next step, and the natural consequence is, to rob us of the greatest consolation and joy of our minds, the blessed hope of a life to come, and of immortality after death:

* Bolingbroke.

—But

—But having attained, by our knowledge and belief of the Gospel, to this sublime and pleasing hope; we cannot willingly part with it, or suffer any slight objections to destroy our confidence in God, and our hope of enjoying the effects of his goodness in a life incorruptible and eternal. Were it possible that our christian faith and hope should be all a delusion; it would be a kind of cruelty to deprive us of so noble and pleasing an expectation, so requisite to support us under adversity, to give us joy in prosperity, and to change the formidable aspect of our *last enemy*, death, into the countenance of a *friend*.

IF, according to all human judgment concerning matters of the greatest consequence, even of life and death, the mouth of two or three witnesses of honest character is thought sufficient to a decision; how vastly superior is that evidence*, which determines our assent to the truth of the

* See the 7th discourse.

Gospel, and on which our faith and hope in the divine promise of eternal life is founded?—What remains then in order to our entire satisfaction, but that we rightly understand, and cordially embrace the Gospel of our salvation?—We have abundant reason to confide in the divine purpose of everlasting goodness and mercy to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. *All flesh is indeed grass; and all the glory of man as the flower of grass: the grass withereth and the flower thereof falleth:* our bodily nature is so far akin to the lower creatures, even the vegetables of the earth, that it must decay and fall like them. *But the word of the Lord, the purpose and promise of God, abideth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you. Let us then hold fast the profession of our faith, and the joy of our hope, firm unto the end; for faithful is he who hath promised.* Let us endeavour to walk as becomes the heirs of the heavenly inheritance, the inestimable gift of eternal life. Having *this hope in*

us, let us *purify ourselves as Christ was pure*: and according to his example, *by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour and immortality*. Then may we have strong consolation in our own minds; and in all the events of this uncertain state, *may rejoice in hope of the glory of GOD*; in hope of seeing and enjoying the glorious effects of divine power, wisdom and goodness in the celestial regions, and to everlasting ages. *Which GOD of his infinite mercy grant, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.*



DISCOURSE XI.

On Religious Gratitude.



PSALM ciii. 2.

Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his benefits.

AS the exercise of gratitude, in return for benefits received, is most natural and agreeable to every ingenuous mind; so the most engaging character, in which we can consider the Supreme Being, is that of a benefactor. Sovereign authority may command obedience; and the idea of Almighty power enforce it: infinite grandeur and dignity of nature may impress awe: and infallible and all-comprehensive wisdom create admiration or astonishment: and other attributes may properly excite religious veneration. But goodness alone attracts love; and benefits received are the only foundation of gratitude. And, as the displays of infinite power and wisdom

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throughout the structure of the world are not more obvious to reason, or more the subject of human *experience*, than the effects of divine goodness; so every person in the world hath reason to say with the Psalmist, *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*

IN recommending the cultivation and exercise of religious gratitude, let us first consider the divine goodness, and the benefits flowing from it, which we have actually experienced. Secondly, the meanness and odiousness of ingratitude. Thirdly, the excellence and advantages of religious gratitude.

FIRST, let us attend to the divine goodness, and the benefits flowing from it, which we have experienced in life.—We have sufficient ground to believe, that the effects of that perfect and unlimited goodness, which is attributed to the Supreme Being, are adequate to the perfection of
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that attribute; i. e. are infinite and endless. But as we are able to discern or understand but a *small* part, (nothing indeed comparatively) of the exertions of infinite wisdom and power; so we are capable of and fitted to enjoy the happy effects of divine goodness, only in the *like imperfect* and narrow proportion. Indeed *no species* of living creatures are *entirely* destitute of their maker's goodness: they all enjoy the things proper to their nature and state of life; and are produced into being for some beneficent purpose. Much *more* is the happiness of *mankind* an object of the divine regard and intention. And we have abundant *experimental proofs* to convince us of it. For the effects are *proportionate* to the natural capacities, the moral qualities, and external situation of mankind: while at the same time there are numberless other states and worlds, in which the divine goodness is infinitely augmented or diversified. — As the sun shines perpetually with the same lustre and heat, tho' the na-

tions of men partake variously of the benefits of it, according to the different climates of the earth, and many objects arise to intercept its influence, and the earth itself interposing occasions nocturnal darkness; so the goodness of the Supreme Being is in itself perfect and invariable, tho' the effects of it are diffused with an infinite variety, and in different proportions to his several creatures; tho' the happy influence of it is frequently intercepted by many calamities and evils; and tho' human mortality *seems* to put a period to our enjoyment of it.

BUT whatever agreeable speculations or probable conjectures we may entertain concerning the unknown effects of divine goodness in *other* states and superior worlds; yet the beneficial effects which we have observed and experienced are the only ground and motive of our gratitude: and it is our part to consider *our own* state, and to reflect upon the advantages we enjoy,
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and the blessings we derive from the divine favour to *ourselves* :—not to ourselves *exclusive* of mankind around us, who are formed of the same nature, placed in the same state, and *equally* the creatures of God and the objects of his care and goodness with ourselves. For those benefits which we enjoy *in common* with others, our fellow-creatures, fellow-subjects, and fellow-christians, are the *most proper* ground of praise and gratitude to *our common* Lord and benefactor.—It is the temper of many to put the least value upon those blessings which they partake of in common with many others, and to turn all their attention to some *peculiar* endowments or advantages which they fancy themselves to be possessed of above others, or some *extraordinary* mercies or blessings which they have singly obtained. Nothing strikes their attention but what is peculiar and singular : nothing moves their gratitude but something which they can appropriate to themselves, *exclusive* of their fellow-creatures.

Life, health, food, raiment, rest, the light and warmth of the sun, the wide prospect of the creation, friends and relatives, are trivial blessings in their esteem, and excite no grateful reflections; only because they are common to mankind in general. This is the effect of vanity and self-partiality; by which men are willing to confine the infinite goodness of God to themselves, and value it only as far as they imagine it to be so confined. And many christians have suffered this selfish and narrow disposition to taint and vitiate the very principles of their christian faith, and tempt them to appropriate the saving mercy of God in Christ Jesus to themselves; and to esteem the gospel principally because they imagine it to contain a scheme of salvation calculated for their own party, exclusive of the rest of mankind. But we may justly observe, that as *all men* are strictly speaking *unworthy* of that divine goodness which they actually enjoy; so *such* selfish persons are of all men the *most unworthy*: and they
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who are so willing to exclude *their fellow-creatures* from the benevolent and merciful regards of their common Creator, do most of all deserve to be excluded from it *themselves*.

IN considering then the grounds of our religious praise and gratitude to GOD, let us not dwell so much on any particular and extraordinary events, in which the divine providence hath seemed to distinguish us from others: for it is the property of weak and vain minds to arrogate to themselves such distinctions. But let us consider the divine bounty as the spring of *universal* good, as the fountain which diffuseth its streams throughout the whole habitable world, enriching the earth, and refreshing its numberless inhabitants. And if *we* enjoy a greater plenty than others, either of the temporal or spiritual means of happiness; let this only serve to *increase* our gratitude, and excite also our benevolent desires and prayers, that *all*

men

men may partake in an equal or superior degree of every blessing which the providence of God hath conferred upon *us*.

IN reflecting upon the *common* benefits and satisfactions of life, and the *constant* and general effects of divine goodness, we may find an ample subject of religious praise and gratitude.—The whole happiness of life; every thing valuable and delightful; whatever is grateful to human sense, great or amiable to the view, or engaging to the affections; whatever informs the understanding, entertains the imagination, or meliorates the temper; whatever restrains vice and promotes virtue; whatever mitigates disease, preserves health, or invigorates the faculties; whatever allays discord, cements society, and establisheth social and relative bliss;—these are all particular effects of that most impartial, unconfined and invariable goodness of God, who is benevolent to all, *and whose tender mercies are over all his works.*

When in the cheerful light of day we view the ample creation around us; does not its very *countenance* bespeak the *goodness*, as well as the power and *grandeur* of the Creator? It is *his goodness*, which makes heaven and earth to *smile* upon us; glows in the sun, refresheth in the breeze, distils in the fruitful rain, and ascends in the copious harvest. His bounty continually gives food to the hungry, cloathing to the naked, health to the sick, and rest to the weary. He supplies the vital current of life, and pours the tide of *joy* into the human heart. *His* wisdom formed and balanced the elements of the world, and made them subservient to the production and preservation of human life. *His* providence planned the constitution of human society, made man allied to man, and implanted in the human breast the *pleasing* affections of friends and kindred. The most engaging ties of nature, the tenderest and strongest emotions of parental affection, are an effect and image of his supreme

preme and paternal goodness. And as *this life*, and whatever administers to the comfort and happiness of it, are the fruits of his beneficence; so all our hopes of *another life*, and of happiness in a world to come, are wholly founded in *his original love* and mercy to mankind. The same power, wisdom and goodness which formed the earth and the whole heavens, and which made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the whole face of the earth, established also that constitution which the christian revelation discloseth to us, according to which *all* mankind are *raised from the dead* by the power of the *Saviour of the world*, and endless life and happiness allotted to *all good* men.—If our knowledge of the Gospel served to no other happy end, than to rescue us from the slavish superstition of popery, or the stupid idolatry and the impure and barbarous rites of heathenism; how much reason should we have to congratulate ourselves, and acknowledge the favour of divine providence on that account!

count! How much *more*; when it dispels the gloomy shades of death, and opens to us a prospect into a *future state*! when instead of the perplexing uncertainty or dark despair which oppressed the human mind, it raiseth us to so great and *joyful hopes* of the event of things after death, and of a *glorious renovation* of the state of mankind; when justice and clemency shall be administered in perfection, all the evils of this world abolished, and virtue and happiness for ever established! What returns of praise and gratitude are due to the eternal giver of all life and happiness; who hath added to the *provision*, which his indulgent providence hath made for our *infant-state* in this world, the inestimable affluence of a world to come, and the *inheritance* of eternal life!

HAVING thus far represented the benefits derived to us from the divine goodness, which are proper to excite our religious gratitude; let us in the next place attend to the
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meannefs and odioufnefs of ingratitude.— This is indeed a vice fo univerfally detefted, that there is little need of arguments to expofe, much lefs to aggravate it. The very idea of it gives immediate offence, and the experience of it never fails to raife repentment. It is contrary to the ftrongeft difpofitions of an ingenuous and liberal mind: and even they who are capable of allowing it in themfelves, abhor it in others. Wherever men confer benefits, they naturally expect fome acknowledgment in return, and to difcover a fenfibility of kindnefs in the receiver. And nothing fo effectually damps the fpirit of generofity, and ftops the courfe of beneficence, as the ingratitude of thofe who are obliged. Efpecially, after various favours, a continued courfe of kindnefs, and repeated endeavours to please and benefit, to meet notwithstanding with a ftupid indifference, or unnatural enmity in return, creates the ftrongeft and jufteft fense of repentment; as it difcovers the utter unworthinefs

worthiness of the receiver, and his insensibility of all obligations. How does the parent find himself affected, when all his tender cares and unwearied endeavours for the welfare of his children, are repaid with contempt or abuse? How does the friend, who hath hazarded fortune or life for another's safety or benefit, resent his enmity or ingratitude?—This vice comes the nearest to that of unprovoked malice and cruelty; and next to that, is the greatest reproach to a reasonable being. Other faults and vices men are drawn into by the power of temptation, and the strength of their natural passions or appetites: but where are the temptations to ingratitude? The sentiments of nature, and the impulses of honest affection, are strong inducements to the contrary, and create a propensity to be grateful. How unnatural and depraved then is that mind, in which every spark of gratitude is extinguished! which no goodness can oblige, no kindness move, no benefits engage!

It must indeed be confessed, that *men* often confer benefits from motives of vanity or interest, and without any real benevolence to those who receive them: and in such instances the motives of gratitude are in proportion diminished. Or they may expect, under a colour of gratitude, unreasonable and disproportionate returns; or may demand slavish or vicious compliances.—But in regard to the *Deity*, who is perfect in goodness, and *who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not*, no such impediment can possibly arise to obstruct or diminish our gratitude. The benefits which he confers proceed from the most pure and disinterested benevolence: and the returns which he requires are the most easy and advantageous to ourselves. To serve him is our most perfect freedom; and to adore and praise him for his goodness, our most natural duty.—What can be easier than to give him thanks, and to receive his favours and enjoy them with grateful hearts? The debt of gratitude is
indeed

indeed endless; “ *still owing, still to pay* :
 “ *But a grateful mind in owing owes not,*
 “ *and is at once indebted and discharged.*”
 The duty of gratitude can never cease ;
 because the goodness is endless which ob-
 ligeth : but this is no less our *happiness* than
 our *duty*.—How then can men be conti-
 nually receiving gifts and blessings from
 the hand of God, yet have no sense of his
 goodness, nor ever return the acknowledg-
 ments due to their divine benefactor ? How
 can they, in *the midst of prosperity*, when
 all nature smiles upon them, when they
 are surrounded with grateful objects, and
 a confluence of delights is flowing in upon
 them ; forget the fountain whence these
 streams of life and happiness proceed, and
 be unmindful of that God *who is giving*
them all things richly to enjoy ? Whence
 comes it to pass, that they are then *most*
negligent of the deity, and are the least
 willing to remember him ?—but when
 the *scene is changed*, when distress and an-
 guish come upon them, when they are

surrounded with dangers and alarmed with fears, *then* and *then only* they begin to think of religion, become sensible of that power which made them, implore the protection of his providence, and fly to his goodness, as their last and only refuge? — So the froward and pampered youth despises the indulgence of his parents, nor thinks himself obliged by their goodness: But when terrified by danger, or afflicted by disease, immediately calls on *them* for help and succour, and trusts himself to their care alone.—But how weak and vain is it, how unbecoming our reasonable nature, how disingenuous and contrary to the dispositions of a worthy mind, to shew *no* gratitude in return for the *greatest* benefits! to have the *less* sense of divine goodness, the *more* we experience of it! to be *most unthankful* for those blessings which occur the *most frequently* and in the greatest abundance! and at the same time most readily to acknowledge *GOD* when he *withholds* his favours, and inflicts chastisements up-

on us; and *trust* entirely to his goodness, when we have entirely *forfeited* it! to be *Atheists* while God is showering down his blessings upon us; and to grow *religious* and devout when he hath taken them away! How servile, mean and odious is *this temper*; which is only to be *driven by fear*, and can never be *won by goodness*!

LET us attend also, on the other hand, to the excellency and happy effects of a grateful disposition towards the Supreme Being.—As ingratitude is the vice of *ignoble* minds, and which none but mean and selfish spirits are capable of; so gratitude is the spontaneous produce of a worthy mind, and always takes root and flourisheth in a generous heart. The more goodness men have in themselves, they are usually the more sensible of goodness in others, and the more *attracted* by its influence; and when they find themselves the objects of it, are the more easily and strongly affected with grateful sentiments.

While they whose hearts are strangers to generous principles and affections, and who are *themselves* destitute of goodness, are wilfully blind to it *in others*, and often endeavour to traduce and vilify it. Hence they become insensible of obligations; and either have no gratitude, or endeavour to weaken the sense and loosen the ties of it, by ascribing the benefits they have received from others to any other motive rather than that of benevolence or generosity.

AND the *effects* are as different as the temper and principles of mind from which they spring. — Ingratitude is usually accompanied with envy and discontent: while a grateful temper is best qualified both to *enjoy its own* peculiar blessings, and to *participate in those of others*. The ungrateful man never thinks that God or men have been *sufficiently* kind and liberal to him; or that he is obliged by *any* benefits *conferred*, while *any* are *with-held*; and is thankful for *nothing*, because he has not
every

every thing. Instead of enjoying his own possessions, he envies those of others. Instead of thinking himself *happy* that Heaven has bestowed *so much* upon him, he is *unhappy* because it has bestowed *no more*. Nothing can satisfy his ungrateful and discontented mind, unless all mankind would bow down before him and serve him, and heaven itself would exhaust its boundless treasures to enrich and bless *him alone*, exclusive of the world beside.—But a man of a grateful temper is easily *satisfied*, and well-disposed for *happiness*. He is *pleased* with the good will and service of his fellow-creatures, without forming unreasonable expectations from them; *enjoys* the gifts of divine providence, without repining for what it has not given; is *happy* in his own advantages, without envying those of others; has the *higher relish* of every blessing the more common it is to others; and contemplates the divine goodness with the *greater delight* the more it appears to be diffused throughout the world and exten-

five as the creation. Instead of engrossing to himself the divine favour and liberality, he is struck with a grateful astonishment, that so *insignificant* a creature as *himself* is an object of the care and goodness of an *infinite being*: and that amidst the immense grandeur and multiplicity of the works of God, and the innumerable superior and more worthy objects of his regard, *himself* should nevertheless enjoy so *large* a proportion of the divine bounty: and that, while the wants and desires of millions of creatures in various states and worlds are to be supplied out of the stores of nature, yet the elements of the world and all nature around him, are, at the same time, formed with so wonderful a subservience to *his own* particular support and benefit. Much more, when he conceives of himself as designed for immortality; and is assured by the Gospel, that the divine goodness to mankind in general, and to himself in particular, shall *not terminate at death*, but be inconceivably *augmented*,

mented, and endlessly diversified in the unknown scenes of the invisible and boundless universe; his heart becomes dilated and animated with the highest esteem of the divine goodness, the warmest gratitude for present benefits, and the most joyful hopes of future happiness. No transient clouds of adversity, no dark prospect of approaching disease or death, can destroy either his grateful remembrance of past mercies, or his hope of final deliverance and salvation.

To conclude: gratitude is a *debt* due to every benefactor in proportion to the benefits we have received from him, and the benevolence of intention with which he confers them. The *smallest* favour merits a return of *thanks*: and the mere *intention* of obliging, separate from the *act*, deserves a grateful acceptance. Where benefits then have been actually conferred, and of the most substantial and valuable nature; where favours have been multiplied and

incessantly repeated, all proceeding from the purest motive of benevolence and the wisest regard to our welfare and happiness; there the obligations to gratitude are proportionably *enhanced*. But the divine benefits, we are certain, can proceed from *no other* motive than *that* of perfect goodness; and comprehend, in number and value, *all*, and *much more* than we can possibly receive from any *other* benefactors. And in God, the Sovereign Author of all good, all the most respectable and *engaging* characters among men, of protector, governor, Saviour, friend, and Father, are united.—If gratitude then be due to any earthly benefactor, or in return for any gifts which men can bestow; how much more to *him*, whose instruments they are, who is the giver of all things, the original author of every blessing, by *whatever* person or medium it is conveyed to us?—Nothing then can be more becoming us, or conduce more to our advantage and happiness, than to cultivate a grateful affection

fection towards the best of beings, *in return* for the numberless and various instances of his goodness to us; and *as a qualification* for receiving *more* and larger effects of his favour. To this we are excited, not only by a sense of duty, but by the ties of nature, the motives of ingenuity, the pleasure of a grateful mind, and the hopes of happiness.

LET us then frequently call to mind, and gratefully celebrate, the constant series and numberless effects of the divine goodness, to ourselves in particular, and to mankind in general. Let us constantly and cheerfully pay our public tribute of homage, adoration, and thanksgiving to our common Creator and benefactor. *Let us now magnify the Lord, and exalt his name together; let us give thanks unto him, and bless his holy name: let us sing praises to our GOD, and extol him in the congregation of the people. O that men*
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would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men. And let every one say to himself with sincere and fervent gratitude, Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits.



DISCOURSE XII.

On Religious Fear.





LUKE xii. 4.

And I say unto you, my friends, Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do: but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear. Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell:—yea I say unto you, Fear him.

IT was one principal intention of most of our *Saviour's* discourses to his immediate disciples, to prepare them for their future office. To this end it was requisite, not only to wean their minds from the vain hopes they were possessed with, of ~~raising~~ ^{raising} to wealth and grandeur under their *Messiah*, but to endow them with sufficient fortitude to endure adversity, persecution and death: a scene quite the reverse to their worldly expectations.—If we carefully attend to our *Saviour's* discourses in
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this view, it will not be difficult to perceive the argument and address of them.

HE begins this discourse to them with warning them against *Hypocrisy*; which he stiles the *Leaven*, or the spreading vice of the *Pharisees*, which diffused itself thro' all their actions. His particular view in this, was to excite them to an open undisguised profession of the *Gospel*, unmoved by the censure or applause of men, or by any worldly consideration, and from a sole view to the approbation of GOD the judge of men's hearts: a character opposite to that of the *Pharisees*, who were only acting a part, seeking worldly preferment, courting popularity, and aiming to draw the veneration of the unthinking vulgar, by their solemn appearances. This instruction he supports by a powerful argument. *For there is nothing covered, saith he, which shall not be revealed, nothing hid which shall not be known.* How artfully and closely soever men may conceal their wicked-

wickedness, or how much applause soever they may gain by their well-dissembled appearances; all such *Hypocrisy* is folly, and will only serve to *expose* them at last to the greater disgrace.

OUR *Saviour* then proceeds in the text to another view of the same subject. For men may not only be allured by hopes of applause and worldly emoluments, to act an hypocritical part; but in some circumstances, such as he foresaw his disciples would come into, may be terrified, by reproach, or violence, to desert the truth, and have recourse to dissimulation. — Worldly *fear*, and the dread of suffering, may operate to the *same* effect, as worldly *hope*, and the prospect of honour and gain. And fear is a most powerful passion; and may as strongly tempt men to dissemble, and betray the cause of true religion, as the contrary passion, the desire of favour and reward: and it was equally necessary to fortify his disciples against
both.

both. He proceeds therefore, in the words of the text, to arm them against the assaults of fear; and to this end, with the greatest propriety and force, employs this powerful passion against itself; and opposes to the fear of human power, an awe of the Almighty power of God; and to the fear of temporal death, a dread of eternal destruction; pointing out the decisive difference which should render the one an over-balance to the other. Human power may extend to the death of the *body*, but no further: that is the limit which providence hath assigned to the rage of men, and to the punishments they can inflict: there all worldly terrors and evils terminate. But 'tis not so with the power of God, and the punishments of his justice. He can make men feel the effects of his displeasure, not only in temporal misery and death, but far beyond; and his justice may extend to the destruction of the *soul itself* for ever. *I say unto you, my friends, fear not them that kill the body, and after that*

have no more that they can do : but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear : fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell ; or as St. Matthew recites it, hath power to destroy both soul and body in hell ; yea I say unto you, Fear him.—Thus our Lord fortifies his disciples against the fear of human power, by impressing on their minds an awe of the unlimited power and justice of GOD.

FROM these words of our *Saviour*, I shall take occasion to treat, in a general view, of the fear of GOD, as a principle or motive of religion : and first, shall endeavour to define it ; secondly, to shew the ground or foundation, and thirdly, the use and effect of it.

FIRST, we are to explain the fear of GOD, as a proper and rational motive of true religion. And here, it is requisite to our information and right understanding, to distinguish the fear of GOD (I.) from

all vain and imaginary terrors, and (2.) from a slavish dread of the Almighty, as of an arbitrary and tyrannical being.

(1.) THE fear of GOD is to be distinguished from all vain and imaginary terrors.—There are some persons exceedingly subject to the passion of fear; and who live in perpetual uneasiness and dread of they know not what; are often raising up formidable appearances in their own imagination, with which they terrify themselves; are afraid where there is no danger; and think they foresee evils where there are none: and mixing religion with such weak and timid passions they impute all calamities and sufferings befalling themselves or others, real or imaginary, to the special judgment of GOD, or to a divine intention of chastizing or punishing them. But the fear of GOD does not consist in a visionary dread of we know not what, or the sudden alarms of a frightened imagination. And those foolish and childish ter-

rors which arise from ignorance, cowardice, or a melancholy fancy, ought not to pass for any true principle of religion or motive to virtue. They may indeed lead to enthusiasm, and excite to superstitious actions; but cannot be a solid ground of a wise and virtuous conduct, which is the proper effect of a rational fear of the Supreme being.

(2.) THE fear of GOD is to be carefully distinguished also, from all slavish dread of an arbitrary and tyrannical power. For it is evident that such a dread is *not a fear of GOD*, but of *another imaginary being* placed in his stead, by our false and unjust apprehensions. GOD is a Being of perfect wisdom and goodness, as well as, Almighty power, most benevolent and merciful in the disposition of his nature, and who employs his power only in promoting and accomplishing the wisest and most beneficent designs. He is the best of governors; and the great end of his go-

vernment is the improvement, good and happiness of his subjects. To suppose, therefore, an Almighty being destitute of these glorious attributes, and who employs his power, not for the general good of his creatures, but to their hurt and destruction; tormenting and consuming them, merely to shew his power; is framing to ourselves a *GOD after our own hearts*, worshipping a being of our own false invention, and living in terror of our own evil imagination.

THE character and title most constantly ascribed by our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* to the Supreme being is *The Father*: and the appellation by which we are taught to address him, *Our Father in heaven*. By this title he is, or ought to be, *known* to all *Christians*. But if we impute to him qualities inconsistent with the *paternal* character, and represent him to ourselves, as seeking and delighting, not in the happiness, but the misery and ruin of his creatures;

tures ; we dethrone, as it were, *the Father*, and set up in his stead *a tyrant*, than which no two characters can be more opposite. And the dread of such a false deity is widely different from the fear of God, not only in regard to the *object*, but in its nature and *effects*, producing timidity, distrust, dejection, horror, and despair, and leading to all the low servile and corrupt methods, by which, men, deceiving themselves, may hope to appease his wrath and gain his favour.

ALL true fear of the Supreme Being can only spring from a right knowledge of him. And it consists, first and fundamentally, in conceiving and believing him to be what he is, most powerful indeed, but at the same time, most wise, just, and benevolent ; the Almighty uncontrollable governor of the world, but whose government is that of *a Father* ; who will chastize the transgressor, and finally cut off and

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destroy the impenitent and incorrigible; but who in the utmost extent of his justice in punishing wickedness, always intends and is infallibly promoting the greatest good of his creatures in general. And in that inward reverence, which the consideration and belief of such a being naturally inspires; in that ingenuous fear of offending against the most perfect goodness, and subjecting ourselves to the penalties of the highest justice, by unworthy and wicked actions; in that strong sense of our dependance upon and obligations to the greatest and best of beings; in that powerful apprehension of the misery of forfeiting his protection, and rendering it necessary to the ends of his goodness, to destroy us for ever; by which we are effectually warned to avoid sin as the greatest evil;—in these sentiments, which naturally result from a just apprehension of his paternal authority and government, consists the true and rational fear of God.

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THIS leads us to consider, secondly, the ground or foundation of this fear; which is, our state of subjection to him, as our Supreme Lord and Governor; or, the authority and dominion which God exercises over mankind as his subjects. It is the consideration, not of his power alone, but of his power connected with his wisdom and goodness, or of those attributes which render him the most just Governor and equitable judge of mankind, which ought to produce a reverential awe of him. It is founded on a belief of his moral government, or of his regard to the difference of men's actions, and his intention to treat all men according to their moral qualities and deserts, and to reward or punish according to those measures which his unerring wisdom sees to be requisite to the ends of his government.

SOME vain *philosophers* have disputed this character of the Supreme Being; and

tho' they have allowed his Almighty creative power and preserving providence, yet have thought, or seemed willing to think, that he takes no cognizance of the actions of men, and exercises no judicial dominion over them; by which they subvert all religion, and take away the only proper ground of the fear of God, as a motive to virtue and a restraint from wickedness. But the books of *Holy-Scripture* constantly impress upon us an idea of the Almighty in his *judicial* character, or as the inspector, judge and rewarder of human actions: and they teach us, that the measures of his justice are not confined to this life, but have only an imperfect *beginning* in this world, are extended forward into futurity, and have their *completion* in another and eternal world. And it is in reference to the *future* judicial exertion of divine power, in inflicting those penalties, which his supreme justice has appointed to the wickedness of men, that our Saviour forewarns his disciples *to fear Him, who*

is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.

THESE sentiments of the *Holy-Scripture* are agreeable to the natural conscience of mankind. For all men are conscious to themselves of their being moral agents, capable of acting right or wrong, and having a power to govern their own actions, and therefore proper subjects of law and authority, and accountable for their behaviour. And the natural notion men form of *GOD*, is that of a *Governor*, whose empire and jurisdiction extend to the whole world and to all the actions of mankind. And as when men break the known laws of their country, they know at the same time that by such actions they expose themselves to public resentment and to the punishing justice of that authority which enacted those laws; so in every criminal action whatsoever, men are conscious to themselves of offending against a higher authority and more extensive govern-

vernment, of transgressing the will and law of the supreme ruler of the whole world, and standing exposed to his righteous displeasure. And who can presume to define the measures of his justice? Who can determine what punishments the divine wisdom may justly annex to the presumptuous violation of his known will, or see to be requisite to the ends of his government?—The punishments of human justice extend to temporal ignominy, pain and death. And do the penalties of divine justice reach no further? Has the *greatest* malefactor or tyrant, who is *above human justice*, nothing to fear from the *justice of GOD*, beyond that death which is common to all mankind? Can we imagine that God hath left it in the power of men to put a stop whenever they please to the proceedings of his justice?—And that what crimes soever they have committed, they can escape out of his hands, by only adding to all their other crimes, that of self-murder?—Our Saviour asserts,

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ferts, not only, that the power of God can, but that his justice will extend to the infliction of penalties in another world, of shame, horror, anguish, and torment, and still further, to the eternal destruction of the soul. And is not this reasonable to be believed? Do we not see that the providence of God sometimes permits the best men to suffer the calamities of this life and the torments of death from human injustice; and can we think that his justice will permit the worst of men to escape unpunished? Or that the punishments of *wicked men* in *another* world shall be less severe and terrible, than those miseries which *good men* sometimes endure in *this* world? Or can it be supposed, that the eternal destruction of any number of souls, is such a loss in the creation, as the Almighty power of God cannot repair? Can he not, at pleasure, create an equal or greater number to replenish the world, in the *stead* of those who have justly forfeited their *being* by their disobedience and wickedness?

edness? If a whole world was to perish at once, cannot his inexhaustible power form worlds without number? What is the whole race of mankind from the beginning to the end, but a mean and little part of his creation? Are there not infinite regions filled with nobler creatures, in comparison of whom mankind are but as worms? Or are the souls of men of such immense value in the eye of the Sovereign Lord of all beings, that he will never suffer them to perish, not even in punishment of their most presumptuous and incorrigible disobedience? — If we entertain such sentiments as these, we *err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power and justice of GOD.*

To deny the punishments of a future state, is in effect assigning limits to the power, or bidding defiance to the justice of GOD. Nor can there be a greater mark of stupidity, than to treat this doctrine as a subject of ridicule and contempt.

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Nothing discovers more of the folly and weakness of men, than, when they shew themselves timorous in virtue, yet bold in wickedness, frightened at what they ought to despise, yet despising what they have most reason to fear, cowards where there is no danger, yet rash and fool-hardy to their own destruction; when the puny mortal, who trembles at a shadow, who is afraid of the creature of his own imagination, who dreads what hath no power to hurt him, and is struck with awe of a *fellow-mortal*; yet hath no reverence of *GOD*, no fear of offending that power which is able to crush him to nothing in a moment. How little are men's fears the effect of rational consideration, or of a judgment distinguishing great from little, and real from imaginary dangers and evils!

SOME wicked men may build their security upon *GOD*'s infinite goodness, and
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flatter themselves with hopes of impunity, from an opinion, that he is too merciful to punish even the worst of men, with the misery of an eternal destruction; and that therefore they have no reason to live in awe of his power or justice: not considering, that it is the infinite goodness of God which is most of all to be dreaded by wicked men, and which renders their punishment inevitable. For if he was not a being of perfect goodness, there might be some room to hope, that he would protect and favour wickedness; or at least, not employ his power in punishing, suppressing, and extirpating it. It is his goodness which renders him an irreconcilable enemy to all wickedness, and determines him as supreme Governor of the world to make a final separation between good and bad men, and *to destroy the workers of iniquity*. For it is evident that the excellence and goodness of every Governor consists in his being *a terror*
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and punishment *to evil-doers*, as well as in his protecting and rewarding *them that do well*. — Would we consider things aright, we should soon be convinced, that nothing is so dreadful in itself, and so proper to strike men with awe, as infinite goodness abused and provoked beyond the limits of patience and forbearance. In the nature of all government, there are certain rules and limits, according to which pardon is dispensed, and offenders restored; and beyond which, it becomes necessary to the purposes of goodness itself, to make the criminal an example of terror to others. And as *all men are guilty before GOD*, and are criminals in the eye of his justice; so every wise and considerate person will dread every approach to those limits where mercy stops, and beyond which there is no redemption. Our *Redeemer* himself, the great minister of divine favour and mercy to sinful men, hath represented to us in many descriptions and figures, the procedure and final execution
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of divine justice, when he shall preside as judge of mankind, and pronounce the sentence of destruction upon the wicked, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

HAVING shewn the proper nature, and the ground or foundation of the fear of GOD, as a reasonable principle of religion; I shall conclude with observing the proper use and effect of it: which is to restrain men from all wickedness, and excite them to all virtue; to make them dread guilt as the only great evil, and that which alone forfeits the favour of the Almighty ruler of the world, and exposes them to his just displeasure, and consequently to misery and ruin.

THERE is nothing in the true notion of GOD, or of his just dominion over mankind, which carries the least terror in it separate from guilt; nothing but what is proper to inspire love and esteem, hope,
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confidence, and joy. He is an object of delight; and a belief of his governing justice is a ground of courage, and is proper to banish all low servile fears out of the mind. The true fear of God has no tendency to enfeeble and enslave the mind with perpetual terrors and dismal apprehensions; but to animate and encourage it, and render it superior to all vain cares and weak fears of little or imaginary evils. It is wickedness alone which arms Almighty justice against us, and converts the most adorable and *amiable* being in the universe into an *object of terror*, and which *disposes us* to consider him as an *enemy*, instead of loving him as our best friend, and delighting to address him as a father. But the truly religious man, who hath established in his own mind an habitual reverence of the Supreme Being upon rational considerations, and as a preservative from every temptation to evil and motive to all virtue; derives from it strength, courage, and hope; in all the emergencies

of human life, and the approach of death. He fears God, and therefore hath no fear but of him. This makes him serene and dauntless amidst all alarms, amidst the commotions of the world and the revolutions of nature; being *secure* in the protection of the Almighty, and knowing that no power whatsoever, neither the elements of the world, nor the malice of men, can *finally hurt* him.

HAPPY state, when we can rest assured, that *no evil* shall ever befall us *beyond* that death which is common to all, and when *death* itself is become no way terrible, our minds being elevated above mean and slavish fears, by conscious integrity and a just confidence in the power and goodness of the great disposer of all things.—But, *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*, and the foundation of happiness. And in order to arrive at this firm tranquility of mind, this secure and happy state, we must learn in the first place to

revere the authority of the Almighty Father and ruler of the universe, to live in awe of his justice, and in obedience to his will; and to *fear nothing* in comparison of his displeasure, neither poverty nor pain, nor any temporal evil, which can extend no further than to the dissolution of the *body*, but *him alone*, who is *able* to add to all temporal evils the far *more* dreadful and *eternal destruction* of the soul. From which may God of his infinite mercy deliver us thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.



DISCOURSE XIII.

On Religious Obedience.





MATTHEW vi. 10.

Thy will be done.

THAT the Almighty being is not only the creator and former of all things, but a *moral Governor* also, is allowed by all men, who have not renounced all religion. And in reality this is the most excellent character, and the highest glory, we can possibly ascribe to him;—That he is the sole, supreme, independent monarch over the universe of rational beings. For to rule over numberless worlds of mere *senseless* matter, however unsearchable and astonishing that skill and power which framed them may appear, cannot in reason be thought equally glorious, as to form innumerable systems of *intelligent* beings, and to govern them by those constitutions, laws, and commands, which

spring from unerring wisdom and perfect goodness.—In *this* character principally the *Holy Scriptures* represent him to us: and in *this* we are principally interested and obliged to consider him. For if he is a moral governor, it undeniably follows, that *his will* is the universal law of his reasonable creatures; and that all mankind, the angels of heaven, and all intelligent beings throughout the creation are bound to say, *Thy will be done.*

ALL true religion consists in resignation and obedience to the will of GOD. To be governed by a view to our own happiness, is *wisdom* or prudence: to act with a view to the happiness of others, is *virtue* or goodness: to be influenced by a regard to the will of GOD, this alone is *piety* or religion. How wisely or virtuously soever men may act upon other motives; yet if an apprehension of the divine will, as requiring or prohibiting certain actions, or

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appointing certain events, hath no influence upon their minds; they have in reality *no religion* in them.

IN order then to our becoming truly religious, the first thing requisite, is to gain a knowledge of the divine will, in regard to our own dispositions and actions: and in the next place, to impress upon our minds, (which is our present design) a just sense of the obligations we are under to comply with it.—To this end, let us particularly attend, first, to the *reasonableness*: secondly, to the *necessity*: and thirdly, to the *advantage* of submission and obedience to the will of God.

FIRST, to the reasonableness of it.— This evidently appears from the nature and perfection of the divine government. For if it be reasonable to comply with the directions of unerring wisdom, and with the designs of infinite goodness; if it be reasonable to do what is in itself the wisest and best

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to be done, and which is also enjoined by the highest authority; if it be reasonable to submit our own will, which is subject to the blindest errors of judgment, and the meanest impulses of passion, to a will which is infinitely remote from all passion, prejudice, and error;—then nothing can be so agreeable to *reason*, as obedience to the will of God; nothing so contrary to it, as an opposition to his will. All justice, equity, right, fitness and propriety are comprehended in wisdom and goodness: and the laws, commands, or appointments of a being who is so *good* that he always intends the best ends, and so *wise* that he perfectly understands what means are conducive to those ends, can never in any instance be unjust, unfit, or improper; and disobedience is in every instance contrary to the rectitude, fitness and propriety of action. Submission to the divine will is no other than a conformity to the true nature, order, constitution, and relations of things which the wisdom of God hath established,

established, and a subservience to those ends for which he established them. And as the ultimate end or purpose of the Almighty being in creating and governing the universe, is the greatest good; so an opposition to his will, is attempting what lies in our power to destroy the good of the world, and to involve it in confusion and misery; and instead of becoming the willing instruments of his providence in promoting the most excellent designs, making ourselves the authors of evil, and becoming the plagues and nuisances of the creation.

THE reasonableness of yielding an entire obedience to the will of God will further appear, from considering the *relation* we bear to him, as his creatures and dependents; and his character in regard to us, as our Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor; who has therefore an absolute unalienable right of dominion over us and of property in us. We are *His* by every possible claim
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of nature and of right; and he may do what he will with *his own*, and dispose of us as he alone shall think fit: and we cannot possibly have a right to dispute his will, oppose his designs, or censure his proceedings in any instance. Nothing is more familiar to mankind than a sense of the obligations arising from the different *relations* among men, and the inferior subordinate and dependent condition of some in respect to others. The relation of parents and children, master and servants, magistrate and subjects, naturally imply authority and *government* on one hand, and a duty of submission and *obedience* on the other: and nothing would be thought more unreasonable and absurd, than to deny such obligations. But all the reasons, which can be alledged for submission in any case to any kind of human authority, are infinitely more strong and conclusive for submission, in every instance, to the authority and disposal of the Supreme Lord and Father of all intelligent beings.

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The lowest creature upon earth cannot be so dependent upon or obliged to any earthly superior, as the highest creatures are to the great Sovereign of the universe. And therefore no person can be under so many or so strict obligations to obey the commands of any superior in the world, as are incumbent on all men at all times to obey the will of God. More especially, where there is not only the most absolute dependence, but also the greatest benefits received, and the highest power and authority are joined to perfect goodness; there the reason and obligation of obedience are still more binding, and receive an additional strength from every instance we experience of that goodness. And disobedience, which is always unnatural and unreasonable, becomes aggravated with the charge of ingratitude, and an abuse of divine mercy and favour.

AND let it be observed, that all these arguments serve to evince the reasonableness
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of submission to the divine will *universally*, even in those instances, if there be any, in which we are not able to discern the utility, or expediency, or even the justice of his commands and appointments. For however things may appear to our weak and narrow understandings; we have a certain principle to proceed upon: that the laws and appointments of his supreme wisdom and goodness are always right and conducive to worthy ends; and that if they do not appear so to us, it is because our apprehension and judgment of them may be often false, and is always imperfect.

IN regard to our *active* obedience, such instances can hardly occur: because the laws by which GOD governs his intelligent creatures are adapted by his infinite wisdom to their nature, capacity and condition; and therefore are *such*, in the whole, as their own understandings can judge of, and perceive the justice and fitness of them, and the beneficent ends they are
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intended to answer. But in respect of our *passive* submission, it must be acknowledged, that there are many events in the course of divine providence, the justice and fitness of which we cannot possibly discover; in which it is notwithstanding our reasonable duty to acquiesce with entire resignation; and from a conviction of our own ignorance, and of the unsearchable extent of divine wisdom, to say, *Thy will be done.*

BUT in every instance, submission and obedience are the more reasonable, and the contrary the more inexcusable, in proportion to our apprehension and conviction of the excellence and utility of the duties required. And therefore when we consider, how reasonable important and useful the *common duties* of religion are, how perfectly suitable to the abilities of human nature and the condition of human life, and how plainly conducive to private and public good, as well as the disgraceful

ful nature and pernicious effects of the contrary vices; to neglect *such* duties, in opposition to the will, in contempt of the authority, and in defiance of the justice, of the greatest and wisest of beings, and the sovereign judge of the universe, cannot but appear to be a conduct inconsistent with the character of a reasonable creature, and attended with aggravating circumstances.

SECONDLY: Let us proceed to consider the *necessity* of obeying the will of GOD; (I mean a *moral* necessity) as we value our own life, safety and happiness, and would avoid misery and destruction. For we cannot escape his power and justice; we cannot throw off his government, and exempt ourselves from his jurisdiction: we cannot abandon his territories and find protection under any foreign potentate. His dominion is universal, and his kingdom is over all creatures. We are, and cannot but be, the *subjects* of his government:

ment: and must of necessity, either live under his protection and by his favour, or endure all the penalties his justice may see fit to inflict. And it is absurd and dangerous to imagine, that the great Governor and judge of the whole world will permit, what no wise governor on earth will dispense with, the presumptuous violation of his known will, and suffer his authority to be insulted, and his laws trampled on, with impunity. The same reasons and ends for which the Almighty sees fit to give laws to his subjects, extend equally to the execution of those laws, by an appointment of rewards and punishments; without which the very design of government will be frustrated. And to suppose that the omniscient ruler of the world will be indifferent to the actions of men, and extend his protection and favour equally to the obedient and disobedient, is supposing him to act contrary to his own wise and good design in making the world, and to destroy his own au-

thority and government, by which the order and happiness of the world is supported. No society can be maintained without government. The wills of finite, frail and mutable creatures are always various, and may often be wrong: and the end and purpose of laws and constitutions is to *incline*, or *compel*, every *particular* will into *one general will*, intending the preservation and good of the whole. And this is to be done, principally by a due distribution of rewards and punishments; by protecting the innocent, rewarding the virtuous, and destroying or chastizing the transgressor.

THE order and happiness of the universe are maintained, by *bending* the *wills* of all intelligent creatures, to a *conformity* with the *will* of the one all-wise and most excellent being who presides over, governs, preserves, and directs the whole. To *this* will, the highest angels of heaven are equally subject as the meanest person upon earth.

earth. In this universal kingdom, the greatest as well as the least, the mightiest as well as the weakest, are bound to obedience, and liable to suffer for disobedience.—From the obscure intimations given us in the books of the holy scripture, concerning the fallen angels, we may conjecture; that among the orders of beings superior to mankind, there were some, who either presuming upon their own dignity and importance, or questioning the reasonableness of the divine commands, ventured to disobey the will of GOD; and in punishment of their disobedience, were thrown down from the height of splendor and glory, into an abyss of darkness and misery. On the contrary, the ever-blessed *Son of GOD*, the *angel* of divine grace to mankind, in reward of his most exemplary *obedience*, was highly *exalted*, raised to glory and dignity above the angelic powers, and obtained *a name which is above every name*.—These examples most strongly evince the *necessity* of obedience; and shew

how vain and dangerous it is, to trifle with the known will of GOD; and what different effects are to be expected from a life of obedience or disobedience. If the *angels* of heaven lost their prior estate, and were thrown into chains of darkness for their transgression; if the *Son of GOD* obeyed and submitted to death, even the death of the cross; how can *men* hope to exempt themselves from the divine judgment, and to transgress his will with impunity?—There is evidently no choice, but either to live in dutiful subjection, and become the instruments of his gracious providence in doing good to others; or by refusal to incur his just displeasure, and so become examples of punishment, for an admonition and terror to others: so that whether willing or unwilling, we are still subject to his power and dominion; and shall be made to serve his wise and good purposes, either by our obedience or our suffering.

THIRDLY:

THIRDLY: We are to consider the advantage of living in obedience to the will of God — By studying to obey the divine laws, and to comply willingly with all his appointments, we may hope to gain his favour and protection; the protection of the all-wise and Almighty ruler of the whole world and uncontrollable disposer of all events: which is the only proper and sufficient security against the evils incident to us, and the only solid foundation of contentment and satisfaction to the mind. If from an unfeigned reverence of the divine majesty, as supreme Governor of the world, we sincerely endeavour to understand and do his will, we may on good grounds hope for his mercy; and that he will at last distinguish us from all the presumptuous violators of his laws; and notwithstanding our numerous imperfections, bestow upon us some marks of his grace and favour.—The Gospel of our *Saviour*, which

reveals to us a future state, hath given us the highest assurance, that if we imitate the *example* of obedience which *he* hath set before us, and *do the will of our Father in heaven*, we shall obtain *like him* a resurrection from the dead, and be raised to a state of immortality and glory. This sublime prospect is set before us for our encouragement; and is sufficient to reconcile our minds to the greatest difficulties we can possibly undergo, in submission to the will of God.

In every well governed state or kingdom on earth, the public advantage and happiness results from obedience to those laws of the community which are framed for, and that will of the sovereign which intends, the preservation and good of the whole: much more, in the universal government of the wisest and best of beings, whose will is perfect reason, the greatest good must arise from the obedience of all his rational subjects. By this chain the
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whole intellectual system is *connected*, and the infinite multitude of various and discordant wills of all intelligent creatures are *united*, and conspire to *one* divine end; and the purpose of infinite wisdom is accomplished in the social harmony and happiness of the universe. To this end, an infliction of punishments, in chastising or cutting off the refractory and rebellious, is no less necessary, than a distribution of rewards to the virtuous and obedient. And thus the happiness of each individual is made to depend on his voluntary subjection to the order and good of the whole.

THE greatest happiness of mankind in this world ariseth from their observance of the laws of their nature and the revealed will of their all-wise Creator and Governor. And their future happiness, when raised to a higher state of existence in another world, will arise, in a still higher degree, from their obedience to the will of

GOD. For the greater powers and faculties any intelligent creature is endowed with, and the more enlarged his sphere of action, so much the greater are his obligations to know and obey the divine will; and the more momentous the consequence, both to himself and others, of his obedience or disobedience. This shews the vast importance and benefit of acquiring as early as possible an habitual reverence of the Supreme Being and attention to the discoveries of his will: that by being enured to piety and obedience in our present state, we may be qualified to act in a higher sphere, and to enjoy a sublimer happiness, than this state affords. On the other hand, by laying aside the fear of **GOD**, and indulging to our evil inclinations in opposition to his known will, we shall not only be disqualified for enjoying the dignity and happiness of a higher state, but shall be utterly excluded from it, and, in just punishment of our negligence and disobedience, be doomed to eternal destruction.

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THE main purpose of our living in this world, and what is of greatest importance to be learned in it, is *obedience*. The constitution of nature is framed in order to instruct and train us up in the habits of obedience. To *this end* mankind are brought into the world in a state of *infancy*, weak, dependent, and absolutely *subject* to the direction and authority of parents: to the *same end* they are placed, when advanced to years of maturity, in a social and subordinate state, *subject* to the will of superiors, and to human law and government. The whole procedure of events is continually teaching us, that we are not to make our own will the law of our actions, nor expect that every thing should bend to our inclinations; but that we are to be governed by a superior will, and ought to be continually bending and molding the temper of our minds, to a conformity with the constitutions of infinite wisdom, and the will of the Almighty sovereign of the world. All the divine
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dispensations, and particularly the revelation of the Gospel, are directed to the same end; to establish *the kingdom of GOD*, or the habits of obedience to his will, in the minds of his rational creatures.— Thus the frame of nature, the events of life, the dictates of reason, the doctrines of revelation, the obligations of duty and gratitude, the motives of hope and fear, the views of another world and an eternal state, all conspire to impress upon us a sense of obedience due to the will of the Supreme Governor and Father of the whole intelligent creation.

LET us then, with the deepest reverence of soul, adore the eternal all-perfect being, the sovereign disposer of all things. Let us learn to submit our appetites, inclinations and desires to his righteous will; and cheerfully resign our interests and lives to his wise disposal: and in the most difficult trials of life and of death, let us say, after the example of our Great Lord and Saviour,

Saviour, when he was going to suffer death upon the cross in obedience to God, *Not my will, but thine be done.*

THAT we may not be found at last among these negligent and disobedient servants, *who knew their Lord's will, and did it not, and who shall be beaten with many stripes*; but may obtain the high applause, *Well-done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord*;—GOD of his infinite mercy grant thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.



DISCOURSE XIV.

On Religious Industry.



JOHN vi. 27.

Labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that meat which endureth to everlasting Life.

NO man that is conversant with the language of the Holy Scriptures can be liable to mistake the sense of this text so far, as to imagine that our Saviour intended to restrain the industry of men in procuring to themselves the supports and conveniences of this life. The church of *Rome* hath indeed given great encouragement to idleness. But the Holy Scriptures on the contrary condemn idleness, represent industry as a great and necessary duty, and assert that *he who provideth not for those of his own household is worse than an Infidel*. And the expression in the text is agreeable to the usual language of scripture

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ture and similar to many other passages: for instance, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice*, was not intended to prohibit sacrifices, but to assert the superior value of moral duties above those that are ritual and ceremonial. St. Peter uses the like manner of expression: *whose adorning, saith he, let it not be the outward adorning of plaiting of hair, and wearing of gold, and putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, in the incorruptible ornament of a meek and gentle spirit, which in the sight of GOD is of great price.* Which passage is not to be understood as meant to prohibit any particular kind of apparel; but to recommend the *internal* graces and accomplishments of the mind, as superior in beauty and value to any *external* and bodily ornaments. So the expression in the text is intended to shew the superior excellence of that spiritual provision which endureth to everlasting life, above the provision requisite to the support of this life. And the propriety and force

force of our Saviour's argument arises from a supposition that men not only may and will but *ought* to use labour and application in order to procure for themselves the supplies of the animal life: and hence he concludes, that if the little possessions and enjoyments of animal life, which is uncertain and soon at an end, be thought worthy of our industry; much more do the provisions necessary to the rational nature and spiritual life, which will last for ever, deserve and require our diligent application.

As the Providence of GOD hath furnished mankind with the means of *bodily* support and pleasure attainable by their natural sagacity and bodily application, so in like manner hath he provided them with the means of rational improvement and *spiritual* delight attainable by the proper use of their spiritual faculties. As the mind opens, and the rational faculties

enlarge, from a state of infancy to mature age, so the means of knowledge become more ample and extensive, and the sources of intellectual improvement and pleasure are enlarged. By parental instruction, by reading and conversation, by study and reflection, by an observation of actions, characters and events, the natural inquisitiveness of the human mind is gratified, and the soul excited to a spiritual discernment of the truth of sentiments, and of the beauty and utility of religious principles and virtuous actions. *As there is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understanding, so in fact GOD teacheth us more than the beasts of the field, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of the air.* By the admirable disposition of all his works, by the continual course of his Providence, by great and striking events, by repeated experience in life, he instructs all mankind, addressing their understandings and exciting their attention,
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leading them to that knowledge of truth and sense of virtue, which sustain and cherish the rational part of their nature.

AND to us Christians the Gospel-revelation is added: which as it conveys to us the clearest doctrines of true religion, and the purest sentiments of virtue, enforced by the properest and weightiest motives; as it discovereth and ascertaineth to us a future and immortal life; so it is in the highest sense a provision for our rational nature, and is stiled by our Saviour with peculiar propriety and emphasis, *The food which endureth to everlasting life.*

LET us attend to the superior excellence and worth of the spiritual provision GOD hath afforded us above the supplies of his providence with regard to our bodily nature: as the former is adapted to the more excellent part of our nature: as it contributes more to our present happiness: and as it is permanent and everlasting.

THE excellence of human nature consists in its being endowed with the faculties of a reasonable being. And the instructions of religion, the precepts of virtue, and the motives of a life to come, are proper to the cultivation and improvement of our reasonable nature and highest faculties. — The external gifts of divine providence are suited to the animal nature, and serve to nourish and adorn the body and gratify the sense. But the other are peculiar to the soul, and are proper to correct its errors, enlarge its capacity, refine its disposition, and to endue it with strength and beauty, virtue and happiness. As much as the soul then is more excellent than the body, so much superior in value are the means of spiritual improvement and pleasure, to all those things which contribute merely to bodily nutriment and gratification. — And the mind is most *capable* of acquisitions and improvements. The animal appetites and capacities are soon filled up and satiated : and how much
labour

labour so ever we may bestow, or how large provision soever we may make for them, it is not in our power to prolong or enlarge them beyond very narrow limits. But the more the *mind* is *already* cultivated and improved, it becomes the more capable of receiving still *greater* improvements. All acquisitions of a *rational* and moral kind serve as a foundation of *further* attainments.—In this sense our Saviour's words are to be understood: *To him that hath shall be given*, that is, to him that hath already improved the faculties and means of knowledge and virtue, more shall be given, *and he shall have abundantly*.

IN the next place, the provision GOD hath made for our spiritual capacities and desires is not only adapted to the more excellent part of our nature, but contributes in the largest degree to our happiness. He that can doubt of this hardly deserves the name of a rational creature. Who-

foever can esteem those gratifications which the brutes are equally capable of, as superior to those pleasures which are peculiar to rational beings, must have a depraved understanding, and be sunk below the dignity of human nature. For this, we may appeal even to the common sense and judgment of mankind. For, how much soever men in their practice are devoted to riches, pomp and animal pleasures, and how alluring soever these things may appear to the imagination dressed in poetical fictions and artificial embellishments, yet no persons are held in so general contempt, or thought so mean and miserable, as they who are abandoned to these pursuits, and have lost all taste and capacity for rational enjoyments. On the other hand none are so much admired and accounted happy, in the sober judgment of mankind, as they whose minds are superior to riches and pleasures, and formed to rational and virtuous delights.—Let us suppose two characters, one of each kind, and compare them.

them. One places all his happiness in worldly possessions, and in faring sumptuously every day; lives a mere brutal life, knows no higher felicity than that of gratifying his senses; is entirely regardless of the good of society, and desires only to please himself; hath no sentiments of religion and virtue, no taste for knowledge and mental entertainments. The other delights above all things in the acquisition of knowledge, the study of religion, and the performance of worthy and beneficent actions; is chiefly solicitous, not *what he shall eat or drink, or wherewithal he shall be clothed*; and is chiefly industrious, not in heaping up riches and temporal provisions; but in cultivating the rational part of his nature, and laying up in store intellectual treasures and delights. Can any one hesitate, which of these characters to prefer in his esteem; or to determine, which of them understands and enjoys the best happiness of life? The former, not even wealth and grandeur, which are so

apt to dazzle the eyes of men, can secure from the general scorn and contempt of mankind. The latter is applauded and esteemed wise and happy, even by men whose lusts and passions will not suffer them to imitate the noble example.—And this consequence results from the nature of things. Animal gratifications cannot administer a happiness to the mind equal or comparable to rational enjoyment, tho' the former were exempt from all the inquietudes of fear and remorse, and all other temporal inconveniencies which attend unrighteous and criminal pursuits. They are in themselves of an inferior and meaner kind; and can contribute but in a small degree to the true enjoyment of human life; and when not moderated by the governing powers of reason and conscience, are always prejudicial, and destructive of tranquillity and happiness.

ADD to this, the important argument in the text; that the provision God hath made

made for our rational capacity is that food of the soul *which endureth to everlasting life*. The spiritual part of our nature will survive the animal part and live after death; and the stores of knowledge and virtue repositied in the mind will remain there, and be a growing treasure and an encreasing source of delight to eternal ages. The strength, health, and life of the soul depend on this support; and if it is destitute of this provision, it will be poor and miserable and perish for ever. But the knowledge of truth, the dispositions of piety, and the love of virtue, prepare the soul for the happiness of a nobler state of being; where freed from all animal incumbrances, it will arrive to the enjoyment of spiritual and intellectual delights, in a higher degree than it is capable of in the present state. How much occasion soever, therefore, we have to labour for *the meat that perisheth*, and reason to acknowledge the divine goodness in rewarding human industry with fruitful seasons and
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an abundance of provisions for the animal life, which will soon be at an end; yet we are infinitely more obliged to receive with thankfulness and to improve with diligence the provision he hath made for the nobler, the rational life, which will continue for ever.

LET us now consider the *labour* or attention of mind requisite in the use of that provision which God hath afforded us in order to our spiritual and eternal happiness.

SUCH is the constitution of things established by divine wisdom, that nothing useful or valuable, either to ourselves, or to society, can be obtained without *Industry*: All goodness and happiness proceed originally from the free gift of divine liberality: but God bestows all blessings in a manner agreeable to that nature, constitution and order of things which his wisdom hath established; that is, by the
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use of the faculties and means which he hath imparted to his several creatures. He hath given to men all the powers of their nature with a design that they should make use of them : and hath so formed their present state, as to allure, stimulate and compel them to action and industry. And he rewards their care and diligence in temporal affairs, with health and the conveniences of this life ; and in spiritual affairs, with wisdom and virtue ; which are the health and happiness of the mind. As he makes use of the powers and abilities wherewith he hath endowed his creatures, to serve his own wise and beneficent purposes ; so he hath made the chief happiness of mankind to consist, not in rest and indolence, but in *action*. And if men do not *exert* the faculties and improve the advantages he hath given them, they cannot attain to happiness, but must suffer the miserable consequences of their criminal negligence.—In regard to the *temporal* and *bodily* state of mankind, GOD giveth

giveth rain and sun-shine, maketh the soil fruitful, bleffeth the springing of the corn, and bestows all the increase of the earth: nevertheless men must *labour for the food that perisheth*, and acquire the necessaries and conveniences of life by their own care and industry: and when they will not use diligence and prudence in order to the preservation and comfort of life, and in guarding against things hurtful and destructive, God doth not interpose by extraordinary acts of power to preserve men from calamity or death. So in regard to the spiritual state of mankind, if they neglect or abuse the faculties and means afforded them; they lose the happiness arising from the right use of them, and bring upon themselves calamity and destruction.

God gave to the Heathen world and to mankind in general the *Revelation of nature*. By a diligent attention to it, they might have attained to the knowledge and
practice

practice of *natural religion*. But when they would not make use of their reason in observing *that* divine revelation, he suffered them to fall into miserable delusions and barbarous practices.—In like manner the *christian world* was favoured with the *Gospel* of our *Saviour*, which *illustrates* and *enforces* natural religion. But when *Christians* would no longer give attention to that *Gospel*, and instead of carefully observing and adhering to its doctrines and precepts, begun (in imitation of the Heathens) to set up a religion after their own vain and foolish inventions; *GOD* gave up them also to strong delusions, and suffered them to fall into that darkness, superstition and slavery in which they were so prone to involve themselves.

IN every nation, knowledge, virtue, and happiness have increased, in proportion to men's sincere and industrious inquiries after true religion; and on the other hand, ignorance, corruption and slavery have been
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established in proportion to their lazy and implicit submission to vulgar opinions and customs. So in regard to individuals, they who honestly and diligently apply their minds to the knowledge and practice of religion, will become *wise unto salvation*; whilst the careless and negligent will sink into ignorance and vice, and expose themselves to final destruction. — This divine constitution and procedure our *Saviour* represents with great force and propriety in the parable of the talents: where the *diligent* servant who had improved his talents is honoured and promoted; but the *slothful* and unprofitable servant is stripped of all that was given him, banished from his master's presence, and condemned to outer darkness.

IN *civil* and *worldly* affairs men often need instruction and persuasion to exert themselves in the most effectual manner to the purposes of life; and sometimes suffer the loss of temporal advantages, and

even of life itself, thro' their negligence. In like manner men suffer in their spiritual and everlasting affairs, thro' want of serious attention and industry. If *bodily* supplies and pleasures are not to be attained without care and diligence, if *all* occupations and arts of life require study and labour; how absurd is it to imagine, that far *greater* advantages and an *eternal* happiness are to be obtained without any thought or application! how unaccountable, that men should expect to grow wise and virtuous *by chance*, without any design or *endeavour* of their own; and to gain heaven *at last* without using any means at *present* to obtain or deserve it! Knowledge is the fruit *only* of a diligent and impartial inquiry after truth: virtue the produce *only* of resolute endeavours of the mind: and eternal life the reward *only* of them *who by a patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honour and immortality*. To expect the most valuable blessings in this world, and everlasting happiness in another,

ther, without using care and diligence to obtain them, is like expecting to *reap* where nothing hath been *sown*: a folly which can be exceeded only by that most absurd and fatal of all errors, hoping for salvation at death after a wicked life; which is not only expecting to *reap where we have not sown, and gather where we have not scattered*, but according to the comparison of our *Saviour*, to gather the most *exquisite fruits* where we have planted only *briars and thistles*.

MEN use indeed for the most part much care and diligence in their *secular employments*: they train up youth in studious arts and laborious occupations: they form numberless schemes, and sometimes pursue them with intense thought and indefatigable industry in order to secure and encrease their worldly possessions. And such diligence is in itself worthy of commendation rather than censure. But at the same time, should not our solicitude and
diligence

diligence bear some proportion to the real value of things?—Does the *body* deserve so much attendance, and is the *mind* not worthy of improvement? Do the things of a day merit so much attention; and are the things of *eternity* neglected and forgot? If indeed there be no life to come, spiritual objects and delights lose their greatest value; yet not *all* their value: for knowledge and virtue are *still* better than riches and bodily pleasures. But if there *is* a life to come, and immortality *is* before us (as assuredly it is) here is evidently the great work and business of life; To make provision for that state which is eternal, to lay up *those riches* which are incorruptible, to secure our title to *that inheritance* which is everlasting. And here, for our great encouragement, we may be most certain of success. All world'y designs may end in disappointment: but in religion, *every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.* For, if God li-

berally rewards the *bodily* and *temporal* industry of mankind, with the provisions and gratifications of the animal life ; how much more certainly and abundantly will he reward the *nobler* industry, the more virtuous and rational pursuits of men, with the happiness of that life which is eternal?--



DISCOURSE XV.

On Religious Liberty.



ROM. xiv. 22.

Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before GOD. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth: and he that doubteth is damned if he eat; because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.—We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

THE sense of the Apostle in this passage, taken separate from the context, and according to our present translation, is very obscure. But by a careful attention to the preceding part of the chapter, and the state of the christians at *Rome* to whom he wrote, his meaning may be made to appear very evident.

THERE were two parties among the christians in *Rome*, as there were in most of the cities, where christianity had been planted. One consisted of those who had been converted from Heathenism to christianity, the other were the converted Jews. There were also subjects of much controversy and warm contention between them; which employed the attention of the Apostle: and he exerts all the force of reasoning, expostulation, persuasion, and address, in order to convince both parties of their errors, and to compose those differences.

THE points of debate referred to in this chapter, were the distinction of *days* into *holy* and *unholy*, and of *meats* into *clean* and *unclean*, i. e. lawful and unlawful to be eaten. The Jewish converts being not entirely free from their old notions and prejudices, still maintained a religious distinction of days and meats; and condemned the other party as guilty of impiety,

piety, because they paid no regard to that distinction. And on the other hand, the Heathen converts, who were indeed right in their christian principles or faith in those disputes, yet took advantage in a wrong manner to despise and insult over the weakness and little superstitions of the Jewish party: and hence animosities and discord arose, to their mutual disquiet, and to the prejudice of the Gospel.

It will be worth our careful attention to observe the arguments, spirit and manner, by which the Apostle endeavours to put an end to those disputes, and the heats and divisions arising from them.—It is evident throughout the whole, that he earnestly persuades both parties to moderation, and to a favourable opinion and kind treatment of each other. And particularly, that he addresses the party that was in the *right*, persuading them to bear with those who were in an error.—Ver. 1. *Him that is weak in the faith*, i. e. an igno-

rant or mistaken fellow-christian, *receive ye, i. e. to friendship and communion, but not to doubtful disputations*:—disturb not his mind with your controversies.—He then asserts, that both parties might think and act differently, yet with the same sincere intention and religious disposition. *For he that regardeth the day, regardeth it to the Lord: and he that doth not regard the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, and giveth GOD thanks: and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth GOD thanks, i. e.* Both may act equally upon a good principle, and with a view to the approbation of Christ.—*Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. i. e.* Let every man form the best judgment he is able in such controversies, and act according to it. But let him allow others to do the same;—and not censure or despise any man who differs from him.—“For what right have
 “you to arraign and judge your fellow-
 “christian, tho’ ever so weak or so much
 “ in

“ in an error? He is not *your servant* in
“ matters of religion; he owes *you* no
“ subjection; he belongs to *another mas-*
“ *ter*; by whose judgment, and not *yours*,
“ he must stand or fall: *may he shall be*
“ *bolden up*.—He will undoubtedly be ac-
“ quitted and approved, if he hath follow-
“ ed the dictates of his own conscience,
“ how mistaken soever. And why do you
“ of the one party *censure* your brethren
“ as guilty of impiety? And why do you
“ of the other party *despise* your brethren
“ as weak and ignorant? Do you not
“ consider, that we must *all stand* upon a
“ level *before the judgment seat of Christ?*
“ Instead then of judging and condemn-
“ ing those who are of a different
“ persuasion; *judge this rather*, let this be
“ your judgment and determination, to
“ avoid *offence*, and not to lay a snare in
“ the way of a weak brother, tempting
“ or compelling him to act against his own
“ conscience, and to do what he believes
“ to be wrong, tho’ you perhaps who un-
“ derstand

“ derstand christianity better, may know
 “ it to be right.—This, adds the Apostle,
 “ is the humane and *charitable* conduct.
 “ And besides, such differences are of little
 “ importance. For *the kingdom of GOD*,
 “ the Gospel-constitution, doth not consist
 “ in such distinctions, but in *righteousness*,
 “ *peace, and joy in a holy spirit*. Will you
 “ then for the sake of such differences
 “ wound the tender conscience of a bro-
 “ ther, tempt him to act against his own
 “ persuasion, and so contribute to the guilt
 “ and ruin of one *whom Christ died to save*?
 “ —For my own part, says the Apostle,
 “ *I know, indeed, and am persuaded by the*
 “ *Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean*
 “ *of itself*, i. e. I am certain, by my know-
 “ ledge of the christian principles, that
 “ no Christian is under any obligation to
 “ that distinction of meats which the
 “ Jewish converts observe: *nevertheless to*
 “ *him that thinketh it to be unclean, to him*
 “ *it is unclean*. i. e. Notwithstanding my
 “ judgment and declaration; yet if any
 “ shall

“ shall continue to have a scruple of conscience in regard to the eating of certain meats, he ought to abstain from them.” —And, to come now to the words of the text, the Apostle addressing one of the wiser party, who observed no distinction of meats, says, *Hast thou faith?* —It should not be an interrogation, but an assertion, *Thou hast faith*: i. e. your principle is right.—*Have it to thyself before GOD.* It should be rendered, hold it, or adhere to it yourself before GOD.—*Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.*—It would be better translated, happy is the man, who doth not condemn himself by his own judgment.—*And he that doubteth is damned if he eat.*—It should be translated, But he that thinks there is a distinction of meats, or he who hath a scruple of conscience in regard to certain meats, is condemned if he eat;—*because he eateth not of faith*: i. e. it is against his principle.—*For whatever is not of faith is sin*: whatever

ever is against principle is sin.—*We then that are strong ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak.* i. e. We who are in the *right*, ought to bear with those who are in the *wrong*; and not to please ourselves. *Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.* i. e. Let every one of us oblige his neighbour in order to a mutual improvement in goodness.

THE Apostle's style is concise and nervous; and it may serve to explain his sentiments more clearly, if we express them in the following paraphrase.—“ In regard to these religious controversies, you of the one party are in the right. I acknowledge it: and am far from persuading you to act contrary to your principles. Adhere to them in your own practice, as you hope to be approved of God. Happy is the man whose principles and practice are consistent. He is satisfied in his own mind, and hath nothing for which to blame or condemn
“ him-

“ himself. But the other party ought not
“ to conform to your practice, while it is
“ inconsistent with their principles: they
“ would be guilty in so doing; because it
“ is against their own judgment. For to
“ act in any instance whatsoever against
“ one’s own judgment or principle, is a
“ sin. You ought not then to insult over
“ their weakness and groundless scruples;
“ but should be rather cautious of giving
“ offence, laying a snare in their way, and
“ tempting them to act against their own
“ conscience. And it is to no purpose for
“ you to alledge, that you are in the right,
“ and they in the wrong, and that I confirm
“ your sentiments: for we that are strong,
“ we who have a better understanding
“ and sounder judgment, ought to bear
“ with the weakness and errors of others;
“ and instead of assuming any thing to
“ ourselves, should be obliging every one
“ to his neighbour: for this is the way to
“ promote the common good, and the
“ mutual

“ mutual improvement of all parties of
 “ Christians.”

Now from this view of the sentiments, spirit and conduct of the Apostle, in regard to the religious parties and controversies among the christians of his time, we may draw some very important and useful instructions applicable to the present time, and to all the religious parties and controversies which are subsisting throughout the whole christian world.

(1.) WE cannot avoid observing in general the proper conduct of a wise and good christian in regard to all contending parties in matters of religion: which is not to blow the coals of contention, and widen a division; but to persuade all parties to moderation, and to brotherly treatment of each other. And in the prosecution of this truly christian scheme and method of reconciling parties

“ and

and composing differences, he will make use of the very same arguments which the Apostle useth: viz. “ That every man hath
“ an equal right to think and judge for
“ himself: that all christians are upon a
“ level in matters of faith and religion;
“ and none hath a right to claim any spi-
“ ritual authority and jurisdiction over
“ others: that none are Lords and masters,
“ but all brothers and fellow-servants, and
“ all equally accountable, each for him-
“ self, to Christ the one common Lord
“ and master of all: that every man, not
“ only may, but ought to follow his own
“ private judgment and the dictates of his
“ own conscience: and if he doth not, in
“ any instance whatsoever, act according
“ to it, he is condemned, he is so far
“ guilty in his own conscience and in the
“ sight of God: that what God chiefly
“ regards and requires is the integrity of
“ the heart: and every man who acts con-
“ sistently with his own best judgment,
“ how mistaken soever, shall be accepted:
“ that

“ that in general, those different opinions
 “ and modes in religion, which christians
 “ contend about, are of no great impor-
 “ tance: *for the kingdom of GOD, the re-*
 “ *ligion of the Gospel, consists in righte-*
 “ *ousness, peace, and joy in a holy spirit. i. e.*
 “ It consists in the integrity of every man’s
 “ own heart, the peace of society, and the
 “ spiritual joy and satisfaction which spring
 “ from holiness and goodness:—That all
 “ parties may probably think themselves
 “ to be in the right:—But if any party
 “ were as infallibly in the right as the
 “ Apostle himself; this is so far from jus-
 “ tifying them in hating, despising, or op-
 “ pressing others, that on the contrary
 “ it is the duty of the *strong*, of those who
 “ have a clear understanding, and are
 “ sound in the faith, to bear with the er-
 “ rors and infirmities of the *weak*; and
 “ the duty of all parties to be condescend-
 “ ing and obliging to others, and to be
 “ cautious of seducing or forcing any
 “ person to conform to their way, while

“ it

“ it is contrary to the persuasion of his own mind.”—These are precisely the sentiments of the Apostle; which every wise and honest christian will endeavour to promote in the world, as the basis of reconciliation, peace and union: and they are the only foundation upon which the security and welfare of the church of Christ ever was, or ever can be, established.

WE may observe in the next place, the equity and candour of our Apostle; of which he hath here given us a memorable example.—How different is the conduct and character of Paul, the christian convert and enlightened Apostle, from that of Saul, the Jewish bigot and persecutor. Before his conversion he was violent and outrageous, establishing his own Jewish religion by the cruelest oppressions, persecuting the poor christians from city to city, and putting them to death. But now being a christian Apostle, he not only permits men to differ from him in an ar-

ticle or mode of religion, but urges it as their duty to dissent from him so long as they have the least scruple remaining upon their minds. For tho' he delivers his own opinion and judgment, upon the subject of controversy among the Roman christians, with the clearness, freedom, and spirit of an Apostle, yet he is so far from contending for his own apostolical authority, and condemning those that would not submit; that he expresseth his own opinion only as it were by the way, without seeming to lay any stress upon it; and insists upon the indispensable obligation every man is under to act according to his own judgment and belief. And in another Epistle he declares, with a view to the like subject of religious controversy, that for his own part, he would never taste of meat or wine, he would deny himself of any indulgence, rather than tempt a weak mistaken brother to act contrary to his own conscience: — Such was the humane, obliging, and benevolent spirit of this eminent

ment profelyte, after his conversion to christianity. And it would move the heart of any attentive reader to observe, in what generous expressions he reproacheth himself, for his own former conduct in his state of Jewish ignorance and bigotry.— So happy a change does true christianity produce in the minds of men, subduing the passions of insolence and tyranny, making them feel the force of equity and goodness, and infusing into them the strictest regard to the conscience and right of another, with the most candid allowance for his infirmities and errors.—In truth, there are no characters in the world more opposite to each other, than those of a christian, and a persecutor.

It is of importance to observe further, the different spirit and method of the Apostle, in propagating the Gospel, from the procedure of men since his time, who have pretended to promote and establish the same true christian faith and worship :

—Whose methods have not been those of reason and persuasion, of lenity and kindness, but of reproach and invective, of cursing and excommunicating, of fining, imprisoning, and torturing; of forcing men by all the terrors of poverty, pain and death, to act against their own judgment and conscience, in a hypocritical conformity to their establishments.---The ground upon which such men have always proceeded, has been a supposition, that they were in the *right*, and those whom they persecuted in an *error*. But this plea, beside the absurdity of taking the very matter in question for granted, is directly contrary to the Apostle's doctrine, that *they who are strong*, they who have truth on their side, *ought to bear with the errors of the weak* and scrupulous.—

BUT let it be observed, in the next place, that tho' persecutors have always taken it for granted, that they have truth on their side, and that what they are establishing

by such oppressive methods is true religion; yet the contrary may be more truly affirmed; that it never was, in any instance, the real faith and religion of the Gospel, which were promoted by such inhuman means, but always falsehood, imposture, and superstition. The kingdom of Christ is *not of this world*; and never was, nor ever can be established on the foundation of worldly principles and motives, or secured and extended by the terrors of persecution. It hath always been a worldly dominion and tyranny, which the authors and abettors of such measures have in fact laboured to establish, under the counterfeit names of the true faith and the true church of Christ; demanding and forcing, as fit means to this end, a slavish submission of men's understandings and consciences to their usurped and antichristian authority in matters of religion. If we reflect on past ages, we shall find it true in history, that persecution has always been employed in sup-

port of error and absurdity in belief, of superstition in worship, and of an arbitrary and tyrannical power : — that in former times, persecution began and increased in proportion as men departed from the purity of the christian faith and worship ; 'till the system of popery was established on the ruins of christianity : — and that in later times persecution hath abated, just in proportion as protestants have returned back to the genuine principles of the Gospel. And whensoever the protestant nations shall become further reformed, and entirely conformed to the truth of christianity, then, and not 'till then, we may certainly expect, that a complete universal toleration will take place in those nations.

THIS leads to another observation similar to the foregoing : which is, That among all parties of christians, where there is the most moderation, candour, and humanity in practice, there is also
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the most truth, and the least error in belief and opinion. And consequently, the surest test by which any person of common understanding may try how far any party or body, church or nation of Christians understand the truth of the Gospel and are found in the faith, or on the contrary are wrong in their doctrine and principles, is to observe what degree of charity or enmity they maintain, in their general conduct towards the different parties of their fellow-christians.—This observation is founded on reason: for undoubtedly those are most likely to avoid error, who are the freest from prejudice and a party-biass.--- It is attested by history; which informs us, that persecution has been always applied to support error and superstition.—It is agreeable to experience: because the church of Rome is at this day the most uncharitable, domineering, and persecuting in practice, and at the same time, the most erroneous and corrupt in doctrine.—It is deducible from the instance of the Apostle; who

who was infallibly in the right, and understood the true principles of christianity better than any of the Christians to whom he wrote, yet had at the same time more candour, condescension and charity towards those who differed from him, than all of them put together.—And finally, It is the same test, by which our Saviour and his Apostles teach us to try the soundness of men's faith and the truth of their professions. Our Blessed Saviour thus instructs us to detect the false prophets, the wolves that appear in sheep's cloathing: *ye shall know them by their fruits.* And by what fruits can we so certainly distinguish them, as by their humanity and goodness, or their malice, censoriousness and bitterness toward their fellow-christians?—And again, *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.*—Thus likewise the Apostle James teacheth us to judge of the true faith: *Thou hast faith and I have works. Shew me thy faith without thy works; and I will shew thee my faith.*

faith by my works. And in another place he gives us the character of true religion, as distinguished from all falshood, superstition, and tyranny, that may assume the name or mask of religion. *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter zeal and contention in your hearts; glory not, and lye not against the truth.* i. e. Do not cover your uncharitableness with boasting and hypocritical pretensions of holding the right faith and maintaining true religion. *This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish:* it is a vile craft and wicked policy to gain your worldly ends. *But the wisdom that is from above, the true knowledge and faith of the Gospel, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*—A more just and admirable description of genuine christianity cannot be expressed: and here is
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the true mark and character held out to us, by which we may discover it in the world. And thus we find it is a confirmed observation, That the true faith and charity of the Gospel are inseparable: and that the latter is the clue by which we are to find out the former, amidst the confusion of various discordant opinions, modes, parties, and denominations.— Under this head let me add, That it becomes us, as christians, to extend our charity even to those, who of all men in the world the least deserve it, I mean, persecutors themselves. It is possible, nay probable, that some of them may act purely from a mistaken judgment, tho' they are fallen into the most pernicious of all errors; and that they may really think *that they are doing GOD service*, while they are abusing and persecuting his most faithful servants. This we know was actually the case of our Apostle, who did it *ignorantly* [and not from base and worldly motives] and therefore he *obtained mercy*.

To conclude:—The great points of our constant view thro' the whole conduct of life, should be these three. First, to preserve our minds open to conviction and ready to receive information ; lest we should be blinded with ignorance and prejudice, and act by the impulse of an erroneous judgment and conscience : in which case it is possible that we might fall into the like dreadful error that the Apostle was involved in before his conversion ; and do the greatest injuries to mankind, under a wild enthusiastic imagination, that we are contending for the truth, and promoting the glory of God.—Secondly, that having gained the best information we are able, we act steddily and consistently, according to the judgment of our own conscience, unmoved by any worldly motives. This is christian integrity, which God, if not men, will always approve. To act otherwise in any instance is in some degree criminal : *for whatever is not of faith is sin.*—And finally that we allow and encourage

courage others to do the same; and not only forbear blaming, but approve and commend them for their integrity, in following the dictates of their own consciences, how much soever they differ from us; according to the noble example, as well as instruction, which our excellent Apostle hath set before us.

ON the first of these depends the knowledge of truth; on the second, the peace of every man's own mind; on the third, the peace of society; and on all three together, the general improvement, happiness, and salvation of mankind.

F I N I S.









