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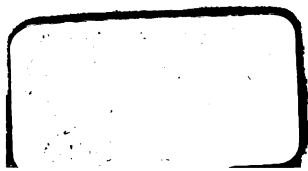
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E S S A Y S

ON

Important SUBJECTS.

Intended to establish the DOCTRINE of
SALVATION by GRACE, and to point out
its INFLUENCE on HOLINESS of LIFE.

By JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D.

To which are added by the PUBLISHERS,

Ecclesiastical Characteristics,
OR THE
ARCANA of CHURCH POLICY,
WITH
A SERIOUS APOLOGY; which have
been generally ascribed to the same Author.

V O L. I.

L O N D O N :

Printed for EDWARD and CHARLES DILLY,
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M.DCC.LXV.

J.C.

P R E F A C E.

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TH E following Treatises were originally published at different times, and some of them on particular occasions; but the attentive reader will easily perceive one leading design running through the whole: The author hath long been of opinion, that the great decay of religion in all parts of this kingdom, is chiefly owing to a departure from the truth as it is in JESUS, from those doctrines which chiefly constitute the substance of the gospel. It may perhaps be justly imputed to other general causes in part, and in some measure to less universal causes in particular places; but as all moral action must arise from principle, otherwise it ought not to be called by that name, the immediate and most powerful cause of degeneracy in practice, must always be a corruption in principle.

I am sensible that many will be ready to cry out on this occasion, "Such notions arise from narrowness of mind and uncharitable sentiments." I answer, that it is surprising to think how easily the fashionable or cant phrases of the age, will pass among superficial thinkers and readers, without the least attention either to their meaning, or to the evidence on which they are

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ounded.

Thus

Thus at present, if a man shall write or speak against certain principles, and stile them pernicious, it will be thought a sufficient vindication of them to make a beaten common-place encomium on liberty of conscience and freedom of inquiry. Blessed be God, this great and sacred privilege is well secured to us in this nation: But pray, is it not mine as well as yours? And is it not the very exercise of this liberty, for every man to endeavour to support those principles which appear to him to be founded on Reason and Scripture, as well as to attack without scruple every thing which he believes to be contrary to either.

Let it also be observed, that if freedom of inquiry be a blessing at all, it can be so for no other reason than the excellence and salutary influence of real truth, when it can be discovered. If truth and error are equally safe, nothing can be more foolish than for a man to waste his time in endeavouring to distinguish the one from the other. What a view does it give us of the weakness of human nature, that the same persons so frequently hold inconsistent principles? How many will say the strongest things in favour of an impartial search after truth, and with the very same breath tell you, "It is of no consequence at all, either for time or eternity, whether you hold one opinion or another."

These

P R E F A C E.

▼

These reflections are only designed to procure a candid unprejudiced bearing to what is offered in the following pages, in defence of what appears to me the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, which are now so greatly neglected, or so openly despised. I am encouraged to this republication by the great demand there has been for some of the pieces, particularly The ESSAY on Justification.

I must observe here, that I have received several letters on this subject, desiring that the phrase imputed righteousness might be changed, as liable to great exceptions; a request which I would readily have complied with, if it could be made appear to be either unscriptural or dangerous. But as I apprehend it is fully warranted by Rom. iv. 6. and many other passages; so I do not see what can be understood by it, different from or more dangerous than forgiveness of sin and acceptance with God, not for our own but for CHRIST'S sake. As the case stands, therefore, it is to be feared, that a studied endeavour to avoid the expression would do more harm on the one hand than it could do service on the other.

In the Treatise on Regeneration, now first published, the same general design is pursued, but in a way more directly

Practical: and indeed I am fully convinced, that it is not only of much greater moment to make experimental than

vi P R E F A C E.

than speculative Christians, but that to explain and enforce the doctrines of the gospel is a better way to produce an unshaken persuasion of their truth, than to collect and refute the cavils of adversaries, which, though they are often trifling, are notwithstanding innumerable. I hope this will excuse the introducing several passages of Scripture in the last-mentioned Treatise, and applying them on what appears to me to be their obvious meaning, without taking the least notice of the unwearied pains frequently taken by wire-drawing critics to interpret them in a contrary sense.

I have only further to add, that the liberty which the publishers seem resolved to take of adding to this collection two anonymous Treatises, is what I could not prevent; and therefore if there be any thing in them improper or offensive, they alone are to answer for it.

London,
June, 1764.

J. W.

E S S A Y

E S S A Y
ON THE
C O N N E X I O N
BETWEEN THE
Doctrinē of JUSTIFICATION
BY THE
Imputed RIGHTEOUSNESS of CHRIST,
A N D
HOLINESS OF LIFE:

With some Reflections upon the Reception which
that Doctrinē hath generally met with in the
World.

To which is prefixed,

A LETTER to the Rev. Mr. *JAMES HERVEY*,
Rector of *Weston-Farwell*, *Northamptonshire*, Author
of *THERON* and *ASPASIO*.

The THIRD EDITION.

VOL. I.

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T O T H E

Rev. Mr. *JAMES HERVEY*, &c.

S I R,

*W*HEN Christ our Saviour was about to go to his Father, he told his disciples, If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. I am persuaded, that by this, he did not only intend to forewarn the twelve of the offence which that generation would take at the ignominy of the cross, but also to intimate, that the case would be the same in all ages; that his doctrine would meet with great resistance and opposition, and that the temper and character of his real disciples would be very different from the spirit that would generally prevail in the world. This hath been continually verified in experience. For as many in the highest stations, and of highest repute for wisdom in the world, did set themselves against the gospel at its first publication, so even where there is a nominal profession of it, there is still an opposition to its doctrines, in their simplicity and

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and purity, by the world, that is to say, those who have most sway in it, who are the most passionate admirers of its fashions, and the most assiduous prosecutors of its honours and pleasures.

It may be also observed, that there is sometimes, perhaps even generally, a sovereignty of divine providence in the choice of the instruments employed in spreading the gospel. As, at first, twelve illiterate fishermen were chosen; so, often since that time, the weakest and most unlikely have been pitched upon, that our faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. Hence it frequently happens, that it is not only difficult to make men believe the gospel, but even to persuade them to bear it. They are apt to despise and deride the message, because of the meanness of the messenger, or the homeliness of the terms in which it is delivered. This is particularly the case with the present age. From a certain love of ease, and luxury of mind, they despise and trample upon all instructions, which have not something pleasing and insinuating in their dress and form.

You, Sir, are one of those happy few, who have been willing to consecrate the finest natural talents to the service of Christ in the gospel, and are not ashamed of his cross. You have been able to procure attention upon some subjects, from many who would hardly have given it

it to any other writer. This hath made me observe with particular attention, the effect of your last performance, Theron and Aspasio, the character given to it, and the objections raised against it. And I have always found that the most specious and plausible objection, and that most frequently made, against the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness, has been in this case, as indeed usually before, that it loosens the obligations to practice. This is what I have particularly applied myself to refute in the following essay, because I have rarely observed it done distinctly, and at full length, in any writer. And I have addressed it to you, as a testimony of my esteem of your excellent and useful writings, as a public declaration of my espousing the same sentiments as to the terms of our acceptance with God, and my ambition of contributing some small assistance to the support of the same glorious cause. It was also no small inducement to it, that thereby it might appear to all, that no external distinctions, or smaller differences, ought to be any hindrance to a cordial esteem and affection among the sincere servants of our common Master.

The greatest part of what follows was first delivered in two sermons; but it is now thrown into the form of an essay, lest the despised title of a sermon should offend some, and that it might the better admit of several additions,

both in the body of the piece, and in the notes, which could not have been so properly delivered from a pulpit. Some of these regard the philosophical principles, which have of late been published among us, of which I propose, in a short time, a much fuller discussion, as there is no way in which the truths of the gospel are more perverted than by what the apostle Paul calls Philosophy and vain deceit, and oppositions of science falsely so called.

That your useful life may be prolonged, and that you may have the honour of contributing more and more to the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of believers, is the earnest prayer of,

S I R,

Your most obedient humble servant,

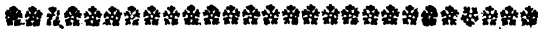
J. W.



E S S A Y

O N

J U S T I F I C A T I O N .



ALL the works and ways of God have something in them mysterious, above the comprehension of any finite understanding. As this is the case with his works of creation and providence, there is no reason to expect it should be otherwise in the astonishing method of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. From this their mysterious nature, or rather from the imperfect measure and degree in which they are revealed to us, they are admirably fitted for the trial of our ingenuity, humility and subjection. They are all of them, when seriously and impartially enquired *of them, when seriously and impartially enquired* into, holy, just and good;

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good; but at the same time, not beyond the cavils and objections of men of prejudiced, perverse and corrupt minds.

The apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, among whom he had never been in person, at great length establishes the fundamental doctrine of the gospel, that sinners are justified by the free grace of God through the imputed righteousness of a Redeemer. To this doctrine men do by nature make the strongest opposition, and are, with the utmost difficulty, brought to receive and apply it. We may well say of it in particular, what the same apostle says of the truths of God in general, that "the natural man doth not receive them*." It is therefore highly necessary to prevent or remove, as far as possible, the objections that may be brought against it by the art or malice of Satan, who will, no doubt, bend the chief force of all his engines against this truth, knowing that the cordial reception of it is a sure and effectual, and indeed the only sure and effectual means of destroying his power and influence in the heart. Accordingly we find the apostle, in the sixth chapter of the above-named epistle, and first verse, supposes an objection made against this doctrine in the following terms, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" To which he

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

answers,

JUSTIFICATION. 9

answers, by rejecting the consequence with the utmost abhorrence, and in the strongest manner affirming it to be without any foundation.

From the introduction of this objection by the apostle, we may either infer, that there were, even in these early days, some who branded the doctrine of redemption by the free grace of God with this odious consequence; or that he, by the inspiration of the Almighty, did foresee that there should arise, in some future periods of the Christian church, adversaries who would attempt to load it with this imputation; or that the doctrine is indeed liable, on a superficial view, to be abused to this unhappy purpose, by the deceitful hearts of men, who are wedded to their lusts. It is probable that all the three observations are just; and the two last render it a peculiarly proper subject for our attention and consideration at this time, and in this age.

It is well known, that there are many enemies of this doctrine, of different characters, and of different principles, who all agree in assaulting it with this objection, That it weakens the obligations to holiness of life, by making our justification before God depend entirely upon the righteousness and merit of another. And so far, I think, we must join with the adversaries of this doctrine, as to lay it down for a principle, That whatever belief or persuasion, by its native and

genuine tendency, weakens the obligations to practice, must be false. And I will also assert, in opposition to some modern infidels, (tho' some may think that my cause might avail itself of the contrary opinion) that a man's inward principle, or the persuasion of his mind, hath a necessary, and unavoidable influence upon his practice*. So that, if I am not able to shew, that justification thro' the imputed righteousness of Christ, is so far from weakening the obligations to holiness, that, on the contrary, the belief and reception of it, as its necessary consequence, must make men greater lovers of purity and holiness, and fill them with a greater abhorrence of sin, than any other persuasion on the same subject, I am content to give up the cause.

I hope we may be indulged a candid hearing on this subject, as experience does not seem to be unfavourable to the doctrine I am essaying to de-

* That is to say, So far as it can be applied to practice, and so far as it is real or prevalent above its opposite; for there are many truths of a religious nature which men think they believe some times, but which yet their corrupt passions often make them doubt of; and these doubts are nine parts in ten of their lives obversant to their minds, as a vindication of their licentious practice: in some sense, such may be said to act in contradiction to their principles; but they are principles either not really believed, or, which is the same thing, not habitually recollected; and none can expect that men will act upon a principle, tho' once ever so firmly believed, if it be forgotten, or at the time of action entirely out of view.

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send. If it appeared in fact that its friends, upon a fair and just comparison, were more loose in their practice than their adversaries of any of the opposite opinions, it would be a strong prejudice against it; or rather, if this were always the case, it would be an unquestionable evidence of its falshood. But, doth not the contrary appear on the very face of the world? Are not the persons who profess to deny their own righteousness, and hope for justification thro' Christ, ordinarily the most tender and fearful of sinning themselves, and the most faithful and diligent in promoting the reformation of others? And do not all careless, profane and sensual livers, almost to a man, profess themselves enemies to this doctrine? I could almost appeal to any one who hath the least experience of, or commerce with the world, whether he would expect to find, upon a strict search and enquiry, the worship of God more constantly attended, the name of God more regularly called upon in families, children and servants more carefully instructed, and more dutifully governed, a greater freedom from levity, profanity, unchastity, pride, malice, or insincerity of conversation, amongst the friends or enemies of this doctrine? So true is this, that they commonly have the appellation of the stricter sort given them, by which is certainly understood,

stood, at least, an apparent strictness of life and manners*.

As therefore experience doth not hinder, or rather warrants us to affirm, that those who expect justification by free grace are, of all others, the most holy in their lives; I propose to shew, that it must be so, and that this is but the native fruit, and necessary consequence of their principles. What has induced me to this attempt, is not only the calumnies of enemies, but the weakness or treachery of professed friends. These last injure the truth often, in two different ways. Some speak in such a manner as to confirm and harden enemies in their opposition to it; they use such rash and uncautious expressions, as do indeed justify the objection which the apostle rejects with so great abhorrence; and, in the heat of their zeal against the self-righteous legalist, seem to state themselves as ene-

* I am not ignorant, that it is the usual refuge of those who are evidently dissolute in their own lives, to alledge, that there is indeed an appearance of this, but that it is no more than appearance, being all hypocrisy. It would be going out of the way to enter upon a large refutation of this slander. Therefore acknowledging, that, no doubt, whatever number of hypocrites there are in the world, and there are too many, they must herd amongst, or attach themselves to the society of the best part of it: I observe, that the general charge of hypocrisy is only thrown out at a venture, is a judging of the heart, and by the very supposition, contrary to appearances, justified, for the most part, by a steady perseverance. Whereas, usually the whole merit of those who bring the accusation, is that of being uniformly wicked, and not so much as professing what it was their indispensable duty both to have professed and practised.

mies,

mies, in every respect, to the law of God, which is holy, just and good. Others, on the contrary, defend it in such a manner, as to destroy the doctrine itself; and give such interpretations of the word of God, as, if they were just, and known to be so, the objection would never have been made, because there would not have been so much as an occasion given to it*.

But of all the pretended Christians, one sort are worthy of the highest contempt, who, acknowledging the truth of this doctrine, call it dangerous, and are backward to teach or publish it, lest it should be abused. Would such weak, half-thinking mortals, be wiser than God? Hath he published it, and shall we throw a veil over it, to remedy the rashness of his proceeding? Do the Scriptures reveal, and are we backward to "testify the gospel of the grace of God?" All the works of God are capable of being abused; that this may be so likewise the apostle supposes. It is, however, not the less useful or important; only let us endeavour to vindicate it from the false

* I have often thought, that there cannot be a stronger argument, that the explication commonly given by Calvinists, of the passages of scripture on this subject, is just, than the apostle's supposition of an objection of this nature arising from it. For if the explication of some others, were supposed to be the obvious meaning of the text, and were substituted in its room, as all just definitions may be without inconvenience, the apostle's words, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" would be quite unnatural and absurd.

charge

charge of favouring or encouraging licentiousness of life. This I would willingly do in such a manner, as to assert while I defend it; to maintain the doctrine itself, while I shew not only its innocence, but its usefulness in practice.

The words of the inspired apostle are, "God forbid, how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" In which he affirms, that the grace of God abounding in the gospel, is so far from being an encouragement to sin; that it destroys the power of sin, and removes the inclination to it, so far as it prevails. The language is very strong, "We that are dead to sin."—It seems to put us in mind of the total effectual breach of relation between a dead man, and the objects with which he was formerly connected in life: they are nothing to him, nor he to them; he neither loves them, needs them, nor uses them. So, in proportion as the grace of God offered through Christ in the gospel is received and applied, sin is mortified in the heart; thus says the apostle Paul elsewhere, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world*." This, which is indeed the language of the Scripture throughout, is not merely denying the ac-

* Gal. vi, 14.

cufation,

culation, but establishing the contrary truth, the influence of this doctrine upon purity of heart and life, which we find the apostle also asserting in the middle of his reasoning upon the point, “ Do we then make void the law through faith? “ God forbid; yea, we establish the law †.”

In the prosecution of this subject, it will be necessary, first, in a few words, to state that doctrine against which the objection is made. It may be delivered in Scripture language thus, “ That all have sinned, and come short of the “ glory of God.—That every mouth must be “ stopped, and all the world become guilty be- “ fore God.—Therefore by the deeds of the “ law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight. “ —But we are justified freely by his grace, “ through the redemption that is in Christ Je- “ sus:—Whom God hath set forth as a propi- “ tiation, through faith in his blood, to declare “ his righteousness, for the remission of sins that “ are past, through the forbearance of God.— “ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By “ what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of “ faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is “ justified by faith, without the deeds of the “ law.—Moreover, the law entered, that the of- “ fence might abound; but where sin abounded,

† Rom. iii, 31.

“ grace

“ grace did much more abound; that as sin hath
 “ reigned unto death, even so might grace reign
 “ through righteousness unto eternal life, by
 “ Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The doctrine asserted in the above and other passages of scripture may be thus paraphrased: that every intelligent creature is under an unchangeable and unalienable obligation, perfectly to obey the whole law of God: that all men proceeding from Adam by ordinary generation, are the children of polluted parents, alienated in heart from God, transgressors of his holy law, inexcusable in this transgression, and therefore exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure; that it was not agreeable to the dictates of his wisdom, holiness and justice, to forgive their sins without an atonement or satisfaction; and therefore he raised up for them a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who, as the second Adam, perfectly fulfilled the whole law, and offered himself up a sacrifice upon the cross in their stead: that this his righteousness is imputed to them, as the sole foundation of their justification in the sight of a holy God, and their reception into his favour: that the means of their being interested in this salvation, is a deep humiliation of mind, confession of guilt and wretchedness, denial of themselves, and acceptance of pardon and peace through Christ Jesus, which they
 neither

neither have contributed to the procuring, nor can contribute to the continuance of, by their own merit; but expect the renovation of their natures, to be inclined and enabled to keep the commandments of God, as the work of the Spirit, and a part of the purchase of their Redeemer*.

This short account of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness will be further illustrated and explained in the progress of this discourse, intended to shew, that in those who do cordially embrace it, the obligations to holiness are not weakened, but strengthened and confirmed. For this purpose be pleased to attend to the following observations; in all of which I desire it may be remembered, even where not expressly mentioned, an opposition is intended between the principles and views of a believer in

* The intelligent reader will probably perceive, that I have expressed the above doctrine in such general terms, as not distinctly to take a part in the differences that are to be found among some authors, as to the way of explaining it, and particularly as to the nature of faith. The reason of my doing so is, that I would willingly rather reconcile than widen these differences; and because it is my firm persuasion, that however some think it justest, or wisest, or safest, to express themselves one way, and some another, yet all who have a deep and real conviction, that they are by nature in a lost state, and under the wrath of God, and that there is no salvation in any other but in Christ, are, if they understood one another, at bottom, or at least in all things any way material, of the same opinion. Accordingly the reader will, I hope, find that the reasoning in the following pages may easily be applied by them all without exception.

Christ,

Christ, who rests his hope on his imputed righteousness, and those who act on any contrary principle.

In the first place, he who expects justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, hath the clearest and strongest conviction of the obligation of the holy law of God upon every reasonable creature, and of its extent and purity. This will appear very evidently, if we consider what it is that brings any person to a belief or relish of this doctrine. It must be a sense of sin, and fear of deserved wrath. Let us search out the cause by tracing the effects. Whence arises the fear of wrath, or apprehension of God's displeasure? Only from a conviction of guilt. And what can produce a conviction of guilt, but a sense of obligation? This is manifestly the doctrine of Scripture, which teaches us, that "by the law is the knowledge of sin"—and that "the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." Those who have none at all, or a very imperfect sense of the obligation of the divine law, will never have the least esteem of the righteousness of Christ, which atones for their transgression of it; it must appear to them to be foolishness: whereas those who have a strong conviction of the justice of the demand of the law, both esteem and use the plea of their Saviour's merit. Such also have a strong
sense

sense of the extent and purity of the law of God, as well as its obligation in general. Whilst others consider nothing as sin, but the grossest and most notorious crimes, they are deeply sensible of the alienation of their hearts from God, whom they are bound supremely to love, and to whose glory they are obliged to be habitually and universally subservient.

This conviction of the obligation of the divine law, so essentially connected with, or rather so necessarily previous to, an acceptance of the imputed righteousness of Christ, is evidently founded upon the relation of man to God, as a creature to his Creator. This relation then continues, and must continue, unchangeable; therefore the obligation founded upon it must be unalienable; and all those who have once been sensible of it, must continue to be so, unless we suppose them blinded to the knowledge of God as Creator, by the discovery of his mercy in Christ the Redeemer. But this is absurd; for the subsequent relation of a sinner to God, as forgiven and reconciled through Christ, never can take away, nay, never can alter his natural relation as a creature, nor the obligation founded upon it. Neither can it be conceived as consistent with the perfections of God, to abate the demands of his law; that is to say, a perfect conformity to his holy

holy will *. Every the least deviation from it, by transgression, or neglect of duty, must still be evil in itself, and must still be seen, and esteemed to be so by the God of truth, who cannot lie. Now, is there any thing in the gospel that hath the least tendency to lessen the sense of this obligation, after it hath been once discovered? Very far from it: on the contrary, all that Christ hath done for the salvation of sinners, as its immediate

* Since mention has been made of perfect conformity to the will of God, or perfect obedience to his law, as the duty of man, which is indeed the foundation of this whole doctrine, I think it necessary to observe, that some deny this to be properly required of man, as his duty in the present fallen state, because he is not able to perform it. But such do not seem to attend either to the meaning of perfect obedience, or to the nature or cause of this inability. Perfect obedience is obedience by any creature, to the utmost extent of his natural powers. Even in a state of innocence, the holy dispositions of Adam would not have been equal in strength and activity to those of creatures of an higher rank: but surely to love God, who is infinitely amiable, with all the heart, and above all, to consecrate all his powers and faculties, without exception, and without intermission, to God's service, must be undeniably the duty of every intelligent creature. And what sort of inability are we under to pay this? Our natural faculties are surely as fit for the service of God as for any baser purpose: the inability is only moral, and lies wholly in the aversion of our hearts from such employment. Does this then take away the guilt? Must God relax his law because we are not willing to obey it? Consult even modern philosophers; and such of them as allow there is any such thing as vice, will tell you, that it lies in evil or misplaced affections. Will then that which is ill in itself excuse its fruits in any degree from guilt or blame? The truth is, notwithstanding the loud charge of licentiousness upon the truths of the gospel, there is no other system that ever I perused which preserves the obligation of the law of God in its strength: the most part of them, when thoroughly examined, just amount to this, that men are bound, and that it is RIGHT and MEET and FIT that they should be as good and as holy as they themselves incline.

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consequence, magnifies the law, and makes it honourable.

Perhaps it may be thought, that the releasing a sinner from the sanction of the law, or the punishment incurred, by pardon purchased and bestowed, has this effect: and here it is, to be sure, that men, by their partial views, are apt to suppose the objection lies. But let us only reflect, that the obligation to duty and obedience to the Creator, hath been seen by a believer in the strongest light; and must continue to be sensible. Will he then be induced to act in the face of a perceived obligation, by an instance of unspeakable mercy? Is this reasonable to suppose? or rather, is it not self-contradictory and absurd? It is so far from being true, that this mercy disposes to obedience, as a peculiar and additional motive, as I shall afterwards shew more fully in its proper place. In the mean time, it is self-evident, that it can be no hindrance. What leads us into error in this matter, is what happens sometimes in human affairs. In a human government clemency, or a promise of impunity for past crimes, may enable, tho', even in that case, not incline a rebellious traitor to renew his wickedness. But this is a most unjust and partial view of the case, in which the very circumstance is wanting upon which the chief stress ought to be laid. Human laws reach only

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only outward actions, because human knowledge is so imperfect, that it cannot discover the disposition of the heart: and as all professions are not sincere, so kindness is often bestowed on improper objects. This kindness, however, though it may discover the impropriety, it cannot cause it.

But make the similitude complete, and see how it will lead us to determine. Suppose one who hath been in rebellion, deeply and inwardly convinced of the evil of rebellion, and his obligation to submission; suppose this conviction so strong, that he confesseth the justice of the sentence condemning him to die, which is very consistent with a desire of life: will a pardon offered or intimated to such a person make him disloyal? Is this its natural, nay, is it its possible effect? If it could be supposed to have any such consequence at all, it could only be in this distant way, that pardon seems to lessen the sense of a judge's displeasure at the crime. But even this can have no place here, because sufficient care is taken to prevent any such abuse of it, by the substitution and vicarious sufferings of a Mediator.

I cannot help observing here, that the similitude above used will lead us to the discovery of one great cause of the objection against which I am reasoning. It arises from that corruption of heart, and inward opposition to the law of God
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in its extent and purity, which is in all men by nature, and continues in all who are not renewed in the spirit of their minds. As they have a strong tendency and inclination to transgress the law where they dare, they are ready to think, that the hopes of impunity must encourage every one to a bold violation of it. And no doubt this would be true, if there could be any real esteem, or cordial acceptance of the gospel, without a previous conviction of the obligation of the law, and the guilt and demerit of every transgressor *. But supposing what is in truth the case with every believer, that there is a real and strong conviction of the obligation of the law of God upon every rational creature, which cannot be taken away; to imagine that the mercy of God in pardoning sinners for Christ's sake will lessen or weaken the sense of this obligation, is a most manifest contradiction. On the contrary, sin must needs have received a mortal blow, the love of it must necessarily have been destroyed, before pardon in

* But this is impossible: for tho' there may be some sort of fear of punishment, occasioned by displays of divine power, where there is no true humiliation of mind, or genuine conviction of sin; this is but like the impatient struggles of a chained slave, instead of the willing subjection of a penitent child. There is still in all such an inward murmuring against the sentence, as that of an unjust and rigorous tyrant, and not of a righteous judge. Therefore, tho' such should pretend to rely on the merits of Christ for pardon and deliverance, it is plainly not from their hearts, and therefore neither to the saving of their souls, nor to the reformation of their lives.

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this way could be sought or obtained: so that the apostle might well say, "How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?"

In the second place, he who believes in Christ, and expects justification through his imputed righteousness, must have the deepest and strongest sense of the evil of sin in itself. This is in a good measure included in, or an immediate consequence of, what has been already mentioned. For the obligation of the law, as hinted above, is but very imperfect, if we consider it only as founded on the power of God, and the dependence of the creature, and not also on the holiness, justice, and goodness of the law itself. In the first sense, perhaps, it may be felt by the wicked in this world, at least, we are sure, it is felt by devils and damned spirits in a separate state. They know that they must suffer, because they will not obey. But where there is a complete sense of obligation, it implies a belief of the righteousness of the law, as well as the power of the law-giver, of the equity, nay, the excellence of the command, as well as the severity of the sanction. All such not only believe that God will punish for sin, but that it is most just that he should do so, and that sin has richly deserved it.

It may therefore seem unnecessary to add any thing on this subject more than has been already said:

said: but I have mentioned it by itself, because besides that sense of the obligation and purity of the law of God, which must pave the way to a sinner's acceptance of the righteousness of Christ, there is a discovery of the evil of sin, and its abominable nature, in every part of this "mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh," and the truths founded upon it; so that the more these are believed, and the more they are attended to and recollected, the more must the believer be determined to hate and abhor every wicked and false way; every new view which he takes of the gospel of his salvation, every act of trust and confidence exerted upon it, must increase his horror of sin, and excite him to fly from it.

Let us consider a little what views are presented us of the evil of sin in the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified. Here we see that a holy and just God would not forgive sin without an atonement. What a demonstration is this of its malignity, if carefully attended to, and kept constantly in our eye, as a part of our very idea of the Divine Nature! The difficulty in this case is our partiality in our own cause; we are unwilling to think sin so very blame-worthy, because this is condemning ourselves: but, let us consider what views an all-wise and impartial God hath of it, and form ours upon his. And that we may

not so much as once blasphemously imagine, that he also is partial on his own side, let us remember that he is the God of love, who, by this very salvation, hath magnified his love in a manner that passeth knowledge. He shews his sense of the evil of the crime, even whilst he is contriving, nay, in the very contrivance of a proper way for the criminal's escape. He is not, so to speak, setting forth the malignity of the offence, in order to justify the severity of his own vengeance, but he is exerting his amiable attribute of mercy, and yet here must the evil of sin appear.

Consider, in a particular manner, upon this subject, the dignity and glory of the person who made this atonement. The value of the purchase may be seen in the greatness of the price; the evil of sin in the worth of the propitiation. "For we are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot*." It was no less a person than the eternal and only begotten Son of God, who was before all worlds, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, who suffered in our stead. Whoever considers the frequent mention in the sacred oracles, of the glory and dignity of the person of Christ, must be satisfied that it is not

* 1 Pet. i. 18.

without

without design ; and none can truly relish or improve these truths, but such as thence learn the evil of sin, the immenseness of that debt which required one of so great, nay, of infinite and inexhaustible riches, to be able to pay it. A creature indeed behoved to suffer ; and therefore he became the son of man, but intimately united to the Creator, God blessed for ever. It was one of the first and earliest confessions of faith, That Jesus Christ was the Son of God ; and this belief must have the strongest influence in shewing us the evil of sin, which none else was able to expiate.

In many passages of Scripture, God's sending his own Son into the world to save sinners, is represented as the strongest proof possible of his compassion and love. The nearness of the relation teaches us, as it were, to suppose some reluctance in bestowing him ; in allusion to which there is a beautiful expression of the apostle Paul, " * 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 ?" The very same thing shews, with equal clearness, his abhorrence of sin. However strongly disposed to save sinners, he would have sin to be expiated, though his own Son should be the victim : if any thing could have made him dispense with it, this

* Rom. viii. 32.

should surely have had the effect: and therefore the condemning of sin seems to have been as much in view, as the salvation of the sinner.

Every light in which we can view this subject, contributes to set before us the evil of sin. I shall only mention further, the greatness and severity of the sufferings of our Redeemer, as they are represented both prophetically, to shew how much was exacted, and historically, to shew what was paid. As the whole of his life was to be a state of humiliation and sorrow, it is said, “ * As many
 “ were astonished at thee, his visage was so mar-
 “ red more than any man, and his form than the
 “ sons of men.” Again, “ He is despised and
 “ rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and ac-
 “ quainted with grief; and we hid, as it were,
 “ our faces from him; he was despised, and we
 “ esteemed him not.” Once more, “ He was
 “ wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised
 “ for our iniquities: the chastisement of our
 “ peace was upon him, and with his stripes we
 “ are healed.” In the history of his life in the
 new testament, we see all this verified, in the
 meanness of his birth, and the continued insults
 and reproaches thrown upon him during the
 course of his life. There is one remarkable pas-
 sage, John viii. 57. “ Thou art not yet fifty
 “ years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?” The

* Isa. lii. 14. liii. 5, 5.

meaning of this is hardly obvious, unless we suppose that his natural beauty and bloom was so wasted and decayed by sorrow, that he seemed to strangers near twenty years older than he really was.

In the close of the gospel, we have an account of the last scene of his sufferings, in the garden, and on the cross. "He was sore amazed, and very heavy.—His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.—His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." He was at last stretched on an accursed tree, where the pain of a tortur'd body was but small to the anguish of an overwhelmed spirit, which constrained him to utter this heavy complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Let the Christian stand at the foot of the cross, and there see the evil of sin, which required so costly an expiation. Let him there see the holiness and justice of God in its punishment. Let him hear the most High, saying, "Awake, O sword, against the man who is my fellow." And let him thence learn, how much sin is the object of divine detestation.

Hath a believer then a firm persuasion of all these truths? Are they the frequent theme of his meditations? And must they not necessarily fill him with an abhorrence of sin, inflame him with a hatred of it, and excite in him a self-loathing on

its account? Thus it is said in the prophetic writings, “ † They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born.” And must not a repetition of the same views still strengthen the impression, so that, as the apostle Paul tells us of himself, “ * The world will be crucified unto him, and he unto the world.”

I am sensible, that these things will have no such effect upon the enemies of the gospel, who disbelieve them, or upon those Christians, if they deserve the name, who disguise, explain away, or give up the satisfaction of Christ; or even those who have a strong tincture of a legal spirit, and are for contributing somewhat toward their acceptance with God, by their own merit, and defective obedience. Such cannot relish these sentiments; and therefore it may seem improper, in reasoning against enemies to bring them at all in view. But let it be remembered, that however little many believe such things, they may yet perceive, if they will attend to it, their natural operation upon those who do believe them. And let any modern adept in the science of morals shew in his account of the foundation of morality, and the nature of obligation, any thing that hath a force or influence

† Zech. xii. 10.

* Gal. vi. 14.

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equal to this: or, will the nominal self-righteous Christian, who thinks Christ only made up some little wants which he finds in himself, or that his death had only some general expediency in it, ever be equally tender in his practice, with him who sees so much of the purity of the law of God, and his detestation of sin, as to esteem all his own own righteousnesses but as filthy rags, and bottoms his hope of acceptance wholly upon the perfect righteousness of his Redeemer?

In the third place, He who expects justification only through the imputed righteousness of Christ, has the most awful views of the danger of sin. He not only sees the obligation and purity of the law, but the severity of its sanction. It is a fear of wrath from the avenger of blood, that persuades him to fly to the city of refuge. And if we compare the sentiments of others with his, either the generality of a careless and blinded world, or those who act upon contrary principles, and a different system from that which we are now defending, we shall find, that not one of them hath such apprehensions of the wrath and vengeance of God due on the account of sin, as the convinced sinner, who flies to the propitiation of Christ for deliverance and rescue.

I am very sensible, that many readers will be ready to challenge this argument as pressed into the service, and wholly improper upon my scheme: they

they will suppose, that every believer, in consequence of his faith in Christ, is screened from the penalty of the law, and sheltered from the stroke of divine justice; he is therefore no more under this fear; and its being no more a motive of action, in the future part of his conduct, is the very ground of the objection I am attempting to remove. This is no doubt plausible; but let it be remembred, in what way it is that believers are freed from their apprehensions of the wrath of God; it is by their acceptance of his mercy thro' faith in Christ. Before the application of this remedy, they saw themselves the children of wrath, and heirs of hell; and they still believe, that every sin deserves the wrath of God, both in this life, and that which is to come. Will they therefore re-incur the danger from which they have so lately escaped, and of which they had so terrible a view? will they do so voluntarily, even although they know the remedy to be still at hand, still ready to be applied, and certainly effectual? Suppose any person had been upon the very point of perishing in a violent and rapid stream, and saved when his strength was well nigh exhausted, by the happy intervention of a tender-hearted passenger, would he voluntarily plunge himself again into the flood, even although he knew his deliverer were standing by, ready for his relief? The supposition is quite unnatural; and it is equally so,

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to imagine, that one saved from divine wrath will immediately repeat the provocation, even whilst he trembles at the thoughts of the misery of that state from which he had been so lately delivered.

Let us only consider the strong sense which a believer usually shews of the danger of others in an unconverted state, from a persuasion of their being under the wrath of God. He warns them, intreats them, pities them, and prays for them. He would not exchange with any one of them, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne. How then should he be supposed to follow them in their practice, and thereby to return to their state?

But perhaps, here again it will be urged, that this is improper; because, according to the principles of the assertors of imputed righteousness, a believer, being once in a justified state, cannot fall from grace; and therefore his sins do not deserve wrath; and he himself must have, from this persuasion, a strong confidence that, be what they will, they cannot have such an effect: and accordingly, some have expressly affirmed, that the future sins of the elect are forgiven, as well as their past, at their conversion; nay, some, that they are justified from all eternity, that God doth not see sin in a believer, that his afflictions are not punishments, and other things.

things of the like nature. Now, tho' I must confess I look upon these expressions, and many more to be found in certain writers, whatever glosses they may put upon them, as unguarded and anti-scriptural; yet not to enter into the controversy at all, I suppose it will be acknowledged by all without exception, that a believer's security, and the impossibility of his falling from grace, is a security of not sinning, that is, of not being under the dominion of sin, as much as, or rather in order to his security of deliverance from the wrath of God. His pardon is sure; but this security is only hypothetical, because his faith and holiness are secured by the promise of God: so that, to suppose a person to sin without restraint, by means of this persuasion, that his salvation is secured by his first acceptance of Christ, is a supposition self contradictory. However strongly any man may assert that a believer's salvation is secure, he will not scruple, at the same time to acknowledge, that if such believer should sin wilfully and habitually, and continue to do so, he would be damned; but he will deny, that any such case ever did, or ever can possibly happen*.

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* Indeed there can be nothing more unfair, than to take one part of a man's belief, and thence argue against another part, upon which the first is expressly founded. If I should say, I am confident I shall never be drowned in a certain river, because I
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The objection must surely appear strongest upon the principles of those who make the nature of faith to consist in a belief, that Christ died for themselves in particular, or of their own personal interest in him, and the pardon and life which he hath purchased, making assurance essential to its daily exercise. Yet even these will not deny, that their faith is not always equally strong, and that their assurance is sometimes interrupted with doubts and fears. Now, what is the cause of these doubts, and this uncertainty? Is it not always sin more directly, or by consequence? So that sin renders their faith doubtful, which is the very same thing with putting them in fear concerning their future state. Indeed it is not more sure that our Redeemer invites all weary heavy-laden sinners to come unto him, that they may find rest, than it is that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. So that every instance of voluntary sin, must throw back the believer (at least as to his own sentiments) into his former state, till he be again restored by faith and repentance.

From this I think it evidently appears, that the motive of the danger of sin is not weakened,

am resolved never to cross it at all; would it not be absurd to reason thus; here is a man who hath a persuasion he will never be drowned in this river; therefore he will be surely very headstrong and fool-hardy in fording it when it overflows its banks, which is contrary to the very foundation of my security?

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but hath its full force upon those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. And, if it is not weakened, it must be strengthened by this persuasion, since, as I have shewn above, none have so deep a sense of the obligation of the law, and the evil of sin, and by consequence none can have so great a fear of its awful sanction. That this is agreeable to Scripture, might be shown at great length, where the putting their right to the favour of God and eternal life more and more beyond all doubt and question, is recommended to believers as an object of their care and diligence. Thus says the apostle to the Hebrews, “ And we desire that every
 “ one of you do shew the same diligence, to the
 “ full assurance of hope unto the end *.” And the apostle Peter, after a long enumeration of the graces of the Christian life, says, “ Wherefore
 “ the rather, brethren, give diligence to make
 “ your calling and election sure †.” Nay, the fear of wrath, and of finally perishing, is represented by the apostle Paul himself, as one view at least, which habitually influenced his own conduct; “ But I keep under my body, and bring
 “ it into subjection, lest that by any means,
 “ when I have preached to others, I myself
 “ should be a cast-away ‡.”

* Heb. vi. 11. † 2 Pet. i. 10. ‡ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

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In the fourth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, have the highest sense of the purity and holiness of the divine nature; and therefore must be under an habitual conviction of the necessity of purity, in order to fit them for his presence and enjoyment. If this doctrine, in its main design, or by any of its essential parts, had a tendency to represent God, (I will not say as delighting in sin, but) as easy to be pacified towards it, passing it by with little notice, and punishing it but very slightly, there might be some pretence for drawing the conclusion complained of from it. For I think it may be allowed as a maxim, that as is the God, so are his worshippers, if they serve him in earnest. Whatever views they have of the object of their esteem and worship, they will endeavour to form themselves to the same character. But if, on the contrary, this doctrine preserves the purity of God entire; nay, if it gives us still more strong, awful and striking views of it; it can never encourage such as believe it, in the practice of sin.

But that this is the case with all such as believe and understand the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, may be demonstrated in the clearest manner. It might indeed be shewn, from a great variety of arguments founded upon the mediation of Christ: at present
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I shall mention but two, the propriety of which, and their relation to the subject in hand, every one must immediately perceive. - In the first place, That Christ behoved to suffer by divine appointment for the expiation of sin, is not only equal with, but stronger than, all other evidences of the purity of God, and his abhorrence of sin. It is an event of the most striking and astonishing nature, every reflection upon which overwhelms the mind, that the eternal and only-begotten Son of God should assume the likeness of sinful flesh, and stand in the room of sinners: even tho' the merited punishment had been inflicted upon the offenders themselves, it would not have been such a proof of the purity of God. Here, even when he is inclined to mercy, its exercise is obstructed till justice is satisfied. Can any one consider this without being deeply convinced, that he is a God "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and with whom unrighteousness can have no communion? Will any, after such views, hope for his favour, while they retain the love of sin, or expect to dwell in his presence while they continue stained with its pollution?

The same thing must also carry convincing evidence with it, that to suppose Christ to have bought an impunity for sinners, and procured them a licence to offend, is self-contradictory, and altogether inconsistent with the wisdom and

uniformity of the divine government: that he never could hate sin so much before, and love it after the sufferings of Christ: that he could not find it necessary to punish it so severely in the surety, and yet afterwards love and bear with it in those for whom that surety satisfied. Not only may this be clearly established by reason and argument, but it must be immediately felt by every one who sees the necessity of the atonement of their Redeemer. They will be so far from taking a liberty to sin, that, on the contrary, they will be ready to cry out, "Who can stand before this holy Lord God*." Accordingly we shall find in experience, that none are more ready to call in question the integrity of their own character; none more ready to fear the effects of the sins that cleave to them, as unfitting them for the divine presence, than such as trust solely in the merits of Christ for their acceptance with God.

* It is a certain fact, that the number of persons under distress of mind by perplexing doubts, or anxious fears, concerning their future state, is incomparably greater amongst the friends than the enemies of this doctrine. By this I do not at all mean that either their doubts are dutiful, or their fears desirable. Such a state is to be looked upon as the fruit of their own weakness and imperfection, and as a chastisement from a wise and gracious God, either more immediately for correcting their sins, or for the trial, illustration and perfecting of their grace and virtue; but its being more common among those who believe in Christ's imputed righteousness, than others, is a plain proof that this doctrine doth not naturally tend to inspire any with an unholy boldness, or a secure and foolish *Presumption.*

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The second thing I proposed to mention in the doctrine of Christ's mediation, which shews the purity of the divine nature; is our continued approach to God by him as an intercessor and advocate. It contributes to keep continually upon our minds a sense of the divine holiness and purity, and of our own unworthiness, that we are not permitted to approach him but by the intercession of another. Such a conduct in human affairs, properly serves to shew dignity and greatness on the one part, distance and unworthiness on the other. The same conduct then in God towards us, doth it not convince us, that he must be sanctified of all them that draw near to him? And, whilst it makes imputed righteousness the condition, plainly shows the necessity of inherent holiness, as a qualification in our approaches to his throne. Suppose an earthly prince were to be addressed by two different persons, one who thought he had a title upon his own merit to make an immediate application, and another who could not approach him without one nearly related to him, and in high favour at court, to procure his admission, and to back his request; which of these would probably be most respectful to his sovereign, and most solicitous to avoid giving offence by his conduct? Surely the latter; and so it is always with the humble, mortified believer, who "counts all things but
" loss

“ loss for the excellency of the knowledge of
 “ Christ Jesus*.”

In the fifth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be induced to obedience, in the strongest manner, by the liberal and ingenuous motive of gratitude and thankfulness to God. That it is the native and genuine expression of gratitude to God, to live a pure and holy life, I suppose will hardly be denied: at least, this the Scriptures represent as pleasing him, serving him, doing his will, honouring him. It is indeed extremely difficult to conceive, how God all-mighty, and all-sufficient, should be at all affected with our conduct, either good or bad: it seems to be improper to say, that he can be pleased or displeased with our actions, or that he hath any interest at stake. Nothing, to be sure, can be more weak and impotent, than the injuries offered, or the assaults made upon him by created beings. As his nature is without variableness or shadow of turning, so his happiness is such, as can neither be increased nor impaired. And yet, in this way, he himself hath taught us to conceive of the matter, that holiness is not only an imitation of his character, but obedience to his will; and its contrary a transgression of his law. These have been the sentiments of all nations without exception; and, after the

* Phil. iii, 8.

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utmost efforts we can make to exempt him in our minds from all human passions or affections, of joy, anger, or displeasure, we cannot help considering it still as proper to say, such a course of life is agreeable, and such another is displeasing to God, and will provoke his wrath.

Is not gratitude then a principle of action that will be powerful and operative? Mankind in general bear witness to this as they have agreed in all ages; to brand ingratitude with the blackest mark of infamy, and to reckon it among the most atrocious of crimes. And indeed we find by experience, that it is comparatively stronger, for the most part, than the opposite motives of force or fear. There is a sort of natural tendency in man to resist violence, and refuse submission to authority, whilst they may be won by favours, and melted to thankfulness and gratitude by kindness and love: at least, this may be applied perfectly to the present case, where the bare outward performance (which may indeed be the effect of fear) will not be accepted without the inclination of the will. A slavish dread both lessens the degree, and debases the nature of that obedience we might essay to perform. This is an universal principle; and, in particular, while the law of God stands in its force and rigour, as a covenant of works, threatening death without hope of mercy, against every transgression, it begets a despondent

dent sloth, and, at best serves only to discover our sin and misery ; nay, as the apostle Paul strongly and justly reasons, it renders our corrupt affections more inflamed and violent by restraint ;
 “ * Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law ;
 “ for I had not known lust, except the law had
 “ said, Thou shalt not covet, &c.”

But let us now complete this argument, by shewing, that a believer in Christ is under the strongest obligations, from gratitude, to do the will of God. And how many considerations concur in shewing this ? The unspeakable greatness of the blessings he receives, no less than deliverance from everlasting misery and anguish, and a right to everlasting glory and happiness.—The infinite and affecting condescension of the great and glorious Giver, who, in mercy to those who could not profit him at all, but, on the contrary, had highly provoked him, laid help for them upon one who is mighty to save.—The astonishing means employed in this design, viz. God’s “ not sparing
 “ even his own Son, but delivering him up for
 “ us all.” Well might the apostle John say,
 “ † God SO loved the world, that he gave his
 “ only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth
 “ in him should not perish, but have everlasting
 “ life.”—But, above all, the sense which he himself hath of his misery and wretchedness. No-

* Rom. vii. 7.

† John iii. 16.

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thing can be more dreadful than the apprehensions which a convinced sinner hath of his own state: what, and how strong then must his sense of gratitude be, to him who hath given his Son, and him who was given himself, for the purchase of his pardon? With what earnestness will he seek after, and with what cheerfulness will he embrace, every opportunity of testifying his thankfulness? Will not the name of his Redeemer be precious, even "as ointment poured forth;" his laws delightful to him, and his honour dear?

It is proper to observe here, that the single view of the blessings of divine goodness, which must have the strongest influence in leading us to a grateful resentment of them, is peculiar to such as expect justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ; viz. their being of free, unmerited grace and mercy. For, though there are classes of Christians who pretend to disclaim the belief of any merit in man, it would be no difficult matter to shew, that there are none who do not, by their professed principles, or their usual language, suppose it, excepting those described in the beginning of this discourse. And such not only believe his mercy to be unmerited, but that they have justly deserved his wrath and indignation, nay, and that they continually do so, even in their best state; their purest and holiest actions having such sins attending them, or such a mix-
true

ture and alloy of unholiness and impurity in them, as, if they were weighed in the exact balance of justice, would be sufficient to procure their total rejection.

In how strong a light is this represented by the sacred writers; and how powerful does its operation appear to be upon themselves? They seem penetrated and possessed with a sense of the love of Christ, and of God in him, as having sinners for its object. Thus the apostle Paul reasons; “ For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*.” And again, “ If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son †.”—What a sense of the love of Christ is discovered by the two following passages of the same apostle! “ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge ‡.” The other is, “ If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, Maranatha §;” than which nothing could more strongly express his own sense of the

* Rom. v. 7, 8. † Rom. v. 10, 11. ‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 17, 18, 19. § 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

obligation. It deserves notice also, that the inspired writers do often represent it as one of the strongest arguments against sin, that it is a reproach and dishonour brought upon our Redeemer and Lord, “ For many walk, of whom
 “ I have told you often, and now tell you even
 “ weeping, that they are enemies of the cross
 “ of Christ*. Seeing they crucify to themselves
 “ the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open
 “ shame †.”

I must again here, as on a former branch of the subject, observe, That, no doubt, such arguments as these, will have little or no effect upon those who have but an imperfect belief of them, which, it is to be feared, is the case with not a few who go under the name of Christian. But, is it not very evident, that they must have the strongest imaginable influence upon all such as are actuated by a lively faith in the doctrine of redemption? They must see themselves indebted to the undeserved mercy and love of God for favours of infinite value, and therefore must certainly endeavour to express their gratitude by an intire consecration of their lives to their benefactor's service.

This leads me to observe in the 6th and last place, That those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possess a supreme or superlative love to God, which is not

* Phil. iii. 18.

† Heb. vi. 6.

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only the source and principle, but the very sum and substance, nay, the perfection of holiness. That those who believe in and hope to be accepted, and finally saved, through the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possessed of a supreme love to God, appears from what hath been already said upon the subject of gratitude. Love is the most powerful means of begetting love. Thus says the apostle John, “ We have known “ and believed the love that God hath unto “ us; God is love*.” And a little after, “ We love him, because he first loved us †.” The infinite and unspeakable mercies which he hath bestowed on us, with all the circumstances attending them, the means and manner of their conveyance, which have been hinted at above, must necessarily excite the most ardent love in return, and every proper expression of it. This is their immediate and natural, nay, this is their necessary and unavoidable effect. “ For the love “ of Christ constraineth us, because we thus “ judge, that if one died for all, then were all “ dead; and that he died for all, that they which “ live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and “ rose again ‡.”

If any shall think proper to assert, That favours bestowed are not to be considered as the

* 1 John iv. 16.

† 1 John iv. 19.

‡ 2 Cor. v. 14.

true

true and formal causes of love, but the excellence and amiable qualities of the object. Thus, for example, supposing any person of a character justly hateful in itself, from caprice, self-interest, or any other sinister motive, to bestow many signal favours upon another, the beneficiary might receive, and delight in the favours, without esteeming, nay, even when he could not esteem, the giver. If this is considered as an objection against what I have just now said, and the conclusiveness of the argument to be founded upon it; I offer the two following answers to it. 1st, That in the account given in Scripture of the redemption of the world by the substitution of a Saviour, and the justification of sinners by the imputed righteousness of Christ, there is the brightest display of all the divine perfections. The almighty power, the unsearchable wisdom, the boundless goodness, the inflexible justice, and inviolable truth of God, shine in this great design, with united splendour. Every attribute, that can in reason claim our veneration and esteem, as well as our thankfulness and gratitude, is here to be seen. Even the perfections of justice and mercy (which I will not call jarring attributes, as some too harshly do, but) which seem to restrain and limit each other in their exercise, are jointly illustrated, and shine more brightly by their union, than they could have done separately; and, at
the

the same time, the purity and holiness of the Divine Nature, which is the sum of them all, is deeply impressed upon the mind. So that here is every thing that can produce love; worth, and excellence to merit it, love and kindness to excite and raise it. From this it evidently appears, that he who believes in the imputed righteousness of Christ, must have a superlative love of God.

But 2dly, Lest it should be said, that many have not this view of the doctrine in question, as honourable to God, and representing him in an amiable light, but the contrary; I observe, that there must have been a discovery of the glory of God, as shining in this plan of salvation, to all who cordially embrace it. Nothing else could induce them to do so. If its enemies do not see this, and therefore set themselves against it; this confirms the different and honourable sentiments entertained by its friends; so that even supposing (what we will never grant) that this view of the amiableness of the Divine Nature, as represented in the gospel, were not well founded; yet, doubtless it is the view of those “who count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ *,” and glory in nothing but “his cross.”

The truth is, notwithstanding any cavilling objections that may be raised against it, many fa-

* Phil. iii. 8.

vours received by one to whom they are absolutely necessary, and by whom they are infinitely prized, must naturally and necessarily produce love. This will be reckoned a first principle, by every unprejudiced mind; and it is always supposed in the Holy Scriptures, where the saints are represented as under the habitual and powerful impression of love to God, for his love to them manifested in their redemption. Thus says the apostle Paul, “ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor
 “ life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,
 “ nor things present, nor things to come, nor
 “ height, nor depth, nor any other creature,
 “ shall be able to separate us from the love of
 “ God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now, is there any thing more necessary to show, that those who believe and trust in the imputed righteousness of Christ must be holy in their lives, than their being under the influence of a supreme love to God? Is not this the first and great commandment of the law, “ Thou shalt love the
 “ Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with
 “ all thy soul, and with all thy mind*?” Is not this a never-failing source of universal obedience? as they love God, will they not love their brethren also: the very worst of men, because they are the creatures of God; and the righteous more especially, because they are his saints, his

* Matt. xxii. 37.

chosen ones? Can they love God supremely, and yet voluntarily displease him, breaking his commandments, or resisting his designs? We know that love hath a quite different effect, in every other and inferior instance, endearing to us every thing related to the person who possesses our esteem and affection; how then can it be supposed so preposterous in this single case, when it is fixed on the greatest, and the best of objects?

It is a received maxim, That there can be no true love, where there is not some likeness and conformity of nature and disposition to the object beloved, and an endeavour after more. And this is a maxim that will in no case hold more infallibly, than in moral subjects. It is impossible that we can love purity, if ourselves are impure; nay, it is even impossible that we can understand it. Though an unholy person may have a very penetrating genius and capacity, may think acutely, and perhaps reason justly upon many, or most of the natural attributes of God, he can neither perceive nor admire his moral excellence. Instead of perceiving the glory of God as infinitely holy, he hates, and sets himself to oppose this part of his character, or to substitute something quite different in its room*. Or, if we can suppose
him

* This is the true reason why many so warmly oppose God's vindictive justice, and that in the face of many awful examples of

him able, or from any particular reason inclined, to tell the truth, as to what God is, he can never discern or feel his glory or beauty in being such. For why, he himself is unholy; that is to say, in other words, he supremely loves, and hath his affections habitually fixed upon something that is not God, something that is contrary to God's nature, and a breach of his law.

Let us continue to reflect a few moments upon this subject, which is of great importance, varying a little the light in which it is viewed. Let us consider what is meant by a supreme and superlative love to God. These words must have a meaning. It is not a supreme love of a certain nature, or person, called God, whom no man hath seen, and of whom we know no more but the name. In this case the old maxim would hold, "Ignoti nulla cupido;" there can be no affection, of either love or hatred, towards an object wholly unknown. A supreme love of God therefore, where it really hath place in any heart,

of it, even in the present partial and imperfect dispensation. That there are many marks of God's displeasure against sin, even in that part of his government which is at present subjected to our view, and also distinct warnings of a stricter reckoning to come, I should think, might be, to an impartial person, past all doubt: and yet, this is derided and denied by many, merely because they can never think that a perfection in the Divine Nature, for which they have no love or esteem in their own hearts. All who love God, then, must be like him; and even those who will not be what he really is, are always strongly inclined, at least, to suppose him what they themselves are.

must

must mean the love of a character in some measure understood, though not fully comprehended. In short, according to the Scriptures, it is a supreme love of the source and pattern of moral excellence, of a Being of infinite holiness and purity, with whom "evil cannot dwell." Is not this, in truth and reality, the love of holiness itself, the supreme love of it? Can we love holiness then, and not aspire after it? can we love it, and not endeavour to practise it? nay, can we love it, and not possess it? can we love holiness supremely, and live in sin habitually? it is the grossest contradiction, the most absolute impossibility. There is then a diametrical opposition between the love of God, and the service of sin. To suppose them consistent, would be supposing, that the tendency of the heart and affections might be opposite to the course of the life, or supremely fixed upon two things mutually destructive of each other; on the contrary, our Saviour justly affirms, That "no man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*."

Once more, Is not the love of God, I mean, the supreme love of God, precisely what is meant by holiness? It is not only an evidence of it, not

* Matt. vi. 24.

only a source of it, not only an important branch, but the sum and perfection of it. For what is sin in the heart, of which all evil actions are but the fruits and expressions, and from which they derive their malignity and contrariety to the divine will? Is it not the love and pursuit of inferior objects on their own account; and giving them that place in our affections which is due only to God? All sins, of whatever kind, may be easily reduced to this, and shown to be nothing else, but the alienation and estrangement of our heart and affections from God, to whom alone they are due; which, so far as it prevails, necessarily occasions a misapplication of every faculty of our minds, and of every member of our bodies, and thus a rebellion of the whole man. But whoever loves God above all, and places his chief happiness and delight in him, is truly holy; not only will be so as the effect, but really is so, by the possession of this disposition. In proportion as this love is increased and strengthened, his sanctification is carried on; and when it is compleat and triumphant, entirely free from the mixture of any baser passion, he is perfect in holiness.

It may probably occur to some readers, that this reasoning will not accord with the accounts given by many moderns of the nature and foundation of virtue. Some found it upon the present

sent prevailing tendency of our own dispositions, and make it point directly and immediately at our own happiness; others found it upon our connexions with our fellow-creatures in this state, and make it consist in benevolence of heart, and beneficence in action; others again, who approach nearer the truth, but without precision, stile it as acting towards every object, according to reason and the nature of things. Upon any of these schemes, the connexion, or rather coincidence, above-alledged, between the love of God, and virtue, or moral excellence, does not so clearly appear. This indeed seems to me the great defect of these accounts of the nature and foundation of virtue, that they keep our relation and obligations to God at a distance at least, and much out of view. But as this is the first commandment of the law which God hath revealed to man for his obedience, "Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." So, upon a fair and just examination, the supreme love of God will be found the most consistent and rational account of the nature of virtue, and the true source from which all other virtues, that are not spurious, must take their rise, and from which they derive their force and obligation: it is founded not only upon the relation of creatures to their Creator, but on the inherent excellence of the Divine Nature.

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ture. For supposing (what will scarcely be denied) that God may be at all the object of our esteem and love, it is plain, that we ought to have the highest esteem for the highest excellence, a supreme love for what is infinitely amiable; and if our affections do in any measure prefer what is less to what is more worthy, they must be, in that proportion, wrong and misplaced.

As to some of the phrases (for they are no more) which come into repute together, or in succession one after another, to express the rise and foundation of virtue, such as a sense of beauty, of harmony, of order and proportion: this is no explication of the matter at all; it is only transferring the language used with respect to sensible objects, to ethics or morality, in which it must be understood figuratively. That there is some analogy between those subjects and morality, may be easily confessed; but there are few different subjects in nature, between which as strong, or a stronger, analogy may not be traced. For example, how easy would it be to reduce all notions of morality, nay, indeed all notions of beauty in painting, or harmony in music, to truth and reality, in opposition to falshood? Wollaston's Religion of Nature Delineated is an example of this, in which he resolves the morality, or immorality, of every action, into the truth or falshood of a proposition. And,
whoever

whoever reads the book will, I dare say, be sensible, that it is just as natural and proper, as a certain noble author's rhapsodies upon beauty and harmony. In short, it were easy to shew, that none of the accounts given of the nature of virtue, have any meaning, truth or force in them; but so far as they are founded upon, or coincident with, that which I have above given from the word of God*.

Thus

* There is one late writer, David Hume, Esq; who, it must be confessed, hath excelled all that went before him in an extraordinary account of the nature of virtue. I have taken no notice above of his principles, if they may be called so, because I think both him and them worthy of the highest contempt; and would have disdained to have made mention of his name, but that it affords me an opportunity of expressing my sense of the wrong measures taken by many worthy and able men, who, in sermons and other discourses, give grave and serious answers to his writings. As to himself, that man must be beyond the reach of conviction by reasoning, who is capable of such an insult upon reason itself, and human nature, as to rank all natural advantages, mental and corporeal, among the virtues, and their contraries among the vices. Thus he hath expressly named wit, genius, health, cleanliness, taper legs, and broad shoulders among his virtues; diseases he also makes vices; and consistently enough, indeed, takes notice of the infectious nature of some diseases, which, I suppose, he reckons an aggravation of the crime. And, as to mankind in general, if they were at that pass as to need a refutation of such nonsense, as well as impiety, it would be in vain to reason with them at all. If I were to contrive an answer to this writer, it would be a visible, instead of a legible answer: it would be to employ a painter to make a portrait of him from the life; to encompass him with a few hieroglyphics, which it would not be difficult to devise; to inscribe upon his breast these words, **HEALTH, CLEANLINESS, and BROAD SHOULDERS;** and put the following sentence in his mouth, which he hath adopted from a French author, **“ FEMALE INFIDELITY: ”** when

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Thus I have shown, that those who believe the doctrine of imputed righteousness must be most holy in their lives; that the obligations to obedience are not weakened, but strengthened and confirmed by it. This any impartial person may be convinced of, who will reflect, that it is hardly possible to conceive an obligation to duty, of any kind, which may not be reduced to one or other of those above-named: and, if I am not mistaken, none of them can operate so strongly upon any other scheme, as that which is here espoused, and which is so evidently founded on the Scriptures of truth.

There is, however, one general consideration, which it would be wrong to omit, in shewing the friendly influence of this doctrine upon holiness of life, although it doth not so properly fall under the notion of a direct obligation; that is, the great encouragement given in it to the study of purity and holiness by the prospect of success. Despair of success cuts the sinews of diligence

“when it is known is a small matter, and when it is not known, is nothing.” This would be very proper when applied to his writings, who, as well as his friend and coadjutor without a name, makes “our most important reasonings upon many subjects to rest ultimately upon sense and feeling.” It is probable some over delicate persons will think this is not treating him with sufficient decency; but till there be a plan agreed upon, of the measures of decency due from infidels to Christians, and from Christians to infidels, whether he does not deserve far worse treatment from any who believe the gospel, I leave to the judgment of those who will read his writings.

in

in every enterprize. And particularly upon the subject of religion, nothing more effectually enervates our resolutions, and leads to a sullen, despondent neglect of duty, than an opinion that we shall not succeed in attempting it, or shall not be accepted in our endeavours after it, or our imperfect attainments in it. But the doctrine of justification by the free grace of God, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," gives the greatest encouragement to all who will return to their duty. This encouragement naturally divides itself into two branches; 1st, The sure hope of acceptance through Christ. 2dly, The powerful and effectual aid provided for them in the Holy Spirit, which he hath purchased, and bestows for their sanctification.

1st, The sure hope of acceptance through Christ Jesus. Although sin hath greatly blinded the minds of men, there is still so much of "the work of the law written in their hearts," as must make them sensible that in many things they offend, and must give them ground of solicitude and fear, while they expect to be justified by their own merits. Accordingly we find, that except the grossest and boldest infidels, of which sort this age has furnished some examples*, all classes

* Vide Essays on the principles of morality and natural religion: These essays conclude with an address to the Supreme Being,

classes of men confess themselves guilty of many sins, faults, or failings; some expressing themselves in a stronger, and some in a softer style, according to the greater or lesser degree of the depravation of natural conscience. If there is any meaning then in these words, they must be liable to the displeasure of God in some respects, for which they cannot themselves atone; and must therefore labour under, at least, much uncertainty as to their acceptance. This must weaken their hands, and slacken their diligence, in an attempt so precarious in its issue.

Perhaps some may say, that this is only levelled against those who deny all satisfaction, or all use of the merit of Christ, but not against those who expect to be justified by their own merit so far as it goes, and trust in their Saviour for making up what is wanting in themselves. But of such I would ask, how they shall be satisfied, that they have gone as far with their own merit as is requisite, if there is any stress to be laid upon it at all? Will they say, as some foolishly do, that they do all in their power, and trust in Christ for supplying what may be still deficient? If they dare resolutely stand to this plea at the last day, when God shall judge the se-

Being, which contains the following words; "What mortals
 " term sin, thou pronouncest to be only error; for moral evil
 " vanishes, in some measure, from before thy more perfect sight."

crets

crets of all hearts, that they have done all in their power, there is really nothing wanting to them; they need no Saviour, they need no pardon. But this is what no mere man that ever lived can say with truth. So that upon any scheme, but an entire reliance on the merits of Christ for justification before God, there must still be a dreadful uncertainty, inconsistent with that liberal and ingenuous freedom with which the children of God love and serve him. These, strongly penetrated with a sense of duty and obligation, deeply humbled under a sense of sin, and resting on the perfect atonement made by their Saviour and substitute, serve him with alacrity and pleasure, wearing the bonds of love. And, knowing the weakness of their best services while here, they long for that blessed time when they shall be made perfectly holy, and yet shall for ever acknowledge themselves indebted, for their place in heaven, and their continuance there, to the grace of God, and the love of their Redeemer.

The other branch of the encouragement which believers in Christ have to diligence in duty, is the promise of the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, and guide them to all duty. This promise is expressly made to believers, and their seed after them, in every age of the church, to the end of the world. Thus says the apostle Peter, "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost;

“ Ghost ; for the promise is to you, and to
 “ your children, and to all that are afar off,
 “ even as many as the Lord our God shall
 “ call *.” And it is to this plentiful effusion of
 the Spirit, that the prophets ascribe the purity
 and prosperity of the church in the latter days.
 “ For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty,
 “ and floods upon the dry ground : I will pour
 “ my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon
 “ thine offspring, and they shall spring up as
 “ among the grass, as willows by the water-
 “ courses †.”

I am sensible, that the nature and form of the
 argument doth not permit me at once to suppose
 the truth of this, and to make use of the direct
 agency and effectual operation of the Spirit of
 God to prove the holiness of saints. But it may
 be easily made appear, that the belief and persua-
 sion of this must have the strongest influence in
 animating their own endeavours. What more
 proper for such a purpose than the belief of an
 almighty aid, certainly to be exerted in their
 behalf? Must not this invigorate their powers,
 and preserve them from sinking through fear of
 the number and strength of their adversaries?
 Nothing but ignorance of themselves can make
 them boast of their own strength. The result of
 experience in the study of holiness, must be a

* Acts ii. 38, 39.

† Is. xli. 3, 4.

humbling

humbling conviction of the force of temptation, and strength of passion on the one hand, and the weakness and feebleness of human reason and resolution on the other. Must it not then be of the greatest advantage to believers, to be under an habitual persuasion of the presence and operation of the Spirit of God to sanctify them wholly? Without this the attempt would be altogether vain; but this makes the exhortation come with peculiar force and energy, “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure* *.”

It will be a support to the present argument to observe, that some sense of the weakness of human nature, and its inequality to any thing arduous and difficult, seems to have been pretty universal in every country and in every age of the world. Thus among the ancient Heathens, of whom we have the fullest account, all great enterprizes were supposed to be undertaken at the instigation, and executed by the assistance, of some superior power. Their poets always gave out, that themselves were inspired, and their hero directed by some deity; and moderns generally suppose, that the very imagination of this had no small influence on the success of the attempt. The interposition of deities was, indeed,

* Phil: ii: 12, 13.

so remarkable in the most eminent ancient poets, that it has been reckoned a branch of their art, distinguished by a particular name, called the machinery, and is now inseparably joined, at least, to one species of poetry. Nay, it was a pretty general belief among some nations, that every particular person had an angel, spirit, or genius, to whose care he was committed, who assisted him in difficulty, and protected him in danger. Does not all this then evidently prove, that a persuasion of superior aid must have the most happy influence on our activity and diligence in duty, and our progress in holiness? Doth it not make it reasonable to expect, that those who trust to nothing better than their own strength, will be proportionably low in their attempts, and deficient in their success; but that those whose eyes are fixed for direction upon God, and who live in a continual dependence on his grace, will become truly partakers of a divine nature?

Now, is not this the distinguishing characteristic of the scheme of redemption by free grace, that it gives less to man, and more to God, than any other plan? It seems indeed particularly to point at this very design in every part of it, to abate the pride of man, and to exalt the grace of God. Self-denial is the first condition of the gospel, and a renunciation of all self-dependence is the lesson continued through the whole.

“ Surely

“ Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and
 “ strength,” may be called the motto of every
 Christian, is a short and comprehensive summary
 of his faith, and the great foundation of his hope
 and trust. As then it has been shewn, that he
 is habitually inclined to obedience, with what
 alacrity and vigour will he apply himself to his
 duty, since he believes that Almighty power is
 constantly engaged in his behalf; and that how-
 ever unable he may be of himself, for any thing
 that is good, yet a thorough and effectual
 change will be wrought in him by divine power?
 What a firmness and fortitude must be inspired
 by the following passage of the prophet Isaiah,
 and other promises in the same strain? “ Hast
 “ thou not known, hast thou not heard, that
 “ the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends
 “ of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?
 “ there is no searching of his understanding.
 “ He giveth power to the faint; and to them
 “ that have no might he increaseth strength.
 “ Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
 “ and the young men shall utterly fall. But
 “ they that wait on the Lord shall renew their
 “ strength: they shall mount up with wings
 “ as eagles; they shall run and not be weary,
 “ they shall walk and not faint*.”

* Is. xl. 28—37.

But

But now, perhaps, after all the advantages of this doctrine pointed out in the preceding discourse, some will be ready to ask me, if it cannot possibly be applied to the encouragement of impiety, or serve to foster a supine sloth and negligence? To this I am ready to answer, By some who profess it, it may; but by those who really believe it, it never can. There is no part of the word, or providence of God, that may not be, or that hath not frequently in fact been, abused to bad purposes, by wicked men under the dominion of their lusts. But, in order to remove ambiguity, it is proper to observe, that wherever there is a national profession of any religious principles, there must be many who are not believers, in any other sense than that they have been accustomed to hear such and such things asserted, have never enquired into nor doubted, seldom even thought of them, and so do not disbelieve them. But there is a great difference between such a traditionary belief as may produce a customary profession, and such a real and inward persuasion as will change the heart, and influence the practice. That there may be some of the first sort of believers in the doctrine of imputed righteousness, who are not holy, or perhaps abuse it, ill understood, to unholiness, I am willing to allow; but that all those who believe it upon real and personal conviction, must be most conscientious

scientific in the practice of every moral duty, I hope, hath been clearly made appear in the preceding pages.

The above is all that was first intended, in the prosecution of this argument: but, perhaps, it will not be improper, before dismissing the subject, to make a few reflections upon the reception which it hath met with, and must still expect to meet with in the world; upon its importance and proper application.

It is very certain, being neither denied by friends nor enemies, that this doctrine hath, in all ages, not only been attacked with the weapons of human wisdom, but generally also loaded with much reproach and contempt. After therefore it hath been so far defended, as may satisfy every impartial mind, and its influence upon practice demonstrated, I observe, that whatever impression this fact may make upon others, it seems to me no small confirmation of its truth, as coming from God, that it is contrary to the spirit of the world. This is both agreeable to Scripture and to sound reason. The doctrine of "Christ crucified," the apostle Paul tells us, "was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness *." And, speaking of the effect of the publication of this doctrine, he says, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not

* 2 Cor. ii. 14.

" many

“ many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty,
 “ ty, not many noble are called. But God hath
 “ chosen the foolish things of the world to con-
 “ found the wise; and God hath chosen the
 “ weak things of the world to confound the
 “ things which are mighty; and base things of
 “ the world, and things which are despised,
 “ hath God chosen, yea, and things which are
 “ not, to bring to nought things that are*.”

This we are not to understand, as if the apostle yielded, that the gospel was not agreeable to true wisdom, or that the proper and legitimate use of human wisdom would not lead us to embrace it: but it contains a strong intimation of a truth not commonly attended to, that great natural abilities have pretty much the same influence on the moral character with great wealth or temporal prosperity. They are both apt to intoxicate the mind, and lead to pride, arrogance, and self-conceit: and perhaps intellectual pride is as great an obstruction to the discovery of truth, as any bad disposition whatsoever. We are also taught, that God ordered and disposed of things in this manner, for the wise ends of his providence, for the subjection of the arrogance and boasted wisdom of men; or in the words of the apostle, “ That no flesh should glory in his presence.” The reception then which this doc-

* 1. Cor. i. 26—28.

trine usually meets with, should be so far from remaining as a prejudice or objection against its truth or utility, that, on the contrary, it should contribute to satisfy us, that it is the real and genuine doctrine of Christ, since it meets with the same sort of opposition, and from the same quarter, with which this was encountered at its first publication.

And indeed, besides this exact correspondence between the event, and what the Scripture gives us reason to expect, as to the reception of the gospel in the world, I apprehend it ought to be a general prejudice in favour of its truth, considering the original it claims, that it doth not carry on it any of the marks of human wisdom. It seems to lie (if I may so speak) quite out of the way of human imagination and contrivance, and is diametrically opposite, in its whole tendency, to the most prevailing human inclination, viz. self-esteem, pride, and vain-glory. This indeed is the true reason why this doctrine is so unacceptable to the world, especially the ambitious part of it, that it is directly levelled against their corrupt affections. It gives a view of the holiness, purity, and justice of God, which is intolerable to all those who are not willing to break their league with sin and vanity. And when it is truly complied with, it not only divorces men from their former attachment to sin and sensuality, but will not suffer them to glory, even in their new character. All who submit unfeignedly
to

to the gospel, both feel and confess themselves wholly indebted for forgiveness and acceptance, for their present holiness and their future happiness, to the free, unmerited grace of God. How hard such a sacrifice is, none can conceive who have not some acquaintance with vital, experimental religion. Now, what is the most natural inference from this? Is it not, that we have not the smallest reason to suspect this doctrine to be a "cunningly devised fable," but may rest assured, that it is "the wisdom and the power" of God for salvation, to every one that believeth*.

This leads me to observe, That if the reasoning which the reader hath perused upon this subject be just and conclusive, there is one circumstance in which this "doctrine according to godliness" essentially differs from all other schemes or systems of morality. It is, that any of these systems a man may understand, embrace and defend, without having his heart made better, or his morals secured or improved by it at all; whereas it is impossible, that any man can really, and from the heart, embrace the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness, without being sanctified by it, "dead to sin, and alive to God." That the first of these assertions is true, the lives and characters of some noted writers on the foundation of morality, have been, and are an unde-

* Rom. i. 16.

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niable proof: some of them do indeed expressly yield it; and it is evidently yielded, by implication, in all the late writings, where there is so frequent mention of the small influence that speculation has upon practice. On this is founded what a late acute and eminent writer * justly calls the master prejudice of this age, viz. "The innocence of error." This may as well be expressed by its counterpart, the unprofitableness or inefficacy of truth, which surely ought to be but a weak recommendation of what is called truth by those who hold such an opinion.

That the other assertion is just, hath been the point undertaken to be made out in this essay: and whoever will but consider how unacceptable this doctrine is to mankind in general, may be satisfied that there can be no effectual inducement to embrace it, till there be such a discovery and sense of the evil and danger of sin, as is utterly inconsistent with a voluntary continuance in it. The apparent state of the visible church, in which vice and wickedness so shamefully abound, will be no objection to this, if what I hinted above be recollected †, that there is a great difference between a nominal or customary profession, and real belief. As to the few more zealous and eminent assertors of this doctrine, who sometimes greatly dishonour their profession, the answer is easy. They are hypocrites by whom in-

* Mr. Warburton.

† See page 64.

deed

deed great “ offences do come ;” and the weak and unstable fall over the stumbling-block, and are tempted to doubt the reality of religion, by this discovery of the falshood of its professors. But such can never be fairly ranked among believers, whose garb and habit they only treacherously wore, for some time, while they were in the interest of another master *. We may say of them as the apostle John says, “ They went out from us,

* Perhaps some may think the late accounts published of the Moravians an objection to the justness of this representation. They are said to be great assertors of the doctrine of imputed righteousness ; and yet there have not only appeared some bad men among them, but they are universally charged as a sect with most impious and scandalous practices. Perhaps candour and charity might have led us to suppose, that most, or all these accusations, were calumnious, if they had been affirmed by none but avowed enemies to the doctrines which they espouse ; as the first Christians were charged by their enemies with eating human sacrifices, when they met in private to celebrate the Lord’s supper. But the case it seems is otherwise here ; for some unsuspected accusers have appeared, whom none can imagine prejudiced against them for embracing the doctrine of imputed righteousness. I confess myself to have so little acquaintance with those Hernhutters, as they are called, either as to their principles or practices, that I cannot very fully handle the subject ; but, if there is no other objection to what is affirmed above, no doubt an acquaintance with the true state of the case would enable us easily to remove this. Perhaps, after all, the bad practices charged against them, may be only the consequence of some designing persons getting in among them, and a great plurality may be innocent, or, at least, comparatively so. But however this be, it is not certain (at least to me) that they really embrace the same doctrine with us : they do indeed talk much of the Lamb, speak of hiding themselves in his wounds, &c. but I think their language is peculiar to themselves, and by no means the phraseology either of Scripture, or of any other sect of Christians. Besides, as Count Zinzendorf, their leader, takes upon him to be a prophet, it is probable, they are just a set of deluded people, drawn away by his art, who may much more properly be said to believe in him, than in Christ.

“ but

“ but they were not of us ; for if they had been
 “ of us, they would no doubt have continued with
 “ us, but they went out that they might be
 “ made manifest that they were not all of us*.”

But this it not all ; for the reception of the doctrine of imputed righteousness is not merely to be considered as the best means, comparatively, of producing, preserving and increasing our sanctification and purity, as sure and effectual, while others are precarious, but it is the only way, and all others are absolutely insufficient for the purpose. If this be indeed the doctrine of Christ, the scripture-method of salvation, then it is not only true, but a fundamental truth. Of this we are frequently and solemnly assured in the word of God. “ I am the way (says our Saviour) and “ the truth, and the life ; no man cometh un- “ to the Father but by me †.” So say the apostles Peter and John, “ Neither is there “ salvation in any other : for there is none other “ name under heaven, given among men, where- “ by we must be saved ‡.” It is therefore in vain for any to expect an effectual change of life, but by an acquaintance with Christ, and him crucified. We have indeed the clearest evidence from experience, that no human reason, no argument whatever, drawn from worldly expediency, is at all sufficient to contend with violent and

* 1 John ii. 19.

† John xiv. 6.

‡ Acts iv. 12.

sinful habits. We see many examples of persons of excellent understanding and knowledge in other matters, nay, who can reason strongly and justly upon the bad consequences of vice in others, sometimes even in themselves, who will yet go on to ruin their name, family, fortune and health, while they are slaves to evil habits: nothing will change them but the grace of God.

And as we have seen above, that our own righteousness in its best state is wholly ineffectual for our acceptance with God, so all who have any expectations of this kind from it plainly show, that they have such defective views of the extent and obligation of the divine law, as are inconsistent with an unfeigned universal submission to it. This is a matter of the last importance, and ought to be particularly recommended to the serious consideration of such as may have, at some times, some imperfect convictions; such as from a weariness and satiety of sinning may give a temporary preference to a life of religion, and raise a feeble ineffectual wish with Balaam, that they might "die the death of the righteous." They ought to be told that no endeavours to be a little better than before, no abstinence from some sins as a kind of atonement for others retained, no resolutions taken in their own strength, no righteousness of their own offered or trusted in as the matter of their justification, will be accepted,

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cepted, or is worthy of being so; that nothing will be truly effectual, till they see their lost condition, and believe in Christ, first for pardon, and then for sanctification, "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved *." If they have any other plea, any other ground of hope and trust, it shall undoubtedly fail them; they must remain under a sentence of just and legal condemnation, and shall finally perish; for "he that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him, John iii. 36 †."

I am

* Eph. i. 6.

† The application of these passages of Scripture, to the particular principles above maintained, will, perhaps, be thought to include in it a very severe and uncharitable condemnation of many Christians, who differ in judgment upon the point of justification. And indeed I pretend no great friendship to the sentiments so frequently expressed of late, "That it is a small matter what a man believes, if his life be good." The assertion might perhaps be allowed, if it did not contain a foolish and unreasonable supposition, that a man may believe wrong, and yet lead as good a life as he that believes right; the contrary to which will always be expected by him who gives credit to the word of God, that his people are "sanctified through the truth." As to Socinians and Pelagians, who are the greatest opposers of the truths above defended, I never did esteem them to be Christians at all; so the consequence, with regard to them, may be easily admitted. But it will be thought hard to say the same thing of the Arminians. However, if the righteousness of Christ is the only ground of our justification, and the reception of him in this character the true principle of sanctification, I do not see how we can avoid concluding the danger of those who act upon any other plan. And yet I am persuaded there have been, and are many good men among them: which may be accounted for in this manner, that their hearts are better than their under-

I am naturally led to conclude this subject, by observing, that the importance, efficacy and necessity of the imputed righteousness of Christ, shews how much it is the duty of all ministers of the gospel, to make it the main and leading theme of their sermons. The preaching of the gospel is by the apostle Paul, in a very just and expressive manner, stiled, preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ." In him every prophecy, precept, promise and truth is centered. His character and work as a Saviour is held forth in a variety of lights in the sacred oracles, and in every opening or view that is given us, so to speak, of the dispensations of divine providence and grace, he is the chief figure, or the termination of the prospect. If therefore we would know what esteem is due to our Redeemer in our hearts, and how high a place he ought to hold in

standings; and they are habitually under the government of principles, which, through some mistaken views, and groundless fears of their abuse, they speak of more sparingly, or rather seem to establish the contrary positions. The proof of this assertion I take from their own writings, particularly from the difference between their sermons and other discourses, and those forms of prayer which they have drawn up, and not only recommended to others, but left behind them as a witness of their own exercise in their closets. If they be supposed to feel the sentiments which they express in their prayers, it can easily be made appear that these sentiments can only be dictated by the doctrine of free grace. If what they say of themselves be true in its natural and obvious meaning, and if they believe it, which charity obliges us to suppose, it must be altogether vain to lay the least stress upon their own righteousness for their acceptance with God.

OUR

JUSTIFICATION. 77

our views of religion, let us observe the regard paid to him by the sacred writers. They derive almost all their motives to every moral duty, from what he hath done, and is still doing for us, and seem to delight even in the repetition of his name. I am persuaded those who are accustomed to the devout and serious perusal of the word of God, will not reckon it "enthusiasm," when I say, that these writers appear to be warmed and elevated above their ordinary measure, when they celebrate his salvation; and that both in the old and new testament, wherever we meet with any passage singularly lofty and sublime, there we may be sure that Christ the Redeemer is the immediate theme.

Justification by the free grace of God, thro' the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, was the doctrine taught among Christians, in the earliest and purest ages of the church. And their departure from it was the prelude to that universal corruption of faith and worship, that relaxation of discipline, and dissolution of manners, which took place in the ages following. It is also very remarkable, that this doctrine was always fully and distinctly taught in those churches which never submitted to the tyranny, or received the corruptions of the Romish Antichrist; I mean the churches of the Piedmontese vallies, which by so many judicious writers, are supposed to be the two

witnesſes mentioned in the Revelation, who fled into the wilderneſs from the perfecution of the beaſt, and prophesied in ſackcloth. The accounts which have been tranſmitted to us of the principles held by them, long before the reformation, plainly ſhow, that they maintained this doctrine from the beginning. And as it is well known that the reformation took its firſt riſe from the groſs and ſcandalous application of the doctrine of merit in indulgencies, ſo all the reformers, without exception, were ſtrenuous aſſertors of free grace. This was reckoned by them “*articulus ſtantis aut cadentis eccleſiæ,*” by which the church muſt ſtand or fall. Particularly, our reformers in both parts of this iſland agreed in preaching the ſame doctrine, and the eminent piety of our fathers is a ſtanding evidence of its force and efficacy.

It doth not perhaps become, and probably it would not be ſafe for me to enter into a particular examination of the manner of preaching in the preſent age; and therefore my reflections upon that ſubject ſhall be very few and general. What is moſt obvious in our preſent ſituation, and what ought to affect Chriſtians with moſt concern, is, the great prevalence of infidelity. This is the more ſurpriſing, that we have never wanted, and do not at preſent want, many able and eminent writers to ſtand up in defence of the
gofpel,

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gospel, and refute the changeable and inconsistent reasonings of infidels, whatever form they shall from time to time, think fit to assume, and on whatever principles they shall pretend to build. But, I am afraid, the best defence of all is but too much neglected, viz. Zealous assiduous preaching the great and fundamental truths of the gospel, the lost condemned state of man by nature, and the necessity of pardon through the righteousness, and renovation by the Spirit, of Christ. This would make a far greater number of those who call themselves by the name of Christ, Christians indeed. And the visible efficacy of his doctrine, would be a sensible demonstration of its truth and divine original. If these truths are not contradicted, it may be safely said, that they are by many kept more out of view than formerly. And surely we have no great cause to boast of our improvements in the preaching art, if its goodness is to be determined, like that of a tree, not by its blossoms, but its fruits.

There is one observation which may satisfy us, that the preaching of the cross of Christ will most effectually promote real reformation. It is, that those preachers who (to say no more) approach nearest to making our own merit and obedience the ground of our acceptance with God, very seldom, if ever, give any alarm to the consciences of their hearers. Let them recommend ever so

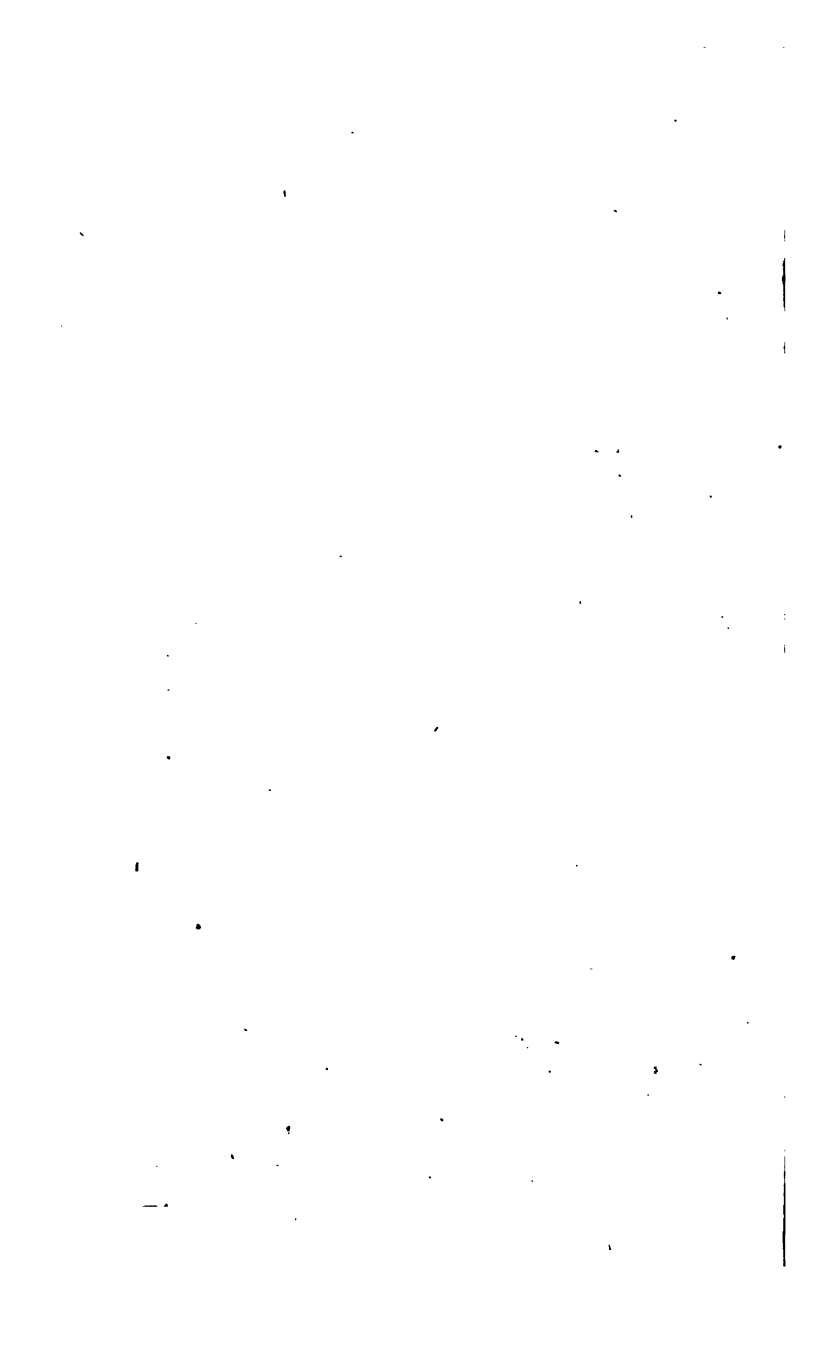
pure and high a standard of morals, they are heard without fear, and, if they preach elegantly, with pleasure, even by the most profligate. To such preachers, all vain worldly-minded people, usually attach themselves, where they have not cast off the very form of religion; but most part of serious Christians, together with professing hypocrites, who cannot easily be distinguished in this world, always follow preachers of another strain. It is easy to see the reason of this from what hath been said above; there are none who set the strictness and obligation of the law, the holiness and justice of God, in so awful a light, as those who believe there is no shelter from the sanction of the law, and the wrath of an offended God, but in the blood of Christ. Perhaps, I am already ensnared and exposed to censure, by affirming, that there are among us preachers of different strains. But it is so certain a truth, that I cannot deny it; and so important, that I will not disguise it.

Upon the whole, as the present aspect of public affairs, as the state of the world, and character of the age, loudly call upon all of every station to exert themselves with diligence for the support and revival of truth and righteousness: I hope the ministers of the gospel will promote this end, by zealously labouring to bring men to the saving knowledge of Christ, “the way, and
“the

“ the truth, and the life — the foundation—
 “ the tried stone—the precious corner stone,”
 the strength and security of the building. To
 deny, explain away, or neglect to impart the
 truths of the everlasting gospel, is the way to
 leave the world in wickedness; but, by preach-
 ing them in purity, and with simplicity, which,
 we have reason to think, will be accompanied
 with “ the demonstration of the Spirit,” sin-
 ners are reconciled unto God, the power of sin is
 broken in them, the divine image is formed in
 them, and upon these truths their hopes of eter-
 nal life must rest and depend. Let us be ever
 ready to say with the apostle Paul, “ God for-
 “ bid that I should glory, save in the cross of our
 “ Lord Jesus Christ*.” And let us quicken our
 diligence, and animate our endeavours, by expres-
 sing, with the psalmist David, our faith in the
 perpetuity of his kingdom. “ His name shall
 “ endure for ever: his name shall be continued
 “ as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed
 “ in him; all nations shall call him blessed.
 “ Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel,
 “ who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be
 “ his glorious name for ever; and let the whole
 “ earth be filled with his glory. Amen and
 “ Amen †.”

* Gal. vi. 14.

† Psal. lxxii. 17, 18; 19.



THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST.

A

S E R M O N,

PREACHED BEFORE

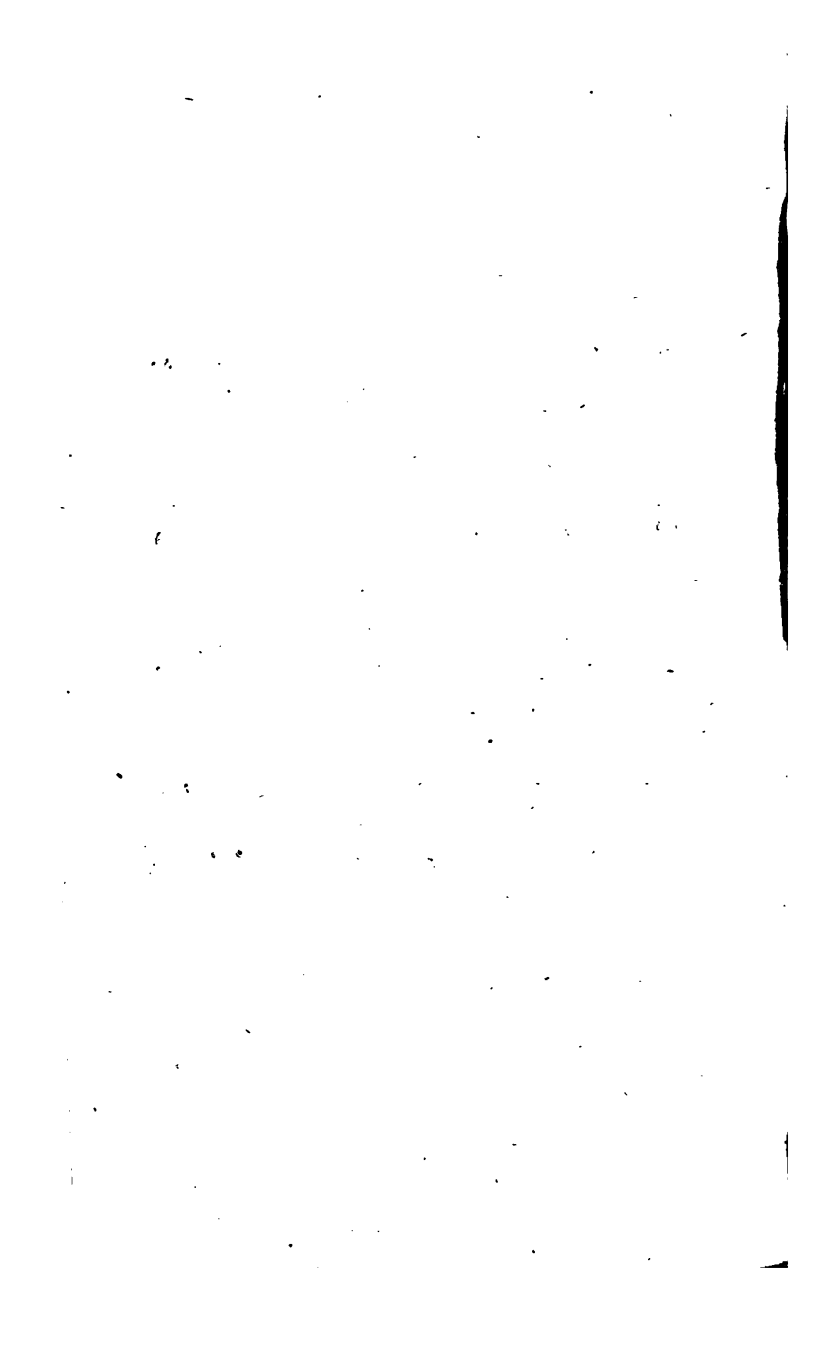
The Society in SCOTLAND for propagating CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

In the HIGH CHURCH of Edinburgh.

On Monday, January 2, 1758.

E 6

ACTS





ACTS iv. 12.

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.

IT is not easy to conceive any subject, at once more important in itself, more seasonable in this age, and more suited to the design of the present meeting, than the absolute necessity of salvation through CHRIST. We live in an age in which (as is often complained) infidelity greatly prevails; but yet in which the cause of truth hath much less to fear from the assaults of its open enemies, than from the treachery of its pretended advocates. The latest infidel writers have carried their own scheme to such perfection, or extravagance, that it must discredit the cause in the eye of every sober judge*. And indeed
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* See David Hume's writings on morals throughout; where, besides leaving out entirely our duty to God, which he hath in common with many other late writers, he expressly founds justice upon power and conveniency, derides chastity, and turns many of the most important virtues into vices. See also Essays.

the gospel can scarce receive a greater injury, than when any professing attachment to it, condescend to enter the lists with such absurdities, or give ground of suspicion that they stand in need of a serious refutation.

But there is another quarter from which we have much greater reason to apprehend danger, viz. that class of men, who, being nominal Christians, disguise, or alter the gospel, in order to defend it. These often endeavour to give such views of Christianity, as will render it palatable to a corrupt worldly mind; and instead of abasing, will sooth and gratify the pride of man. Hence the unnatural mixture often to be seen of modern philosophy with ancient Christianity. Hence the fundamental doctrines of the gospel are softened, concealed, or denied; as, the lost and guilty state of man by nature, his liableness to everlasting misery, and the necessity of that satisfaction and ransom which was paid by our Redeemer when he died upon the cross. Instead of these, are we not many times presented with a character of Christ

on the principles of morality and natural religion; the author of which, at one decisive blow, takes away all sin, by founding virtue on a delusive feeling. These writings are far from being hurtful in proportion to the intention of their authors: for though the principles contained in them are often retained in conversation, yet it is only by way of amusement, on account of their boldness or novelty, not one in an hundred appearing to have any serious conviction of their truth.

as a teacher only, and not a Saviour; as one excellently qualified to reform the abuses that had some how or other crept into the world, but the real source of which is hardly confessed, and never willingly brought into view? Is not our blessed Redeemer thereby put on a level, and expressly classed with mortal reformers? Perhaps indeed, a small compliment of superiority is paid him; which, however, there is reason to suspect arises more from a prudent compliance with established faith, than from any inward and cordial esteem.

What could be reasonably expected as the effect of such conduct? No other than we find by experience hath actually taken place, that a cause so ill defended must daily lose ground. The nearer Christianity is brought to the principles of infidels to solicit their esteem, the less occasion will they see for it at all; and when it is perverted from its original purpose, it can expect no countenance from its real author. The truth is, if there be no more in the gospel than many by their language and writings would lead us to conceive, it is of small consequence whether it be embraced or not; and there can be little merit in a society who have this as the design of their union, to spread and propagate Christian knowledge. But very different are the sentiments expressed by the apostle Peter in the text; where,
speaking

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speaking of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, he says,
“ Neither is there salvation in any other: for
“ there is none other name under heaven given
“ among men whereby we must be saved.”

I am sensible, there are some of the very persons hinted at above, who endeavour to explain away this text, and give it a very different meaning from that in which you will easily perceive I understand it. They make salvation to refer to the cure recorded in the preceding chapter, wrought upon the lame man? as if the apostle had said, Neither is there a power of healing in any other, &c. This is but one instance among many of the force and constraint they put upon Scripture, in order to accommodate it to their own sentiments. I shall not waste your time by a tedious refutation of this criticism, -as the sense I affix to the words will be sufficiently supported by what shall follow on the subject. They appear to me plainly to affirm, that there is no other way by which sinners of mankind can escape everlasting misery, but through Christ.

In discoursing on this subject, I propose, thro' divine assistance,

I. After a little illustrating the meaning of the assertion, to establish and confirm its truth from the word of God.

H. To

II. To make a few reflections on this scheme, and shew, that it is not only most self-consistent, but most agreeable to the other parts of Scripture, as well as to the visible state of the world; and therefore that those who, in reasoning with infidels, depart from it in any measure, do thereby betray the cause which they profess to support.

III. I shall make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I return to the first of these.

And as to the meaning of the assertion, the word saving or salvation evidently supposes a state of misery from which our deliverance must be wrought; and therefore no more than the full meaning of the passage is expressed in what follows, That all the posterity of Adam are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; alienated in heart from the love of God, and exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure. That they have not only access to salvation through Christ, but that in this work he hath no rival; it is his, exclusive of all others: so that no man, whatever be his character, or whatever be his hope, shall enter into rest, unless he be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

Now, that all mankind are by nature in a state of guilt and condemnation, is evident from
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 the whole strain of the holy Scriptures. This originally constituted the necessity of a Saviour, and alone illustrates the love and mercy of God in the appearance of his Son in our nature. Unless this is supposed, the whole dispensations of the grace of God, both in the old testament and in the new, lose their beauty, and lose their meaning; nay, and would be justly esteemed foolishness, as they are in fact by all who see not this foundation upon which they are built. As our first parents, and the earth for their sakes, were laid under a curse immediately after the original transgression; so the effects of this apostacy on their posterity are amply declared in Scripture. We have this repeated testimony from God himself concerning the old world, “ And God saw
 “ that the wickedness of man was great in the
 “ earth, and that every imagination of the
 “ thoughts of his heart was only evil continu-
 “ ally*.” And again, “ And the Lord said in
 “ his heart, I will not again curse the ground
 “ any more for man’s sake; for the imagination
 “ of man’s heart is evil from his youth †.”

The rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic dispensation also, together with the whole history of providence contained in the old testament, suppose the guilt and impurity of our nature. But the gospel, as it is in all respects a clearer dispen-

* Gen. vi. 5.

† Gen. viii. 21.

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sation than the former, so it is most full and express upon this subject. Instead of enumerating many passages, we may consult the epistle of the apostle Paul to the Romans, where there is a distinct and laboured illustration of the guilt and apostacy of all mankind ; towards the conclusion of which he thus expresses himself : “ For we
 “ before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they
 “ are all under sin ; as it is written, There is
 “ none righteous, no not one : there is none that
 “ understandeth, there is none that seeketh after
 “ God. They are all gone out of the way,
 “ they are together become unprofitable ; there
 “ is none that doth good, no not one *.”—And
 a little after, “ That every mouth may be stop-
 “ ped, and all the world become guilty before
 “ God †.” To this I shall only add one passage
 from the same apostle : “ Among whom also we
 “ had our conversation in times past, in the lusts
 “ of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh,
 “ and of the mind ; and were by nature chil-
 “ dren of wrath, even as others ‡.”

That the same Scriptures point out to us one only remedy for this our misery, is equally evident. Christ Jesus was promised to our first parents under the designation of the seed of the woman, who should bruise the head of the serpent. He is afterwards promised to Abraham as his seed,

* Rom. iii. 9—12. † Rom. iii. 19. ‡ Eph. ii. 2.

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 in whom all the nations of the earth should be bleffed; to Jacob as Shiloh, to whom the gathering of the people should be. He is pointed out by Moses as the great prophet that should come into the world. And unless we suppose a typical reference to Christ in the legal washings, sacrifices, and other services, they will appear altogether unworthy of God, and altogether insufficient for the purposes for which they were used. This indeed is affirmed by the apostle to the Hebrews, “ For it is not possible that the blood “ of bulls and of goats shall take away sins *.” In the later prophets, there are many distinct and particular, many high and magnificent descriptions of the glory of Christ’s person, and the greatness of his work. The attention and expectation of every believer is directed to him; and he is styled “ the desire of all nations †.”

And in the new testament, at his conception it is said, “ Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for “ he shall save his people from their sins ‡.” At his entrance on his public ministry, he is thus designed by John the Baptist, “ Behold the “ Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the “ world §.” The great design of his appearing in our nature, is declared in many passages of Scripture. And as salvation is promised to those

* Heb. x. 4.

† Hag. ii. 6.

‡ Matt. i. 21.

§ John i. 29.

who

who believe, so the condemnation of all unbelievers is necessarily implied as its counter-part, and often expressly affirmed. Thus the apostle John represents our Saviour himself as teaching, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not PERISH, but have everlasting life *." And when he gave commission to his disciples to preach the gospel, it was in these terms: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned †." The very meaning of the word Gospel is glad tidings; importing not only the great, but the distinguishing happiness of those who hear the message, and comply with the call. The apostles, who spread these glad tidings through the world, considered themselves as bringing salvation to those who before sat in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death. And by the following description given by the apostle Paul of the state of the Ephesians before conversion, may be seen what view he had of the condition of all who knew not God, as well as who believed not the gospel, "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the common-wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of pro-

* John iii. 16.

† Mark xvi. 15, 16.

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“mife, having no hope, and without God in
“the world *.”—From the above summary, I
hope it clearly appears, that, according to the
Scriptures, there is no falvation in any other
than in Jefus Chrift of Nazareth.

It will, however, be proper, for the further
illuftration of this fubject, to confider a little to
what this doctrine ftands oppofed. And though
it is impoffible diftinctly to enumerate every thing
that may in fome fhape or other be put in Chrift’s
room, or attempt to rob him of his glory as a
Saviour; yet, in general, they may all be re-
duced to the two following heads: 1ft, Falfe re-
ligions, and uninftituted rites; adly, Self-righ-
teoufnefs, or the merit of our own defective
obedience to the moral law. It is neceffary to
confider each of thefe by itfelf, and to ftate the
bounds between them: for however little rela-
tion they may feem to have one to another,
they are often mingled together in our apprehen-
fions, and mutually fupport and ftrenghthen each
other’s caufe.

In the firft place, then, All worfhip of falfe
gods, holding for truth what hath not the ftamp
of divine authority, and all uncommanded wor-
fhip, be the object of it what it will, is wholly
ineffectual to falvation: nay, fo far is any thing
of this kind from being fufficient to fupplant, or

* Eph. ii. 12.

proper

proper to co-operate with what Christ hath done, that it is detestable in the sight of God. Perhaps it may be thought, that this is of small moment, and wholly unworthy of notice; as in these days few or none will so much as pretend, except in jest, to lay any stress upon fabulous deities, or superstitious practices of human invention. But I did not chuse to omit it, because it appears to me a thing peculiarly insisted on in the holy Scriptures, which contain nothing unnecessary. It is also very much the object of the resentment of infidels*. At the same time, many pretended Christians have, by design or inadvertance, spoke too much the language of infidels on this subject, or on subjects nearly related to it.

How much stress the Scriptures lay upon the knowledge of the true God, nay, how pernicious and destructive all false religions are, it were easy to shew at great length; but a few hints will suffice, as it is not a point controverted so much as neglected and forgotten. The very first commandment of the moral law is, "Thou shalt have no other Gods before me †." And the second, which forbids un instituted worship, hath this strong sanction, "For I the Lord

* It is very remarkable, that though infidels always set out on pretence of searching impartially after truth; yet they have unanimously agreed in putting truth and error entirely upon the same footing, both as to worth and influence.

† Exod. xx. 3.

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“ thy God am a jealous God, visiting the
 “ iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto
 “ the third and fourth generation of them that
 “ hate me*.” Through the whole old testa-
 ment, the idolatry and false worship of the Hea-
 thens is represented as highly criminal in them,
 and an abomination in the sight of God. It is
 there considered, not as a small part, but as the
 first and most provoking of their enormities ;
 and in particular, is assigned as the ground of the
 utter extirpation of the nations of Canaan. In a
 perfect consistency with which, in the charge
 brought against them by the apostle Paul, this is
 the leading part or ground-work of the whole,
 “ Because that when they knew God, they glo-
 “ rified him not as God, neither were thank-
 “ ful ; but became vain in their imaginations,
 “ and their foolish heart was darkened †.—And
 “ changed the glory of the incorruptible God,
 “ into an image made like a corruptible man,
 “ and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and
 “ creeping things ‡.”

The great end also of the separation of the
 children of Israel, and their being kept from in-
 tercourse with other nations, was, that they might
 be preserved from idolatry. To the worship of
 the true God their blessings are promised, and

* Exod. xx. 5. † Rom. i. 21. ‡ Ibid. ver. 23.

against

against defection from his service to other gods the heaviest curses are denounced. Thus, after an enumeration of the blessings that should attend them if they kept God's commandments, it is said, "And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words that I command thee this day, to the right-hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them*." And when they stood before the Lord, to enter into his covenant, it is said, "For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the nations which ye passed by. And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them. Lest there should be among you, man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood †." The same thing may be seen running through the whole of the prophetic writings. Almost every judgment of God threatened or inflicted, is ascribed to their idolatry as its cause. I only mention one passage, not for any thing particular in it, but as a sufficient specimen of the whole. It is a message from God by Ezekiel to the children of Israel: "Therefore say unto the house of

* Deut. xviii. 14.

† Deut. xxix. 16, 17, 18.

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“ Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, Repent and
 “ turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away
 “ your faces from all your abominations. For
 “ every one of the house of Israel, or of the
 “ stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which se-
 “ parateth himself from me, and setteth up his
 “ idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-
 “ block of his iniquity before his face, and
 “ cometh to a prophet to enquire of him concern-
 “ ing me; I the Lord will answer him by myself,
 “ and I will set my face against that man, and
 “ will make him a sign and a proverb, and I will
 “ cut him off from the midst of my people, and
 “ ye shall know that I am the Lord*.”

In the very same manner, in the new testa-
 ment, embracing the gospel of Christ, and con-
 tinuing stedfast in the faith, is required as abso-
 lutely necessary to salvation: “ He that believeth
 “ on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that
 “ believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but
 “ the wrath of God abideth on him †.” The
 importance of holding the truth without mix-
 ture, is plainly declared in the following passage:
 “ Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth,
 “ and one convert him; let him know, that he
 “ which converteth the sinner from the error of
 “ his way, shall save a soul from death, and
 “ shall hide a multitude of sins ‡.”

* Ezek. xiv. 6, 7, 8. † John iii. 36. ‡ James v. 19, 20.

It had been easy to have given a much larger proof of this from Scripture ; but it is unnecessary ; for our enemies themselves confess it, nay object it as a ground of reproach. How many invectives have we from infidel writers against the unpeaceable, unsocial spirit of the Jewish first, and afterwards of the Christian religion ? and how often are these contrasted with the mild and associating temper of the Heathen worshippers ? Among them it implied no absurdity, that different nations should have different gods, and different forms of worship ; nay, they often intermixed, compounded, and mutually adopted each others worship. The Athenians, that wise people, were so prone to receive every foreign rite, that they got this character from an ancient writer (whether by way of encomium indeed, or satire, is at this distance uncertain) that they were hospitable to the gods. According to the sentiments of modern unbelievers, they would deserve much praise for this ; but, according to the sentiments of an inspired apostle, “ professing themselves wise, they became fools.”

In this then it is acknowledged, that the gospel of our salvation essentially differs from every human invention ; that it constantly represents itself as THE TRUTH, and all things opposite to it, as false, dishonourable to God, and unprofitable to men. This has been the case in every step of

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its progress, from its first rise in the comparative
obscurity of the original promise, through all the
preparatory discoveries of succeeding ages, to its
complete manifestation in the fulness of time.
And though it has been exposed on this account
to the virulent reproaches of men of corrupt
minds, it is but so much the more credible, and
appears to be from the one only, the living, un-
changeable, and true God*.

It may be proper here to observe, that it is
either the same objection assuming a different
form, or one very much like it, when it is al-
leged against the gospel, That it lays too much
stress upon mere belief of the truth. To this
some have, perhaps by mistaking the true spring
of the objection, given a very wrong and dan-
gerous answer. They deny the fact, that the gospel
does lay too much, or any stress at all upon bare
belief separate from goodness of life. The dan-
ger of this answer does not lie in its being false,
but in its being ambiguous, incomplete, and in a
great measure improper. It seems to allow, at
least not to deny, that there may be sincere belief,
while yet it is not attended with its proper fruits.
Thus unbelievers, whose real quarrel is with
the alledged importance and efficacy of the truth,
are hardened in their indifference and disregard

* See this subject handled with great clearness and precision
by Dr. Warburton in his *Divine Legation of Moses*.

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to it; whereas they ought to be taught to consider the principles which are productive of real reformation, as more excellent in themselves, as both necessary and effectual for this purpose.

The gospel does indeed lay great stress upon belief of the truth, not without, but as the only way of producing holiness. Many passages may be cited from the old testament, in which going after false gods, and committing other gross crimes, are represented as inseparable branches of the same character; and worshipping and serving the true God, as a summary description of universal obedience*. And many passages may be produced from the new testament, in which the good effects of the truth, and the misery of departing from it, as necessarily implying an un sanctified state, are declared †. From all this I conclude, that Christ Jesus, the promise of old made unto the fathers, the hope of Israel, the light of the world, and the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth, is the only Saviour of sinners, in opposition to all false religions, and every uninstituted rite; as he himself says, “ I
“ am the way, and the truth, and the life: no
“ man cometh unto the Father but by me ‡.”

* See Deut. xxix. 18, 19. Numb. xxv. 1, 2. † See
John viii. 31, 32. Id. xvii. 17. 2 John ver. 4. Col. i. 5, 6.
‡ John xiv. 6.

But, 2dly, Christ is the only Saviour, in opposition to the merit of our own obedience to the moral law. I know, some will be ready to suppose, that though false religion and uninstituted rites may have no positive influence in procuring salvation to those who embrace them, yet they may not hinder their acceptance with God by virtue of their own personal merit and obedience. On this subject there are many things which deserve a more particular and distinct consideration than there is room for at present; such as, 1, That all false religion is not merely unprofitable, but highly criminal in the sight of God. Thus the apostle Paul, "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils*."—

2. That all who embrace not the truth as it is in Jesus, must neglect the whole duties of the first table of the moral law, and so their obedience be not only greatly, but essentially defective.—

3. That the Scriptures give us no ground to believe, that false principles can produce any virtue but what is spurious. But instead of insisting upon these at present, I shall only attempt to shew, that the Scriptures exclude all human merit, and indeed seem to have it as their express purpose, to stain the pride of all human glory; and

* 1 Cor. x. 20.

therefore

therefore that no pretence of this kind can possibly be admitted.

And here I shall wholly pass the sacrifices of atonement under the Mosaic dispensation, because they all pointed at the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross; and therefore, in the account given of the end and destination of this last, we may expect the clearest view of the grounds of our acceptance with God. Now, Christ appears in Scripture, “as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;” as “giving his life” for his people; as “bearing their sins in his own body on the tree.” And indeed every expression is used that could well be imagined to signify a propitiatory sacrifice, an atonement for sin, or the punishment of an innocent person in the room and stead of the guilty. If this was necessary for any, it was necessary for all; and as there is not the least intimation given in Scripture of any distinction, or hint, as if there were any persons with regard to whom it was superfluous. Nothing, therefore, can stand more directly opposed to the design of the gospel, than any plea of merit in man: and none do in fact receive it with more disdain, than those who trust in themselves that they are righteous.

But, for our satisfaction on this point, we need only consult the epistle to the Romans, before referred to, as there is no part of the sacred writings

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where there is a more full and connected account of the foundation of the gospel. There, after proving that all the world are become guilty before God, the apostle says, "Therefore by the
 " deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight : for by the law is the knowledge of sin*. Being justified freely by his
 " grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ : whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins
 " that are past, through the forbearance of God †." And again, "Therefore as by the
 " offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation ; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men
 " to justification of life ‡." Consonant to this is the doctrine of the same apostle elsewhere :
 " Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ
 " Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung
 " that I may win Christ, and be found in him ; not having mine own righteousness, which is
 " of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God
 " by faith §."

* Rom. iii. 20. † Ib. ver. 24, 25. ‡ Chap. v. 18 :
 § Phil. iii. 8, 9. See also Rom. iv. 23—25. Tit. iii. 5.

I am not insensible, that great pains have been taken, even by some Christians, to evade the force of these passages of Scripture, which exclude the merit of man's obedience from any share in his justification before God. Particularly, the passages from the epistle to the Romans are evaded, by alledging, that the law, and the works of the law, there, mean only the rites of the Mosaic dispensation. This is not a proper time and place for entering fully into that controversy; and therefore I shall only observe, that, besides the correspondence of the above interpretation with all the other parts of Scripture, it may be sufficiently supported by this one consideration, That the apostle, who is speaking both of Jews and Gentiles, expressly states the opposition with respect to our justification between grace and debt, and excludes every thing that might make it of debt: "Where is boasting
 " then? It is excluded. By what law? of
 " works? Nay; but by the law of faith.
 " Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified
 " by faith, without the deeds of the law †." And to the same purpose, a little after, "Now to him
 " that worketh, is the reward not of grace, but
 " of debt. But to him that worketh not, but
 " believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly,
 " his faith is counted for righteousness ‡" What-

† Rom. iii. 27, 28.

‡ Rom. iv. 4, 5.

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ever would make our acceptance with God not
free, or not of grace, is here excluded. Now,
certainly, as there is a much more plausible plea
of merit in favour of works of obedience to the
moral, than the ceremonial law; the first are at
least as much excluded as the last by the apostle's
reasoning*.

Thus

* It is easy to foresee, that a grand objection against what is
said on this head will be, That it is going upon a very narrow
scheme, and a scheme very uncharitable to many parties of Chris-
tians. It is the fashionable language of the age, to give large
encomiums upon charity, when the design is to level truth and
falshood; and to alledge, either that there is little difference
between them, as to their effects, or that they cannot be dis-
tinguished from one another by their proper marks. This is a
subject that needs as much to be set in a proper light, as any I
know. If the sense in which charity in sentiment is commonly
understood, viz. a favourable judgment of the opinions of others,
be the Scripture meaning of it, then certainly some bounds
must be set to it; and it must be praise or blame-worthy, ac-
cording to the cases in which it is exercised. I must needs take
it for granted, that there are some fundamental errors, and that
it is possible to make shipwreck of the faith. Now, however
common or fashionable it may be, to think, the farther charity,
is extended the better: it may be demonstrated, that a favour-
able judgment of errors fundamental, or destructive of religion,
doth necessarily imply either a light esteem or weak persuasion,
of the truth, or both. This surely is no part of a truly Chris-
tian character; and if it be rightly denominated charity, it is
become vicious by excess. I confess it appears to me, that just-
ification by free grace is a fundamental doctrine of the gospel.
If this be true, I am not wrong in having the deepest sense of
the danger of contrary opinions: nay, if I am mistaken, the
consequences I draw from it, are no breaches of charity, but the
necessary effects of an error in judgment; and so I claim charity,
in my turn from my adversaries upon their own principles.

But I am persuaded, the above is not the meaning of the word
Charity in Scripture, but that it means an ardent and unfeigned
love to others, and a desire of their welfare, temporal and eter-
nal;

Thus I have endeavoured both to explain and confirm the assertion in the text, That there is no salvation in any other but in Christ. There is, however, one question upon it which I would willingly pass over in silence, but that the omission of it might, to some intelligent hearers, weaken the conclusion, and make them reckon the subject incompletely handled. The question is, Whether an objective revelation and explicit discovery of Christ, and what he hath wrought, is necessary to salvation? or if his undertaking may not be the ground of acceptance for many who never heard of his name? In support of the last of these it is said, That many of the ancient pa-

nal; and may very well consist with the strongest abhorrence of their wicked principles. We do find indeed in Scripture many charges, not to judge one another, mutually to forbear one another in things indifferent, and not to suppose that mens outward actions proceed from a bad principle which they do not profess. But this is never called charity; and it is, by the reasoning on it, expressly limited to things really indifferent in their nature. (See the xivth and xvth chapters of the epistle to the Romans.) Perhaps it will be said, some may judge things to be necessary, which in truth are but indifferent. This cannot be denied; but there is no help for it. It is a consequence of the imperfection of human nature. Yet still every man must judge for himself, and must distinguish between things indifferent and necessary, in the best manner he can. It is very remarkable, that the apostle John, who speaks most of the importance of charity and mutual love, hath also perhaps the strongest expressions of any of the apostles, on the hatefulness and danger of error. Thus he says in his second epistle, ver. 10, 11. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed, is partaker of his evil deeds."

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triarchs and prophets were far from having distinct views of the person, character, and work of Christ; and if (as all suppose) his undertaking was available for their acceptance, why not of others also? On such a question, no doubt, modesty and caution is highly commendable, and perhaps it were wise in some respects to suspend the determination altogether. But there are cases in which it comes necessarily to be considered: for instance, I do not see how it can be avoided, in speaking of the importance or necessity of propagating the gospel among the nations that know not God.

We may therefore observe, that the only just foundation of our hope in God, either for ourselves or others, especially as sinners, is his promise. The first of these ought to be precisely commensurate to the last. In so far as it is defective, or falls short of this measure, we are chargeable with unbelief; and in so far as it exceeds, with presumption. Now, to whomsoever the true God is revealed in any measure, as merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; however obscurely he points out the meritorious cause of pardon, if they believe his word and accept of his mercy, they shall be saved; as we are told, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness."

“ousness*.” As to any others, if they are in absolute ignorance of the true God, we must say, that there doth not appear, from Scripture, any ground on which to affirm, that the efficacy of Christ’s death extends to them: on the contrary, we are expressly told, that they have “no hope †.” We find indeed in Scripture, that the display of divine perfection in the works of creation, and the conduct of providence, is represented as rendering the Heathens inexcusable in their contempt and neglect of God: “Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness ‡. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse ||.” Should any desire from these passages to infer, that if any of them made a just and dutiful use of these natural notices of God, he would not frustrate their search, but would lead them to the saving knowledge

* Rom. iv. 3.
 † Acts xiv. 17.

‡ See the forecited passage, Eph. ii. 12.
 || Rom. i. 19, 20.

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of himself, I have nothing to object against the
general position ; but I am afraid it will be dif-
ficult to make any other legitimate use of this
concession than the apostle has made already,
that they are “ without excuse ” in their estrange-
ment from God. One thing more we are au-
thorised from Scripture to say, that their guilt
is in proportion to their means of knowledge ;
that they continue in their natural state, and are
not chargeable with the sin of rejecting the gos-
pel which they never heard : “ For as many as
“ have sinned without law, shall also perish with-
“ out law ; and as many as have sinned in the
“ law, shall be judged by the law *.”

I proceed now to the second thing proposed,
which was, To make a few reflections on this
scheme ; and shew, that it is not only most self-
consistent, but most agreeable to the other parts
of Scripture, as well as to the visible state of
the world ; and therefore that those who, in
reasoning with infidels, depart from it in any
measure, do thereby betray the cause which they
profess to support.

We have many proofs of the ingenuity and art
of persons under the power of prejudice, in evade-
ing the force, or wresting the meaning of parti-
cular texts of Scripture ; and therefore it must
serve much for the confirmation of any doctrine,

* Rom. ii, 12.

that

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that it is not only supported by express passages, but agreeable to the strain and spirit of the whole. That this is the case with the doctrine in question, I might shew at great length: at present I content myself with the few following reflections.

1st, There is nothing more frequently or more undeniably found in Scripture, than a celebration of the rich mercy and free grace of God in Christ Jesus, in such language as will scarce accord with any other plan than that which I have above endeavoured to explain and support. It has been a remark frequently made, of the justice of which every serious peruser of the sacred writings will be sensible, that the inspired penmen seem, as it were, to be raised and elevated above their ordinary pitch when they are on this theme, and that both in the old and new testament. Wherever there is a striking passage in the poetic or prophetic writings, containing sentiments of the most rapturous joy, or most ardent gratitude, there we may be sure is a prophecy of Christ. See the Psalmist David often thus distinguishing himself, particularly in the following passage:

“ His name shall endure for ever: his name
“ shall be continued as long as the sun: and
“ men shall be blessed in him; and all nations
“ shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord
“ God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious
“ name

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“ name for ever ; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen *.” The apostle Paul also, not only when expressly handling the subject, but even when he accidentally meets with it in the illustration of another argument, seems to fire at the thought, and either expatiates upon it with a profusion of eloquence, and energy of expression ; or collects, as it were, his whole force, and surprises us more, by dispatching it at one single masterly stroke †.

Now, I would ask, Why so many encomiums on the mercy and grace of God in pardoning sinners through Christ, if his undertaking had not been absolutely necessary for their recovery? Whence could arise so deep an obligation to gratitude, if our state had not been absolutely deplorable, or if relief could have been obtained from any other quarter? There must surely be a great impropriety in the Scripture-language upon this subject, when used by some persons agreeably to their other sentiments. And indeed their being very sparing of this language, avoiding it as much as possible, and dwelling with most pleasure on different themes, is a tacit confession and acknowledgment of this truth.

But, besides the mercy of God to the world in general in sending his Son to redeem us who were

* Psal. lxxii. 17, 18, 19. See an instance of the first of these, Eph. iii. 17. and of the last, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

fold under sin, we find in Scripture many strong declarations of the infinite mercy of God in sending the tidings of salvation to those who were ignorant of them before. This appears from several of the passages formerly cited, and many more that might be added. I only mention one of the apostle Paul recorded in the Acts of the Apostles : “ Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it*.” Now, what is meant by this ? Were these Gentiles in a way of salvation before ? and what benefit did they reap from this intelligence ? If it be said, that they were comparatively in a more advantageous situation than before ; this when strictly examined, will be found to draw after it all the consequences so disagreeable to the pride of man, for which the other supposition is rejected. Or rather, when their comparative advantages are carried so far as to give any thing like a consistent meaning to the above and other passages of Scripture, it will amount entirely to the same thing. For I hope no Christian will assert, that any person in the world, who hath the exercise of reason, is under a Natural, but only a Moral impossibility †, of coming to the knowledge, and doing

* Acts xviii. 28.

† I use the words Natural and Moral impossibility in the sense in which they are used by the authors who first applied that

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doing the will of God. If the first were the case, it would take away all sin ; but the last is only such an obstinate disinclination, as is still consistent with guilt and blame.

Another reflection we may make on this subject, That, according to the constant tenor of the holy Scripture, not only an offer of mercy for Christ's sake must be made to the sinner, but a change must be wrought on his heart and temper so great, as to be termed a New Creation, and a Second Birth. The first of these is an act of the divine government, the last is a work of divine dower. Now, I would beg leave to ask, How and where is this to be expected ? It cannot surely proceed from the influence of fabulous deities, or be the effect of idolatrous rites. It is not the work of man, and therefore only of the Spirit of Christ. Should any think fit to presume, that the sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost are bestowed universally, though unknown

that distinction to subjects of philosophy and divinity, and not in the absurd sense in which some late infidel writers do obstinately persist in using them. These gentlemen, instead of meaning by Natural or Physical necessity or impossibility, that which arises from the irresistible operation of the laws of nature, and by Moral, a high degree of probability, from concurring circumstances, tell us, that Physical necessity is what arises from the laws of matter ; and Moral, that which arises from the laws of mind or spirit. But nothing can be more evident, than that any influence from without upon mind or spirit, if it be irresistible, is as much physical or natural necessity as any other. And the distinction thus explained, or perverted, is utterly useless, when applied to morals.

to the receivers; this again annihilates all the superior advantages of Christians; and, on the very best possible supposition, is an assertion thrown out at random, and altogether destitute of support from the oracles of truth.

A third observation I would make, That this scheme alone makes the foundation of the gospel sufficient to bear the superstructure. Nothing else can sufficiently account for the cost and expence, if I may speak so, that have been laid out in the redemption of man. It is very evident, that both the prophets in the old testament, and the apostles in the new, are at great pains to give us a view of the glory and dignity of the PERSON of CHRIST. With what magnificent titles is he adorned? what glorious attributes are ascribed to him? and what mighty works are said to be done by him? All these conspire to teach us, that he is truly and properly God, God over all, blessed for ever. On the other hand, How much is his humiliation and abasement insisted on; the reproach and contempt of his life, the pain and ignominy of his death? and the infinite value of his sufferings, arising from these two united considerations? Nothing can more plainly shew the guilt and misery of man, than that so great a person should be employed in rescuing him, so infinite a price paid for his ransom. If such a propitiation was necessary for the heirs of glory,
how

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how hopeless must be the state of those who have no claim to, or interest in, or dependence upon it*?

The last observation I am to make at present, is, That the scheme above laid down, is also most agreeable to the visible state of the world, and furnishes the plain and the only sufficient answer to the old objection against the Christian revelation, the want of universality. This assertion to some will appear surprising, as it seems to have been on purpose to avoid or answer this objection, that all the other opinions have been formed. However, they still leave the objection in all its force; nay, it is often supported and strengthened by the reasonings upon them. But, on the principles above laid down, it is capable of the following plain and easy solution. It is of the infinite mercy and free grace of God, that he did not leave all mankind to perish in a state of sin and misery. Where then lies the difficulty in believing, that some only, and not all, are saved, or are furnished with the means of salvation? If all are justly liable to wrath, upon which the whole gospel is built, mercy to a part can never be impro-

* It is a strong confirmation of this, that it holds almost without exception, in comparing the sentiments and schemes of the different parties of Christians, that those who have the slightest sense of the necessity of atonement, and the greatest bias to a self-righteous plan, are always most disposed to lessen the glory of our Redeemer's person; least most to, or judge most favourably of the Socinian or Arian hypothesis.

bable,

nable, or unworthy of God, on account of the ruin of the rest : so that the objection can only take its rise from doubt or disbelief of that first and fundamental truth.

If a prince had a number of traitors in his power, whose treason was of the most aggravated and inexcusable kind, and we should be informed that he had granted a free pardon to some, and left the rest to suffer the just punishment of their crime ; would it be the least objection against his clemency, that it extended only to a select number of the offenders ? or would it be any just impeachment of his management, or render the intelligence incredible, supposing the prince to be wise, as well as gracious ? The case is precisely the same with God. If it be but granted, that it is Mercy extended to those who escape, this absolutely destroys the force of any objection that can be drawn from the number or circumstances of those that perish.

There is in this respect a beautiful and instructive analogy between the course of divine providence, and the methods of divine grace ; and much in both must be resolved into the wisdom and sovereignty of God. There is an immense variety in the distribution both of natural advantages and spiritual blessings ; and it is vain for us to expect that we should be able to assign the whole, or indeed almost any, of the grounds either
of

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of the one or the other. But if neither sort is merited, if both are the effects of free undeserved bounty, this cuts off all cause of complaint; and as to the difference which we observe in fact, particularly with regard to the last, we must be content to say, with the apostle Paul, "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out*!"

From these observations it will plainly appear, that departing from the principles above laid down, is a very great injury to the cause of truth, and strengthens that of infidelity. If they are founded upon the word of God, as I hope has been sufficiently proved, then no good can possibly flow from softening or disguising them, in order to lessen their opposition to the pride and prejudices of corrupt minds. Has such conduct in fact lessened the number of infidels, or reconciled them to the doctrine of Christ? On the contrary, have they not become more numerous, and more bold in their opposition to the gospel, in proportion to the attempts that have been and are made to suit it to their taste? nay, have they not made use of innumerable passages from Christian writers in support of their own cause? For

* Rom. xi. 32, 33.

in all such cases, as Christians speak merely the language of natural religion, or magnify the present powers of the human mind, in order to rear up a self-righteous scheme, they are considered by infidels, and justly, not as defending the gospel with success, but as yielding up the great point in debate, and coming over to their own party.

I proceed now to make some practical improvement of this subject. And, in the

1st place, From what hath been said, you may see the real, the unspeakable moment of propagating Christian knowledge. It is indeed, so far as it is cordially embraced, turning men “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” These words have a deep and interesting meaning, if understood as above, but not otherwise. Let us only suppose those who deny or call in question the absolute necessity of salvation through Christ, employed as missionaries in converting the Heathens: how cold, how ambiguous and inconclusive the arguments with which they would endeavour to press the change! But the view of it given above, must in the strongest manner dispose every serious person to support such a design, and powerfully animate to diligence those who are employed in carrying it into execution.

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It is allowed by all, that doing good, and communicating happiness, is the most excellent character; that promoting the interest of our brethren of mankind, is a natural fruit and expression of our love to God, and an imitation of the divine benignity. But what comparison is there between any acts of beneficence that regard only the present life and the welfare of the body, and those that affect the everlasting interest of an immortal spirit? As far as God's redeeming grace is superior to his providential care, so far must our sincere and successful endeavours to promote the salvation of the soul, excel any relief or help we can give to the wants of the body.

The last of these purposes, however, is often celebrated by infidels, in opposition to the other, which they delight in treating with derision and scorn. But as nothing can be more evident than its comparative excellence, supposing its reality; so there is not the least contrariety between the two designs: so far from it, that they are strongly connected together, and are always best promoted in conjunction. There may be indeed single instances of persons, from ostentation or other false motives, parting with their goods to feed the poor, who have no true love to God or their brethren. But, in general, it is certain, that those who have "their treasure in heaven; who love not the world, nor the things of the world;"

“ world ;” which, however hard a saying it may appear, is the real character of every Christian, will more easily communicate of what they possess to those who stand in need. True religion always enlarges the heart, and strengthens the social tie. Every believer must view his poor brethren in several endearing lights, as children of the same heavenly Father, as under the same original guilt, dependent on the same Saviour, and preparing for the same judgment ; whereas wicked men, however various their characters, do habitually, by luxury and self-indulgence of some kind or other, feed their pride, increase their wants, and inflame their appetites. This not only gives them a narrow turn of mind, but often wastes their substance ; and so necessarily obstructs their liberality, by taking away both the inclination and ability to bestow.

And as those who have a just concern for the everlasting interest of others, will be most disposed to relieve their present distresses ; so the bounty of such will always be best directed, and followed with the happiest effects. They never separate the two great ends, of making men happy in this world, and heirs of eternal life ; and will therefore have it as their chief care, to promote industry and sobriety in all whom they take upon them to supply. It is too often seen, that what is dignified with the finest names, and represented

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as the effect of generosity, humanity, and compassion, is wholly without merit in the giver, pernicious and hurtful to the receiver. How many dissolute livers are not covetous, only because they are under the dominion of a contrary passion? In the mean time, what they bestow, is either entirely thrown away by an indiscriminate profusion; or, as is more commonly the case, it is worse than thrown away, being confined to the most worthless of all wretches, who are their assistants or companions in their crimes. In opposition to this, a real Christian, supremely governed by the love of God, will direct every action to his glory; and while compassion, strengthened by a sense of duty, excites him to deal his bread to the hungry, he will have a still superior solicitude to preserve them from sin. Instead of an injudicious supply of fuel to their lust, which is easy to a slothful, and gratifying to a carnal mind, he will endeavour to fit them for heaven, by suitable instruction; and rescue them from want and idleness in this world, by lawful industry.

These two great purposes have been jointly promoted by the society in Scotland for propagating Christian knowledge. They have been promoted with a most laudable zeal and diligence, and with a success fully equal to the means the society are possessed or furnished with for carrying them on. The promoting of true religion, loyalty,

alty, and industry, in the highlands of Scotland, was the first object of their care: and the importance of encouraging it has been represented in the strongest light on many former occasions of this sort, and is well known. But there is another part of their design, to spread the knowledge of Christ, the only Saviour of sinners, among the unenlightened Heathen nations. On this the subject of my discourse leads me to speak a little more particularly.

Of the importance of such a design every one who believes the gospel must be sensible. But, except the very restricted efforts of the society, little or nothing has ever been attempted by the British nation. And is not God, in his righteous providence towards us at present, manifestly and severely punishing us for this neglect? Are we not engaged in war with a potent and formidable neighbour, in which the supreme Disposer of all events hath visibly written disappointment on every one of our attempts? Did not this war take its rise from the disputed limits of our territories in America? And are not our colonies in that part of the world exposed to the most cruel and merciless depredations? Are not families, which ought to be quiet and peaceable habitations, frequently alarmed in the silence of the night with the cry of war; and the tenderest relations often butchered in each other's presence,

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and that by a people of a strange language, while
the weak mother and helpless infant can only
lift a supplicating eye, but cannot ask for mercy?
Who then are the instruments of this cruelty?
Must we not answer, Those very Indians, a great
part of whose territory we possess, and whom,
with a contempt equally impolitic and unchristian,
we suffer to continue in ignorance of the
only living and true God, and Jesus Christ
whom he hath sent?

Such a particular interpretation of the language of providence may be thought bold; but there are many circumstances which, in a manner, constrain us to confess its propriety. We have been a nation early and long favoured with the light of divine truth, and are therefore bound to communicate it to others. That distant country was a refuge to many of our pious forefathers, when flying from the rage of ecclesiastic tyranny; and the territory either taken from, or ceded to us by these people, has been the great source of wealth and power to this nation. But what seems chiefly to warrant this application is, that the care taken by our enemies to convert the Indians, is the chief, if not the single cause of their superior interest among that people. Their free, independent manner of living, makes the British temper, character, and customs, in all other respects more agreeable to them. But being once
converted,

converted, not to the Christian faith, but to the Romish superstition, they are inviolably attached to the French interest. And that politic, but fraudulent nation, are able to cover and excuse their own treacherous designs, by the ungovernable and savage barbarity of their Indian allies.

Can there be therefore a more noble, a more important, or more necessary exercise of Christian charity, than enabling the society to carry on their useful and salutary schemes, especially to extend their missions to the Indian tribes? Who that knows the value of immortal souls, can refuse to contribute his share in promoting this excellent design? Who that fears the just judgment and displeasure of God, can refuse to take this step, amongst others, evidently necessary for averting his threatened vengeance? And who that loves his Redeemer's name, but must desire that it should be adored from the rising to the setting sun? The boldness and activity of sinners in spreading every species of corruption, should excite an emulation in believers not to be behind-hand in the service of a much better master. Have we not seen much profane zeal discovered in support of the most pernicious and criminal amusements, which consume time, enervate the body, and pollute the mind? And shall there not be a like concern to promote knowledge and holiness in the uncivilized parts

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of our own country, and to carry the glad tidings of the gospel of peace to those who now sit in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death? Are there not many to whom the name of a Saviour is precious, "even as ointment poured forth;" who burn with desire, that the riches of divine grace, which can never be exhausted, may be more largely diffused? And will not all such cheerfully and liberally contribute to extend the bounds of their Redeemer's kingdom, in the prospect of that blessed time, when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea? or of that still more glorious period, when every vessel of mercy, from the east, west, north, and south, shall be gathered together, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their Father?

I shall now conclude my discourse, by preaching this Saviour to all who hear me, and intreating you, in the most earnest manner, to believe in Jesus Christ; "for there is no salvation in any other." This is far from being unnecessary or improper, even in an audience of professing Christians. Wherever there is a national profession of the gospel, there are always many who, though they retain the name of Christians, are strangers to real faith in Christ, or union with God through him; nay, who in their hearts
are

are enemies to the truth in its simplicity and purity. It is in vain to attempt, by reasoning, to bring men to an acknowledgment of the truth of the Christian doctrine in speculation, unless we also bring them to such a personal conviction of their guilt and wretchedness, as will make them receive the information of Christ's character and work, as glad tidings to their own souls. No other converts receive any benefit themselves by the change; nor are they of any service to Christ and his cause, except so far as they are overruled by the sovereign providence of that God who only can "bring good out of evil."

Wherefore, my beloved hearers, be persuaded, from the word of God, which you profess to believe, from the state of the world, which you may see, and of your own hearts, which you may feel, that you are by nature wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. You are so far from having such a conformity to the pure and perfect law of God, in your thoughts, words, and actions, and the principles from which they ought to flow, as can intitle you to his favour, that the imaginations of your hearts are only evil from your youth, and that continually. Whatever imaginary schemes of a virtuous character you may rest or glory in, you are wholly unable to stand the trial of God's impartial judgment. Oh! how hard is it to convince

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men of sin, even while the earth groans under their guilt! Would but those who are most apt to boast of the dignity of their nature, and the perfection of their virtue, make an exact register of all the thoughts that arise in their minds; there remains still as much of the law of God written upon their hearts, as would judge them out of their own mouths. Instead of being able to bear that such a record should be exposed to public view, they could not even endure themselves to peruse it: for self-flattery is their ruling character, but self-abhorrence would be the effect of this discovery. Ought you not therefore to be ready to acknowledge, that you are altogether as an unclean thing, and unable to stand before God if he enter into judgment? But whether you acknowledge it or not, I bear from God himself this message to you all, that whatever may be your character, formed upon worldly maxims, and animated by ambitious and worldly views, if you are not reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, if you are not clothed with the spotless robe of his righteousness, you must for ever perish.

But behold, through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. There is a fullness of merit in his obedience and death to procure your pardon. There is no sin of so deep a dye, or so infectious a stain, but his blood is sufficient

sufficient to wash it out. This is no new doctrine, or modern discovery, to gratify a curious mind. Perhaps you have heard such things so often, that you nauseate and disdain the repetition. But they are the words of eternal life, on which your souls salvation absolutely depends; and therefore, though this call should come but once more to be rejected, it is yet again within your offer; and as “ an ambassador from Christ, as
 “ though God did beseech you by me, I pray
 “ you in Christ’s stead be ye reconciled unto
 “ God.” You have heard the danger of all who are without Christ; but I beseech you remember the aggravated guilt, and the superior danger of those who continue obstinate under the gospel. All the mercy that is shown to sinners in the offer, shall inflame the charge against them in the great day, if they are found impenitent. Mercy and justice are never separated in any part of the gospel plan. They illustrate each other in the contrivance, they shine together on the cross, and they shall be jointly manifest in the day of judgment. Shall not the blood of Christ, which is so powerful in its influence for taking away the guilt of those who trust in it, greatly add to the guilt and danger of those who despise it? “ Be
 “ wise now, therefore, O ye kings,” and all of every rank; “ be instructed, ye judges of the
 G 5 “ earth.

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“ earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice
“ with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be
“ angry, and ye perish from the way, when
“ his wrath is kindled but a little : blessed are al
“ they that put their trust in him*.”

* Psa. ii. 10, 11, 12.

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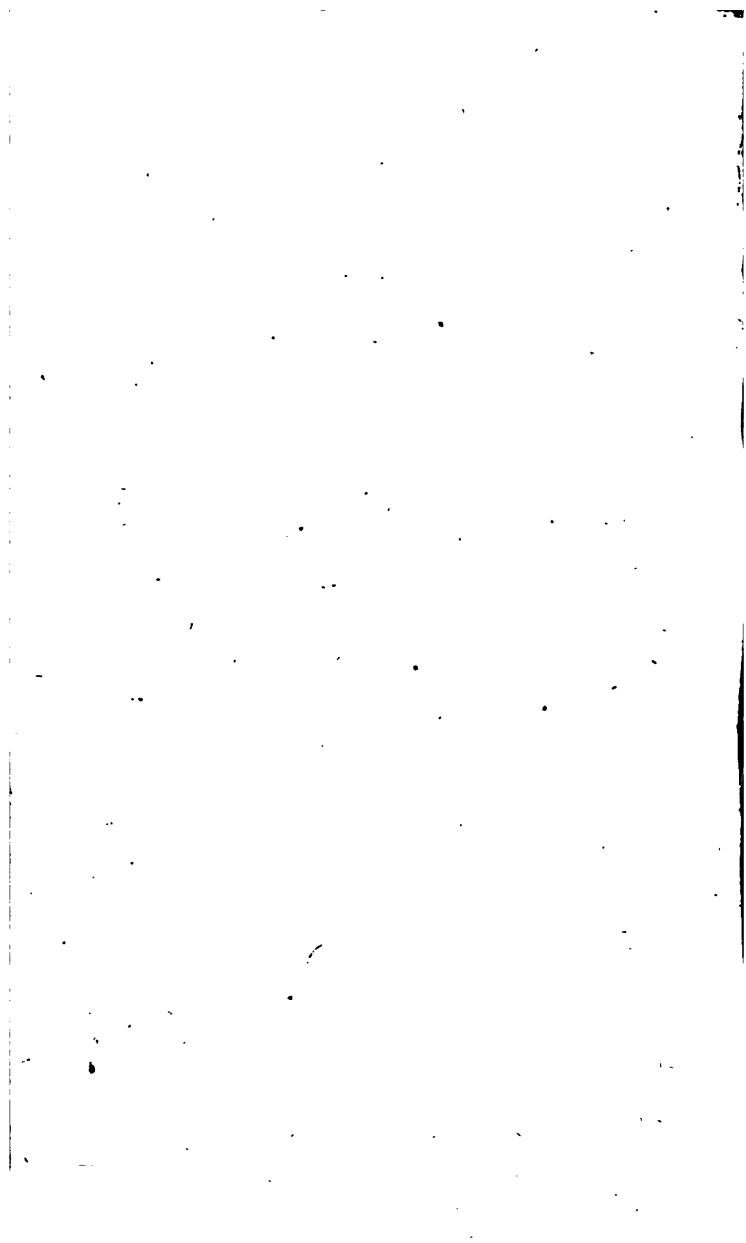
By its MORAL INFLUENCE.

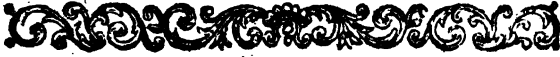
A
S E R M O N,

Preached at the Opening of the Synod of
Glasgow and Air, October 9th, 1759.

G 6

MATT.





M A T T. vii. 20.

Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

EVERY one who hath any acquaintance with the writings of infidels, must know, that there is no topic on which they insist at greater length, or with more plausibility, than the innumerable sects and parties into which the Christian world is divided. With what apparent triumph do they enlarge, on the contradictory tenets, which different persons profess to found upon the same Scriptures, their violent opposition one to another, and the great difficulty, or rather impossibility of discovering truth, among so many, who pretend each to have the entire and exclusive possession of it.

Having gone thus far, it is easy and natural to proceed one step farther, and affirm, that the great plurality of every denomination, do not embrace religion in general, or the tenets of their own sect in particular, from rational or personal conviction, but from a blind imitation of others,

others, or an attachment to one or a few distinguished leaders, whose authority is stronger than all other evidence whatever. Thus is religion at once, supposed true and yet destroyed; that is to say, it is at one stroke, as it were, annihilated, in almost all who profess it, their opinions, whatever they are in themselves, being no more than implicit faith and party prejudice in those who embrace them.

The same visible state of the world, which gives occasion of triumph to the enemies of religion, gives, often, no small uneasiness and anxiety to its friends, particularly to the best and most dispassionate of every party. Serious and conscientious persons, when they reflect upon the divisions that prevail, when they are witnesses to the contention and mutual accusation of different parties, are ready to be overwhelmed with melancholy upon the prospect, as well as involved in doubt and perplexity, as to what course they themselves should hold. It is not uncommon to find persons of every rank in this situation, not only those of better education, who are able to take an extensive view of the state of things, in this and in preceding ages; but also those of less knowledge and comprehension, when any violent debates happen to fall within the sphere of their own observation.

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These reasons have induced me to make choice of the passage now read as the subject of discourse at this time. It contains the rule to which our Saviour appeals in his controversy with the Pharisees, and by which he, once and again, desires that their pretensions may be judged. I apprehend from the context, that it is equally applicable to their characters and their principles, their integrity before God in their offices of teachers of others, and the soundness of their doctrine as to its effects upon those who should receive it. These two things are, indeed, in a great measure connected together, or rather they are mutually involved in one another, though it is possible, and, in some few cases, profitable, to make a distinction between them.

What is further proposed, through the assistance of divine grace, in the prosecution of this subject, is,

I. To show, that the rule here given by our Saviour is the best that could have been given, and that it is sufficient to distinguish truth from error.

II. That this is in fact the rule by which all good men, and, indeed, mankind in general, so far as they are sincere, do judge, of religious principles and pretensions.

III. To

III. To conclude with some reflections on the subject for the benefit both of ministers and people.

In the first place then it is proposed to show, That the rule here given by our Saviour is the best that could have been given, and that it is sufficient to distinguish truth from error. To lay a foundation for this, it will be necessary to begin by settling, in as precise a manner as possible, the meaning of the rule, and to what cases it can be justly applied. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," saith our Saviour.—That is to say, when any person assumes the character of a divine teacher, and proposes any thing to your belief, as from God, see whether its fruits be really suitable to its pretensions : particularly, you are to lay down this as a principle, that, as he is holy in his nature, every thing that proceeds from him must be holy in its tendency, and produce holiness as its fruit. In proportion as you see this effect in him who teaches it, and those who embrace it, so receive it as true, or reject it as false.

By laying down the rule in these terms I do not mean to deny, that, when a revelation is first proposed as from God, or when the credit of such revelation in general is examined, miracles are a distinct and conclusive proof of a divine commission: I am persuaded that nothing is more vague and indeterminate, and at the same time,
a more

a more manifest inverting the natural order of things, than to say with some, We must judge of the truth of a miracle by the nature of the doctrine in support of which it is wrought; and, if this last is worthy of God, we may then admit the honorary testimony of the mighty work in its behalf. They do not attend to the great ignorance of man in all spiritual and divine things without revelation, and to the boldness of human pride, who speak in this manner. I would rather include this as one of the proper fruits of a divine commission to teach any new doctrine, that signs be given of a superior power accompanying the prophet. Thus we see the Jews made this demand of our Saviour, "What sign shewest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work *?" It is true, in some instances, when, after many miracles, they persisted in asking new signs of their own devising, he condemns their obstinacy and refuses to gratify it. Notwithstanding this, we find him often appealing to his works as an attestation of the truth of his mission: thus he says, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very works sake †." And elsewhere, "If I had not done among them the works that none other man did, they had not had sin: but now

* John vi. 30.

† John xiv. 11.

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“ they have both seen, and hated both me and
“ my Father *.” Agreeably to this, we find
Nicodemus drawing the conclusion, “ Rabbi, we
“ know thou art a teacher come from God, for
“ no man can do the miracles that thou dost,
“ except God be with him †.”

There is no doubt, however, that this must
be inseparably joined with a purity of character,
and sanctity of purpose. When these are want-
ing, it gives the justest ground of suspicion,
leads to the strictest examination of miraculous
pretensions, and will certainly end in the disco-
very of such as are false. For this is the very ex-
cellence of the rule laid down by our Saviour, that,
though reason may be very unfit to pass an inde-
pendent judgment upon truth and error, con-
science may, with little danger of mistake, reject
what is evil, and yield its approbation to what is
good.

But what I have chiefly in view is, that sup-
posing the truth of the gospel in general, par-
ticular opinions and practices must be tried in
this manner. As the gospel is allowed on all
hands to be a doctrine according to godliness,
when differences arise, and each opposite side
pretends to have the letter of the law in its fa-
vour, the great rule of decision is, which doth
most immediately and most certainly, promote

* John. xv. 24.

† John iii. 2.

piety and holiness in all manner of conversation. In this way every doctrinal opinion, every form of government, and every rite and practice in worship, may be brought to the test and tried by its fruits.

As opinions, so characters; must be tried in the same manner. The truth is this, tho' deserving particular mention, is included in, or is but a part and branch of the other. To pass a judgment on particular characters is of very small moment; or rather, a peremptory decision of this kind is both unnecessary and improper, unless when it is of weight in a cause. It is only prophets and teachers that fall to be singly, or personally tried, because they are supposed to exhibit, in their own practice, an example of the force and influence of their principles. If on them they have no effect that is good, there is not the least pretence for insisting that others should embrace them.

Nothing farther seems necessary by way of explanation of this rule, save to observe from the context, that fair and plausible pretences, either of opinions or characters, must be examined with particular care, as being most ready to deceive; and the trial must be more by facts than by reasoning, as is implied in the very language used in the text, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

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The excellency of this rule may be comprehended under the two following particulars, 1st, Its certainty. 2dly, Its perspicuity.

The first of these will admit of little dispute. As God is infinitely holy in his own nature, every discovery that he has made to any of his creatures, must carry this impress upon it, and have a tendency to promote holiness in them. And, as this is manifestly the design of the sacred oracles, and that system of divine truth which they contain, every thing by way of opinion, or practice, that pretends to derive its authority from them, may lawfully be tried by this rule, Will it make us more holy than before ?

It is of moment here to observe, that this rule hath a deep and solid foundation. It proceeds upon the supposition, that all natural are inferior to moral qualities; that even the noblest intellectual abilities are only so far valuable, as they are subservient to moral perfection; or in other words, that truth is in order to goodness. It is not (as has been often said) in his Almighty power, his infinite wisdom, or the immensity of his being, that the glory of God chiefly consists, but in his immaculate holiness and spotless purity. Each part of the divine character, indeed, derives a lustre from the other. It is the union of greatness and goodness that makes him truly God, His moral excellence becomes
infinite

infinite in value and efficacy by residing in an infinite subject. But if it were possible to separate his natural perfection from his moral excellence, or could we suppose them joined to malignity of disposition, he would be the proper object, (let us speak it with reverence) not of supreme love, but of infinite detestation.

This is more than sufficient to support the order in which things are represented above, and show, that its moral influence is the proper touchstone and trial of religious truth. These doctrines only come from God, which tend to form us after the divine image. Thus far, perhaps, all will allow it to be true; at least the assertion is common. But be pleased to observe, that this necessarily supposes the sure and infallible efficacy of real truth in promoting holiness, and the insufficiency of error and falshood for this purpose. If these were not both alike certain, the rule would be equivocal and absurd. If men by believing lies could attain to unfeigned goodness and true holiness, then their moral effect could not in the least serve to distinguish between truth and error. It is no less plain that if so absurd a supposition is admitted but for a moment, the value of truth is wholly destroyed, and no wise man will employ his time and pains in endeavouring to discover, to communicate, or to defend it.

The other particular comprehended under the excellence of this rule, is its perspicuity; That, it is not only sure and infallible in itself, but capable of an easy application by those who have occasion to use it. Here, if any where, there is room for doubt and disputation. Here, it may be alledged, all the confusion and uncertainty returns, which was before complained of, and for which a remedy was required. Men will still differ in their opinions as to what is true goodness. Besides, they will still debate the sincerity of many pretensions, and the reality of many appearances; and, as art and hypocrisy will always be used on the one hand, delusion must be the unavoidable consequence on the other.

This, however, is no more than the necessary consequence of human imperfection. It cannot be denied, and it may, without any hesitation, be confessed, that men are liable to err, and that many have erred in the application of this rule. But, who can from thence justly infer, that it is not of sufficient clearness, to direct those who will honestly make use of it, and to lay the error of those who are misled entirely at their own door?

It pleased God to write his law upon the heart of man at first. And the great lines of duty, however obscured by our original apostacy, are still so visible, as to afford an opportunity of
judging,

judging, what conduct and practice is, or is not agreeable to its dictates. It will be found from experience, that men are able to determine on this point, with far greater certainty, than on any other subject of religion: that is to say, they can perceive the excellency of the end, when they are in much doubt about the means, in themselves, or separately considered.

Such authority hath natural conscience still in man, that it renders those who, in their own conduct, despise its reproofs, inexcusable in the sight of God*. But it is of importance in the present argument to observe, that every one is able to pass a far surer judgment on the moral character of another, than his own. The pollution of the heart brings a corrupt bias on the judgment, in a man's own case, and makes him palliate and defend those sins, to which he is strongly inclined, or of which he hath been already guilty: whereas in determining the characters of others, this bias is less sensibly felt. This is perhaps the true and only reason why any deference is paid to virtue as praise-worthy, by those who are enemies to it in their hearts, or any public honour and respect given to the service of God in the world, where so great a majority are evidently in the interests of another snaster.

* Rom. i. 20,—ii. 14.

One singular excellence of this rule is, its being the most universally intelligible. It is level to the capacity of men of all degrees of understanding. There is little difference, if any, in this respect, between the wise and the unwise, the learned and the ignorant. Perhaps this circumstance alone ought to give it, in justice, the preference, to every other test of religious truth. Religion is the concern of all alike, and therefore, what relates to it should be open to all. It was the character, and the glory of the gospel, at its first publication, that it was preached to the poor. And by this it is still distinguished, not only from many or most false religions, but especially from those philosophical speculations, in which the enemies of all religion place their chief strength. When we peruse a system or theory of moral virtue, the principles of which are very refined, or the reasoning upon it abstracted and above the comprehension of the vulgar, it may be ingenious, but it carries in itself a demonstration, that, because it is unfit, it could never be intended for general use.

Here then, lies the great advantage of the rule laid down by our Saviour. The bulk of mankind, those of lower rank, and even those among them of weakest or least cultivated understanding, are able to judge of the effects of principles, or to see the beauty of an excellent character,
when

when they are not able to examine a doctrine, or apprehend the reasoning upon which it is founded. The dictates of conscience are often immediate and clear, when the deductions of reason are long and involved. To make intricate researches in theory, requires great natural abilities, which are the portion of very few: but to judge of a visible character requires only an impartial sense of right and wrong. Of this the plain man is as susceptible as the most acute by nature, or the most enlightened by education. In God Almighty, infinite knowledge and infinite holiness are united, and, we have reason to think, that in their perfection they are inseparable. But we know, by experience, that they do not bear an exact proportion to one another in inferior natures, at least, among sinful creatures. There may be, and there often is, great virtue and goodness in a mean capacity, and great depravity in persons of eminent ability.

From these considerations it is plain, that this rule of trying a doctrine by its effects, as a tree by its fruits, may be applied by the meanest as well as the greatest, and with as little danger of mistake. Perhaps it might have been safely affirmed with less danger of mistake. Great intellectual abilities, and great natural advantages of every kind, are very ready to swell the mind with pride and self-conceit, than which no dis-

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position is, in itself more odious in the sight of God, or more unfavourable to the discovery of truth. This seems to be confirmed by experience, and it is plainly the view given us of our present state in the holy Scriptures. Thus the apostle Paul says, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence*." For the very same thing we find our blessed Redeemer adoring the depth and sovereignty of divine providence, in the following terms, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight †."

Mistakes, however, after all there will be, and some differences even among the best; but, from this very circumstance, I derive another great ex-

* 1 Cor. i. 26—29.

† Luke x. 21.

cellence

cellence of the above rule laid down, that, it is not only the test of truth for a man's self, but the measure of forbearance with regard to others. By carefully examining their fruits, men may not only be directed what to embrace, and what capital and fundamental errors wholly to reject, but also in what particulars to exercise mutual forbearance, and, tho' smaller differences still subsist, to receive one another to the glory of God. If in any person or persons, of whatever party, you perceive the spirit of true and undefiled religion, they are accepted of God, and should not be condemned by you. This ought not, in justice, to induce you to approve or embrace every one of their principles, or every part of their practice, of which perhaps you have seen or felt the bad tendency; yet should it engage you to love them with unfeigned affection as sincere, though, in some measure, mistaken servants of our common Lord.

I hope it appears from the preceding observations, that this rule, of trying every principle or profession by its fruits, is the best that could have been given. It is certain and infallible in itself, and we are less liable to mistake in the use of it than of any other. There seems, indeed, to be an exact analogy between this rule in religious matters, and reason in our common and civil concerns. Reason is the best guide and director

of human life. There is certainly an essential difference between wisdom and folly, in the nature of things. They are also sensibly opposite to one another in their extremes. Innumerable actions, however, there are, or modes of action, of a more doubtful and disputable nature, as to the wisdom or weakness of which, hardly any two men would be entirely of the same opinion. Let the enemy of religion make the application, who denies its reality, because all good men are not of the same mind; or because there are different parties and professions, who oppose one another in some opinions and practices. He acts just the same part, as he, who seeing the differences of judgment among men, upon almost every subject that falls under their deliberation, should renounce the use of reason, or deny that there is, in nature, any such thing.

We now proceed to the second thing proposed, to show, That the rule above explained and defended, is that by which, in fact, all serious persons, and indeed, mankind in general, so far as they are sincere, do judge of religious principles and pretensions.

By serious persons, I understand all those who are truly religious, in opposition to those who have only a nominal and customary profession. If we would speak with precision, or reason in a just and conclusive manner, we must keep this distinction constantly in view. Nothing does
more

more harm to any cause, than a treacherous friend, or bosom enemy: and nothing does more hurt to the interest of religion, than its being loaded with a great number, who, for many obvious reasons, assume the form, while they are strangers to the power of it. The fallacy of almost all the reasonings of infidels lies here. They consider religion as answerable for all the hypocrisy of those who profess it, and all the wickedness of those who have not renounced the profession; as if in order to its being true, it must be impossible for any to counterfeit it. If that were the case, no thanks would be due to impartial enquiry. All colour of objection being taken away, the assent would not be yielded, but compelled. This, doubtless, the presumptuous wisdom of man ordinarily dictates, but according to the superior wisdom of God “offences must come”—and “heresies also, that they that are approved may be made manifest.”

Supposing, therefore, the important distinction between real and nominal Christians, all of the first character, of every age, and of every party, are so far from being under the influence of implicit faith, that they try the truth by its fruits, and adhere to it for its effects. There is something more in the case of every good man, than barely a rational persuasion of the truth of religion in general, from the arguments adduced

to support it. The truths of the gospel give him such a view of himself, and his own state, as experience shews him to be true. In the gospel he finds a remedy proposed for his guilt and misery, which, besides all the other evidences of its divine original, is exactly suited to his felt condition. Add to both these, that he immediately experiences its happy effect, not only in laying the best foundation for his peace, but in operating a thorough change in his heart and life. Thus hath every real Christian, an inward and experimental proof of the truth of the gospel, not contrary, but superior to, stronger and more stable than any speculative reasoning. In this sense we are to understand the words of the apostle John, "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself*." This is common to all real believers of whatever denomination, who not only are perfectly agreed in the essentials of religion, but much more agreed in every thing material, than they themselves either clearly apprehend, or are willing to confess.

So far every good man must be acquitted from the charge of implicit faith; we may adopt concerning all such the words of our Saviour to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: For flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven †." It is

* 1 John v. 9.

† Matt. xvi. 17.

no less plain, that in every thing that is supposed to make a part of, or that hath any connection with religion, they may judge by the same rule. In all these modes of opinion in lesser matters, in all these circumstances, which serve to distinguish one sect from another, tho' they may determine in different, nay, in opposite ways, yet they all proceed upon the same general rule, viz. the influence which such disputed point has, as a means, upon the substance and end of all religion. This appears from the reasoning on each side, in all religious disputes. This principle as common to both is often expressly mentioned, and always manifestly implied that those doctrines, or that way of expressing doctrines, and those practices, which are in fact most conducive to holiness, are, and for that very reason must be, most agreeable to the will of God.

But what I have chiefly in view is, to show, that this appears from the very fact usually brought to prove, that the religion of almost all mankind is no better than implicit faith. The fact I mean is, that the bulk of mankind is greatly swayed in the choice of opinion, by the authority and example of others. This, indeed, does not hold so generally as is commonly supposed. We have seen above, that it doth not hold, with regard to the substance of religion, in any good

man; for in this he will call no man master on earth. But even when it does hold, it is, perhaps, not so blameable as many are apt to imagine. Let it be admitted then, that, in many instances, it is the authority and example of men, more than any other reason that determines the judgment. Let it be admitted, that this is the case with the bulk of mankind, and even in some measure with the best. I must be allowed to ask, what is it that procures these persons such authority? What is it that first begins, establishes, or perpetuates their influence? Nothing else, but the real or apparent sanctity of their character. In vain will a profligate, or one manifestly destitute of personal worth, set himself at the head of a party, or attempt to draw away disciples after him. It is the supposed piety and probity of the person that gives weight to his example, and force to his precepts. This weighs more with the sober serious part of mankind, and, indeed, with mankind in general, than the greatest intellectual abilities, and otherwise most admired talents. Whoever has acquired a great reputation for piety and sincerity, will, with little art, or rather no art at all; nay, without so much as intending it, bring his principles and practice into repute. At the same time, one of a contrary character, with all the powers of eloquence, and every other outward advantage, shall fail in attempting to persuade.

Now

Now what is this, but that mankind proceed mainly in their judgment, upon the very rule which I have endeavoured to show is the best they could have chosen. They try principles by their effects, as a tree by its fruits. Wherever they see the best man, they conclude that he must be acted by the most excellent, as well as the most powerful principles. The multitude, or lower class of mankind, are usually the scorn of half-thinkers and superficial reasoners, for this attachment to persons. But were a comparison faithfully made between the several motives of choice in different classes, there would be no great cause of triumph. When we consider how unfit the plurality of mankind are to judge in an intricate debate, darkened, perhaps, by the art and subtilty of those who handle it, we shall find they are little, if at all, to blame. In one view, no doubt, they may be said to be acted by implicit faith, but in truth, and at bottom, they are following the wisest and most salutary of all moral maxims.

A survey of the history, either of religion in general, or of the Christian religion in particular, would set this matter in the clearest light. But little of this kind can come within the limits of a single discourse. I shall not therefore stay to mention the retired manner of life, and pretended sanctity of the inventors of the heathen idolatry, tho' it may be applied to this subject;

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and would serve to shew the universal sense, and general expectation of mankind. There is a saying of an eminent and violent enemy of the Christian faith, "That gravity is of the very essence of " imposture." This is nothing else but a perverted view, and malicious representation of the general truth, that apparent sanctity is necessary to establish any sacred authority. But is there any thing more unquestionable, or that hath been more frequently observed, than that the victory of truth over error, in the first ages of Christianity, was much more owing to the shining piety of the primitive Christians in general, together with the patience and constancy of the martyrs, than to any other means. Reason may convince the understanding, but example seizes and keeps possession of the heart. It was the eminent piety and usefulness of the saints in former ages, which attracted such veneration and love from the multitude, as soon proceeded to a criminal excess. Not content with imitating the amiable example of those whom they held in such esteem, by a natural association they affixed a sanctity to relics, and this produced a variety of superstitious practices. I cannot also help being of opinion, that it was the severe and mortified lives of many of the retired devotees in the Romish church, that kept that corrupt body in credit for some ages longer than it could have otherwise continued.

On

On the other hand, who does not know, that the most formidable and successful attacks made by the reformers on that mother of abominations, were their exposing the corrupt and dissolute lives of her priests and members. This they were at no small pains to do, both in a grave and in an ironical strain. As the covetousness and ambition of many, and the licentious debauchery of others of the clergy, first brought the doctrines into suspicion, so those examples when held up to light, made a far greater number of converts, than any absurdities in belief, how gross and palpable soever. The truth is, we find all parties greedily lay hold of this weapon whenever it is presented to them, and use it with great confidence against their adversaries; and in so doing they discover a conviction, that principles are never so powerfully supported as by the good, nor so effectually disparaged as by the bad characters of those who profess them.

If we leave the history of former ages, and examine the state of the present, the same truth will still be the result of our enquiry, and appear with increasing evidence. Different parties and denominations prevail in different places: and wherever any party or denomination greatly prevails, the effect may easily be traced up to its cause; and will appear, by no very distant tradition, to have been owing to the eminent piety of some

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one or more of that profession in a former period, or, which is much the same, to the comparatively odious and vicious characters of those who opposed them*.

It is no just objection to the account here given, that we find instances, in which principles seem to give a sanction to characters, instead of receiving support from them. There are, no doubt, cases in which a man's being known to

* Our own country will afford us some sensible and striking proofs of the justice of this observation. There had been a struggle, from the very first dawn of the reformation, between presbytery and episcopacy in Scotland. This contest however came to its greatest height about 100 years ago, when the presbyterians were ejected, and episcopacy was established by a tyrannical civil government, and continued by a severe and cruel persecution. We had by this means a trial of both: and it is very observable, that the odium which justly fell upon episcopacy, from the rage and inhumanity of those who had the chief direction, was the circumstance that determined the body of the nation to endeavour its subversion. Yet, wherever there happened to be a few ministers of that persuasion pious in their lives, and diligent in the duties of their office, there were many persons and families who joined with them in communion, and their posterity adhere to that opinion even to this day. This was the case in some places of the east and north country. But in the western parts of Scotland, where the episcopal clergy were, almost to a man, ignorant, slothful or vicious, they were universally deserted, and hardly a single adherent to that persuasion is now to be found.—I cannot omit mentioning here what was said by a lady of quality at that time to Dr. Burnet, when he came to visit the west country. It was to the following purpose: “We of the laity cannot judge upon controversial points, but we see these men whom you persecute, grave in their deportment, strictly holy in their conversation, and very laborious in their functions, while many of your clergy are ignorant, slothful and vicious.” This is what determines the judgment of the people.

embrace

embrace certain principles, will be alone sufficient to make him odious, however blameless, or even praise-worthy his conduct be, in every other respect. At the same time, perhaps, the failings of another shall be either wholly pardoned, or greatly extenuated, if he espouse, but especially, if he is active in vindicating the principles which are held sacred. But this is no more than the natural and necessary consequence of any set of principles being once firmly established. They acquire their credit at first, in the way I have already mentioned; but when that credit is high, it will bring a suspicion upon every thing that opposes it, however specious and promising in outward appearance. There is nothing surprising here, nor, indeed, any thing but what is perfectly natural; for as one or a few instances commonly do not, so in reason they ought not to shake the reputation of truths, which have been established by long experience of their worth and efficacy. Neither must it be forgotten, that when examples seem to stand in opposition one to another, and to lead to different conclusions, it is not from one or two that a judgment can be passed, but from many, and these compared and examined with great diligence and care.

I conclude the illustration of this head with remarking, that the principle above laid down will explain, in a clear and satisfying manner,

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two appearances in the moral world, which seem directly to contradict one another. By what happens sometimes in religion, we shall be apt to conclude, that there is in human nature a proneness to change, or a love of novelty purely on its own account. Accordingly we find this laid to the charge of mankind by several authors. And it cannot be denied, that some men, or sects, often introduce new practices which acquire great reputation, and almost universal acceptance. By other examples, however, we are taught to ascribe to human nature a strong attachment to old opinions, and hatred of all innovation. What is remarkable is, that both these take place chiefly in little circumstances, and things of small moment; new inventions, being sometimes gone into with a zeal, and old customs adhered to with an obstinacy, which the intrinsic value of the things contended for does not seem to merit on either side. To ascribe this to the different dispositions of individuals will not be a satisfactory solution, for we see sometimes examples of both in the same persons. But, by searching a little deeper, we shall unravel this difficulty, and discover, that though the love of novelty, or a veneration for antiquity, may be sometimes the immediate principle of action, there is another ultimate principle which is the cause of both, and in different circumstances,

circumstances, produces either the one or the other. This principle is no other than that admiration of real or supposed worth, which has been illustrated above. Whoever hath acquired a great reputation for piety and holiness, may easily introduce any indifferent practice, though not common before, especially if it be considered as an evidence or expression of his piety. On this supposition, his differing from, or doing more than others, will be taken notice of to his praise*. But he may much more easily introduce a new, than depart from an old custom. The reason is plain; for ancient customs having been established on the ground already assigned, men are usually very tenacious of them, and it requires no small degree of credit and character, either to change or to abolish them.

We now proceed to make some practical improvement of what has been said.

In the first place, from what has been said upon this subject we may, derive one of the plainest and most satisfying proofs of the truth of the

* There is great reason to think that it was in this very way that many different rites were brought into the Christian church, which in a long course of time grew into a mass of abominable superstition. They were at first, perhaps, but the modes or circumstances of the worship, or practice of pious persons, but from being voluntary and purely circumstantial, they came by degrees to be considered as parts of religious worship; and therefore sinful in the performers, but much more sinful in the imposers.

gospel. A proof, level to the meanest capacity, and therefore proper to preserve ordinary Christians from being shaken by the bold and insolent attacks now made on religion by some of the lowest rank. A proof, at the same time, not only deserving the attention of the most intelligent, but which of all others, is certainly the most decisive. Let us try it by its fruits. Let us compare the temper and character of real Christians, with those of infidels, and see which of them best merits the approbation of an honest and impartial judge. Let us take in every circumstance that will contribute to make the comparison just and fair, and see what will be the result. I say this, because I can by no means allow, that great multitudes, though born in a country where Christianity is professed, ought to be considered as Christians, when they are open and violent enemies to the gospel in all its parts. They ought rather to be thrown into the scale of infidelity. But, since most of them have formed no fixed principles at all, because they have never thought upon the subject, we shall leave them entirely out of the question.

Is then the character and practice of infidels in general, once to be compared with that of such Christians as believe upon personal conviction? However much the natural sense of right and wrong may be obscured and perverted in some, I
 should

should think there are very few, who will not manifestly perceive to whom the preference is due. In which of the two do you find the most regular and fervent piety towards God? Here, perhaps, it will be said, This is what no man expects to find in unbelievers, it is no part of their plan, and therefore ought not to be included in the comparison. But as the general sense of mankind does not require it, so I can never suffer that our duty to God should be erased out of the moral law. Besides, the general pretence now, is not atheism but theism. The question is therefore altogether pertinent; and persons of this character are self-condemned, who, by their total neglect of all religious worship, are as much chargeable with impiety as infidelity.—In which of the two is to be found the greatest integrity and uprightness in their commerce between man and man, the most unfeigned good-will, and most active beneficence to others? Is it the unbeliever or the Christian, who clothes the naked and deals his bread to the hungry? Ask the many and noble ancient structures raised for the relief of the diseased and the poor, to whom they owe their establishment and support?—Which of these two classes of men are most remarkable for self-government? How often is the unexperienced youth initiated in debauchery of all kinds, by these very friends of mankind,

mankind, who charitably disclaim against priest-craft and delusion, and happily eradicate the prejudices of education, by treating religion and all religious persons with derision and scorn? With what fatal success has the infidel often seduced the unwary virgin into the destructive path of lust, by first loosening the obligation of religion, and then justifying the indulgence of every natural desire. We shall carry the comparison no further in this place; but I must beg of every one who hath had the happiness to be acquainted with an eminently pious, humble, active, useful Christian, to say, whether he can admit it as possible, under the administration of a wise and good God, that such a person is governed by a fable invented by designing villains, while the infidel alone is in possession of the truth, which is pure in its nature, and must be proved by its fruits*.

In

* I am sensible it is often pretended, that several infidels have been men of unblemished morals. Collins was a good man, say some, and Shaftesbury was yet a better man. Perhaps, these individuals might not be chargeable with the most open dissipation, and grossest sensuality, which would have been inconsistent with their giving themselves to close study and application. Besides, they who assaulted with so much boldness established opinions, must have been under a considerable restraint, from a regard to their character and cause. This ought not to be rejected as an improbable supposition, or uncharitable allegation against them, who so liberally reproach others, with insincere, hypocritical, and saint-like pretences. But, after all, making even the largest allowances, there is one piece of conduct, of which both the above-named persons were habitually guilty.

In the 2d place, since not only religion is general, but every particular doctrine of religion ought to be tried by its fruits, let neither ministers nor people, ever lose view of this great rule in the doctrines which they teach on the one hand, or embrace on the other. Let us also particularly remember, that no credit is to be given to any high professions or bold pretences, but as they are confirmed by the fact. I observe here, with much pleasure, what advantage the fundamental Scripture doctrines, which have been long the glory and happiness of this church, will derive from a fair and full enquiry into their influence and effects. The doctrines I mean are, the lost state of man by nature; salvation by the free grace of God; justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; and sanctification by the effectual operation of the holy Spirit. These were the doctrines of the reformation, when their excellence was put beyond all doubt or question, by their powerful and valuable effects. Many adversaries, indeed, soon rose up to contradict or to corrupt them; and it is much to be lamented that they guilty, which it is impossible for me to reconcile with good morals, even upon the laxest principles that have ever yet been avowed. What I mean was, their solemnly receiving the holy sacrament, to qualify themselves for bearing office in their country, though they believed it to be altogether imposture and deceit. This was such a piece of gross and aggravated dissimulation, as it is impossible either to defend in itself, or to suppose consistent with integrity upon the whole.

are, at present, by many, so boldly and so violently opposed in this once happy island. But we may venture to affirm, that when the doctrine of the cross retained its purity and simplicity, then was true religion, including every moral virtue, seen to grow from it as its fruit. On the other hand, when and wherever it has been run down, and a pretended moral doctrine has been introduced, to the prejudice and subversion of the grace of God, it hath been always followed by a deluge of profaneness and immorality in practice. It is easy and common to disguise the truth by misrepresentation, or to vilify it by opprobrious titles. It is easy to pretend a warm zeal for the great doctrines of morality, and frequently to repeat, in a pulpit, the necessity of holiness in general; but all impartial persons ought, and the world in general will judge more by works than by words. Let us suppose, for example, the old objection revived against a minister who preaches the doctrine of grace, that it loosens the obligations to holiness of life. The objection is, of all others, the most specious: yet, if that minister discharges his duty with zeal and diligence, watches over his people's souls, reproving, rebuking, exhorting with all long-suffering and doctrine; is strict and holy in his own conversation, abhorring and flying from the society of the ungodly; and if the effect of his ministry

ministry be to turn many sinners from the error of their ways, and to make an intelligent, serious, regular people, the accusation will not be received: and who will say that it ought? On the other hand, is any minister more covetous of the fleece, than diligent for the welfare of the flock; cold and heartless in his sacred work, but loud and noisy in promiscuous and foolish conversation; careless or partial in the exercise of discipline; covering or palliating the sins of the great, because they may promote him; making friends and companions of profane persons; tho' this man's zeal should burn like a flame against Antinomianism, and though his own unvaried strain should be the necessity of holiness, I would never take him to be any of its real friends.

Let us not, my brethren, deceive ourselves, or attempt to deceive others by plausible pretences. Let us all be zealous for good works; not the name, but the thing. Let us not expect to promote them by a little cold reasoning, or affected flowery declamation; but by the simplicity of the gospel; by the doctrine of the cross, which will not only tell men that they ought to be holy, but effectually bring them to that happy state. The leading principle of true holiness, according to the gospel, is a deep and grateful sense of redeeming love. "For the love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all
 " then

“ then were all dead : and that he died for all,
 “ that they which live, should not henceforth
 “ live unto themselves, but unto him which
 “ died for them, and rose again *.”

In the 3d place, from what has been said on this subject you may see, in a very strong light, how necessary it is, that ministers should be, not only really but visibly and eminently holy ; and with how much care they are bound to avoid every appearance of evil. There are some ministers who strongly plead for liberty and freedom, and loudly complain of the malice, uncharitableness, and censoriousness of the world. They seem as if they desired, nay, which is still more foolish, expected, that no part of their conduct should be attended to, or any inference drawn from it with respect to their character. This will never be the case till they are invisible. It appears, from what hath been said in the preceding discourse, that it is the right and the duty of every man to try a minister by his fruits. Ignorance indeed, may sometimes be guilty of mistakes to our prejudice, and malice or envy may go too far ; yet this is only what we ought to lay our account with, and it should excite us, not to a contempt of the judgment of others, but to greater strictness and circumspection, that

2 Cor. v. 14.

“ they

“ they may be ashamed who falsely accuse our
“ good conversation in Christ.”

It is very hurtful in this as in many other cases, when a man views things only on one side. Some are apt to impute so much to the malice and uncharitableness of the world, that they seldom or never think themselves as truly guilty of any offence or miscarriage. I am persuaded many are in a manner blinded to the errors of their own conduct, by this very circumstance. Or, if they cannot but be sensible that they have been guilty of something that was wrong, when the fault is aggravated by report, they seem to think that this atones for any thing really blameworthy, and so are hardened both against confession and repentance. To speak without prejudice, it is more than probable, that we are as much chargeable with unguarded and offensive conduct, on the one hand, as the world with precipitate or partial judgment on the other. It hath been sometimes observed, that the multitude or common people are but poor judges of a man's ability or learning, but they are very good judges of his life. There is a great deal of truth in this observation ; and to support it I add, that even a hypocritical pretence is extremely hard to maintain, and so often betrays itself by little circumstances, that there are very few whose real character is not better understood by the world than

than themselves. The chief exception I know to this is the case of violent party disputes. The injustice done to characters on each side there, is very great. If you take a man's character from one to whom he stands in party opposition, you must conceive him not a man but a monster. But (setting this aside, which does not fall within the compass of our present subject) in general, it is surely much more becoming, and it is infinitely more safe for us to suspect ourselves, than to complain of hard measure from the world. Let us therefore, by doubling our diligence in every personal and ministerial duty, endeavour to
 “ make our light so shine before men, that they
 “ may see our good works, and glorify our Fa-
 “ ther which is in heaven *.”

In the 4th place I must now take the liberty, in fidelity to the trust committed to me, to be a little more particular in the application of this subject, and to enquire, whether ministers are not, in a good measure, chargeable with the low state to which religion is at present reduced. May I not say without offence, that an eminent, holy, diligent, and successful gospel ministry was once the glory and blessing of this part of the united kingdom! But how are we since fallen asleep! “ How is the gold become dim! How
 “ is the most fine gold changed!” That there

* Matt. v. 16,

is a difference is plain; and that this difference does not lie in inferior abilities or a less proportion of learning, is equally certain. I am sensible, that this is a part of my subject which would require to be touched with a very tender and delicate hand, and that, perhaps, I run as great a hazard to inflame and exasperate the sore, as to bring any effectual cure. This is, indeed, itself, one strong symptom of our disease, that we cannot endure plain dealing; and there is not a single circumstance, in which there is a greater difference between this and the preceding age. What in former times would have been reckoned (to speak in their language) no more than plainness and ministerial freedom, would now be called the most slanderous invective and unpardonable abuse. Instead, therefore, of taking upon me to say who are chiefly to be blamed as the criminal causes of it, I shall only affirm and lament the melancholy effect, that we have in many places of this church a despised, forsaken, useless ministry; that many of the people have gone from mountain to mountain, and forgotten their resting place, while a still greater number is fast asleep in ignorance, security, and sloth. Where is that union, that mutual esteem and affection, which once subsisted between ministers and their people. It must be acknowledged, that their influence and authority is now in a great measure

lost, and therefore I may safely conclude that their usefulness is gone. That the fault is all on one side, is neither a modest nor a probable supposition. Should we throw the blame off ourselves, what a terrible load must we thereby lay upon others? We must suppose and say, that under a blameless ministry, under the best and purest of instruction, one part of the nation is sunk in brutality and sloth, and the other rent in pieces by division, and religion lost in the fury of contending parties.

We may say so, my brethren, and some do say what amounts to the same thing, but it is not credible. I do therefore, in the most earnest manner beseech every minister in this audience, seriously to think, how far he hath given just cause to his people to despise his person, or desert his ministrations. Let us not so insist upon the ignorance, prejudices, and weakness of the giddy multitude, as if a failure on our part was impossible. We may be sometimes blamed in the wrong place; but we have, perhaps, as much respect in general, as we really deserve. Do not think it is sufficient that you are free from gross crimes, such as blasphemy, riot, and unclean lust. Blessed be God, nothing of this kind would yet be suffered among us without censure. But there are many other things, which, either separately or together, render a minister justly contemptible,

tible, on which no law, either civil or ecclesiastic can lay hold. If one set apart to the service of Christ in the gospel, manifestly shows his duty to be a burden, and does no more work than is barely sufficient to screen him from censure; if he reckons it a piece of improvement how seldom or how short he can preach, and makes his boast how many omissions he has brought a patient and an injured people to endure without complaint; while, at the same time, he cannot speak with temper of those who are willing to do more than himself; however impossible it may be to ascertain his faults by a libel, he justly merits the detestation of every faithful minister, and every real Christian.

The things here in view, though they are easily seen, are difficult to describe; and, therefore, I shall not attempt to be more particular. But I cannot forbear warning you against, and pointing out the evil of two pieces of dishonesty, which may possibly be found united to gravity and decency in other respects. One of them is common in our neighbour kingdom, and may possibly have taken place among us, though I cannot affirm it. The other, I am certain, hath many times taken place in the church of Scotland. The first is a minister's subscribing articles of doctrine, which he does not believe. This is so direct a violation of sincerity, that it is asto-

nishing to think, how men can set their minds at ease in the prospect, or keep them in peace after the deliberate commission of it. The very excuses and evasions, that are offered in defence of it, are a disgrace to reason as well as a scandal to religion. What success can be expected from that man's ministry, who begins it with an act of such complicated guilt. How can he take upon him to reprove others for sin, or to train them up in virtue and true goodness, while himself is chargeable with direct, premeditated, and perpetual perjury. I know nothing so nearly resembling it, as those cases in trade, in which men make false entries, and at once screen and aggravate their fraud, by swearing, or causing others to swear contrary to truth. This is justly reputed scandalous even in the world, and yet I know no circumstance in which they differ, that does not tend to show it to be less criminal than the other. We are not yet so much hardened in this sin as many in our neighbour church, for I have never found any among us so bold as to profess and defend it. But, if no such thing is at all admitted among us, Why is there so heavy a suspicion of it? Why do so many complain, that the great and operative doctrines of the gospel are withdrawn, and an unsubstantial theory of virtue substituted in their place? Or why are not such complaints put to silence, since
it

it may be so easily done? Appearances are certainly such as will warrant me in mentioning it upon this occasion: and I have particularly chosen to introduce it upon this subject, that I may attack it not as an error, but as a fraud; not as a mistake in judgment, but an instance of gross dishonesty and insincerity of heart. Supposing, therefore, that there may possibly be truth in the charge against some of us, I must beg every minister, but especially those young persons who have an eye to that sacred office to remember, that God will not be mocked, though the world may be deceived. In his sight, no gravity of deportment, no pretence to freedom of enquiry, a thing excellent in itself, no regular exercise of the right of private judgment will warrant or excuse such a lie for gain, as solemnly to subscribe what they do not believe.

The other particular I proposed to mention is the solemn attestation of men's characters, not only in general, but for particular qualities, without any satisfying knowledge whether the thing affirmed is true or false. This hath been often done in the church of Scotland, not by particular persons, with whom we might renounce relation, but by consent of many, gravely and deliberately in constituted courts. Can we avoid making the following obvious but melancholy reflection, How great is the blindness of men to
I 3 those

those sins which are introduced by degrees and countenanced by prevailing fashion? Should we be told by an historian of credit, that, in one of the dark and corrupt ages of popery, it was common for a body of ministers, when desired, to give a signed attestation to particular persons, that they were strict observers of the sabbath, and worshipped God regularly in their families, while the persons attesting knew nothing of the matter, and, in fact, with regard to some of them, it was absolutely false. Would there be a dissenting voice in affirming, that such men must have been lost to all sense of integrity, and utterly unworthy of regard. What shall we say, if the same thing is done among us every day, and defended by no better argument than the judgment of charity, which believeth all things. Charity teaches us to believe no ill of another without satisfying evidence, and forbids us to spread it, although it be true, without apparent necessity; but will charity either justify or excuse us, in solemnly affirming a positive fact, the existence of which is uncertain in itself, and to us unknown. I do not take upon me to say, that all are bad men who are guilty, by act or consent, of this practice, because I do not know how far the plea of ignorance or mistake may go; but this may be safely said that they do in a public capacity, what, if they were to do in a private capacity

city between man and man, would render them contemptible, or infamous, or both.

These two particulars have often brought reproach upon the church of Scotland, to which it is very difficult to make a proper reply. Would to God the occasion given for it were wholly taken away. In the mean time, every one who has a just regard to the glory of God, or the success of his own work, will endeavour to maintain such an uniformity of character, as will bear that examination, to which it ought in justice, and must of necessity be exposed.

In the last place, I must beg leave to speak a few words to the people in general, on the subject of this discourse. You may learn, my brethren, from the preceding discourse, by what rule you ought to judge, in all religious controversies, where a determination is necessary. Try all principles by their effects, and every person's pretences by his conduct. Examine, as far as you have proper evidence, who have real and vital religion most at heart, and what means do effectually promote it. Believe not every profession, but see which is most consistent in all its parts. Have patience, in difficult cases, till the tree have time to bring its fruits to maturity. Time will often write a clear and legible character, on what was very dark and dubious at first.

It is probable some will be ready to say, there is no small doubtfulness in this rule itself. There may be found good men of many different parties, how then shall we judge between them? I answer, wherever there is true religion, these persons are to be considered as the servants of God, and his grace in them is to be confessed without reluctance, and adored with thankfulness. There will, nevertheless, be still sufficient means to distinguish between one profession and another, which hath the greatest influence in making men truly good. There may be, here and there, a good man under very great disadvantages. This may serve to keep us from a bigotted narrowness of mind, and uncharitable condemnation of others. But it will never occasion, in any prudent person, a departure from these principles, and that dispensation of ordinances, which he sees to be best for building him up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation. The truth is, one great design of this discourse was to teach men to distinguish between the upright and the worthless of all sects. Turn your zeal from parties to persons. Do not reproach or oppose men merely because they are of this or the other persuasion. But, wherever there is a wicked or a worldly man in the office of a minister, avoid the wolf in sheep's cloathing for your own sake, and, if possible, drag off his disguise,

guise, that others may not be his prey. What doth it signify what party a man is of, if the foundations are destroyed, and truth and holiness, these inseparable companions, are trampled under foot. When shall the time come, when the sincere lovers of Christ of every denomination, shall join together in opposition to his open enemies and treacherous friends. There is a wonderful, though a natural union, among all worldly men, against the spirit and power of true religion wherever it appears. I am sorry to add, that this is one of the instances in which the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. Many will not meet together on earth for the worship of God, who shall have but one temple at last, where all from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, shall meet, and join in their Creator and Redeemer's praise. The terms of admission into, and of exclusion from this happy dwelling, are recorded in the following remarkable terms, with which I shall conclude this discourse, as indeed they are the sum of all that has been said in it, "And there shall in no wise enter into it, any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life*."

* Rev. xxi. 27.



**The CHARGE of SEDITION and FACTION
against good MEN, especially faithful MI-
NISTERS, considered and accounted for.**

A

S E R M O N

Preached in the Abbey-church of PAISLEY,

O N

THURSDAY, Sept. 7th, 1758.

At the Ordination of Mr. ARCHIBALD
DAVIDSON, as one of the Ministers of
that Church.

To which is subjoined,

**The CHARGE to the MINISTER, and the
EXHORTATION to the PEOPLE.**

Published at the Desire of those who heard it.





ACTS xvii. 6. last clause.

*These that have turned the world upside down
are come hitber also.*

My BRETHREN,

YOU have had, of late, frequent opportunities of hearing discourses on the ministerial character and office. These subjects, indeed, have, on occasions of this and a similar nature, been so often and so well handled, that it is hard to say any thing on them, which shall not be either bare repetition, or an alteration very much for the worse. I have therefore made choice at this time of a subject somewhat different, but the usefulness of which, both to ministers and people may be easily discerned.

A great part of the sacred volume consists of history. And, as the knowledge of past events, and the history of mankind in general, is an improving

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proving study; so there is no object of study more pleasant or more profitable, than that extensive view of the great plan of providence which is exhibited to us in the word of God. There we have access to observe the power, the wisdom, and the grace of the various revelations of the divine will, given in successive ages, their correspondence one to another, and how well each is suited to the season, and other circumstances of its discovery. Above all, it is useful and delightful to observe, the perfect union and harmony of the whole, and the several striking and distinguishing characters that are to be found on all the works of the one, eternal, and unchangeable God.

This uniformity is in nothing more remarkable, than in the sufferings of good men, and their causes. True religion being the same in substance in every age, we may expect to find a very strong likeness in all the real servants of God, however distant the periods in which they make their appearance. A conformity of state also may be expected, as well as a similarity of character. They have the same end in view, they tread in the same path, and therefore, must meet with resistance from the same enemies. There was from the beginning, and there will be to the end of the world, a strife and conflict between the righteous and the wicked, between “ the
“ seed

against GOOD MEN accounted for. 183

“ seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent.” And, in particular, it is natural to suppose, that slander and calumny will be always one of the weapons used by the enemies of the truth. We have no reason then to be surprised, that every good man should have occasion to say with the Psalmist David, and with a greater than he, the Son of David, “ They laid to my charge “ things that I knew not.”

This was the case with the apostle Paul and his companion, in the passage of history of which my text is a part. But the nature of the accusation here brought against them seems to be singular, and to merit particular attention. They were the servants and the ministers of the Prince of peace. Their office was to preach and publish the gospel of peace. Their doctrine was full of meekness and love. They discovered the love of God to men; and, after the example of their master, they charged men to love one another. They were mean in their outward appearance, and neither possessed, nor claimed any earthly dominion. In one word, they had nothing about them that one would think could give jealousy to the civil power, that could seem formidable or dangerous to any character or class of men. Yet here they are charged as seditious, as disturbers to the public peace, as enemies to the government. “ These that have turned the
“ world

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“ world upside down are come hither also.—

“ These all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar,

“ saying, That there is another king, one Jesus.”

What sort of an accusation is this? not only false but improbable. Does not the arch-enemy, the accuser of the brethren, seem to have failed in his usual skill? Is there the least prospect of success in so groundless a charge?

But what shall we say, if, upon an accurate examination it be found, that the same charge hath been brought against the servants of God in every age? That none hath been advanced with greater boldness, and none with greater success? Nay, perhaps, that it is the single standing charge, from which their enemies have never departed since the beginning of the world, and which, of all others, hath been most readily and most universally believed. In other instances, the reproaches thrown upon the children of God have been opposite, and mutually destructive of each other. Christ himself, when his zeal in his Father's business made him forget to eat bread, was said to be beside himself, and mad. At other times he was called a cunning deceiver and master of the curious arts. But in this, his enemies, and those of his people, have never varied. And their success has been equal to their malice. They crucified him as an enemy to Cæsar, with the title of usurpation written over him; and they have
com-

against **GOOD MEN** accounted for. 185
compelled all his disciples after him, to bear his
cross, and to groan under the weight of the same
unjust and slanderous charge.

There are few subjects more worthy of the
serious attention of those who firmly believe the
word of God. None which will afford greater
occasion to adore the mysterious depth of divine
providence, or furnish more instructive lessons to
such as desire to hold on with steadiness in the
paths of true religion. Above all, this subject
may be useful to ministers of the gospel. It will
contribute to ascertain the character which they
ought to bear; to direct them in their duty; to
prepare them for, and fortify them against, the
trials which it is impossible they can avoid.

In discoursing further upon this subject it is
proposed, through the assistance of divine grace,

I. By a short historical deduction, chiefly from
the holy Scriptures, to shew, That the charac-
ter of seditious, troublesome, and disorderly, hath
been constantly given by wicked men to the ser-
vants of God.

II. To enquire, and endeavour to point out,
what it is in true religion that gives occasion
to this charge, and makes the world prone to
believe it.

In

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In the last place, To make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I return to the first of these, viz.

I. By a short historical deduction, to shew, That the character of seditious, troublesome, and disorderly, hath been constantly given by wicked men to the servants of God.—It would not be difficult to point out something of this spirit prevailing in the world, from the life of almost every good man, whose name stands upon record, however short and general the account be, that is given of many of them in Scripture. But, as much of what might properly enough fall under this head, will be necessary in the illustration of the second; to prevent confusion and repetition, I shall content myself with some leading instances, in very different ages, from the earliest to the latest times.

The first I shall mention is, a passage as extraordinary in its nature, and as singular in its circumstances, as any that history affords. It is the meeting of Ahab and Elijah, in the time of a great famine in the land of Israel. Ahab, that profane prince, had by his apostacy and idolatry, brought down the judgment of a righteous God, both on his kingdom and on his house. We are told, “ That he did more to provoke
“ the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all the
“ kings

“ kings of Israel that were before him*.” He had persecuted the worshippers of the true God with unrelenting violence; and, as it was natural to expect, he hated with uncommon rancour, and distinguished by uncommon severity, all the prophets who continued stedfast in the cause of truth. As many of them as he could lay hold of, he had put to death. He had hunted for Elijah, not only through all the kingdom of Israel, but through the neighbouring nations, as we find related by Obadiah his principal servant, “ As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee; and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation that they found thee not †.” After all this severity on his part, when Elijah, by the command of God went out to meet him, see the form of his salutation; “ And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel ‡?” To this the prophet makes the following strong and just reply, “ I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, have troubled Israel, in that thou hast forsaken the commandments of the Lord; and thou hast followed Baalim.”

* 1 Kings. xvi. 33. † 1 Kings xviii. 19. ‡ Ibid. ver. 17.

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Another instance similar to the former may be found in Jehosaphat and Ahab's consultation before going out to battle. "And Jehosaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may enquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehosaphat, There is yet one man (Micaiah the son of Imlah) by whom we may enquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil*." Here, you see, Micaiah was the object of hatred and aversion, because he denounced the judgment of God against the king's wickedness. That vengeance which he himself not only merited but solicited by his crimes, was attributed to malice in the prophet.

See an instance of a general accusation of this kind against all the worshippers of the true God, by Haman in the book of Esther. "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them †."

The prophet Jeremiah met with the same treatment at different times. Neither prince, nor

* 1 Kings xxii. 7, 8.

† Esther iii. 8.

priests,

against GOOD MEN accounted for. 189

priests, nor prophets, were able to bear without resentment, the threatenings which he denounced in the name of God. “ Now it came to pass, “ when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking “ all that the Lord had commanded him to speak “ unto all the people, that the priests and “ the prophets, and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die. Why hast thou “ prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, “ This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city “ shall be desolate without an inhabitant, and “ all the people were gathered against Jeremiah “ in the house of the Lord *.—Then spake “ the priests and the prophets unto the princes “ and to all the people, saying, This man is “ worthy to die, for he hath prophesied against “ this city, as you have heard with your ears †.” We find him afterwards expressly accused of treachery on the same account. “ And when “ he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of “ the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, “ the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, “ and he took Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “ Thou fallest away to the Chaldeans ‡.”

The prophet Amos is another instance, precisely parallel to the last. Because of his fidelity to God, he was invidiously represented as an ene-

* Jer. xxvi. 8, 9. † Ibid. ver. 11.

‡ Jer.

xxxvii. 13. See also chap. xxxviii. 4.

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my to the king. “ Then Amaziah the priest of
“ Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel,
“ saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in
“ the midst of the house of Israel: the land is
“ not able to bear all his words *.”

Our blessed Lord and Saviour fell under the
same accusation. However plain and artless his
carriage, he is called a deceiver of the people.
“ There was much murmuring among the peo-
“ ple concerning him, for some said, he is a
“ good man; others said, Nay, but he deceiv-
“ eth the people †.” His enemies endeavoured
to embroil him with the civil government by this
insidious question, “ Is it lawful to give tribute
“ to Cæsar, or not?” And that which brought
him at last to the cross was the same pretended
crime. “ And from thenceforth Pilate sought
“ to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying,
“ If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar’s
“ friend: whosoever maketh himself a king,
“ speaketh against Cæsar †.”

I shall close this view of the Scripture history,
with the passage of which my text is a part. The
whole crime of the apostle Paul, and his compa-
nion, was preaching the doctrine of the cross of
Christ, his great and darling theme. We are
told, he “ opened” and “ alledged, that Christ
“ must needs have suffered, and risen again from

* Amos vii. 20. † John vii. 12. † John xix. 12.

“ the

“the dead.” Then the Jews, to whom this doctrine always was a stumbling-block, were “moved with envy,” and endeavoured to inflame the resentment of the idolatrous multitude: they took for their associates the most wicked and profligate, “Certain lewd fellows of the baser sort:” They “set all the city in an uprore:” And as, no doubt, the friends of Paul and Silas would endeavour to protect them from the injurious assault, their enemies very gravely charge them as the authors of the confusion, both there and elsewhere, “They that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also.”

Having produced these instances from the holy Scriptures, which are liable to no exception, I shall say but little on the subsequent periods of the church. Only in general, the same spirit will be found to have prevailed in every age. Whoever will take the pains to look into the history of the church before the reformation, cannot fail to observe, that when any one, either among the clergy or laity, was bold enough to reprove the errors in doctrine, or the ambition, luxury, and worldly lives of his contemporaries, he was immediately branded as a factious and disorderly person, and often severely punished as an enemy to the peace of the church.

That this was the case with the first reformers, both at home and abroad, is too well known to

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need any proof. And we have had still more recent examples of it in both parts of the united kingdom. The noble struggle which many in England made, about an hundred years ago, for their liberties sacred and civil, still bears the name of the grand rebellion. And it is remarkable, that, however just a title they had to stand up for their rights as men and Christians, yet their doing so at that time, was in a great measure owing to the fury and violence of their enemies, who were, in every respect, the aggressors. A very judicious historian says on this subject, " That which, upon the whole, was the great " cause of the parliament's strength and the " king's ruin, was, that the debauched rabble " through the land, took all that were called " Puritans for their enemies; so that if a man " did but pray in his family, or were but heard " repeat a sermon, or sing a psalm, they pre- " sently cried out, Rebels, roundheads, and all " their money and goods that were portable, " proved guilty, how innocent soever they were " themselves. This it was that filled the armies " and garrisons of the parliament with sober pi- " ous men. Thousands had no mind to meddle " with the wars, but greatly desired to live " peaceably at home, when the rage of soldiers " and drunkards would not suffer them*."

* Calamy's Life of Baxter, Chap. IV.

And in Scotland, after the restoration, though there was no struggle for civil liberty, all who chose to obey God rather than man, either in the substance or circumstances of religious duties, were charged with treason and suffered as rebels. They were expelled from the church; yet censured as schismatics. They were harrassed, fined, and imprisoned, when living in peace, without any fault but "concerning the law of their God;" and yet complained of as troublesome. They were banished, excommunicated, and denied the common benefits of life; and yet, when the extreme rigour of their oppressors compelled them to take up arms in self-defence, they were condemned in form of law, for resisting that government which had denied them its protection.

I forbear to add any more particular examples; but from the deduction above given, it will plainly appear, that worldly men have been always disposed, first to oppress the children of God, and then to complain of injury from them, that by slander they might vindicate their oppression. Their slander too, hath still run in the same strain; troublers of Israel, deceivers of the people, enemies to Cæsar, and turners of the world upside down, have been the opprobrious titles generally given to the most upright and most faithful men, in every age and country.

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We proceed now,

II. In the second place, To enquire, what it is in true religion that gives occasion to this charge, and makes the world prone to believe it.

That there must be something of this kind is very evident. So uniform an effect, could not take place without an adequate cause. And, to a serious and attentive observer, I am persuaded it is not difficult to discern. The general cause of this effect is, that, in an equivocal sense, the charge is just. True religion does, indeed, give trouble and uneasiness to wicked men, while they continue such; and it cannot be supposed, but they will deeply resent it. In order to illustrate this a little more fully, I beg your attention to the three following observations.

I. The example of the servants of God, is a continual and sensible reproach, to the contrary conduct of the men of the world. Nothing can preserve peace to any man, but some measure of self-satisfaction. As a deceived heart turns the wicked aside, so the continuance of self-deceit is necessary to his tasting those pleasures of sin in which his mistaken happiness is placed. To reproach his conduct, therefore, is to disturb his dream, and to wound his peace. And as pride, however finely disguised, has the dominion in every unrenewed heart, how offensive must every species of reproof be, to men of this character?

Now,

Now, is not the example of every good man, a severe and sensible, though silent, reproof to the wicked? With whatever specious arguments men may sometimes plead for sin, with whatever false pretences they may often excuse and palliate it to their own minds, when it is brought into one view with true religion, it is not able to bear the comparison. The example of good men to the wicked is, like the sun upon a weak eye, distressing and painful. It is excellent in itself, but it is offensive to them. If I may speak so, it flashes light upon the conscience, rouses it from a state of insensible security, points its arrows, and sharpens its sting. What else was it that produced the first act of violence that stands upon record, the murder of Abel by his brother Cain? Of this the apostle John speaks in the following terms; “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked
“one, and slew his brother: and wherefore
“slew he him? Because his own works were
“evil, and his brother’s righteous.”

And, as every worldly man’s own conscience is thus made troublesome to him by the example of the children of God: so it tends to set sinners at variance with one another, and exposes the conduct of each to the censure of the rest. Sin, however universally practised, is yet generally shameful. Conscience though bribed, and comparatively blind in a man’s own case, is often

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just and impartial, at least under far less bias, in the case of others. It is in this way, and in this way alone, that the public honour and credit of religion is preserved, amidst so great a majority who are enemies to it in their hearts. Must not then, the example of a strict and conscientious person, set in the strongest light the faults of those who act a contrary part, so often as they happen to fall under observation together. Nay, does it not open the eyes of the world upon many lesser blemishes which would otherwise escape its notice? The degree of shame that attends any practice, is always in proportion to the sense which the bulk of mankind have of the evil of it. And this sense cannot, by any means, be more strengthened, than by an example of what is good; as deformity never appears so shocking as when compared with perfect beauty. Thus, a truly pious man is, by every instance of his visible conduct, exposing to reproach some one or other, and by consequence provoking their resentment.

It is for this reason, that men discover such a proneness to disparage every profession of piety superior to their own. How common is it to ascribe every such appearance to weakness or hypocrisy. In the generality of wicked men this is not so properly malice as self-defence. If they should allow the excellence of such a charac-

ter, it would be condemning themselves out of their own mouths. Their inward reflection, in all probability, is perfectly similar to that of the Pharisees, when Christ asked them, Whether the baptism of John was from heaven, or of men? "They reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say from heaven, he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him?" In the same manner, should any confess the excellence of a conduct opposite to their own, it would be impossible to avoid saying to them, Why do you then so sin against light?

Every one will see, that this must necessarily hold most strongly in the case of those whose office, or whose work, is of a public nature. They are like a city set on an hill. As their character is most conspicuous, it is, by necessary consequence, most useful to the good, and most provoking to the wicked. Faithful ministers of Christ, for instance, are the lights of the world, and, by their piety and diligence, are a standing reproach to the world lying in wickedness. But, in a particular manner, they must be the objects of the hatred and resentment of those of their own order, who will not follow their steps. This is an evident consequence of the principle above laid down. As their character suffers most by the comparison, their passions must necessarily be most inflamed. Let a minister of Christ be

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ever so guarded in his speech, ever so inoffensive in his carriage, ever so distant in reality from injuring others ; if he is more frequent or more affectionate in preaching, if he is more assiduous in the duties of his function, this must naturally excite the resentment of the lazy, slothful part of his profession. This of itself, is injury enough to those who love their worldly ease, and have more pleasure in the possession of their benefice, than the exercise of their office. Is this surprising? Not in the least. His conduct does indeed molest their quiet : it either forces them to greater diligence, or holds up their real character to light, and exposes them to contempt and scorn.

In order at once to confirm and illustrate this truth, be pleased, my brethren, to observe, that the force and malignity of envy in defaming of characters, is always in proportion to the nearness of the person to whom the character belongs. Distance, either of time or place, greatly abates, if not wholly extinguishes it. Suppose the character of a person drawn, who lived many ages ago, or even at present in a very distant country ; suppose him represented as eminent in virtue of every kind, as remarkably diligent, as indefatigably active in doing good ; there are few who shew any disposition to call in question the fact, or impute it to sinister motives. But let the same be the apparent character of any man
among

among his contemporaries, and how many are immediately up in arms against him? How implicitly do they believe, and with what pleasure do they spread every idle calumny to his prejudice? How is his piety immediately converted into hypocrisy, his zeal into faction and ill-nature, his fervour and diligence into affectation and love of popularity; and, in a word, every valuable quality into that vice, by which it is most commonly or most artfully counterfeited.

That this difference of judgment is entirely owing to the reason I have assigned, will further appear, if you consider, that so soon as a connection of the same nature happens, by any accidental circumstance to be established, the same invidious resentment immediately takes place against the most distant characters. What inveterate prejudice do infidels generally show, against the characters of the Scripture saints, and those of the fathers of the Christian church, because the establishment of such characters does necessarily and manifestly infer the overthrow of the cause in which they are embarked. In the mean time, the wise men of the heathen nations are suffered to possess, without contradiction, all the reputation which their countrymen in after-ages have thought fit to bestow upon them. Nay, sometimes to serve a certain purpose, their character is increased and magnified beyond all rea-

sonable bounds. What pains have been taken by those Christians, who patronize the modern inventions and improvements in theology, to undermine the characters of the most eminent champions of the ancient faith? What would some persons teach us to believe of Athanasius and Augustine in earlier, Calvin, Luther and Melancthon in later times? Not that we have not well-attested evidence of their piety and integrity, but that, being of different sentiments from their accusers, the excellence of their character is too good a support to their cause*.

2. Another reason why the servants of God are represented as troublesome is, because they

* I take the opportunity here to add, That the principle above laid down, will plainly account for the great and unassaulted reputation, which the monks and retired devotees so long enjoyed in popish times. It was their reputation, indeed, which upheld for so long a period, that immense load of idolatrous superstition the Romish religion; and it was not lost, till they were grossly corrupted, and convents were become receptacles of the most shameful impurity and lust. These persons were separated from the world. No frequent, and few near comparisons, could be made between them and others. Nay, their character was voluntary, and peculiar to themselves, containing no pretence of an obligation upon all others to imitate it; and therefore, they were suffered to live unenvied. But, if any persons of piety towards God, and fidelity to their Master's cause, live in the world, and refuse to be conformed to it, they must expect the same treatment that he met with. This he hath told them himself, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you*."—The servant is "not greater than the Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also †.

* John xv. 18.

† Verse 20.

will not, and dare not, comply with the sinful commandments of men. In matters merely civil, good men are the most regular citizens and the most obedient subjects. But, as they have a Master in heaven, no earthly power can constrain them to deny his name or desert his cause. The reply of Peter and John to the Jewish rulers when they were commanded "Not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus," was in the following terms, "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye*." With what invincible constancy and resolution did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? The case of Daniel was perfectly similar, whom even the king's commandment could not restrain from prayer to God.

When good men are unhappily brought into these circumstances, their conduct is an apparent contradiction to authority. How ready are lordly and oppressive tyrants to style it obstinacy and pride? And when are there wanting slavish and submissive flatterers near every inferior tribunal, to aggravate the crime, and to cry, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend?" It is not to be imagined; indeed, but such as are strangers to true religion, must be greatly provoked at those who will not

* Acts iv. 19.

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comply implicitly with their commands. There is a remarkable passage in a letter of Pliny the younger, to the emperor Trajan, which plainly points out the sentiments entertained by many on this subject. He was a man in other matters abundantly humane, and yet hear his own account of his treatment of the Christians when brought to his tribunal. "I asked them if they were Christians; if they confessed, I asked them again threatening punishment. If they persisted, I commanded them to be executed; for I did not at all doubt but, whatever their confession was, their stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy ought to be punished."

There is a love of dominion natural to all men, which is under no controul or restraint in those who are void of religion. This must naturally dispose them to carry on their schemes, and to insist on having them universally complied with. It frets and provokes them, therefore, to find any who will not be subservient to their pleasures. A refusal to obey, on a principle of conscience, is expressly setting bounds to their authority, and saying, Hitherto shalt thou go, but no further. How few are able to bear this with patience, the history of the world in every age is one continued proof.

Such refusals also, do always reflect some dishonour upon the measures to which they stand
in

in opposition. Whatever any person refuses to do, he, as far as in him lies, represents as wrong and sinful; and, in some respects, unworthy or unfit to be done. Thus it comes to be considered not only as withdrawing his own allegiance, but as corrupting and seducing others. And no doubt, it tends to draw the attention of the world to the disputed command, and makes some, perhaps, list and examine what they had before blindly gone into without suspicion. Hence it naturally follows, that whenever such interference happens between human and divine authority, good men must be considered as disorderly and troublesome; and those of them of all others most troublesome, who with the greatest constancy adhere to their duty, or who, with the greatest honesty and boldness, resist and oppose corrupt measures.

It is less surprising to find instances of this between heathen and Christian, between the professing servants and open enemies of the true God. But it is astonishing to think, how often the same thing has happened between Christian and Christian, who ought to have been better acquainted with the rights of conscience, the measures of submission, and the duty of forbearance. Not only all the persecutions, but many, if not most, of the schisms and divisions that have fallen out in the Christian church, have

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arisen from the rigorous impositions of usurped authority. Unjust authority is the very essence of popery. The church of Rome has expressly claimed a power of making laws to bind the conscience, distinct from the laws of God; and severely punishes all who call this authority in question. Nor hath this been confined to them: protestant churches, though their separation is founded upon the very contrary principle, have yet often in practice acted in the same arbitrary manner. They insist upon obedience to all their appointments, however sinful in the judgment of the subject: and, as good man will not comply in such cases, how often doth it happen, that, after they have expelled him from their society, stript him of his office, and robbed him of his maintenance, they also cast out his name as evil, loudly charge him as seditious and troublesome, and the author of all that confusion which their own tyranny occasions.

3. One other reason why the servants of God are accused as troublesome, is, because they are, in many instances, obliged, to bear testimony against the sins of others, and openly to reprove them. Reproof is plainly, of all others, the greatest offence and provocation of the proud, and draws down their heaviest resentment: and yet it is often unavoidable. There are some cases in which every Christian without exception, must feel

feel the constraint of this divine law. "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him*." Some sins are so flagrant in their nature that, even to witness them with silence, would imply some participation of the guilt. In such cases it is the glory of the poorest and meanest servant of God; to resent the dishonour that is done to his name, and reprove the most exalted sinner.

But this duty, and the odium arising from it, falls most frequently to the share of the prophets and ministers of God, who have received a commission to speak in his name, and to plead his cause. The faithful discharge of their duty, includes in it plainness and boldness in reproofing sin of every kind. They must assert and maintain the truth, and point out the errors opposite to it, with all their guilty fruits, and all their dreadful consequences. How offensive this to human pride? It must certainly either convince or provoke, reform or inflame. When righteous Lot says, in the mildest terms, to the lustful Sodomites, "I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly," how fierce is the answer? "And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge †."

* Lev. xix. 17.

† Gen. xix. 9.

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How many martyrs to truth have there been since the world began? Without mentioning those in the old testament, you see John the baptist lost his life by reprovng the incestuous adultery of Herod and Herodias. Our blessed Saviour gives the following account of the hatred of the world to him, and the contrary reception it gave to his temporising brethren, “ The world cannot hate you ; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, “ that the works thereof are evil.” By consulting the history of the gospel you will find, that what gave rise to the conspiracy of the Scribes and Pharisees against him, was his dragging off the mask under which they lay concealed, and discovering the errors of their doctrine, and the licentiousness of their practice. When they “ perceived that he spake against “ them,—they took counsel against him to put “ him to death ;” and accomplished it so soon as they could do it with safety. But there cannot be a better example, or indeed, a more lively and well drawn picture of the effect of plain and just reproof, than in the case of Stephen, when pleading his cause before the Jewish rulers. “ Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart “ and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost ; “ as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the “ prophets have not your fathers persecuted ? “ And they have slain them which shewed be-
“ fore

“ fore of the coming of the just One; of whom
 “ you have been now the betrayers and mur-
 “ derers. — When they heard these things,
 “ they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed
 “ on him with their teeth *.” It is plainly for
 this reason that the apostles, in their prayers for
 assistance, do almost constantly ask, that they may
 be endued with a proper degree of boldness and
 resolution, “ And now, Lord, behold their threat-
 “ nings; and grant unto thy servants that with
 “ all boldness they may speak thy word †.”
 Many other prayers are to be found in the apos-
 tolic writings, which run in the same strain ‡.”

It is very natural for every one at this dis-
 tance, to imagine, that he could have been in
 no danger of making such an obstinate resistance
 to the truth, or persecuting, with such implaca-
 ble enmity, those who espoused it. But, my bre-
 thren, all worldly men, in every age, have still the
 same abhorrence of the faithful servants of God;
 the same impatience of reproof, when it touches
 themselves. Our Saviour draws their character
 with great beauty, in speaking to the Pharisees;
 “ Wo unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypo-
 “ crites, because ye build the tombs of the pro-
 “ phets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righ-
 “ teous; and say, If we had been in the days

* Acts vii. 51, 52, 54.

† Acts iv. 29.

‡ See Eph.

vi. 19. 2 Thess. iii. 2.

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“ of our fathers, we would not have been
“ partakers with them in the blood of the pro-
“ phets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto your-
“ selves, that ye are the children of them which
“ killed the prophets*.” It is very delicately
hinted in this last verse, that they were of the
same nature, that they grew, as it were, upon the
same stock, and therefore it might be expected
that they would bring forth the same fruit. I can-
not but here mention a remark of a very eminent
writer upon this passage; “ That all nations
“ partake much of this disposition of the Jews,
“ to honour the dead saints, and persecute the
“ living †.”

I have taken notice above, that in every pe-
riod of the church, the most faithful of the ser-
vants and ministers of God, have, in fact, been
counted troublesome by corrupt and worldly men.
The same passages of history constantly shew,
that this has arisen chiefly from their attempts
to stem the tide of prevailing vice; from their
boldness and faithfulness in reprovng fashionable
crimes. In the twelfth century Arnulphus a de-
vout man, and excellent preacher, speaks thus to
the clergy: “ I know that you seek my life, and
“ will shortly kill me; But why? I speak the
“ truth to you, I reprehend your pride and
“ haughtiness, avarice and luxury, therefore I

* Matt. xxiii. 29, 30, 31.

† Tillotson.

“ please

“ please you not *.” And in the fourteenth century, an ancient writer speaks of the court of Rome in the following terms : “ For what can
 “ you conceive will happen where virtue was
 “ long ago extinct and buried? There surely
 “ truth is the highest crime, and of itself sufficient to procure the hatred of many. For
 “ how can we expect but that should happen,
 “ where a true word cannot be spoken without
 “ a great reproach, where the worst of men are
 “ promoted,—where simplicity is esteemed madness,—where good men are rendered ridiculous, insomuch that now scarce any of them
 “ doth appear to be laughed at. These few
 “ things truth itself hath dared to speak, whence
 “ you may gather what you are to think of many others, which fear doth force me to conceal †.” It is unnecessary to cite many passages to this purpose; I shall therefore conclude this head with the following just reflection of the pious, diligent, and catholic Mr. Baxter;
 “ I see there is no help for it, but we must offend wicked men. It is impossible to avoid it,
 “ but either by our silence or their patience.
 “ Silent we cannot be, because the word of God
 “ commands us to speak; and patient they can-

* Whitby's App. to his book on Host-worship.

† Petrarch's Ep.

“ not

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“ not be, because sin has the dominion in their hearts.”

We now proceed in the last place, to make some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

In the first place, You may learn from what has been said upon this subject, the just and proper answer to an objection against the gospel, much insisted on by its enemies, viz. That it has introduced persecution for conscience sake, with which the world was in a great measure unacquainted before. There are few subjects, on which infidels enlarge with greater pleasure, than the cruel hatred and animosity that has prevailed; the bloody wars that have been carried on; nay, the savage and inhuman massacres that have been perpetrated on a religious account, since the publication of the gospel. I think this objection is but seldom answered as it might be. It is usually indeed, and justly observed, that whatever may have been done by those professing the gospel, there is no countenance given in it to such a spirit and practice. But the objection is not wholly removed, while infidels are allowed still to contend, as if it served their own cause, that persecution has been its constant attendant and inseparable effect. We ought therefore, to wrest this argument out of their hands, and first to produce this fact as an accomplishment of our Saviour's prediction;

dition; " Think not that I am come to send
 " peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but
 " a sword. For I am come to set a man at va-
 " riance against his father, and the daughter
 " against her mother, and the daughter-in-law
 " against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes
 " shall be they of his own household *."

Having gone thus far, we have reason to con-
 tend that the disciples of Christ have always suf-
 fered, and never inflicted the injury, though they
 have been often obliged to bear the blame. The
 multitude of heathen religions, though not al-
 ways, yet did generally agree together: and well
 they might, for they were all from the same au-
 thor. None of them, however, could agree with
 the gospel: for this plain reason, that " no lie is
 " of the truth." But from what quarter did the
 violence proceed? Did not the dreadful perfec-
 tions against the Christians, in the three first cen-
 turies, proceed from the heathens? Did the
 Christians commit any other crime against them,
 than pointing out the sin and danger of their ido-
 latrous worship, and immoral practices? Was
 not this alone sufficient to raise a cry against
 them, as turning the world upside down? And
 in all the subsequent persecutions among pro-
 fessing Christians, was it any thing else than the
 proud, violent, and worldly spirit of those who

* Matt. x. 34, 35, 36.

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made a gain of godliness, oppressing the few real believers of every denomination? There is an antichristian spirit in every church that shews itself in persecution, in a greater or lesser degree. But there can be nothing more unjust, than to attribute the persecution of Christ's disciples by his enemies and theirs, to the spirit of his religion.

Is it then boldly affirmed by some, that the Christian is the only religion in the world that leads to persecution? I answer, on the contrary, It is the only religion that has suffered persecution from all its numerous enemies: and at the same time, it is the only religion in the world that requires, and points out the obligation, of mutual forbearance, and makes the just and proper division between the things that are Cæsar's, and the things that are God's. That it is often blamed as persecuting others, is a proof and illustration of this truth. For all is of a piece, and the false accusation arises from the source which I have opened up above, and confirmed by examples produced from history. To these I shall now only add one observation, which comes in with peculiar propriety here; That innumerable instances may be given, in which those very persons who were ready to lift the secular arm against good men, have loudly complained of the exercise of discipline, and the censures of the church upon their crimes. These they often style persecution.

cution, and always affirm to flow from a persecuting spirit. But as they are often necessary, so even when they are unjustly applied, it is plain from their very nature, that if they be groundless, they must be perfectly harmless.

Thus the state of the world is so far from being an objection against, that it is a proof of the truth of the gospel. True Christians have suffered from every quarter; from within and from without; from open enemies and from false brethren. They have been first persecuted, and then slandered as persecuting others; nay, obliged to bear the odium of that very oppression under which they groaned. Of all this they are fairly forewarned by their Saviour, who says, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves." They are exposed to injurious treatment from many, and may expect to suffer without cause. None however make so cruel a havoc, as those wolves who put on sheeps cloathing; and yet, of all their cruelty, the poor suffering sheep must bear the blame.

2. From what hath been said, you may see the guilt and danger of those who falsely accuse the children of God. Perhaps you may be ready wholly to refuse the charge, and to say, Where is the necessity, where is the propriety of this at present? Have we not all civil and religious liberty? and are not religion and its ministers in esteem

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esteem and repute? I answer, It is never unnecessary. The fault I complain of is no part of the peculiar degeneracy of this age. It is not confined to any one age, country, or profession, but is common to them all: and we would but deceive ourselves, should we fondly fancy we are exempted from it. Nay, our present state as a church and nation, seems to render such a warning peculiarly seasonable. We have long enjoyed outward peace. In every other country this has introduced a worldly spirit, ambition, luxury, and sloth. And is there no vestige of these characters among us now? Who will pretend it? Are there not some who cannot endure such strictness as is inconsistent with conformity to the gay and fashionable world. Do not all such, incline to charge every profession of piety with hypocrisy? Do they not consider every faithful reprover, as an enemy to their peace? Do they not hear with secret pleasure, and spread with apparent triumph, every report, to the prejudice of such troublers of Israel?

This then is the character; and as many of you as conscience charges with the guilt, may see your danger. You may see whose cause you plead, and whose reward you shall share. What inward enmity do you discover against the spirit and power of true religion? You are of the number of those who "Hate the light, and

“ will not come to the light, lest your deeds
“ should be reproved.” You are of the num-
“ ber of those who say “ to the seers, See not,
“ and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us
“ right things, speak unto us smooth things, and
“ prophecy deceit.” You will not “ endure
“ sound doctrine,” but love and follow only that
which will exercise and amuse your imagination
and fancy, sooth and gratify your pride and vani-
ty, or make and keep you at peace with your-
selves. You are asleep in security, and will avoid
every thing that may tend to disturb or interrupt
your dangerous repose. And how hurtful is your
conduct to others? You blast the characters and
lessen the usefulness of the ministers of Christ.
You bring an evil report upon the truth, by ren-
dering them odious or contemptible who bear it.
—And if we, my brethren, who are ministers of
the gospel, imitate this example in any measure,
if we discover a suspicion and jealousy, or an
aversion and hatred, at all who are more dili-
gent than ourselves, what dishonour must fall up-
on our profession, what a hindrance is it to the
edification of others, and what guilt do we bring
upon our own souls.

3. If this has been the constant lot of all
the servants of God, to be accused as seditious
and troublesome, let every cautious person be-
ware of being misled by the persecuting cry.
I ask any man who is conversant in the world,

if

if he hath not, in many instances, been insensibly taught to form a hateful idea, or to entertain a despicable opinion of many ministers, without the least personal knowledge, the least satisfying evidence or proof. What is the reason? Why, he hath been told, that they are proud, hypocritical, factious, censorious, troublesome men. Well. The thing is possible, no doubt. But, in the mean time, it is far from being certain; and this sort of character industriously propagated, is no evidence of it at all, or rather is a presumption of the contrary. You see, from the instances produced above, that this is a reproach perpetually thrown upon the most upright and faithful of the servants of God; that it may very naturally arise from their fidelity itself; and that it cannot be avoided by those who resist the corrupt measures, who reprove the public vices, or who shame the criminal laziness, and negligence of others. An ignorant, vicious, worthless minister, is envied by no body. He is therefore quite safe from all the poisoned arrows which fly from that quarter. He is rather a foil to many, to set off and illustrate their own comparative excellence. He is therefore often pardoned, pitied, and protected. Whereas a faithful minister, who openly dares to bear witness against the apostacy of others, is traduced and slandered, loaded with imaginary crimes, and often falls a martyr to the sinking cause of truth and righteousness.

4. Since

4. Since the world is so prone to receive the accusation of faction against the children of God, let them be careful to give no real ground for it. Unjust calumny has sometimes the contrary effect. When men find, that it is impossible to please a capricious world, or wholly to escape slander, they are apt to give up all solicitude upon that head, and take no farther pains to avoid suspected appearances. This I take to be, precisely, what the Scripture calls being "overcome of evil." But how much better is it "to overcome evil with good?" Let us, as often as possible, confute the accusation by an unblameable carriage; and when we must suffer, let us be careful that we suffer, not as evil doers, but for well doing. For this purpose I would humbly offer to ministers the two following directions, which I esteem of great moment.

(1.) Let all our zeal for the glory of God be conducted not only with steadiness, but with meekness. Let us ever remember, that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Let our language be always strictly guarded, and free from expressions of rage and fury. If we are faithful to our duty, it will sufficiently provoke sinners, we need not add to it by any mixture of human passion. What noble and effectual principles are we furnished with in Scripture, for avoiding every dangerous extreme? Love to God, and love to man, make up the

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sum of practical religion. These are the immediate fruits of faith, and all the truths of the gospel tend to strengthen and improve them. And as love to God produces indignation against sin, resolution and boldness in opposing it; so, love to man will naturally produce the deepest compassion for the miserable state of every enemy of God, and prevent firmness from degenerating into violence.

(2.) The other direction I would offer upon this subject is, that ministers take care to avoid officiously intermeddling in civil matters. A minister should be separated and set apart for his own work; he should be consecrated to his office. It is little glory to him to be eminently skilled in any other science, except such as may be handmaids to theology, and are by him habitually turned into a divine channel. Ministers giving themselves to worldly employments, has been commonly of bad fame; and, where there is a sufficient provision made for their maintenance, seems to be an unjust alienation of their time and talents. But it is still more sinful and dangerous, for them to desire or claim the direction of such matters as fall within the province of the civil magistrate. When our blessed Saviour says, "My kingdom is not of this world," he plainly intimates to his disciples, that they have no title to intermeddle with state affairs. Nay, he expressly warns them against a lordly and

and arbitrary dominion, even in their own proper sphere. “ The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve*.” I cannot help mentioning here, that this is one of the things, for which our worthy ancestors of the church of Scotland (now despised by many) deserve the highest commendation. It was an invariable principle with them, to be against the civil power and places of kirkmen. And surely, if ministers confine themselves entirely to their own proper duty, they will be much less liable to exception than otherwise. They may then, warrantably use the greatest fidelity in reproving, and the greatest strictness in discipline; and tho’ the wicked slander and oppose them, the good will defend them, and God will support them.

5. In the last place, Since the charge of faction and sedition has been always brought against faithful ministers, let us learn to bear it with patience, and never dissemble the truth, or depart, in any measure, from our duty, in order to avoid it. A person of a generous mind feels a wound in his reputation more deeply, than almost any other injury. We are still apt fondly to flatter ourselves, that as religion is truly amiable

* Luke xxii, 25, 26.

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in itself, and ought to make no enemies, that therefore we shall have none. Some are very apt to omit, or slightly to perform, several parts of their duty, through that "fear of man that bringeth a snare." They are unwilling to forego the hope, that by certain prudent compliances they will conciliate and preserve the favour of every man and every party. But the expectation is wholly vain. The experience of many ages hath proved it so. Let us therefore bear with patience the false accusation. It hath been the lot of the best and worthiest men in every age. It was the lot of our blessed Master, and shall we refuse to bear his cross? Is it not "enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant that he be as his Lord?" The triumph of sinners is but very short. In a little time all earthly relations shall be dissolved. Then high and low, magistrates and subjects, ministers and people, shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. He shall "render to every one according to his deeds." There the great and noble shall find no partial favour; there the poor and mean shall not escape observation; and there the lying slanderer shall be put to eternal silence. He shall openly acknowledge every faithful servant, and "bring forth his righteousness as the light, and his judgment as the noon day."

THE

T H E
C H A R G E.

S I R,

AS you are now ordained a minister of Christ, and have received the charge of this congregation, I hope you will bear with me a little, while I offer you a few advices as to the discharge of your important trust. And I cannot help beginning, by congratulating you on the unanimous call you have received from this people. However despised by some, I count it a most happy circumstance both for you and them. It introduces you with great advantage. It gives you a fair and impartial hearing; and, if you do not preserve their esteem and love, it will probably be, in a great measure, owing to yourself.

I must first of all beseech you, in the most earnest manner, to be strict and frequent, in enquiring into the truth and reality of religion in your own soul. Personal religion is the foundation of all relative duties. They can scarcely be performed in any tolerable measure without it. It is equally necessary to your usefulness, and to

Your comfort. It is a difficult thing, and it is a dreadful thing, to preach an unknown Saviour. Examine, therefore, whether you are "born again;" whether you have "passed from death to life;" whether you are united to Christ by faith; whether you know by experience, the difference between a state of nature and a state of grace, or not. While I speak this, I assure you, I do not mean it, and I hope none will interpret it, as any reflection against, or implying any suspicion of you, who have given me no cause. I speak it from a deep impression of its importance to us all. How miserable a case is it, to have it as our business to bring others to the kingdom of heaven, and be ourselves at last thrust out. A minister is as much liable to self-deceit as any other, and in some respects more so. We are in danger of thinking ourselves too easily safe, by comparing that outward regularity, to which our office itself, even from secular motives, obliges us, with the licentious extravagance of prophane sinners. We may also mistake our frequent thinking, and speaking of the "things of God," in the way of our calling, for an evidence of true religion in ourselves. Nay, we are in danger of mistaking those gifts, with which God furnisheth us for the benefit of his own people, for the fruits of the Spirit, and gracious dispositions in our own hearts. Maintain,

tain, therefore, a holy jealousy over yourself. "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure." And, if you save your own soul, you will probably carry many others with you to a better world; and be able to say, after the example of Christ, "Behold I, and the children whom God hath given me."

As to the duties of your office, see that you preach the pure and uncorrupted doctrine of Christ. Preach Christ crucified, who is "the way, and the truth, and the life;" and without whom "no man can go unto the Father." You will never be able to make men truly good, till you convince them of their lost state by nature; and thence make them see the necessity of justification by the free grace of God, through the imputed righteousness of Christ. If you would know what place Christ ought to hold in your preaching and scheme of doctrine, observe what room he fills in the oracles of truth. To the cross of Christ give all the prophets witness. The cross of Christ is the sum and substance of the new testament. The cross of Christ is the Christian's hope. The cross of Christ is the Christian's glory. You see, by a serious perusal of the new testament, that the sacred writers largely illustrate the several parts of his character and office, and seem with pleasure to embrace every opportunity of speaking to his praise. They show

how much we are to depend upon him for strength in the discharge of our duty; and enforce all their exhortations by motives drawn from what he hath done, and is still doing, for his church and people. You will soon find from experience, that no cold reasonings on the nature and beauty of virtue, can have such influence in mortifying corrupt affections, as a believing view of a pierced Saviour. For this very reason many detest the doctrine of the cross. It gives a mortal blow to every darling lust. It gives such a view of the holiness and justice of God, as is intolerable to all those who cannot think of breaking their attachment to sin and vanity.

There is one particular reason why I have mentioned this at present, and insisted on it at some length. It is ordinary to meet with serious persons who complain much, that from many pulpits they hear little or nothing of the doctrine of the grace of God; that the grand and leading truths of the gospel are either flatly contradicted, or kept entirely out of view, and something else substituted in their place. I am far from saying that this is indeed the case. On the contrary, I tremble to think that it should be but barely possible, for all these doctrines are clearly contained in the Confession of Faith, which every minister in Scotland has subscribed. If, therefore, there be any one among us, who doth
not

not preach the doctrine of original sin, of Christ's imputed righteousness, justification by free grace; the necessity of regeneration, and the operations of the Spirit, he is guilty of perjury of the worst kind, for which I know no excuse. Such a person is not only chargeable with departing from the faith, but with an absolute prostitution of conscience, and a whole life of hypocrisy and deceit. I am indeed entirely at a loss how to account for this apprehension in the people, of a difference in doctrine; but, as there certainly is such an apprehension, I think I cannot discharge my duty on this occasion, without exhorting you to be clear and explicit upon these heads. The truth is, they are of so general consequence, and have so necessary a connexion with every other part of religion, that, be the subject what it will, where they are firmly believed, I should imagine the manner of thinking and speaking would be such, as to leave no jealousy of an intended omission.

This leads me to exhort you, to preach plainly, or in a way that may be level to the capacities of the hearers, both as to sentiment and expression. God forbid, that I should desire you to rush into a pulpit without preparation, to preach in a disorderly method, or in a mean, slovenly, or indecent style. All pains should be taken to seek out fit and "acceptable words." But there cannot

be a greater absurdity in speaking to a multitude of common people, than to discourse in such a stiff and abstract way, as it is plainly impossible for them to comprehend. Nor is it any less absurdity to dress up an harangue with excessive elegance, and a vain, ornamented foppery of style. Some discourses may very well be likened to painted windows, which, with fine colours upon themselves, keep out the light, and make the house comfortless and dark. Such conduct is ordinarily followed by those, who would willingly recommend themselves to persons of better taste; but it must evidently render them contemptible to every person of sound judgment. However, it is much worse than absurd, for it is very wicked, when the everlasting salvation of sinners is at stake, to speak in such a manner as they cannot understand, or such as tends only to amuse their fancy, and never can reach their hearts. If we would know what is a proper and just manner of style and composition in preaching, let us consider how any man would speak, if he was on trial for his own life. Would he not speak with great plainness, earnestness and force? And is not the salvation of souls of infinitely more moment than any man's life? And should it not, if we believe the Scriptures, be more regarded by every faithful minister?

You

You must also take care to preach experimentally and particularly. You will soon find that this is the only profitable way of preaching, and that, unless you apply general truths to the several classes and characters in your audience, they will make but a sorry improvement of the best instruction. The ignorant cannot, and the wiser will not apply them to themselves. Besides, the general way is not only useless, but pernicious and hurtful. Suppose I should make an encomium on the wise, just, and gracious government of God over his rational creation, and observe what reason all have to rejoice under his administration. Should I say so to this audience without distinction, it would be to many a dangerous and stupifying poison. A just and holy God, is a consuming fire to all the workers of iniquity. Those who are still in their sins, should tremble to think of the government of God.

Besides public preaching, you must be diligent among your people "from house to house." You must not neglect family instruction, and personal admonition or reproof. This is, if not the most useful part of a minister's work, at least absolutely necessary to the success of his preaching. It is also by far the most laborious part, from which slothful men are most apt to excuse themselves. A man may gratify his vanity by preaching, and public performantes; or, the

neglect being visible, he may be compelled to regularity by fear of reproach or prosecution. But diligence in private, can scarcely arise from any thing but a sense of duty, and of the presence and observation of God.

The exercise of discipline is another part of your duty which must not be omitted. It is of very great moment to the interest of religion. It is a saying of one of the first reformers, "They that desire to banish discipline, desire to banish Christ from his church." There must needs be offences in the Christian church. But when discipline is neglected, then the offence becomes unspeakably more dangerous, especially to the young and weak. It makes them think lightly of the character and privileges of a Christian, when there is either a promiscuous admission to church-communion, or when openly wicked persons are suffered to continue without censure. When you come to instruct young persons, in order to renewing their baptismal engagements in the Lord's supper; or, if ever you have occasion to instruct a heathen in order to baptism, I can assure you, from experience, you will find the unhappy effect of the low state of discipline among us. It will immediately strike yourself, and these catechumens will soon betray, by their discourse, how hard it is to have a just sense of the sanctity of the Christian character, while so many profane persons

persons are suffered to be called Christians; and not a few whose conduct is very exceptionable, continue to be admitted at stated times, to the seals of God's covenant.

How inexcusable are we in this neglect? If the first Christians, without the help or sanction of an establishment, kept so strict a discipline; what might we do, who have the countenance and approbation of the civil power. In discipline then, be strict, regular, and impartial. Especially be impartial. It is commonly want of impartiality, that makes us fail in strictness. You will have many enemies to impartiality in discipline. You will have the great and wealthy, many of whom, though they live in open defiance of the laws and ordinances of Christ, yet will be much offended, and complain of it as a grievous injury, if by a judicial sentence you deprive them of his name. Nay, you will find in every congregation some professing piety, who, though they are well pleased with, and commend the strict exercise of discipline in the case of others, yet when it comes to touch themselves, or their own relations, will use many arts to evade it. But if you be firm and unbiassed in so good a cause, it will have a sensible effect.

This leads me to exhort you in the whole of your work, public and private, to beware of the sin of man-pleasing. I do not say, beware of popularity:

popularity : because, in the sense to which common language hath confined that word, it is but one half of the snare. Besides, in propriety of speech, popularity should signify only being accepted and beloved, which in itself is neither duty nor sin, but a blessing. Man-pleasing signifies, in Scripture, having this as the end and motive of our actions, rather than being acceptable to God. You ought, indeed, for edification, to avoid displeasing any without necessity. But as in this, so in every other thing, you should have a far higher principle, than merely courting the favour either of great or small, good or bad. It is, doubtless, a mean and despicable principle, to act only with a view of gaining the applause of the vulgar and ignorant. But I have often wondered, how some should so boldly and uncharitably lay this to the charge of their brethren, without considering how easy it is, with at least equal justice, to presume that they are under the influence, and acting with a view to please the great. I am sure, there is a much stronger temptation to this than to the former. And, if I am not mistaken, fawning and servility hath been the road, in which ambitious and corrupt churchmen have travelled to preferment in every age. The truth is, they are equally detestable in the sight of God. But the last is much more destructive to the interest of religion than the first. The favour

of the multitude can scarcely be obtained, without either the truth or the appearance of piety; but the favour of the great is often obtained by silence and suffering them in their crimes, being assistant in their pleasures, or subservient to their political designs. To deliver you, Sir, from both, remember the condition on which you hold your office. "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand *." Forget then the foolish accusations of popularity or vanity; and consider, that your people are daily carried to their graves, and you must give an account of every soul that perishes through your neglect.

To conclude, be much in earnest prayer to God, that he would fit you for your work, and crown your labours with success. Prayer is absolutely necessary to the steadfastness and growth of every believer, and especially to a minister. If you believe the gospel, you will believe that "every good gift cometh from above;" that

* Ezek. iii, 17, 18.

God only can make you an able and useful pastor; and this will make you importunate with him for a plentiful measure of the Holy Spirit to fit you for his service. And I desire to join in praying, that God, for Christ's sake, would make you an "able minister of the new testament,"—and help you to preach the gospel, not with "the wisdom of words,"—but with "the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven."



EXHORTATION

TO THE

PEOPLE.

My BRETHREN;

YOU have heard the Charge given to your minister. Are there then, so many duties incumbent on him, by his standing in the relation of a pastor to you? is not the relation mutual? And are there not several correspondent duties incumbent on you as his people? I beg your patience, while I put you in mind of a few of the most important and necessary.

In

In the first place, It is evidently your duty diligently to attend upon his ministry. It is plainly impossible that you can profit by him, if you do not hear him. I am sorry that there are many in these days, who pour contempt upon the ordinances of Christ's institution. But in particular, there hath been, of late, a great and remarkable desertion of public worship by those of higher rank. There is a happy opportunity in this case to put all such among you in mind, that having subscribed a call to their minister, they stand bound by consent to attend upon him. Is it not surprising to think, that any should forget the terms in which that invitation runs. You intreat him "to take the charge of your souls, and promise him all due obedience and submission in the Lord." Can a man honestly subscribe this, who seldom comes within the walls of any church? One would be counted infamous in the world, who should act in the face of a signed obligation, in any other matter, or who even should falsify a solemn promise. And, is it less criminal, because it relates to religion and the service of God? It is indeed seldom re-sented or punished by men, because the offence is not immediately against them, but it remains to be punished by that righteous God, "To whom vengeance belongs,—and who will not be mocked."

In

.; In the next place, my brethren, let me intreat you to be tender of the character of your minister, and of ministers in general. As their office makes the guilt of their sins great, and as a stain on their character is most hurtful to religion, on both accounts, you ought not rashly to receive an accusation against them.

I do not mean to ask indulgence to the unworthy, I give them up freely to that reproach and contempt which they justly deserve. But let it fall upon the person, and not upon the office. Do not transfer the faults of particulars to the whole order. It is easy to observe the different reception which the faults or miscarriages of ministers meet with, from persons differently disposed. The good are affected with grief and concern for the offence, or filled with zeal and indignation against the sinner. But loose and careless persons disparage the profession, and bless themselves in their own uniformity and consistency of character. You may spare your reflections, "That ministers are but men, ministers are but like other men," and the like, when, I assure you, we deny it not. We have all the same great interest at stake. We often speak the more earnestly to you, lest, while we preach the gospel to others, we ourselves should be cast-aways; and many times describe the workings
of

deceitful, wandering, slothful, worldly mind, by taking the copy from our own.

It falls very properly in my way on this occasion, to take notice of a reproach thrown upon ministers, by the mistake or perversion of two of the questions usually put at an ordination, and which you have just heard put to your minister. They are supposed by many to be such as no man can answer with truth, and so quite improper to be put at all. The first of them is in the following terms, “ Are not zeal for the honour of God, love to Jesus Christ, and desire of saving your souls, your great motives, and chief inducements, to enter into the function of the holy ministry, and not worldly designs and interests.” This is maliciously interpreted to suppose, that a minister in accepting of a fixed charge, hath no view or intention, primary or secondary, of being provided of a maintenance. This would be both unnatural and unreasonable. “ They that serve at the altar, must live by the altar.” The plain meaning is, That the great motives of a minister, in consecrating himself to this employment, and accepting the particular station assigned him, ought to be the honour of God, and interest of religion, as expressed above. And surely, that this should be the case, hath nothing in it incredible in our country, the provision for the ministry not being so large, but
a man

a man of tolerable abilities hath a much greater hazard of rising to wealth and dignity in many other employments. But alas! how ignorant are they who cavil at this question? Do they not know that every Christian is bound habitually and supremely to regard the glory of God in all his actions. This is not peculiar to ministers, except so far as they ought to be exemplary in every thing. Wo to every man in this assembly, be his employment what it will, if he does not habitually point his whole actions to the glory of God. “Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God with your bodies, and your spirits, which are God’s*.”

The other question is this, “Have you used any undue methods by yourself or others, in procuring this call?” It is impossible to find fault with this question, but by leaving out the word, undue. And indeed, it is so far from being wrong, that there would be no harm if it were more particularly explained. It was probably intended to discourage all briguing and solicitation, other than a man’s real character does for itself, or the free unbiassed judgment of others, inclines them to do in his behalf. I apprehend it does not reach a reproof to all those, who either promote or hinder settlements from politi-

* 2 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

cal connections, or in expectation of temporal favours: and to those who, by promises or threatnings, endeavour to influence their inferi-ors in such a cause. In the mean time, I dare say it will be allowed, that any thing of this kind done by a minister himself, or at his direc-tion, in his own favour, would be very wrong; and, blessed be God; it is at present among us considered as highly indecent and criminal.

I must also put you in mind of the great duty of family instruction and government. Heads of families must prepare their children and servants for receiving benefit by public instruction, and endeavour by repetition to fix it in their minds. It is our duty to speak plainly, no doubt; but it is impossible, preserving the dignity of the pulpit, to speak in such a manner as to be understood by those who have had no previous instruction in a familiar way. It is like casting seed upon an un-opened, unprepared soil, which takes no root, and brings forth no fruit. Is it not hard, that, when many are so ready to find fault with every neglect of ministers, and sometimes expect more work from one than ten can perform, they should take so little pains in their families, these small-er districts, which are committed to their own charge.

To conclude all, Strive together with your minister in your prayers to God for him. There

is no way more effectual to prepare him for serving you in the gospel, and there is no way more proper for preparing you to attend upon his ministry. If you make conscience of this duty, you will come to receive the answer of your prayers, and indeed to hear the word of God. Alas ! that there should be so few of our hearers of this charitable, sympathizing kind. We have some stupid and insensible hearers, some proud and disdainful hearers, many criticising and censuring hearers, but few praying hearers. Let all that fear God give themselves to this duty. And let them not only remember that corner of God's vineyard in which their own lot is cast, but the kingdom of Christ in general ; and pray, that his name may be great, " from " the rising of the sun, unto his going down." Amen.

PRAYER

PRAYER for NATIONAL PROSPERITY
and for the REVIVAL of RELIGION
inseparably connected.

A

S E R M O N

Preached on

THURSDAY, FEB. 16, 1758.

Being the Day appointed in

S C O T L A N D

For the late PUBLIC FAST.

M 2

ISAIAH





ISAIAH li. 9.

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD: Awake as in the ancient days in the generations of old. Art not thou it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon.



MY Brethren, we are this day called by our sovereign to the duty of solemn fasting and humiliation, and to earnest prayer for the blessing of God on his councils and arms. Religion and humanity conspire in urging us to a hearty compliance, especially while public affairs wear so threatening an aspect. It ought also to awaken the attention, and increase the seriousness of every particular worshipping assembly, that they are joining with so many others in intreating deliverance from these national calamities, in which all are equally concerned.

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We have often, for some years past, professed to humble ourselves in the sight of God, and have done it alas! with a shameful coldness and indifference, or with an hypocrisy still more criminal. But it is remarkable, that such is the situation of affairs at present, as hath given an alarm even to some of the most insensible, and constrained them to consider this duty as now somewhat more than a form. There has been for some time past, such a continuance and increase of public judgments, such a series of abortive projects, and broken disconcerted schemes, as makes the most obstinate and inconsiderate stand and pause, and seriously ask, Is there not a cause?

Our setting apart this day, and applying ourselves to the duty of fasting and prayer, implies a confession of the power and providence of God.

It implies, that we believe in him, as the Almighty Creator, and righteous Governor of the world; the supreme Disposer of every event, and sovereign Arbiter of the fate of nations. How were it to be wished, that there was a just sense of this truth on the minds of all of every rank! And that, in all who are in any measure sincere on this occasion, the impression may not be transient and partial, but lasting and effectual! It should excite us to a holy jealousy over ourselves, that we have so often essayed the like duty without
any

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any apparent success. "Is there unrighteousness
" with God? God forbid!" The fault, doubt-
less, lies in ourselves. Our fasts have not been
such as God has chosen, and therefore he hath
refused to hear our prayers.

In general, no doubt the evidence and the ef-
fect of an acceptable fast, is repentance compleat-
ed by reformation. Where this is wanting, we
are justly liable to the charge brought by the pro-
phet Isaiah against the children of Israel, "Bring
" no more vain oblations, incense is an abomi-
" nation unto me, the new moons and sabbaths,
" the calling of assemblies I cannot away with,
" it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your
" new moons, and your appointed feasts my soul
" hateth, they are a trouble unto me, I am weary
" to bear them. And when ye spread forth your
" hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea,
" when ye make many prayers, I will not hear:
" your hands are full of blood*." There is no
question but the unrestrained flood of impiety
which has overspread this nation, solicits divine
vengeance, and prevents the efficacy even of the
sincere prayers that are offered up for deliverance
and mercy. But as, with respect to particular
persons, every error or defect in practice is the
consequence of an erroneous or defective princi-
ple, as every vicious action proceeds from an im-

* Isa. i. 13, 14, 15.

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pure heart ; so, in a national capacity, I am persuaded, that our fasting and prayer has been fundamentally wrong, or essentially defective in itself, and therefore, has been followed by little or no sensible fruit ; or rather that impiety, which it should have removed, it hath only contributed to increase.

For this reason my intention at this time is to point out to you what is the just and proper object of prayer for divine aid in a time of public calamity, as well as the great encouragement to its exercise. For this there is a proper foundation in the passage of Scripture just read in your hearing. In the former part of the chapter, the prophet had pronounced many gracious promises, of inward and spiritual prosperity, and of outward protection and security to the church, tho' surrounded and threatened, by enemies to her interest in both respects. He then changes the form of his discourse, personates believers, and in their name, as one of them, addresses to God the prayer in the text, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord : awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old : art not thou it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon ?"

The beauty and strength of this language, the justness and force of the figures here used, it is almost impossible to overlook. The prophet prays
for

for such a display of divine power and mercy as might be signal and sensible. "Awake, awake, put on strength," that is, exert thy power, discover thy glory in such a manner, as that thy present forbearance may be like the vigour of a waking man, compared to the defenceless and inactive state of one that is fast asleep. "O arm of the Lord." This expression the arm of the Lord, with the addition of his making bare his holy arm, is frequently used in Scripture; and it is so strong, and at the same time, so intelligible a figure, that it is impossible to amplify or explain, without weakening it. In the last part of the verse, he animates his own faith, and enforces his request, by calling to remembrance past transactions, and former displays of the power and grace of an unchangeable God. By Rahab and the dragon we are to understand Egypt and her king, as appears by comparing other passages of Scripture, particularly by Ps. lxxxvi. 4. and Ezek. xxix. 3. the last of which runs thus: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am against thee, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers: which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself."

In discoursing on this subject, what I propose, through the assistance of divine grace, is,

I. To point out to you the import of this prayer in the first part of this passage, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord."

II. To consider the encouragement included in the last part of it, "Awake as in ancient days, in the generations of old: art not thou it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?"

III. To apply the subject to our own present situation.

And we are to consider,

I. The meaning and import of the prayer: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." And in this I have no hope either of instructing or persuading any but those who have some measure of real religion, who do unfeignedly believe, and will, when called upon, recollect the constant superintendency of Divine Providence. These only will be sensible that, as every event is directed and over-ruled by the Almighty, so there are righteous, wise, and gracious purposes to be served by them. All men it is true, are ready to complain under distress. The most wicked and profligate, "when the waters are gone into their soul," when they feel their misery,

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misery, will cry for relief. And, as they will turn them on every hand, and lay hold on every twig that may afford the least prospect of saving them from sinking, so the terror of divine power, with which public calamity is sometimes accompanied, will even make them cry unto God. But there is a great difference, between this complaint of the miserable, and the prayer of faith, which proceeds upon just views of the nature and government of God, and is assured of success. It may sometimes please God to make use of desolating judgments or alarming public strokes to awaken a secure thoughtless generation; but dutiful, acceptable and successful prayer for their removal, can only be the work of his own children.

Perhaps it may be thought unnecessary to direct persons of this character to the proper object of their prayers, as they must be supposed habitually to flow from right principles, and to point at just and warrantable ends. But it is certain, that, when wickedness and profaneness greatly, and universally prevail in any nation, the real servants of God are not only few in number, but, even this little flock always receives some degree of infection. This we are taught to expect by our blessed Saviour, who says, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." They may both be negligent and defective in their duty, restraining prayer before God, and may be

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in a great measure unmindful of the great and principal views with which they ought to offer up their intercessory requests. But, hoping that all such among you as are justly liable to this charge, will discern the light, and feel the force of divine truth, it is my desire to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

And, in general, such a petition as this, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord," suggests to us, that our prayers for divine interposition and deliverance from public calamities should be supremely directed to the glory of God. This, as it is, upon the whole, the leading purpose of every real believer, so it ought to hallow every single action, and purify every particular desire. Therefore our prayers must be conceived in such a manner, and our desires after deliverance must be so qualified, that the supreme honour due to God may be preserved inviolate, that duty may maintain its precedency before interest, and sin may be still more feared and avoided than suffering. The great end both of personal affliction, and national correction, is to weaken our attachment to present and temporal enjoyment, by staining its glory, and convincing us of its vanity. If then our chief or only aim, in asking deliverance from outward calamity, is that we may again recover the ease and quiet of security, and the pleasure of
plenty,

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plenty, though we may seem to honour God by imploring his aid, yet is our homage really given to a sensual idol.

That this is neither impossible nor unfrequent, is plain from the history of the children of Israel. They often applied to God in their straits: "When he slew them then they sought him, they returned and enquired early after God*." But this sort of seeking, merely for present relief, or temporal mercies, was far from being acceptable to him. We are told, that it was tempting God, thus "to ask meat for their lust†." In opposition to this, let us look into the grounds assigned in Scripture for God's granting deliverance, and thence learn with what views we ought to implore it. The Psalmist says, "Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known‡." And the prophet Ezekiel, "But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the Heathen among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known to them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt."

But, in order to illustrate this a little further, observe, that a just regard to the glory of God, in our prayers, implies the two following things. In the first place, That we expect deliverance

* Ps. lxxviii. 34.

† Ps. lxxviii. 18.

‡ Ps. cvi. 8.

250 PRAYER for National Prosperity and from God alone, desire that it may be attended with such circumstances as his hand and power may be seen in it, and are willing to acknowledge him as the supreme and only Author of it. This is plainly included in the words of the prophet, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord." As if he had said, In thee alone is our hope; "curst be the man that maketh flesh his arm." A prophane irreligious people are always prone, in undertaking any enterprize, to put their trust in human prowess, to glory and boast in the greatness of their strength. And when they are disappointed in their expectations, they are ready to dwell so much upon second causes, that they entirely overlook, or are with great difficulty brought to acknowledge the supreme agency of God. We may, however, be sensible, by his taking to himself so often, in Scripture, the title of the Lord of hosts, "great in might and strong in battle," that such conduct is robbing him of the glory that is justly his due. Many are the warnings we have in the word of God not to place too much confidence in any human means of safety. "Put not your trust in princes (says the Psalmist) nor in the son of man in whom there is no help*. There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much

* Ps. cxlvi. 3.

" strength.

“ strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety, “ neither can he deliver any by his great “ strength †.” And there is no Scripture truth more frequently, or more sensibly confirmed in the course of providence. How often do we find, both in former and in later ages, the events of war diametrically opposite to the greatest human probability, and the most confident human expectation ?

Now prayer for divine interposition should always be made under a deep impresson of this truth. And indeed we shall never come to importunity and fervency in prayer for such a mercy, till we are somewhat affected with it. All the honour that is given to man is taken from God. All trust and dependance on human means as such, or on their own account, divides and weakens our reliance on God. But when he is considered as the single and only source of relief, we apply with that ardour and earnestness which necessity and extremity suggest. This doth not hinder the diligent use and application of outward means, but keeps them in their proper place, induces us to ask the divine blessing upon them, and prevents us from provoking the divine jealousy by idolizing and trusting in them.

It ought also to be our desire, that the glory of divine power may visibly shine in our deliverance;

† Ps. xxxiii, 16, 17.

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not only that his hand may do it, but that his hand may be seen in it, and, if possible, to the conviction of all. Nothing is more impious, and nothing more provoking to God, than when men arrogate to themselves the honour of what they have done by his help, or acquired by the bounty of his providence. Hear the language of the proud monarch of the east, “Is not this great
“ Babylon that I have built, for the house of
“ the kingdom, by the might of MY power, and
“ for the honour of MY majesty*?” But mark the unexpected change by the more powerful word of the King of Kings. “When the word
“ was in the king’s mouth there fell a voice from
“ heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to
“ thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from
“ thee †.” How often in Scripture is the destruction and punishment of kings and princes ascribed to their self-sufficiency, insolence and pride? Thus in that remarkable prophecy against the king of Babylon: “For thou hast said in
“ thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will
“ exalt my throne above the stars of God: I
“ will sit also upon the mount of the congregation in the sides of the north. I will ascend
“ above the heights of the clouds. I will be
“ like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought
“ down to hell, to the sides of the pit: They

* Dan. iv. 30.

† Ver. 31.

“ that

“ that see thee, shall narrowly look upon thee
 “ and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that
 “ made the earth to tremble, that did shake
 “ kingdoms? That made the world as a wilder-
 “ ness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that
 “ opened not the house of his prisoners *?” How
 strongly does this prove, that in order to pray
 acceptably for the interposition of divine pro-
 vidence, we should be willing that God alone
 should have the honour entire and undivided.
 “ That the lofty looks of man should be hum-
 “ bled, and the haughtiness of man should be
 “ bowed down, and the Lord alone exalted in
 “ that day †.” Was it not thus that the
 ancient warriors of the holy nation fought
 and prospered? In confidence of divine aid,
 or resigned to the divine will, they went out
 and played the men for their people and the ci-
 ties of their God. And when they had done so,
 they acknowledged that his right hand and his
 holy arm had gotten HIM the victory. See the
 Song of Moses on his victory over the Egyptians.
 “ Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious
 “ in power: Thy right hand, O Lord, has dash-
 “ ed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness
 “ of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them
 “ that rose up against thee: Thou sentest forth
 “ thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble ‡.”

* Is. xiv. 13—17.

† Is. ii. 11.

‡ Ex. xv. 6, 7.

I cannot conclude this branch of the subject without observing, that we have had in the course of providence a very recent instance, both of a singular appearance of the hand of God in defence of a righteous cause, and a modest ascription of it to the power of the Highest. That prince, who appears now to be the chief outward support of the protestant cause in Europe, has been enabled literally (according to the ancient promise) “with five to chase a hundred, and “with a hundred to put ten thousand to flight.” The greatest earthly potentates had combined against him and conspired his ruin. Assured of victory, they were forging chains for his followers, and dividing his inheritance by lot. But in the name of the Lord he set up his standard. The Lord turned the counsels of his enemies into confusion. His victories have been numerous, extraordinary and important. And he hath all along avoided boasting and vain-glory, and piously acknowledged that “Salvation belongeth unto “God.”

In the second place, in applying to God for an extraordinary interposition of his providence, we ought also to pray for a dispensation of his grace and mercy. When we pray that the arm of the Lord may awake and put on strength, it should be that a revival of religion may accompany temporal relief, and that by a plentiful effusion of the
Holy

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Holy Spirit many sinners may be delivered from the worst of bondage, and brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God. As this should be in itself the object of our desire, so it should be inseparably joined with the other, and their mutual connection still kept in view. Temporal mercies to a nation, as well as to particular persons, ought always to be made subservient to the promoting of truth and righteousness. It is remarkable, that these two things are always joined in Scripture. And, indeed, if temporal mercies be considered in the light I formerly mentioned, it is impossible that they can be asunder. Let any one consult the intercessory prayers in which deliverance from external calamity is intreated, the prophecies in which it is promised, or the songs of praise in which it is celebrated, and he will find, that the purity and spiritual prosperity of God's heritage is still kept in view. They are considered as involved in one another, and the one, as only valuable, because leading to the other. Instead of enumerating many passages, I shall only mention one of the prophet Isaiah.

“ And I will turn mine hand upon thee, and
“ purely purge away all thy dross and take away
“ all thy tin. And I will restore thy judges as
“ at the first, and thy counsellors as at the begin-
“ ning: Afterward thou shalt be called the city
“ of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall
“ be

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“ be redeemed with judgment and her converts
 “ with righteousness.”

And, my brethren, is not the arm of the Lord and the glory of his power particularly displayed, when the influence and dominion of error is destroyed, and the obstinacy and rebellion of sinners is subdued? This is a more extraordinary, as well as a more excellent effect of power, than producing the greatest changes in our outward state and condition. It seems to be on this account that, in Scripture, the Saviour of sinners, the king of Zion, is so often represented as glorious in his person, and great in his power, “ For
 “ unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,
 “ and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
 “ and his name shall be called Wonderful,
 “ Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting
 “ Father, the Prince of peace*. Gird thy sword
 “ upon thy thigh, O most Mighty: with thy
 “ glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty
 “ ride prosperously, because of truth and meek-
 “ nefs and righteousness: and thy right hand
 “ shall teach thee terrible things †.” These and a multitude of other passages plainly show that the conversion of sinners, and defeating the powers of the princes of darkness, requires an exertion, and is a signal display of the strength of the divine arms.

* IC ix. 6.

† Ps. xlv. 3, 4:

But

But as it is a matter of the utmost importance and propriety at present, I must beg your patience, while I endeavour a little to illustrate the necessity of joining earnest intercession for the revival of religion and the glory of Christ's kingdom, with our prayers for a recovery of national prosperity.

For illustrating this let us attend to the three following particulars.

1. We have no warrant to ask the last of these without the first.

2. We have no reason to expect that it will be separately bestowed.

3. If it should, in any degree, it would not be a blessing but a curse.

First, we have no warrant to ask national prosperity without a revival of religion. Our prayers are then only warrantable when we adjust and proportion our esteem of the mercies of God to their real worth, and desire them for their proper ends. Now, a love to one's country, and a desire of its outward welfare, is, no doubt, an excellent and an amiable disposition. But it is much more so to be concerned for their everlasting interest. Why doth the love of our country merit any praise, but because it is a disposition and tendency to communicate happiness? But what is temporal to eternal happiness? What is a fruitful field to a renewed heart? Peace at
home

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home to peace with God? Security from an earthly oppressor to deliverance from the wrath to come? A compassionate heart bleeds for the misery of his fellow-creatures in poverty or bondage, but a sanctified heart is still more deeply affected with the ignorance and guilt of others, and their endless consequences. Now is it a warrantable manner of offering up our desires to God, to admire or ask a share in the bounty of his providence, while we despise and trample upon the riches of his grace?

But that such prayers are unwarrantable, doth not only appear from the unjust preference given to lesser before greater mercies, but from their being a total perversion of our desires from the great point in which they ought to center. The gifts of God are intended to lead us to the giver; the events of his providence to be subservient to the methods of his grace. When, therefore, we ask temporal prosperity, without an equal, or rather superior solicitude for the enlightening and sanctifying influences of the Holy Ghost, we are alienating his mercies from their proper use, turning them into weapons of rebellion against him, and cherishing that love of the world which is destructive of the love of God.

Secondly, As all such desires are unwarrantable and disorderly, so we have no reason to expect that they shall be granted. Let us recall to mind

this important truth, that God is the supreme Disposer of all events. Every prosperous event is the effect of his bounty. Every calamity is the rod of his anger, and carries his commission. Are there not then wise ends to be served by every thing appointed by him? Affliction springeth not out of the dust. National calamity is not the rigour of an arbitrary tyrant, but the wise chastisement of a gracious father, or the punishment of a righteous judge. He ruleth the nations "sitting upon the throne of his holiness;" and, unless when he hath a mind to "make a full end," of a people ripe for destruction, gives them for a season into the hands of their enemies to bring about their reformation. If then public calamity bears a commission for this purpose from him whose work is perfect, what reason is there to expect, that it will be removed before it hath attained its end? Will he not repeat the stroke, and increase its severity, till it procure submission? It is true, we cannot precisely say how far the forbearance of God may go, or how long his patience may endure. There may be a remission, or suspension of the final stroke, for their farther trial. But it is certain that when there is no returning to God by repentance, there can be no reasonable ground to hope that his displeasure will cease, or its effects be removed.

Thirdly, Though temporal deliverance were granted to a nation, in any measure, without a dispensation

dispensation of the Spirit and revival of religion, it would be no blessing but a curse, and could not be of any long duration. It would be giving them up to themselves, to fill up the measure of their iniquities, that, when the appointed time of vengeance should come, their destruction might be more terrible and signal. It is remarkable, that this is found among the judgments of God, and reckoned one of the most dreadful, when he ceases to strive with a people, and gives them up to themselves. Thus he says, by the Psalmist, "But my people would not hearken to my voice, Israel would have none of me, so I gave them up to their own hearts lusts, and they walked in their own counsels*." So also saith the prophet Hosea, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone †." The consequence of this is the continuance and increase of all manner of wickedness. Then spiritual judgments come in the room of temporal, which, tho' they are less sensible, are but so much the more fatal. Blindness of mind, hardness of heart, and an obstinate contempt of instruction, are the usual consequences of unsanctified prosperity. In such circumstances a nation may exult, and bless themselves in their abundant wealth; nay, they may be the envy of their foolish and short-sighted neighbours; but to the eye of faith their condition is most wretched

* Ps. lxxxi. 13, 12.

† Hos. iv. 17.

and

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and deplorable. To what a pitch of impiety they
may proceed when all restraints are withdrawn,
some nations recorded in history are a standing
and melancholy proof. And the sudden desola-
tion sometimes inflicted, after long forbearance,
by the Lord of nature, on cities and kingdoms,
by fire from heaven, by earthquakes, pestilence,
or the sword, is a fearful presage of the fate of
all, who, in the day of recompence, shall suffer
the vengeance of eternal fire.

All these things are plainly founded on the
word of God, and manifest consequences of the
divine government. They will, however, make
very little impression on a thoughtless and secure
generation, plunged in sensuality and lust; and
least of all on those, who have expressly lifted them-
selves under the banner of infidelity, and learned
to be profane upon principle. This is one of the
worst symptoms of our present condition; the
greater our guilt, and, therefore, the nearer the
danger. Nothing was less looked for by the Ba-
bylonian monarch, in the height of his riotous
midnight feast, than his kingdoms being taken
from him. And yet how speedily was it accom-
plished, and in how short a time was this superb
and opulent city, the "beauty of the Chaldees
"excellency," turned into a ruinous heap*?"

I proceed now to the second general head,
which was:

* See Isaiah xliii. 21, to the end.

II. To consider a little the encouragement to prayer, contained in the last part of the text: "Awake as in the ancient days, as in the generations of old," &c.

In this the prophet animates his faith, and encourages his own dependance and that of others upon the promises of God, by celebrating the greatness of his power, as manifested in former memorable deliverances granted to his chosen people. He continues his address to the arm of the Lord: and, instead of an enumeration of the mighty acts of this arm in ancient days, and the generations of old, he fixes upon one signal and leading display of divine majesty and power, in the destruction of the Egyptians, and the deliverance of Israel from that subjection and bondage in which they were formerly held by that people. This is done with the highest propriety; for the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage was most remarkable and extraordinary in its circumstances, and the hand of God did most eminently appear in it. Thus the prophet says, in the verse immediately following the text: "Art not thou it, which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep, that hath made the deeps of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" From this appearance in behalf of Israel, God often takes his designation: this chiefly constituted the special relation
between

between him and the people of Israel ; and on this their obligation to obedience is founded in the preface or introduction to the moral law : “ I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” And indeed this deliverance is often considered, and justly, as typical of the still more important deliverance of the elect of God from sin and misery.

Now let us consider a little the effect of such a view upon the mind, and its influence in prayer. This, I think, may be included in the two following particulars :

First, it satisfies us of the power of God, and his ability to save. There can be no prayer addressed to God for relief and deliverance in an acceptable manner, but what proceeds upon a confidence in his power. And there is in men, for the most part, on this subject, a very imperfect and wavering persuasion. Nay, there is often a greater degree of unbelief, than they themselves are sensible of, or distinctly apprehend. They are often so held captive by sense, and their attention so much taken up and engrossed by outward means and instruments, that they are backward to believe, or rely even on an almighty, because an invisible power. This was the case often with the children of Israel, even after repeated proofs of the strength of the divine arm.

Thus says the Psalmist: "How oft did they
 " provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him
 " in the desert? Yea, they turned back and
 " tempted God, and limited the holy one of
 " Israel. They remembered not his hand, nor
 " the day when he delivered them from the
 " enemy*." Against this unhappy tendency,
 God, by the prophet, warns his people, a few
 verses after the text: "I, even I, am he that
 " comforteth you: who art thou, that thou
 " shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of
 " the son of man, which shall be made as grass.
 " And forgetteth the Lord thy maker, that hath
 " stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foun-
 " dations of the earth? And hast feared conti-
 " nually every day, because of the fury of the
 " oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy; and
 " where is the fury of the oppressor †?" And
 indeed nothing can be more supporting under
 such fears, than to remember the instances in
 which God hath formerly made his power known.
 It is, as it were, realizing the divine perfections,
 and making us to see him, who is invisible. In
 this very way does the Psalmist recover from a
 disconsolate state, and dark discouraging views of
 divine providence. "Hath God forgotten to be
 " gracious; hath he in anger shut up his tender
 " mercies? Selah. And I said, this is my in-

* Ps. lxxviii. 40, 41, 42.

† Is. li. 12, 13.

" firmity,

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“ firmity, but I will remember the years of the
“ the right hand of the most High. I will re-
“ member the works of the Lord ; surely I will
“ remember thy wonders of old. I will me-
“ ditate also of all thy works, and talk of thy
“ doings*.”

In the second place, The same view serves to ascertain us of the mercy of God, and his readiness to help us in distress. It is not enough that we have ever so unshaken a persuasion of the power of God, unless we have some ground to believe that it shall appear in our behalf. Now former instances of extraordinary providential deliverance not only afford a proof of divine power, but shew us in what cases we have reason to expect that it shall be exerted. That part of the providence of God which is already open to our view, enables us, from analogy, to infer what shall be his subsequent conduct ; at least so far as to direct and encourage us in our own duty. We know for example, that he is a refuge in times of trouble to those that are in distress : and that in extremity, when all human help fails, then is deliverance more to the glory of God. By this very argument does Jehosaphat conclude and enforce his prayer. “ O our God wilt thou
“ not judge them ? for we have no might against
“ this great company that cometh against us ;

* Ps. lxxvii. 9, 10, 11, 12.

“neither know we what to do, but our eyes are
“upon thee*.”

We know also that his faithfulness is engaged to hear those, who, refusing to lean on any broken reed, or trusting any refuge of lies, place their confidence in him alone; and that the glory of God is immediately and chiefly concerned, in the support and preservation of his own people. They see that he hath, in all ages, counted this his own cause; and therefore they say with the Psalmist: “They that know thy name will
“put their trust in thee, for thou Lord hast not
“forfaken them that seek thee †.” In fine, former instances of extraordinary deliverance point out the great end and design of such interpositions. That they are for promoting of truth and righteousness, and to make those who are the objects of them, chearful and willing servants to God; not only partakers of the bounty of his providence, but monuments of the riches of his grace.
“In that day shall this song be sung in the land
“of Judah. We have a strong city, salvation
“will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.
“Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation,
“that keepeth the truth may enter in ‡. Vio-
“lence shall no more be heard in thy land,
“wasting and destruction within thy borders;
“but thou shalt call thy walls salvation and thy

* 2 Chron. xx. 12. † Ps. ix. 10. ‡ Is. xxvi. 1, 2.

“gates

“ gates praise*.” From all which it appears that, in prayer properly warranted, and rightly directed, it must give unspeakable confidence and hope, to survey the remarkable instances of divine providence, and thence take encouragement to commit our cause to, and rest our hope on, the same unchangeable God.

I conclude this head with observing, That, in the expression of the prophet, “ Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon,” he hath a particular view to the eternity and immutability of God. “ He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” If he hath done great and marvellous things in the most distant ages, “ his hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy that it cannot hear;” his strength is not impaired by exercise, nor his fulness wasted by communication. Such an argument would not hold with regard to man, whose power is so exceeding mutable, and his strength so exceeding liable to decay. It is recorded in history, that an old Roman, Milo, who in his youth was a prodigy of strength, happened to live to old age; and that he used often to weep when he looked on his arms, his once nervous and vigorous arms, and saw the wrinkled and decayed sinews, and the weak, feeble state to which they were reduced by time.

* Is. lx. 18.

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But this is not, cannot be the case with the arm of the Lord. His strength and stability, particularly as opposed to created weakness and frailty, is often declared in Scripture. Thus in the following sublime passage of the prophet Isaiah. " And the voice said, Cry: And he said what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever*."

I proceed now in the last place to apply the truths you have heard on this subject to our own present situation, as to public affairs.

And first. Is not our state, both as a nation, and as a church, exceedingly fallen and low; and have we not the greatest need to address this prayer in the text, " Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord?" May we not take our low and fallen state as a nation from the universal confession of all without exception, however opposed in sentiments or interest? Every class and denomination of men among us, every party and faction, however unwilling each may be to acknowledge its own share of the guilt, and however prone to load its adversaries

* Is. xl. 6.

with

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with the blame of procuring it, is yet willing to
acknowledge that we are at present in a distressed,
and in a contemptible state.

And indeed the thing itself speaks. We have
of late suffered under a variety of public strokes.
We have not only had, for some time past, re-
peated threatenings of scarcity and dearth, but vast
multitudes have been afflicted with famine in its
rigour, which is one of God's "fore judgments."
Through the mercy of God this is alleviated in
some measure at present, but far from being en-
tirely removed. We have also been long engag-
ed in war with a powerful and politic enemy.
And has not the providence of God sensibly
frowned on us, and visibly frustrated almost every
one of our attempts? This hath been the case to
a degree hardly known in any former instance.
We have "turned our backs faint-hearted be-
fore our enemies," in almost every encounter;
and the greater and more formidable our prepara-
tions for any enterprize, the more pitiful the
issue, and the more shameful our defeat and dis-
appointment. Has there not been an obstructed
trade, a loss of territory, a loss of honour, and
expence of treasure? Is not this nation, once in
a manner the arbitress of the fate of Europe,
now become the scorn and derision of her neigh-
bours and all that are round about her? What
weak and divided councils among those that pre-
side?

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side? Instead of any genuine public spirit, a
proud and factious endeavour to disgrace each
other's measures and wrest the ensigns of govern-
ment out of each other's hands. How numerous
and expensive, but how useless and inactive have
been our fleets and armies? And how deplora-
ble is the condition of our colonies abroad? They
are the chief theatre of the war, because, indeed,
they are the subject of the contest. And surely it
is affecting to think of the unnatural barbarity
and cruelty that there is often exercised, when no
age or sex is spared. It is true, the distance of
the place may probably make us less sensible of
their misery. But, if it please God to suffer our
enemies to continue their progress, it is hard
to say how far the desolation may extend, or how
universal it may prove.

Are we not also in a very low and fallen state
as a church, or a nation, still retaining some pro-
fession and form of religion? This will be found
to correspond with the other, as the cause with
the effect. How have all ranks, from the high-
est to the lowest, corrupted their ways? How
gross and prevalent is infidelity, undermining the
principles of natural, with the same zeal and
eagerness, with which it formerly endeavoured to
weaken the foundations of revealed religion?
How many of high rank have wholly deserted
the house and worship of God, nay, openly
and

and boldly treat his service and servants with contempt? How often do we observe such, with a criminal and insolent self-contradiction, trample upon the very laws against profaneness which they contribute to make? And, with how much zeal and diligence does the lower part of the nation emulate the higher, in that which is the reproach of both? So great is the prevalence of irreligion, contempt of God, sensuality and pride, that many of the grossest crimes are not only practised but professed, not only frequent but open; not only persisted in but gloried in and boasted of: insomuch, that it requires no small degree of fortitude and resolution, stedfastly to adhere to the principles and character of a disciple of Christ, in opposition to the spirit and strain of fashionable conversation.

It is not, indeed, to be wondered at, that not only this nation, but the protestant states of Europe in general should be brought under the rod, as they have so shamefully departed from that purity of faith and strictness of morals which was the glory of the reformation. How many have of late been ashamed of the cross of Christ, and the doctrine of the grace of God? And what hath been substituted in their room? A pliant and fashionable scheme of religion; a fine theory of virtue and morality. A beautiful but unsubstantial idol, raised by human pride; adorned and

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dressed by human art, and supported by the wisdom of words. And hath it not, in this, as in every preceding age, in this, as in every other Christian country, wherever it gained any credit, been the fore-runner and brought fast at its heels a deluge of profaneness and immorality in practice? Can any of these things be called in question? And are not they, as well as many more which might easily be enumerated, the melancholy proofs of our degenerate and corrupt character?

In the second place. From what hath been said you may see what wrong measures we have hitherto taken for removing these evils, so far as we have been sensible of them. Our gracious sovereign hath, indeed, been pleased to point out our duty, by calling us annually to fasting and humiliation. But with the far greater number it hath been no more than an unmeaning and lifeless form: and they have continued still in the same forgetfulness and contempt of God. You have heard above that nothing is more contrary to the genuine spirit of intercessory prayer in public calamity, than putting trust in an arm of flesh. And yet, is there any thing with which this nation is at present more justly chargeable? Nothing is more apparent from the very face of our common channels of intelligence. In the case of disappointments, on the one hand, are we not ungovernable and head strong in our resentment
against

against men? and equally foolish and sanguine on the other, in our hopes of those who are substituted in their place? We give pompous details of armaments, and prophesy, nay, even in a manner describe their victories, long before the season of action; and incautiously celebrate the characters of leaders, while they are only putting on the harness, and going into the field. What proud and arrogant sentiments do we often express on the subject of our national courage, and ancient British fire, as it is called? In short, we seem to have got entirely into that vain-glorious, ostentatious system, with which we used to upbraid our neighbour and rival nation; and they seem to have given it up in our favour, and to have adopted the wiser and more profitable method of putting deeds for words.

And how negligent have we been of promoting, or praying for the interest of religion? You have heard, that when the arm of the Lord puts on strength, it must be to appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks to a people: But how few discover any concern upon this subject? The want of public spirit, in those who retain any sense of religion, is an evidence of its low and languishing state. When it is lively, it will always be communicative. Love to God and love to man, the two great branches of practical religion, necessarily imply a concern for its progress. And yet,

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so rare is any thing of this kind, that when it appears as a sort of prodigy, it is looked upon, by most, as romance and extravagance. Let experience tell, if this is not often the case. When any one appears, in imitation of the Scripture saints, to grieve for the sins of others, or discovers any more than ordinary concern for their reformation, are not all his endeavours immediately resisted and represented as troublesome, or branded with every name of contempt, as visionary frenzy and enthusiasm?

In the third place. From what hath been said on this subject, you may learn what ought to be the great aim of every serious and sensible Christian among us, at present in his intercession at the throne of grace, viz. That the power of the Almighty may appear in behalf of this nation, in such a manner, as all may be obliged to say, "This is the doing of the Lord." That, as he useth to do on extraordinary occasions, he may raise up instruments for this purpose, who may be as polished shafts in his own hand, and may have a single eye to his own glory. That, not for our sakes, who have deserved to be cast off for ever, but for his own name's sake, he would support those who still adhere to the protestant cause. And, in a particular manner, for this end, that he would discover his power and glory in an eminent and remarkable revival of religion

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among

among all ranks. That our blessed Redeemer, the king of Zion, who reigns to all generations, who hath ascended up on high, and received gifts for men, would send forth his Spirit in a large and plentiful measure. That his work and power may appear in all his gracious influences, convincing and converting sinners, sanctifying, quickening and comforting believers. That this may be a common blessing on all corners of the land, on persons of every class and denomination, of every rank and degree, from the highest to the lowest, of every station and office, civil and sacred. Above all, that he would "cloath his priests with salvation, that his saints may shout aloud for joy." O when shall the time come, when "the Lord of hosts shall be for a crown, of glory, and a diadem of beauty to the residue of his people;" when, instead of fine schemes spun for the honour of their makers, those who are called ministers of Christ, shall preach the gospel, "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven?" When the truth of God, by its simplicity, majesty, force, and efficacy, shall make its way into the hearts of the most obstinate, and Satan's kingdom fall as lightning before it. Plead, my beloved hearers, that protestants in general may be brought back to their first faith and their first love; that the unhappy divisions among us may be abolished; and that
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the bond and centre of union may be Christ crucified, the only author of salvation : that men may be no longer rank'd in parties, and marshalled under names, but the great and only strife may be, who shall love our Redeemer most, and who shall serve him with the greatest zeal.

And in this critical conjuncture, when the bloody sword is threatening so many nations, and when there is so general a combination of anti-christian powers, be earnest in prayer, that it may please God to subvert their schemes, and turn their counsels into foolishness ; and that he, with whom is terrible majesty, may consume “ the man of sin with the spirit of his mouth, and “ and destroy him with the brightness of his “ coming.”—Pray for our gracious sovereign king George, under whose mild and legal government, we have long enjoyed as much happiness as our national guilt would allow : that God, by whom “ kings reign and princes decree justice,” would give him a wise understanding heart in his fear, protect his person, direct his councils, and prosper his arms : and long preserve his numerous issue, as happy pledges of the security of our civil and religious liberty.—Let us also, while we give thanks to God for raising up an eminent prince in Germany as the head of the reformed interest, and signally supporting him hitherto, pray, that he may continue his protection to him, encourage his
his

his heart, and strengthen his hands, and fight his battles. In fine, let us pray for the speedy accomplishment of the prophecy, whoever shall be the instrument of it, of the downfall of Antichrist, when the cry shall be heard, "Babylon the great is fallen is fallen, and shall arise no more."

In the last place. For our encouragement in this duty, let us remember, that we serve an unchangeable God, the rock of ages. We pray for the appearance of the arm of the Lord "as in ancient days, in the generations of old," when it "cut Rahab and wounded the dragon." Review the history of his conduct to the church and people of Israel, how, with a mighty hand and out-stretched arm, he delivered them from bondage, and humbled their proud oppressors. And remember how often, in succeeding ages, he has appeared in behalf of his own people, and supported his own cause when at the very lowest, and as it were in an expiring state. How low was the interest of Zion at the reformation, when all the kings of the earth served the "scarlet whore," and "were drunk with the wine of the wrath of her fornication?" How thick the darkness that overspread the nations, and how universal the dominion of error? And yet, in opposition to all the cunning of earthly policy, in opposition to all the fury of persecuting cruelty, he enabled

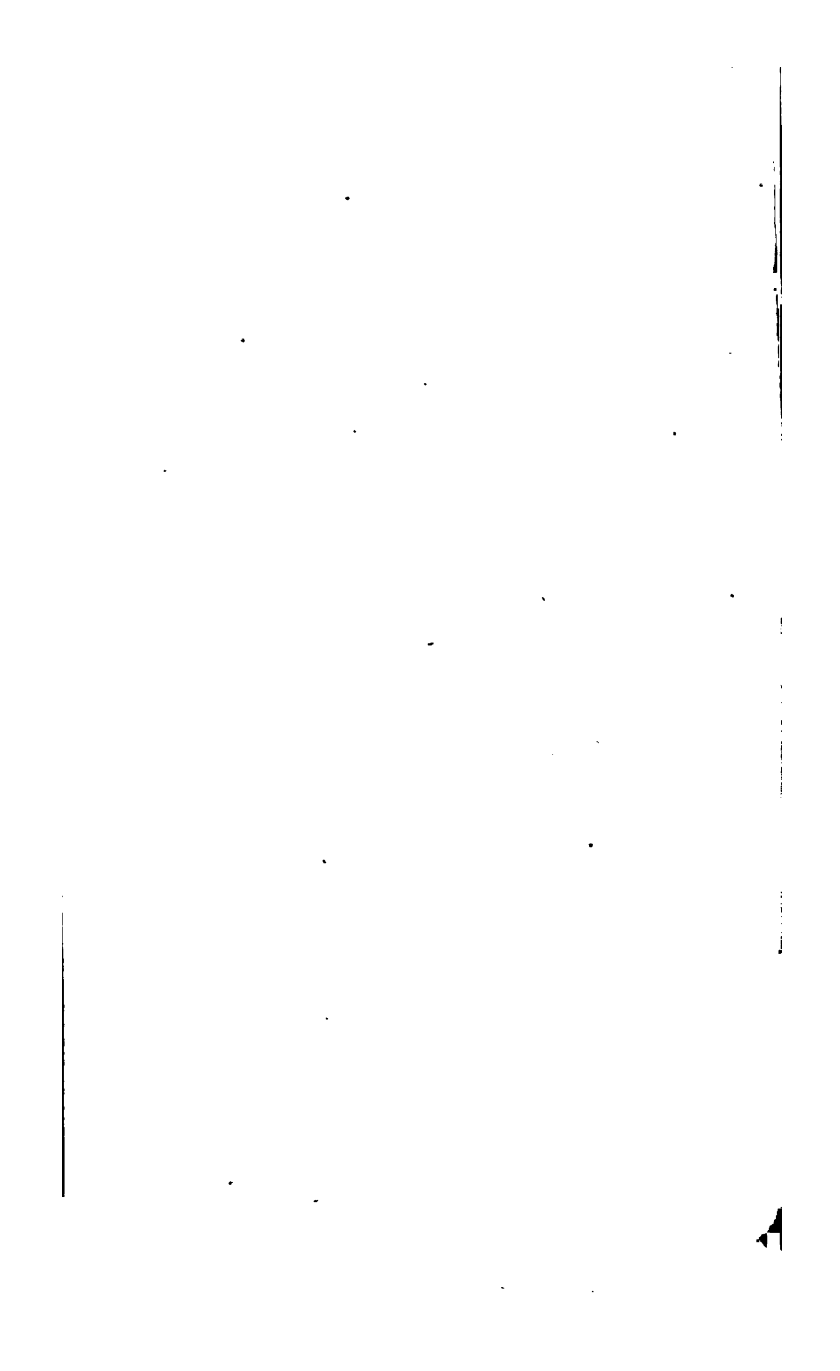
278 PRAYER for National Prosperity and enabled a few plain men, lovers of the truth, to assert, to defend, and to spread it.

The most remarkable times of the revival of religion, in this part of the united kingdom, immediately succeeded times of the greatest apostacy, when truth seemed to be fallen in the streets, and equity could not enter. This was the case immediately before the year 1638. Corruption in doctrine, looseness in practice, and slavish submission in politics, had overspread the church of Scotland. And yet, in a little time, she appeared in greater purity, and in greater dignity, than ever she had done before, or perhaps than ever she hath done since that period. In the same manner, immediately before the happy revolution, how desperate in appearance was the situation of this church? When all the best, as well as many of the noblest persons in the nation, were chased as fugitives from their dwellings and considered as unworthy of an abode on earth! When many of our worthy ancestors fell in battle, died on a scaffold, or were murdered in the fields by the unrelenting rage of ecclesiastic tyranny. And when worshipping the Lord God of our fathers, according to his own word, was a capital crime! Yet our captivity was brought back, and "we were as men that dreamed," so unexpected was the mercy.

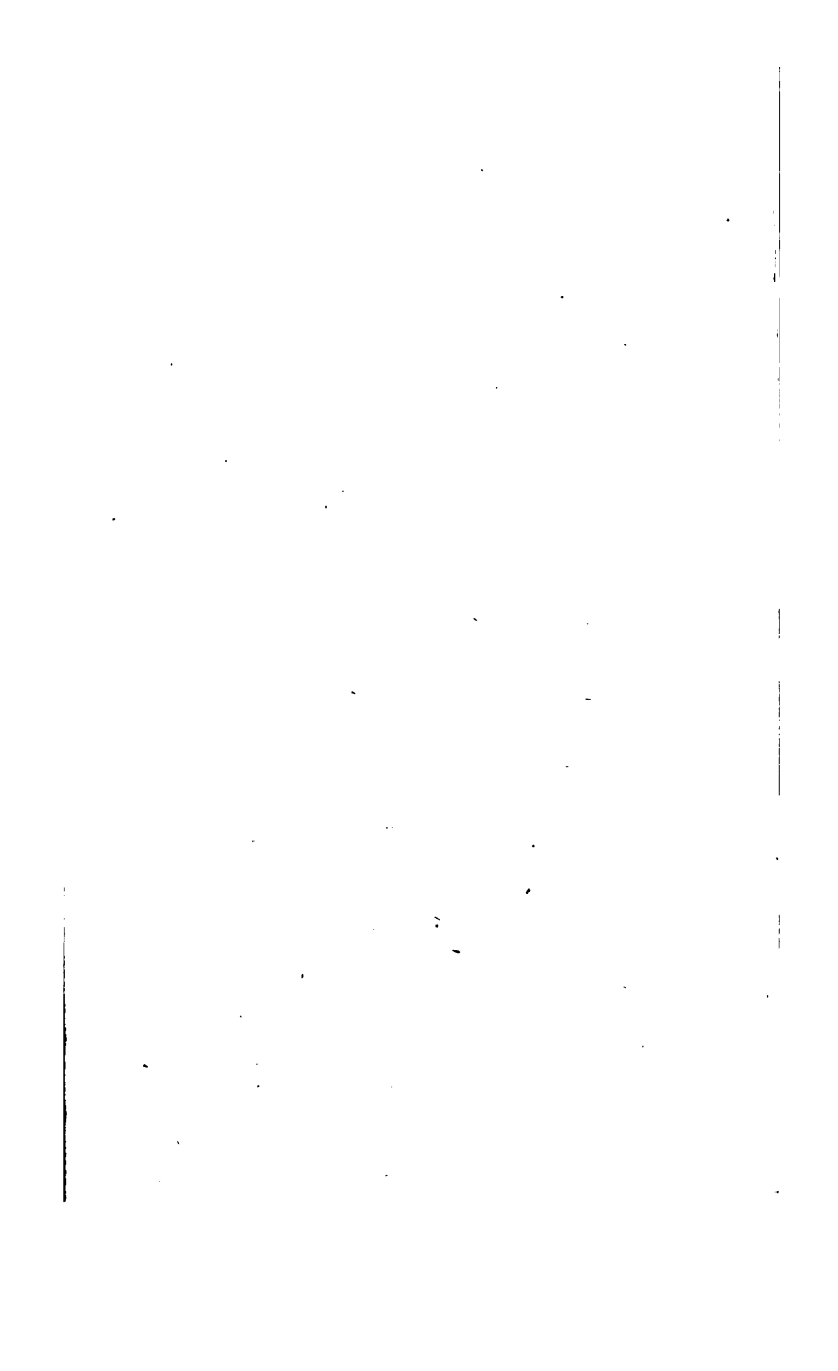
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Let no Christian therefore give way to desponding thoughts. Though infidelity unresisted spreads its poison, though profaneness and enmity to religion and seriousness every where abound, tho' there are few to support the interest of truth and righteousness, though we have seen a new thing on the earth, a minister of Christ leaving the pulpit for the stage, let us not be discouraged. We plead the cause that shall finally prevail. Religion shall rise from its ruins; and its oppressed state at present should not only excite us to pray, but encourage us to hope for its speedy revival. While every one is diligent in his own sphere, and in his proper duty, and earnestly pleading for the revelation of the arm of the Lord, let us recollect his favour and protection to the church in every time of need, and his faithfulness which is to all generations. Let us say with the Psalmist, "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death *."

* Ps. xlviii. 12. 13. 14.



T H E
NATURE and EXTENT
O F
VISIBLE RELIGION.
A S E R M O N.





MATTH. v. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

THere are two different divisions frequently made of practical religion. One, into our duty to God, and our duty to man. Not as though every part of our duty were not to be ultimately referred to God, and to be done from a regard to his authority enjoining it; but because there are some duties, of the performance of which the Lord our maker, and some of which our neighbour is the immediate object. Another common division is into the hidden and the apparent part; the inward frame and temper of the mind, and the outward life and conversation. These two divisions, though they are near akin to one another, and often by indistinct speakers in a great measure confounded, yet are by no means one and the same; and when the difference is not sufficiently attended to, it is fol-

lowed by many bad consequences. It is undeniable that God is chiefly delighted with truth in the inward parts; yet there are many of the duties we owe to God, which ought to have an outward expression, which without it will not be acceptable to him, but which are greatly neglected by those who imagine that a good life and conversation implies no more than the performance of a few of the most obvious and necessary social virtues.

The truth is, there are few things that seem to be less understood than the nature, extent, and obligation of visible religion. Some lean to one extreme, and some to another. Reproaches are mutually thrown upon one another. Some are blamed for too much profession; and they are ready to retort the charge, and blame their accusers with at least equal justice, for too little, or none at all. In the mean time, there are too few of any sort who have such a conduct and character as really adorns the doctrine of their Saviour, and serves for the instruction of sinners, or the edification and comfort of those who fear God. For this reason, I have chosen to insist a little upon these words of our Saviour to his disciples, in his excellent sermon on the mount, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

I am sensible that some, and particularly one commentator of great eminence, understand these words as addressed only, or chiefly, to the twelve

twelve apostles; and that by light is to be understood their doctrine, which they were to let, or to suffer to shine; freely to communicate, as they had freely received it. This they presume to have been intended, in opposition to the Heathen philosophers and the Jewish teachers, who confined their instructions to their schools, and imparted what they esteemed their most valuable discoveries only to a few select disciples. To support this interpretation, it is alledged, that the metaphor of light is constantly used in scripture to signify knowledge; and that of darkness, ignorance. But though this be the primary intention of the metaphor, it is surely sometimes carried on to express the effects of knowledge; and not only walking in the light, (as 1 John i. 7.), but shining as lights in the world, (as in Phil. ii. 15.), an expression almost the same with that in our text, is used to signify holiness of life. Besides, I do not think the above interpretation can be made, without some constraint, to agree with the expression in the last part of the verse, "that they may see your good works." I understand the words, therefore, as originally addressed to all who then heard our Lord's discourse, and now to all professing Christians; and by the expression, "Let your light so shine before men; that they may see your good works;" that the holiness and purity of their conversation should be visible and eminent; that men, by observing it, might be constrained to

acknowledge the truth and power of the principles which produced it, and persuaded to yield themselves also to their government.

In discoursing upon this subject, what I propose, through divine assistance, is, 1. To illustrate the meaning and extent of the exhortation, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works*: 2. To illustrate the motives with which it is enforced, as they are contained in the text, the glory of God, and the good of others: And, in the last place, To make some practical improvement of what may be said.

I. IN the first place, then, let us consider the extent and meaning of the exhortation, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works." This, in general, includes the whole of visible religion; every part of the duty of a Christian, to which his neighbours are or may be witnesses. And here it is of importance to observe, that though the inward temper of the mind is not in itself and immediately the object of human observation; and though there may be, and there is, much hypocrisy in the world; yet every disposition of the heart hath a natural and genuine expression, and may be more clearly or more obscurely discerned by some outward symptoms. There are therefore few grosser mistakes than to suppose, either that no conclusions will, or that none ought, to be drawn by the world about us, concerning

cerning our inward dispositions, from our outward carriage. So established is the connection between them, that hypocrites are usually much more successful in deceiving themselves than the world. On the other hand, those who, from a real or pretended fear of the imputation of hypocrisy, put off all outward appearances of devotion, and abstain from all expressions of the inward exercise of their souls, will hardly persuade any impartial person, that the hidden source is strong and plentiful, when the streams which should issue from it are so easily concealed. Other natural affections of the mind, as sorrow, anger, and joy, do immediately discover themselves in the countenance and carriage; and though they may be restrained and moderated, can scarcely be wholly or long concealed: Why then should it be otherwise with religious affections, which are at least as just in their nature, and much more noble in their object? I am afraid we may say, with too much truth, that there is but little real religion in the world at present; and yet even that little is often, in a most shameful and cowardly manner, dissimulated or denied.

But because the impression of general truths is but seldom strong or lasting, I shall add a few particular observations, for opening the meaning and extent of this exhortation, *Let your light shine before men.*—And, in the *first* place, If you would make your light to shine

before the world, you must be careful of the practice of such duties as are most *rare* and *uncommon*; and that whether their being so arises from the difficulty of the duties themselves, or from the peculiar degeneracy and contrary practice of any particular age or place. The metaphor itself will teach you this. Nothing can be said to shine, but that which throws out a distinguished lustre, in comparison of other objects. Those who are but as other men, and do no way excel the world about them, cannot possibly bring any honour to their profession, or be properly said to make their light to shine. Thus our Saviour argues, in recommending a very rare and eminent virtue *, “ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.— For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?”

I observed, in entering upon this particular, that the practice of some duties may be uncommon, either from the difficulty of the duties themselves, or the peculiar degeneracy of any particular age or place. The first of these happens in all those cases in which the law of God,

* Matth. v. 44. 46. 47.

from

from its purity and spirituality, is most immediately contrary to the bent of carnal affection. For though it be true in general, as the apostle Paul tells us *, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God; neither indeed can be;" yet this enmity is much stronger in some cases than in others. Some of those gracious dispositions which shone in the man Christ Jesus when he dwelt among us, full of grace and truth, and which he so ardently recommends, such as, contempt of the world, and heavenliness of mind, meekness, humility, the forgiveness of injuries, and the love of our enemies, are much more opposite to the tendency of corrupt nature than some other parts of the moral law. Or, to speak more properly, it is only by an obedience to the will of God, carried to this degree, and manifestly flowing from such principles, and such an inward temper, that we can make our light to shine in the view of an observing world.

I took notice also, that whether any duty be difficult or easy in itself, if it is neglected, or brought into contempt, by the peculiar degeneracy of any age or place, he who would make his light to shine before men, must, with boldness and resolution, with steadfastness and constancy, adhere to the practice of it. If in any place, or in any age, the very outward attend-

* Rom. viii. 7.

ance upon the ordinances of Christ's institution is made light of, or despised, by many of every rank; if the name of God is profaned and abused by unholy conversation; it is then the duty of every real servant of God, publicly to manifest his esteem and love for divine ordinances, and to maintain the highest reverence for the holy name of God in his discourse and language. And, if I am not mistaken, the very meaning of making our light to shine before men, is, to be doubly watchful in all such cases, not only on our own account, but also on account of others; or, as our Saviour expresses it, that they may see our good works: for instance, not only to esteem the institutions of Christ in the gospel, for their tendency to promote our sanctification and comfort, but even when these purposes might be at least as well obtained in another way, at particular times; yet to attend carefully upon public ordinances, that we may contribute our part to preserve the respect that is due to them: or, in the other case supposed, when profane swearing is common and prevalent, to discover the deeper reverence for the holy name of God, and use the utmost caution in the whole of our conversation, to avoid every doubtful expression, or any thing that may have a tendency to insnare the unwary, or confirm the wicked in an evil course. You will probably conclude, that my mentioning these two instances arises from a persuasion that

that

that these sins prevail remarkably among us in the present age, and your conclusion is just. I shall add one more to them, *viz.* voluptuousness; either excessive sensuality and intemperance, or at least a pleasing of the flesh, with a total neglect of mortification and self-denial. And be assured, my brethren, you are particularly called upon, by the exhortation in the text, in these and every other instance of the like kind, not to lose your horror of sin by the frequency of it, but, according to the exhortation of the apostle Paul *, to be "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

In the 2d place, In order to make your light shine before men, you must act an unexceptionable part in all such cases as your conduct falls most *immediately*, and most *fully*, under the *observation* of others. I have said above, that the exhortation, in its full extent, includes the whole of visible religion. But there are some cases in which our conduct is comparatively more visible than in others, and more immediately subjected to the examination of the world. As there are some places more conspicuous and exposed to public view than others, so are there also some persons in the whole of their deportment, and some actions of the same

* Phil. ii. 15.

persons. It is the last of these that chiefly relates to my present subject. Are you not sensible, then, that in those actions which fall most immediately under the observation of others, the greatest caution and circumspection is necessary? It is from these that the judgement of men is chiefly formed of professing Christians, and the character fixed which they must bear in the world. With respect to other actions, men proceed more upon conjecture, and therefore will not, even themselves, lay so much stress upon their observations; but in such as are wholly subjected to their view, their conclusions are peremptory. If you ask, what are those actions that fall most immediately under the observation of others? I answer, they are many. Most of those of which our neighbour is the object; particularly all relative duties, and also the government of the tongue. Although those who are conversant with you, may make shrewd guesses, by what they see in your outward deportment, whether you are constant in secret devotion, or serious and fervent in public, they must still labour under much uncertainty. But a neighbour will quickly and certainly know, whether you are friendly or selfish, froward or peaceable; a wife must know, whether she hath an affectionate husband, and a husband whether he hath a dutiful wife; a servant must know, whether he is under a reasonable and gentle, or a capricious and cruel master; and a master, whether

whether he hath a submissive and diligent, or an idle and slothful servant. The same thing holds with respect to every other relation. And as to the government of the tongue, the world must know whether your conversation is pure and inoffensive at all times, and profitable, as opportunities present themselves; or if it is frothy, unprofitable and vain, rash, peevish, passionate, unchaste, or censorious. As therefore, in the language of our Saviour, a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid; so a Christian, in these cases, cannot be concealed. And I hope I may be allowed to say, without being thought to put the shadow of religion for the substance, or preferring the form to the spirit, that he ought, in all such cases, to be particularly watchful that nothing may escape him, which may, in its consequences, tend to the dishonour of God, or the ruin of the souls of men.

In the 3^d place, In order to make your light to shine before men, you must be careful in the discharge of such duties as are most *acceptable* to others. It is self-evident, that if there are some of the duties which we owe to our neighbours more acceptable to them than others, nothing will more recommend religion to their esteem, which is the design of a shining conversation, than the faithful discharge of such duties. Now, that there are some duties more acceptable to mankind than others, is very evident; and none will call it in question, who reflect up-

on the different reception given to those duties which promote mens temporal interest, and those which restrain or punish their crimes. The one class of these procures the love and esteem of all without exception, whether good or bad ; the other often provokes the resentment and inflames the passions of the vicious, who make so great a part of the world. Reflect also what a different reception is usually given to a covetous hard-hearted oppressor, or to a fraudulent unjust man, on the one hand ; and to a profane swearer, a drunkard, or despiser of religion, on the other. The first is hated and fled from by all ; the last is freely caressed by many, and indeed often by those from whose profession a more equal and impartial detestation of vice and wickedness might have been expected. This is easily to be accounted for, if we consider that worldly interest is the idol of by far the greatest part of men, and that there is too strong a bias to it in the very best.

From this it is plain, that he who would make his light to shine before others, must be extremely careful of such duties as are most acceptable to them, particularly justice and integrity in all his dealings ; and such justice as, if possible, may be beyond dispute, and to the conviction of all. There was a very great beauty and dignity in the language of Samuel to the children of Israel, when he was able to appeal to themselves, as to the unblameableness of his
conduct

conduct among them in a public station : “ * Be-
 “ hold, here I am, witness against me before the
 “ Lord, and before his anointed: whose ox
 “ have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or
 “ whom have I defrauded? whom have I op-
 “ pressed? or of whose hand have I received a-
 “ ny bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and
 “ I will restore it unto you. And they said,
 “ Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us,
 “ neither hast thou taken ought of any man’s
 “ hand.” Mercy and charity also to those in
 distress is universally acceptable: this is still
 more acceptable to mankind in general than ju-
 stice alone. The reason is, they think they
 have a claim to justice, and, in many cases, can
 obtain it by compulsion, when it is not willingly
 given them. Besides, that worldly wisdom may
 easily be conceived the principle of just dealings,
 through fear of a discovery, and its consequen-
 ces: but charity and compassion to the necessi-
 ties of others, is looked upon as the free uncon-
 strained exertion of good dispositions. The a-
 postle Paul supposes a difference in the estima-
 tion of the world, between a merely righteous
 or just man, and a good or merciful man, when
 he says †, “ for scarcely for a righteous man
 “ will one die: yet peradventure for a good man
 “ some would even dare to die.”

The same selfish bias in men to their worldly

* 1 Sam. xii. 3.

† Rom. v. 7.

interest will indeed sometimes carry them so far, as to make them excessive and unreasonable in their expectations. The world seems not only to expect, that those who profess to fear God should be just and upright in their dealings, merciful and charitable to proper objects; but that they should be at all times ready to yield up their own rights to the extravagant demands of worldly men, and give such evidences of self-denial, as are neither consistent with wisdom nor with piety. These excessive expectations of the world, which it is found by experience impossible to gratify, are too apt to make some, in peevishness and displeasure, throw up all hopes of, or endeavours after, avoiding its reproaches. This is to disobey God, because it is impossible perfectly to please men. The more ready they are to take offence without reason, the more watchful ought the conscientious Christian to be, that he may give no just ground for it. And undoubtedly the private example, or the public endeavours of any person for reformation, bid much fairer for success, when his conduct is such in the particulars above mentioned, as the world in general must confess to be amiable and excellent.

I shall only add one consideration more to shew the necessity or propriety of shining in such duties as are most acceptable to others. It is, that usually the loose or profane part of the world, in order to prevent or wipe off in some measure

measure the reproach which their conduct, in other instances, brings upon them, pretend to glory in the justness of their dealings, their generosity and charity; and this often not without insinuations, that those who appear to be religious, are not so strict in point of moral honesty. It is therefore incumbent on every servant of God to make his practice a continual and visible refutation of this calumny; and to shew, that none can, to such perfection, discharge any moral duty whatever, as those who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, and having the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, must of consequence love their brethren also.

In the 4th and last place, If you would make your light shine before men, you must be diligent in the practice of such duties as are most profitable to others. It will not be difficult to determine, what are the duties most profitable to others, if we only consider what has the most immediate tendency to promote their spiritual and eternal interest. Of this kind, there are many incumbent on persons of every station, and in every situation of life; though the obligation of them is little thought of, for the most part, and the practice generally neglected: such as, private and personal instruction, tender and affectionate counsel, faithful admonition and reproof. Every one of us knows the persons to whom his influence extends, when any scheme for his worldly interest and advancement, or
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that of his friends, or the power and credit of his party, is at stake; but few think of using the same interest for the glory of God, and the salvation of deluded sinners.

Of this kind are all the duties of superiors to their inferiors; as parents and heads of families, teachers of youth, ministers of the gospel, magistrates and rulers. These every one, in their several capacities, are obliged, either more directly, or by consequence, to promote the everlasting interest of those who are under them; and nothing will make their light more to shine, nothing will contribute more to adorn and illustrate their Christian character, than a faithful, zealous, and diligent discharge of the duties of these stations.

Perhaps it may be thought, that the reasoning on the former particular is contrary to this; and that if these duties which are acceptable to others make a Christian's conversation to shine, the practice of such as men are averse from submitting to, must have an opposite effect. But this is far from being the case: for though some sins are contrary to other sins, religion is consistent throughout; and every part of it, instead of obscuring, throws a lustre upon another. This will easily appear, if you consider, that however unwilling men are to be instructed in their duty, or restrained and limited from their irregular indulgence; so soon as the endeavours used for that purpose are successful, they will,
with

with the highest thankfulness, acknowledge the care bestowed upon them. Though a child may, at first, and for some time, be impatient of the father's authority; if it is attended with success, he will ever afterwards reckon it one of the greatest blessings of his life; and the memory of such a parent will be infinitely more dear, than of one who has shown the most partial and indulgent fondness.

Further, such duties, though they may be harsh and unpleasant to those who are the immediate objects of them; yet as they are unquestionably good and useful in themselves, they must command the esteem and approbation of every impartial observer. It is indeed by this means alone, or chiefly, that the public honour and credit of religion is preserved, amongst so great a majority who are enemies to it in their hearts. What they would hate and resist, or perhaps revile, in their own case; when others are concerned, conscience constrains them to bear a clear and strong testimony in its favour. Nay, not only so, but the most wicked and profligate, though they hate religion and righteousness in itself; yet are they sufficiently sensible of the connection between a religious profession and its proper fruits, and sufficiently apt to reproach those in whom they observe the deficiency; and that in such cases as the performance would be painful, and not acceptable to themselves. Thus a child of a slothful parent, a subject of an unfaithful

ful magistrate, if their profession is such as to make the neglect scandalous, shall despise them in their hearts, and sometimes go so far as to reproach them by their words, even where their own ease and security is wholly owing to that very criminal indulgence. From all which it evidently appears, that a conscientious discharge of such duties as are most useful and profitable to others, is highly proper to make our light to shine before men.

I am sensible, my brethren, that these classes into which I have divided our public and visible duties, *viz.* such as are most rare and uncommon, such as are most subject to the observation of others, such as are most acceptable, and such as are most profitable to them, are not so entirely distinct one from another, but that there are many parts of the duty of a Christian, which fall under more than one of these divisions, and some that may perhaps fall under them all; yet I have mentioned them separately, because each of them hath some duties which do peculiarly, or at least eminently belong to itself: and as every one of them contributes to shew us the extent of our duty upon the whole, so they, at the same time, serve to set the obligations to it in a striking light.

II. I proceed now to the second thing proposed, which was, briefly to illustrate the two motives added in the text to enforce the exhortation;

tion; and these are, the glory of God, and the good of others.

1. The glory of God. The glory of God is the supreme and highest aim of every real Christian, to which every other design is subordinate and subservient. I am not ignorant, that profane and worldly men are apt to deride this language, of the glory of God being the highest aim of a Christian. It is not however the less agreeable to truth, that it is contrary to the spirit of the world: “* For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” It might be sufficient to support this manner of speaking, to say, it is agreeable to the word of God, which is a much surer test of truth, than any maxims established by human wisdom. But for silencing gainsayers in some measure, though their conviction (without a change of heart) cannot be hoped for, I would observe, that it is the character of a Christian to love God above all: and is it not a natural consequence of supreme love, to be jealous of the honour and zealous in the interest and cause of the object of our esteem? Real love cannot, even in imagination, be separated from this its natural effect and expression.

Now, if this is once admitted, there is no way in

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

which we can so well, or rather there is no way in which we can at all promote the glory of God, but by a holy and unblameable conversation. As the works of creation are said to shew forth his glory, because they point out his natural perfections exerted in their formation; so his reasonable creatures glorify him, when his image, or some resemblance of his moral excellence, and this as his own workmanship, is discerned upon their hearts.

It is no doubt, in one view, difficult for us to conceive how the glory of God, who is perfect and unchangeable, should at all depend upon our conduct; yet as this is the light in which he hath represented it to us himself, so it is necessarily felt in this manner by every one of his servants. Indeed we see, that the unholiness or the unguarded conduct of those who profess to serve God, and stand in an apparent relation to him, has the greatest tendency to dishonour him, as far as that expression hath any meaning or propriety in it. The state of the world may easily convince us of this; for as no argument has been oftener used against the gospel, so none ever gave it a deeper wound, than the wicked lives of its professors. As many, therefore, as have any regard to the glory of God, or the honour of the Redeemer's name, must carefully endeavour to make their light shine before men, "that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven."

2. The other obligation contained in the text, to an useful or shining conversation, is the good of others. As some degree of love to mankind is naturally implanted in every heart, and as love to others is the second commandment of the law, and a necessary effect of the love of God; so it is impossible but this love, if it be real, must, in every believer, evidence itself in a deep concern for, and conscientious endeavour after, the salvation of others. Whomsoever we love, we naturally express this love, by endeavouring to avert from them those ills which we most fear, and to procure for them those advantages which to ourselves appear most valuable: and therefore, the looking upon sinners with indifference, and not using the means in our power for their recovery and salvation, is the most unquestionable evidence, either of our not believing the important truths of religion, or being altogether void of good-will to our fellow-creatures, or rather of both; because they are essential branches of the same character. A parent who should profess, from his own experience, to have the greatest apprehensions of the danger of a certain practice, and yet should freely suffer or encourage his children in the same practice, would give good ground to judge, either that his fears were wholly affected, or that he was altogether destitute of love to his children, or concern for their welfare.

Now, how can any man more effectually promote the real, that is, the everlasting interest of

others about him, than by a shining example of piety and usefulness of conversation? A blameless life, such as becometh the gospel, is a more effectual reprimand to vice, and a more inviting argument to the practice of religion, than the best of reasoning. Reason and argument, to pattern and example, is but as an uninformed picture to a living man. The most part of mankind are best instructed by their senses, and are both unwilling to attend to, and incapable of perceiving the force of speculative reasoning; but a good life answering to what their own consciences declare to be right, is a sensible representation that never fails to make an impression, both on the memory and heart. As the impression on the wax is more discernible than the engraving on the seal, though this last be just and perfect, whereas many accidents may render the impressed image faulty and defective; so though a just and complete view of the doctrine of Christ is only to be had from the scriptures of truth, yet the general integrity and uprightness of a good man is more legible to the bulk of mankind; and being the character of a man originally of like passions with themselves, engages them to imitate it. From all this I conclude, that the love of God, and the love of our neighbour, jointly concur in laying the strongest obligation upon every Christian to make his light shine before men.

III. I proceed now, in the last place, to make some

some practical improvement of what has been said. And,

1st, From what has been said, you may see in what respect alone it is our duty to aim at the approbation of others, and from what principle it ought to flow. We are bound so to order our outward conversation, as that it may, on the one hand, contribute nothing to the corruption of others, but rather that they may be invited to the practice, and persuaded of the excellence and amiableness of true religion. There is no character against which our Saviour pronounces a severer doom, than that of being religious that we may be seen of men; that is to say, when the view is only to procure their applause to our own character as a gratification of vanity. Such persons have their reward. But when the design is, to watch that the name of God be not blasphemed on our account, to bear much fruit that God may be glorified, there are few things more useful and important. For this reason, the friends of religion owe no thanks to those who glory in a contempt of what others think or say of them, who are at no pains to avoid the appearance of evil, but freely indulge themselves in whatever they can, with any plausibility, alledge to be lawful in itself. They may cry out, as much as they will, against the uncharitableness and censoriousness of the world; but they themselves are acting in downright contradiction to the exhortation in our text, and neither show regard to the will of God, nor compassion to the

fouls of men. In opposition to this, the Christian who would make his light to shine, in obedience to his master's command, must use the utmost tenderness and circumspection, not lest his own reputation should be wounded, but lest religion should suffer through his unguarded conduct. Such an one hath this advantage, that though perfectly to please a capricious world is impossible, he may yet obtain mercy of God to be faithful; and though there is a wo to the world because of offences, he may escape the wo of that man by whom the offence cometh.

In the 2d place, What hath been said upon this subject serves to reprove the sin, and shew the darger, of all those who are notoriously deficient in the practice of the duty recommended in the text. Indeed you may see from the extent of it, that it affords ground of humiliation for all without exception; and, like every other precept of the pure and holy law of God, shews plainly, that a perfect righteousness is not to be found in ourselves; and that, for our final acceptance, we must be indebted to the free grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. But, in a particular manner, this reproof is directed to two sorts of persons.

I. Those who are wholly unprofitable to others, and altogether insensible of their obligation to profit them. There are not a few in the world, who openly justify themselves, and extenuate their sins by this pretence, that they do no harm to others; that, if they do evil, none suffer
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but themselves. This is the usual pretence of dissolute livers, who are plunged in sensuality. Let such consider their entire neglect of the command of our Saviour in the text; let them consider their obligations to serve God, and the account they must render to him. Let me suppose any of you had a servant who should altogether neglect your business, and, upon your reproving him, should make this excuse, I have done no harm, I have put nothing out of order, I have not hindered the other servants in their work; how would you be satisfied? or rather with what indignation would you receive the shameless pretence? Let this then convince you of the justice of the sentence that shall at last be pronounced by our Supreme Master upon all such: “ * Cast ye the unprofitable servant into utter darkness, where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” But the worst of it is, this excuse, weak as it is, is not true; for all those who are not profitable, must be hurtful to others. Drunkards, swearers, profane and lascivious jesters, and the whole tribe of those who pretend to do harm to none but themselves, pollute and corrupt, by their example and influence, all that come within their reach: so that, for the hazard of infection, thieves and robbers are less dangerous companions.

But, 2. This reproof ought to be directed to such as are further chargeable with the actual guilt of seducing others. How many are there

* Matth. xxv. 30.

who, by the contrary methods of flattering insinuations, or derision and insult, as they expect from the disposition of the persons the one or the other will be most successful, endeavour to banish a sense of religion from the minds of others, and gradually to involve them in sin and guilt? This is the immediate tendency of all that conversation, which, with a malicious pleasure, enlarges upon the real or supposed miscarriages of the people of God, and charges every profession of religion with hypocrisy. How aggravated is the guilt of all such, and how dreadful will be the punishment! They are eminent and faithful agents for the devil. The works of their father they do, and his reward they shall share. As the union and mutual love of the saints in heaven will increase the happiness of every particular member of that blessed society; so we must suppose, that the mutual reproaches of the damned and miserable spirits in hell, accusing each other as the authors of their destruction, will greatly sharpen their anguish. The fear of this seems to have alarmed the rich man, even in torments, lest his brethren should come to the same place. What must a child, for example, ruined by the neglect of restraint, or pernicious example of a parent, think of or say to the author of his misery? Oh! unmerciful monster, and not a parent, who, instead of correcting, sported with or encouraged the first instances of impiety; who taught me, by example, to profane my creator's name, and to neglect his service; and who, though ambitious of making me

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me rich and great for a few days in a transitory world, hast contributed to bring me to, and fix me for ever in this place of torment! Take warning then, I beseech you, all of every rank, and increase not your own condemnation by the guilt of seducing others.

In the 3^d place, What hath been said upon this subject will enable you to try the purity and sincerity of your outward conversation. An inquiry here is of the more consequence, that we are in great danger of deceiving ourselves, because both a truly serious and a worldly motive may lead to many of the same outward actions. For this purpose let me ask you, whether it is the glory of God, and the good of others, that makes you watchful of your conduct; or a tenderness of your own reputation? This may be, in a good measure, discerned by the faithful search and trial of your own hearts; and particularly by observing, whether the injuries and reproaches of wicked men excite in you a greater resentment of the offence, or compassion for their folly. Again, I would ask you, whether you are equally conscientious in such duties as may be painful and troublesome, and may expose you to the reproaches and insults of the ungodly, as in those that immediately tend to your outward honour and credit? I have shown above, that it is necessary to make your light to shine, by the first as well as the last. Is then your concern equal and impartial to fulfil the duties of your station, whatever they are, whether agreeable or mortifying to the flesh; or are you
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most careful when you will reap the greatest present reward? By examining into these particulars, you may be enabled to judge of the purity of your intentions.

In the *last* place, Suffer me to improve this subject, by an earnest exhortation to all who now hear me, to the practice of the duty recommended in the text, to "make your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." That this may be the more distinct and effectual, I shall address it to three different classes.

1st, To those who are the professed advocates of good works. Every one who hath any experience of, or commerce with the world, must know, that there is a set of men who profess to love and esteem those discourses only that teach and recommend good works; and that in order to state a distinction where there ought to be none, between the truths of the glorious gospel, and the doctrines of morality. I intreat all of you to consider what hath been said of the great extent of visible religion, and it will have a greater tendency to humble you, and excite you to seek the sanctifying grace of God as the source of true holiness, than to glory in the excellence or perfection of your moral character. Take heed also, that you fall not into the shameful inconsistency too common in the world, of being the strongest pleaders for moral preaching, and the least tender of moral practice. What a shame and scandal is it, and how pitiful in the eyes of those who understand what true and undefiled

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