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*J. S. A. 1707*

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Mr. *Sacheverell's*  
**S E R M O N,**  
Preach'd Before the  
**Univerfity of OXFORD,**  
*Septemb. 14th, 1707.*

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# S E R M O N, &c.

*Numbers XV. 30, 31.*

*But the Soul that doth ought, Presumptuously, (whether he be born in the Land, or a Stranger,) the same Reproacheth the Lord; and that Soul shall be cut off from among his People:*

*Because, He hath Despis'd the Word of the Lord, and hath broken his Commandment, that Soul shall utterly be cut off, his Iniquity shall be upon him.*

**T**HERE cannot be an higher Demonstration, as well of the Impartial Justice of God, in His Government of the World, as of the Excellency of those Laws, whereby it is Administred, and Supported, than the Exact Distribution of Rewards, and Punishments, in both; proceeding always, according to the Different Proportions of Vice, and Vertue; Still Guarding Duty with an adequate Sanction, and as 'twere Adjusting the several Degrees of Guilt, in the Weight, and Number of its Penalties. Upon which account, We find in this part of the Mosaick Institution, a Series or Catalogue of Sins, distinguish'd from each other, by their Rise, and Gradation, their Complexion, and Magnitude, the many Aggravating Circumstances, wherewith they are Inham'd, and the Peculiar Attonements assign'd for them; to Convince Us, of the Real Malignity and Intrinsick Turpitude of Sin; that the Pollution of some Human Actions dos not proceed from the meer Arbitrary Imposition of God, or that the Punishments, He has annex'd to them, are the Harsh Determinations of a Tyrannical and Unjust Severity; but that they are the most Fit

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and Proper *Motives*, to work upon our *Reason*, and *Passions*, that we may submit our selves to the Divine Will, and Law: whereby, our Sins are so nicely *Weigh'd in the Balance of the Sanctuary*, and so Equitably *estimated* according to the *Measures of Abatement*, or Degrees of *Provocation*, that the *Size*, and *Quality* of the Transgression, is always visible in the *Penalty* attending it. As for those Sins of a *Lower Class*, committed through that *Ignorance*, or *Infirmity*, to which Human Nature is often unavoidably Obnoxious, He, who knoweth whereof we are

Ps. 103.  
14 made, and remembers, that we are but *Dust*, did out of his Great Mercy condescend to Accept of an *Expiation* by *Sacrifice*, under the *Jewish Law*; and do's now, for much more Heinous Sins, (provided we repent) accept of the Inestimable Blood of the blessed *Sacrifice of the Lamb of God*, as a sufficient *Oblation*, and *Satisfaction* for their Guilt. Nevertheless, what *Punishment* can be too Great, what *Menaces* of Divine Vengeance too Rigid, to Deter Mankind from so Flagrant and Dreadful a *Degree of Vice*, as that of an Open, Wilful, Contumacious, and Obstinate Violation of God's Law; such an *Exorbitant Pitch of Iniquity*, as without the most severe *Repentance*, cancels and *supercedes* all *Propitiation*, Evacuates the Attonement of the Son of God, and Consigns over the Impudent Offender to an Irremissible State, and utter Incapacity of Pardon? But the Soul that doth ought *Presumptuously*, &c.

Now this Law, being Built upon the Eternal Foundations of *Natural Reason*, and *Justice*, is not confin'd to the *Jewish Nation* only, nor barely to be extended to *Strangers*, or *Profelytes of the Gate*, but Includes *Gentiles*, as well as *Jews*, and is equally Applicable to all *Christians*; and is not (as some *Learned Writers* Critically remark) so much to be understood of any One, *Specifick*, Distinct, Kind of Sin in it self, as of a certain *Manner*, or (as the *Schools* speak) of a *common Accidental Difference*, or Circumstance of Aggravation, in the *Formal* way of Sinning, belonging to *all Transgressions in general*, whereby they are render'd more Heinous, and Provoking, and are therefore call'd *Sins of Presumption*, from the sad *Affinity* and *Analogy* they bear to that *Material Great Sin of Presumption*, eminently so stil'd; whereby, we boldly and arrogantly, presume on God's *Power*, *Mercy*, *Justice*, and *Goodness*, his *Assistance* without *Promise*, or *Revelation*, or his *Pardon*, and *Permission*, contrary to Either.

And, since We are so Prone in the Grand Concerns of our Salvation, and the Conduct of our Lives, to Flatter our selves with this Delusive  
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and *Fatal Confidence*, that most of those Errors We commit, may be Cover'd with the *Extenuating Plea* of *Ignorance*, or *Infirmity*, and consequently to be Expiated with a *General* or *Superficial Remorse*; which has so securely betray'd Millions, into everlasting *Perdition*; it is certainly a matter of the Highest *Importance*, and of the most *Absolute Necessity*, for the settling the *Peace* of our Consciences, upon a firm and unshaken Bottom, to Examine, what the *Distinguishing Marks* of those *Malicious*, and *Daring Sins* are, what their *Sorts* and *Degrees*, what their *Extent* and *Danger*; that We may be able to make the *Austerity* of our Repentance, *Commensurate* to the vast Load of their Guilt. For tho' God's *Mercy* is in it self, as *Infinite* as his *Nature*, (of which it seems to be his most *Delightful Attribute*) yet since He has been pleas'd to *Circumscribe* it, within *Evangelical Bounds*, beyond which, We cannot, (without the utmost *Presumption*,) *Claim*, or *Hope* for it; it is certainly, no *Insolence*, want of *Charity*, or *Derogation* from the All-sufficient *Merits of Christ*, to Assert, that We may by some the most *Flagitious*, and *Consummate Acts*, and *Habits* of *Unrepented Impiety*, Forfeit the Merciful Terms of the *Gospel-Covenant*, and Transgress beyond the Reach of *Grace*, or Conditions of *Remission*; and so draw down on Our selves the *Dismal Curse* mention'd in the Text, not only in a *Temporal*, but *Spiritual* Sense. To Prevent which, I shall Endeavour,

- I. *First*, To Enquire into the *Nature*, and several *Kinds* of *Presumptuous Sins*. And
- II. *Secondly*, To shew their *Prodigious Guilt*, and *Dreadful Danger*.

Now to make this Matter Clearer, before Us, it may not be Improper, to Premise this *Maxim*, That the *Guilt of All Sins*, is to be measur'd, by the several *Degrees of Consent*, whereby they are Approv'd of, in the *Will*, which renders them more, or less *Immoral*; for tho' every *Wicked Act* is either lessen'd, or increas'd in its *Obliquity*, with regard to the *Difference* of the *Law*, of which, 'tis a *Violation*, and the various *Circumstances* of *Time*, *Place*, and *Persons*, which Affect it, the *Matter*, whereof it consists, the *Means*, whereby it was accomplish'd, and the *End*, for which it was Produc'd, together with the sundry *Conditions* of *Light*, *Knowledge*, and *Assistance*, the *Agent* lay under; all which very much Alter the *Case* of the *Delinquent*, and either *Heighten*, or *Diminish* his Crime; yet the *Concurrence* of the *Will*, does chiefly De-

*nominate* and *Distinguish* it ; and is of it self, *sufficient* to *change*, even the very *Nature* of an *Action*, render *Good*, *Evil*, *Indifferent* things, *Vicious*, and as the Scripture Elegantly speaks, *to make Sin it self, more Exceedingly sinful*. So that of no less *Irrational*, than *Impious* Consequence, are those *Wild*, *Paradoxical Tenets* of the Ancient *Stoicks*, and Our Modern, *Rigid Predestinarians* (the most Absurd *Philosophers* of the Two) the *First* whereof, by holding the *Equality* of All Sins, set the most *heinous Enormities* in Nature, such as *Blasphemy*, *Murder*, *Perjury*, *Adultery*, and the like, upon a Level, with the most *Pardonable Mistakes*, and *Weaknesses* ; and the *Latter*, by inducing a Strange, *Fatal Necessity* of Sinning, *disannul* its Guilt, render it a meer *Innocent* Notion, destroy the *Freedom of the Will*, take off all the *Odium*, and horrid *Dread* of Transgressions, and charge their *Malignity* upon the Fountain of all Good, *God Blessed for ever*.

This being in General Premis'd, as the *Foundation* of the following Discourse, I proceed to the Subject propos'd, Namely,

I. *First*, To Enquire into the *Nature*, and several *Kinds* of *Presumptuous Sins*.

Now tho' this Copious and Fruitful Argument is as *wide* in its *Latitude*, as 'tis *necessary* in its *universal Use*, rightly to be understood, as taking into its Compass, so large a *Sphere* of *Practical Morality*, yet I conceive, the most *Considerable Cases* belonging to it, may be *Comprehended* under, or *Reduc'd* to, one of these following Particulars, Namely,

1. *First*, Sinning either with a *Wilful Ignorance*, or against *Positive Knowledge*.
2. *Secondly*, Sinning *Without*, or Complying with *Small*, or Running into *Great*, *Temptations*.
3. *Thirdly*, Sinning against the *Means of Grace*, or after *Signal Judgments*, and *Mercies*.
4. *Fourthly*, *Persevering* without *Remorse*, or *Shame*, in the *Habitual Commission* of *Many Offences*, or any *One Darling Sin*, with the vain *Hopes* of *Repentance*, and *Pardon*.

1. And *First*, Sinning with a *Wilful Ignorance*. As all Laws both of *God*, and *Nature*, Exempt Us from the Imputation of Guilt, in Cases of *Invincible Ignorance*, so on the other hand, they induce an *Indispensable Obligation*, both of *Knowledge* and *Obedience*, when they are

are *Promulg'd*, and *Understood*. Where our Duty lies Level to Our *understanding*, and suited to Our *Practice*, to Neglect it, is to *Presume* upon the *Mercy*, and *Goodness* of the *Lawgiver*, neither can the fault of *One* be then Plead'd in Defence of the *Other*. *Non putaram* is the *Apology* of a Sot, and was never alledg'd but by such *Fools*, as thought to Justify *one Crime*, by the commission of a *Worse*. This is, as if a Man should shut his Eyes, and pretend Blindness, or put out the *Candle of the Lord*, on purpose to wander in the dark. He that has the advantage of a *Sure Guide* to shew him the Road, if He refuses his Counsel, can never Answer for his Conduct, in Losing it. Many of the Lines of *Humane Duty* are drawn so plain and visible in Our Natures, that nothing can *Efface*, or *Obliterate* them, but what *Extinguishes* Our *Reason*; inso-much that the *Apostle* says, *it left the very Gentiles* that were Ignorant of it, *without Excuse*. And if *Ignorance* could not be allow'd in vindication of *them*, who wanted a clearer *Revelation*, can it be urg'd in behalf of such, as enjoy the Happiness of the *Glorious Light of the Gospel*? wherein all its Precepts are written, as 'twere with a *Sun-beam*, that *He that Runs may read them*; and a Man may be as well Ignorant of his Own heart, wherein they lye so deeply Engraven, as of this *Hand-writing of Ordinances*; nay it must be as *hard* as the *Stone* on which, the Commandments were Inscib'd, not to perceive 'em, at first view, Legible: to walk thus in Darkness, in the midst of *Gospen*, and of that *Light*, that *lightneth every Man that cometh into the World*, is to Grope and Stumble in *Egyptian Error*, at Mid-day, and to abuse the Blessed Means of Knowledge, that Providence has provided Us, to Direct Us safely in the way of Truth and Salvation; and is doubtless, a very *Wilful* and *Presumptuous Sin*.

2. But, Secondly, if the Sins We commit through this bare Neglect of Information, which are as 'twere *Negative Crimes*, are of so great Obliquity, an *Affected* and *Studied Ignorance*, is a Sin of an higher Degree, of a more Daring and *Presumptuous* Nature. Wherein, We industriously Labour to *Blind* the Eye of our *Reason*, and *Faith*, to Shun that Knowledge, that would prevent Our Transgressions, and to shut our *Ears against the Voice of the Charmer*, least *We should be Converted and heal'd*. We fly from the *Light* because Our *Deeds are Evil*, and skulk in Obscurity, to avoid their Discovery. When Men *bate Knowledge*, and will not chuse the *Fear of the Lord*, when they will have none of his *Counsel*, and despise all his *Reproof*; this is an Ignorance that God will be so far from *Winking at*, that He will punish it with *Infatuation*

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Rom.  
1. 20.

Job.  
3. 19  
Prov. 1.  
29. 35.

and Delusion, by giving up such *Volunteers* in the *Devil's Service*, to receive the *Wages of Sin*, to eat the *Fruit of their Own ways*, and be fill'd with *their Own Devices*. The Former sort of *Ignorance*, may be look'd upon as an Act of supine *Sloth*, and *Oscitancy*, wherein We do, as 'twere carelessly Pass by, forget, and overlook Our Duty; but this carries *Premeditated Malice* in it, 'tis casting the *Law behind Our Backs*, endeavouring to Evade its Force, by a Mean *Subterfuge*, or crafty *Equivocation*, to commit Sin with the prospect of an *Excuse*, to cloath our *Nakedness* with *pitiful Fig-leaves*, and with a Blasphemous *Credulity* Imagine to put upon the *Omniscience*, and Delude the *Omnipotence* of God. This is a Second Degree of Sinning through *Wilful*, and *Presumptuous Ignorance*.

3. But, Thirdly, *Sinning against Positive and exprefs Knowledge*, is yet a farther pitch of *Aggravation*. This Crime rises, and falls, according to the *Advancement*, or *Imperfection*, of the Delinquent's *Understanding*: Nay, with regard to the same Person, it *Alters*, with respect to his *various Circumstances*. As We may learn from that instructive *Parable* about the *Talents*, from whence Our *Blessed Saviour* has Authoriz'd Us to conclude, that God will proceed with Mankind, at the great day of Final Retribution, not in an *Arithmetical*, but a *Geometrical Proportion*, expecting and Judging the Performance of our Duty, responsibly to the *Endowments*, *Gifts*, and *Abilities*, that He has severally *Dispens'd* to every *Individual Man*. So that this Sin is in some *Greater*, and in others *Less*, but in all *inexcusable*. To run counter to the manifest *Light* and positive *Dictates of Reason*, in any thing, that it expressly *Forbids*, or *Commands*, in despite of the *Contradictions*, and *Convictions* of Our *Conscience*, the *Suggestions*, *Persuasions*, and *Menaces* of the *Blessed Spirit*, within Us, in matters of fact Notorious, evident, and indisputable, is doubtless a very high and audacious act of *Presumption*. If I had not come, (says Our Saviour) and spoken amongst them, they had not had Sin, but now they have no Cloak for their Sin. And if (as St. James affirms) to him that knoweth to do Good, and doth it not, to him it is a Sin, that is, of *Omission*, (as St. Paul says) much more so to him, that knoweth the *Judgment of God*, that they who commit such things are worthy of *Death*, not only doth the same, but takes pleasure in those that do them. But even this heinous Transgression is yet capable of one degree more of *Aggravation*. When the Criminal is not *Surpriz'd*, or *over-born* by his *Passions*, or by sly *Insinuations* entic'd and allur'd into some Vicious action, but with a *Resolute Calmness*, and *sedate Deliberation*, takes time and Leisure to *advise* with himself, and

Ponders

*Ponders every Motive, and Circumstance, Weighs the Temporal Advantages and Pleasures on the one hand, and the Eternal Punishments and Divine Vengeance on the other; and yet maugre all the Arguments of his Reason, and Decisions of his Judgment, will follow his Own wicked Inclinations, fulfil his Lewd Desires, and Accomplish his Worldly ends; this is so Dreadful and Presumptuous a way of Sinning, that nothing can Extenuate its Flagitiousness, or mitigate its Guilt. And yet as Slight, as Ambitious, Covetous, Time-serving, Profane Libertines, and Atheistical Debauchees make of this Tremendous matter, who can with Shameless Foreheads, and obdurate Hearts, commit such Deadly and Damning Impieties, there is no one Flagrant, and Deliberate Act of Vice but falls under this Hellish Character: As all Hypocrisy, (particularly that Quintessence of Fanaticism, Occasional Conformity) Betraying the Church in its Doctrine or Discipline, Lying, Fornication, Adultery, Perjury, Murder, Rebellion, Sacrilege, &c. and the like, if there can be any other Sins in the Devil's Catalogue of a more Crimson Dye, committed against the Reluctance of Conscience, and the Commands, and Laws, of God and Men.*

Now in all these *Gross and palpable Points*, there is not only a full Concurrence, but a peremptory Election of the Will, overbearing, and as it were forcing the Intellectual Powers, to a sordid Compliance. For Men usually in these Cases, act with Subtle contrivance, and anxious Forecast, Jer. 4. 22 they are *Wise to do Evil* (as the Prophet speaks) like crafty Politicians they lay Plots and Schemes of Iniquity, Sin with Artifice and Stratagem, and as dextrous Professors, that are Skill'd in the Mystery of Ungodliness, Cultivate and manage every piece of Villany to advantage, suck out all the Poyson, and Drain the very last Drop of Pleasure, and Profit, that it contains.

Out of the Great Number of Examples, that the Scriptures so plentifully abound with, to illustrate this Matter, I shall only produce Two of each Kind. The First is, that Astonishing Instance of a wilful and affected Ignorance, in that Obstinate, Perverse, and Wayward Nation of the Jews; a Nation Rais'd, Supported, Govern'd, and Deliver'd, by a continual and uninterrupted Series of a Miraculous Providence; to whom, as the Peculiar Favourites of Heaven, were committed the Oracles of God, and his Will reveal'd by a Successive Mission of Prophets after Prophets, to instruct, warn, invite, and threaten them into a Sense of their Duty, with repeated Mercies and Judgments, of both which they so deeply Tasted, but in vain: tho' their

their Law was so *Intelligible*, and the *Predictions* of the *Messiah* and *Gospel-Dispensation* so *Evident*, that nothing but their forc'd and false *Glosses* could *obscure* the *One*, and their studied *Obstinacy*, induce them to *reject* the *Other*; yet by their long Abuse of all these *Divine Privileges*, they Endeavour'd to *make the Counsel of God of none effect*, and fulfill'd that strange Prophecy of *Esaïas* upon themselves, which saith, *By hearing Ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing Ye shall see, and not perceive; for this People's Heart is waxed gross, and their Ears are dull of hearing; and their Eyes they have clos'd, lest at any time they should see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and should understand with their Heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

Again, there is not in the whole Body of the *Sacred History* a more Execrable Instance of *Presumptuously Sinning against Positive Knowledge*, than in the Example of *Ahab*, who is *Emphatically Stigmatiz'd* by the Holy Ghost with the abominable Character, of *provoking the Lord God of Israel to Anger, more than all the Kings of Israel that were before him, nay, of having sold himself to work Wickedness in the sight of the Lord; as if he had Bargain'd with the Devil, for the highest Post in the Kingdom of Darknes, and had Barter'd his Soul for a more exquisite Degree of Damnation.* Among the many Flagitious Acts, whereby he *Signaliz'd his wicked Reign*, and render'd it *Odious* to all Posterity, we find most particularly recorded, with all the *Circumstances of Aggravation*, that *Imperial Villany* in the Murder of *Naboth the Jezreelite*; Because the poor Innocent Man would not, contrary to the *Express Command* of the Law, *Alienate his Paternal Inheritance*, this cursed Tyrant by the *Instigation and Contrivance* of his Two *Privy Counsellors*, the *Devil* and his *Wife*, for the more Solemnity and *Sanctification* of this Transcendent Wickedness, first orders a *Fast to be proclaim'd*, then *Naboth* to be set up on high, before a pretended Court of *Justice*, to sentence him to Death for *Blasphemy*, by the *false Accusation* of Two *suborn'd Witnesses*. What an horrid *Complication* of Sins were there here join'd in One, *Oppression, Robbery, Hypocrisy, Perjury, Murder*, to satisfy Us that a *Presumptuous Crime* scarce ever goes *Single*!

II. But *Secondly*, The next Kind of *Presumptuous Sins* I mention'd was, *Sinning without, Complying with Small, or Running into Great, Temptations.*

I. And *First*, *Sinning without any Temptation* at all. When there is no Motive, either of *Real Pleasure, Honour, or Profit*, to induce Us



{ to the Commission of it; when out of a *false Principle of Vain-Glory, or Singularity*, an *Ostentation* of being above the *Check or Controul* of *Law, Reason, or Faith*, or a *Diabolical, Monstrous, Malignity of Nature, delighting in Evil*, Men seek Opportunities of becoming *Sceptical, Profligate, and Cruel*; and in cool Thoughts, when their *Passions and Intellectuals* are less disturb'd, they bid *Defiance to God, his Truth, and his Power*; such as are, the *Denying or Questioning* the great *Mysteries of our Religion, Ridiculing, or Blaspheming God's Word, or Providence, Irreverently Profaning* his Holy Name, in common *Oaths or Imprecations, or Asserting, and Propagating Corrupt, Seditious, Lewd, Schismatical, or Latitudinarian Principles*, with a virulent Intention of spreading *Poison*, and doing *Mischief*: Or when Men of *Invidious and Black Dispositions*, purely to gratify their *Spleen or Rancour*, secretly *repine* at their Neighbour's *Happinels*, and without any Prospect of Advantage to themselves, give an *Underhand Stab* to his *Fortune, or Character*: To these, we may add the *Old Debauchees*, who when they are grown *Maim'd, and Emerit in the Devil's Service*, and are left *Impotent, and Vanquish'd* by their beloved *Wine and Women*, when the *Act of Vice* has quite forsaken their *decay'd and rotten Constitutions*, rejoice to view its Commission in *others*, enjoy it at *second-hand*, *play over* their former *Lives*, in their own *Filthy Imaginations*, call up the *Ghost* of their departed *Sin*, and are perhaps more *Lascivious* in their *Thoughts*, than they were before, in their *Practices*. In all these Cases, Men *act the Tempter's Part* upon themselves, and are most *Presumptuously Wicked*, without *sufficient Allurement, Provocation, or Gain*.

{ 2. Secondly, *Complying with small Temptations*, is another kind of *Presumptuous Sinning*. As the *Greatness* of the *Temptation*, and *Power of Inducement*, do *Mitigate* the *Guilt* on the one hand; so by a *Parity of Reason*, on the other, must its *Little Influence*, and the *Capacity of Resistance* in the *Offender*, *aggravate and inhance* his *Crime*. For here, tho' he stands *ready and prepar'd* to meet his *Enemy*, he *throws down his Arms*, basely *Capitulates*, and *Surrenders* upon the first *Onset*. A Man that thus *Dishonourably gives up* himself, wants only an *Opportunity* to be a *Traytor* to his *Cause*; whereas, nothing but the *Last Opposition* can *Acquit the spiritual Souldier* thus *fortify'd* with the *Successes of Strength and Grace*; he must *dispute* his *Ground*, *Foot by Foot*, and like a *True Christian Champion*, rather *Dye* upon the *Spot*, than *Yield* the least *Point* to the *Powers of the Kingdom of Darkness*. God do's indeed out of his *Infinite Mercy*, make some *Allowances* for the

Inevitable *Infirmities* of Our *Nature*, whereby we are often surpriz'd into Evil, and overtaken by a quick and sudden Temptation, before we could well view its *Danger*, Guard against, or Prevent its *Attacque*; or where, (possibly we having *Leisure* or *Will* to do this) the *Violence* of Our *Passions* may perhaps Overbear Our Intentions, and the frequent *Returns*, and almost irresistible *Affaults* of *sensual Enjoyments*, prove too Powerful for *Flesh* and *Blood* to Encounter and Subdue: In this *Combat*, wherein he does not *Cowardly desert his Colours*, the *Just Man* may be said to *fall seven times a day*, and yet to maintain his *Post* and *Character*, tho' he may be frequently *defeated* in it. But least we should be too *Favourable* to our selves, in that worst and most fatal Self-Flattery of *Excusing* or *Lessening* our Crimes, we *must carefully observe*, that even the Sins of *Infirmity*, howsoever *Pardonable* in themselves, may become *Sins of Presumption*, when we are wilfully deficient in our *honest Endeavours* to guard our blind-side, to *watch* against those Vices that *so easily beset us*, and lose the *Victory* through a *Culpable Neglect*; which he is grossly Guilty of, who is so far from fencing against, that he *Anticipates* the *Dull* and *Lingring Temptation*, is not so much *caress'd* into, as *courts* his own *Slavery*, prevents Importunity, *closes in* with the first Offer, and lazily suffers himself to *fall into the Devil's Snare*, and be taken Captive by him, at his Will.

3. Thirdly, Next to *Complying with Small*, is *Running into Great Temptations*, which is a different Instance of *Presumption*. Tho' a Man is never so well assur'd of the *Strength* of his *Reason*, and the *Steadiness* of his *Resolution*, to undergo the greatest *Difficulties* and *Trials*; tho' he should (as our Blessed Saviour says) like one King going to make War against another, sit down first, and consult, whether he be able with Ten Thousand, to meet him that cometh against him, with Twenty Thousand; (which great odds, as it must be always expected, is enough to make any Man, thus Out-number'd, doubt of Success;) tho' he should by a strange, and unaccountable *Fortune*, gain the Day, yet he scarcely deserves, either Thanks, or Reward, for a Victory, he so rashly and unadvisedly *Hazarded* at the *Expence* of his *Ruine*; and if he is *Beaten*, may not unjustly be *Condemn'd* for his *Fool-hardiness*, and *Indiscretion*. A Man may as well touch Pitch, and be undress'd, or go upon Coals, and not be burnt, as engage prevailing *Allurements*, or *Occasions* of Evil, without *forfeiting*, or *betraying* his *Vertue*; All *Caution* in this *Insidious Case* may prove vain, we are *catch'd* and *intangl'd* before we *think*, or are *aware* of it; Nay, tho' we sometimes

see our *Destruction* before us, we may *slide* on the *smooth, slippery* way, inevitably into it. There is a strange *Deceitfulness in Sin*, (as the *Holy Ghost* expresses it) which may *beguile* and *infatuate* the wisest *Man* upon Earth; and no one can be *Secure* against a *Fall*, that goes *in the midst of Snares*, or *walks upon the Battlements of a City*. The *Bewitching* *Temptations* of *Riches, Honour, Pleasure, and Beauty*, prove too often an *Over-match* for our *Reason*; and those *Bold Combatants*, that are to *wrestle*, not only against *Flesh and Blood*, but against *Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World, against spiritual Wickedness in high places*; had need to take unto them, the whole *Armour of God*, that they may be able to *withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand*; that when they are *tried, they may be found faithful, blameless, and harmless, the Sons of God without Rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation*. But what *Man* can have such an *infallible Assurance* of his own *Heart*, (which is *deceitful above all things, who can know it*) as without the *Shield of Faith*, and the *Breast-plate of Righteousness*, to open his *Bosom*, and expose it to all the *fiery Darts* of an *indefatigable, and implacable Enemy*; and especially, when 'tis as much *betray'd within*, as *beset without*, what a *presumptive Madness* is it, causelessly to venture in such a *Danger*? where he may probably be bereft of the *Protection* of the *Grace of God*, and given up to the *cruel Mercy* of the *Devil*? This may prove an *uncall'd for*, and *unjustifiable Walking thro' a Fire Ordeal*, not so much to prove our *Innocence*, as to incur *Guilt*; 'tis like *St. Peter's* (who was a *Sorrowful instance* of human *infirmity*) treading on the *faithless Deep*, where, without *immediate Divine Assistance*, a *Man* must *sink and perish*. He that engages in this *perilous Enterprize*, knows not where it will end; and this *vain Confidence* has often foil'd the *stoutest Heroes in Christianity*, and brought them to a *shameful Defeat and Repentance*, for *trusting too much to their own Strength*, without the *Aids of Grace*, in *difficult, and unwarrantable Circumstances*. So great *Reason* have the best of *Men* to *pray not to enter into Temptation*; to set (as it were) *Scourges* over their *Thoughts*, and the *Discipline of Wisdom* over their *Hearts*; to *flee from Sin* as from the face of a *Serpent*, not to come near it, lest it bite us; for the *Teeth* thereof are as the *Teeth of a Lion*, *slaying the Souls of Men*; like a *two-edg'd Sword*, that cannot be touch'd, without a *Wound*, which cannot be heal'd. To converse within the *Infection* of the *Plague*, and to visit the *Confines of Death*, is certainly the most ready way to catch the one, and fall into the other.

III. Thirdly, *The next Kind of Presumptuous Sins, is against the Visible Means of Grace, or after signal Judgments, or Mercies.* By the Means of Grace, I understand not here, the *Internal Operations* of the Blessed Spirit, on our Souls, Sinning against which, I have already observ'd to be a heinous Degree of *Presumption*, and which in some degree attends *all other sorts* of it: But here, 'tis rather meant of all those *External Gifts*, and *Favours*, which Providence bestows upon us, as the Means of doing Good in the World, and being *Serviceable*, either to God, our Country, or our Friends, in promoting their *Glory*, or *Interest* in Church, or State. Such as are, *Wealth, Honour, Reputation, Authority, Power*, with the noble *Faculties*, and useful *Endowments* of *Mind*, or *Body*; as *Learning, Wit, and Eloquence, Health, Strength, Address, Beauty*, and the like; which are given, as so many mighty *Blessings*, and *Talents*, for *Excellent Ends*; and when *mis-spent*, or *abus'd*, in the base Purposes of *Avarice, Ambition, Pride, or Lust*; or any ways *imbezzel'd*, or *misemploy'd*, draw a fearful Reckoning down, on the *Presumptuous Offender*.

But among all the *External Means of Grace*, the *Divine Mercies*, and *Judgments* Signally shewn, ought to have the most quick and powerful Influence upon Our Thoughts, being as 'twere the *manifest Display* of God's *Favour*, or *vengeance* upon Us, which should either *Melt down* the most *Flinty* heart into a pious Sense of *Gratitude*, and *Praise*, or into an humble *Acknowledgment* of, and *Submission* to, the Hand that Blesses, or Smites Us. *Prosperity*, and *Success*, should make Us Naturally remember the *Kind Benefactor*; and *Distress*, and *Affliction*, *Whet*, and *Sharpen* the Soul, Rouse and Awake a *Stupify'd* and *Lethargick Conscience*, and like the *Hand-writing on the Wall*, strike Terror, Astonishment, and Remorse, even into a *Belshazzar*, carousing in the midst of *Wine, Women, and Banquets*. But the Man whom neither *Mercy* can *Soften*, nor *Punishment* *Terrify* into *Duty*, is under a worse State of *Impenitency*, and *Obduration*, than *Pharaoh, Manasseh, or Nebuchadnezzar*. To Sin under these *Provoking Circumstances*, is to *Spit* in the Face of Providence, *Kick* at Omnipotence, *baffle* and *Disappoint* all its tender *Designs* upon Us, and in the apposite Language of the Prophet, to *turn Judgment into Gall, and the fruit of Righteousness, into Hemlock*. What greater Obligations can there be to Piety and Religion, than the Visible Demonstrations of God's Blessing in our *Success*, or *Advancement*, in *Supporting* Us under, or *Delivering* Us out of, any pressing Disaster, Calamity, or Danger? These are *Times of Encourage-*

*couragement*, and *Trial*, and Opportunities of Exemplifying a more than ordinary *Thanksgiving*, *Humility*, *Patience*, and *Obedience*. We may observe the just Reflections that the *Holy Ghost* has made upon those Two remarkable Instances of *Both*, *Hezekiah*, and *Ahaz*. To the *One*, as the Reward of his *Eminent Vertues*, God had given for the most part, a very *Prosperous Reign*, had promoted him to more Honour, Riches, and Glory, than any Prince, next to *Solomon*, that sat upon the Throne of *David*; He Deliver'd him by two Astonishing *Miracles* out of the most perilous Circumstances, the *Danger* he was in from his powerful Enemy *Sennacherib*, and a *Mortal Distemper*; Blessings one would think, worth perpetual Acknowledgment! Yet it is said, *Hezekiah render'd not agen, according to the Benefit done unto Him: for his Heart was lifted up, therefore there was Wrath upon him, and upon Judah, and Jerusalem. For in the business of the Embassadors of the Princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the Wonder, that was done in the Land, God left him to Try him, that He might know all that was in his heart, and accordingly punish'd his Pride in the Scandal, and Misery of his Posterity.* But *Ahaz* was the very *Reverse* of his Son, and most exorbitantly Wicked, and therefore God visited him throughout his *impious Reign*, with a continued Series of *Plagues* and *Troubles*, which were so far from bringing him to a *Sense* of his Crimes, that when God had *Surrounded* him with innumerable Hosts of Enemies, who laid his Kingdom in *bloud* and *desolation*, led Captive one part, and slew the other with a *rage that reach'd unto heaven*, and left the Land as *Naked* of Inhabitants, as of God's Protection, yet even under these *dismal Extremities*, it is emphatically observ'd of him, that *in this time of his Distress, did He trespass yet more and more, against the Lord.* For which *Incorrigible* and *Diabolical Temper*, whereby he did as 'twere *Defy*, and *set himself against* God, the *Holy Ghost* has fix'd this infamous Brand upon his Character, to distinguish him, for a most audacious Sinner, to all Eternity, *This is That Ahaz!* Such unpardonable *Ingratitude*, and exasperating *Presumption* is it, to abuse the *Mercy*, and *Long-suffering* of God, to Spurn at his Rod, and *Revolt when We are Smitten*, and not perceive the *Wound*, or endeavour the *Cure*, when his *Arrows stick fast in Us*, and his *Hand presseth Us sore*.

2 Chron.  
32. 25.

Verf. 51.

2 Chron.  
28.

Is. 38. 1.

IV. Lastly, *Persevering without Remorse, or Shame, in the Habitual Commission of Many Offences, or any one Darling Sin, with the Vain Hopes of Repentance, or Pardon, is an exceeding Presumptuous Sin.* There cannot be Invented by the *Wit* of Man, or the *Sophistry* of the *Grand Deceiver*

of Souls, any Two more *Erroneous Opinions*, or more directly and fatally Destructive of all *Practical Christianity*, than those *Absurd Tenets*, of the *Unlimited Mercy of God, thro' Christ's Sufferings*, so as that they may be Extended to the utterly impenitent, and most Harden'd Wretches: and that *Enthusiastick*, arrogant Notion of God's *Absolute Decree of uncovenanted Salvation*, to certain Favourite Persons, without any the least respect had, to their *Qualifications*, or *Demeanours*: both which Opinions do in a manner, Disannul the *Conditions of the Covenant*, Abrogate the *Necessity of Repentance*, and permit the most *Insolent Offenders*, to run on with *Comfort*, and *Alacrity*, in their Vices, without *check* or *Regret of Conscience*. Upon these Two equally *False Foundations*, Men are apt to Flatter themselves that the *Day of Grace* can never be pass'd, that they can *Reform* themselves, when they please, and that tho' they Offer to *come in* at the very *Last Hour*, they shall be *Admitted*, and never Deny'd Entrance: With this *Alluring Prospect*, they resolve to enjoy the *Pleasures of Sin*, together with the *Hopes of being Sav'd*, take their full *Swinge of Iniquity*, and when They have *Squeez'd out all the Satisfaction*, and *Profit* they can, then to Relinquish it; and when they are *fit for nothing else*, Sit down and Reflect a while, upon their Follies. Now to *Sin* with a bare Intention to *Repent* of it, afterwards, is to do *Despight to the Grace of God*, in order to Obtain it; that is, in other words,  *affronting all the Divine Attributes*, yet depending on that *Single one of his Mercy*. But tho' God has graciously promis'd *Pardon* to all those that *truly Repent*, yet He has no where promis'd the *Grace of Repentance*, to such as *Slight*, and *Abuse His Holy Spirit*, which alone can bestow it. Of such vast importance is that excellent Advice of the *Wise Man*, Say not, *I have sinned, and what harm hath happen'd unto Me? for tho' the Lord is long-suffering, He will in no wise let Thee go. Concerning Propitiation, be not without fear, to add Sin unto Sin. And say not his Mercy is great; he will be pacify'd for the Multitude of my Sins; for Mercy, and Wrath come from him, and his Indignation resteth upon Sinners. Make no tarrying to turn to the Lord, and put not off from day to day: for suddenly shall the Wrath of the Lord come forth, and in thy Security, Thou shalt't be destroy'd, and perish in the day of Vengeance. Therefore Bind not one Sin upon another, for in one, Thou shalt't not be Unpunish'd.*

There is another Sort of *Demure and Reserv'd Sinners*, who out of regard to the *World's Censure*, or their *Own Reputation*, will not live in the Commission of any *Flagrant*, and *Scandalous Vice*, but Stick not in *Private*, at those of a *Lesser Quality*, which are Suited to their

Parti-

Lev. 5.  
4, &c.

Chap. 7.  
vers. 8.

Particular *Humour*, *Interest*, or *Constitution*, in which they think they may with Impunity *Indulge* themselves, and Persevere, without Reluctance. *Oh! this is but Little one, and their Souls shall Live.* They will *Compound* to hold these *Bosom-Sins* undisturb'd, to Rail most devoutly at All others: thus the *Covetous* Man will condemn *Sensuality*, and *Extravagance*, the *Epicure* Declaim against *Avarice*; and the like, in all *Opposite* Sins. Now tho' the *Danger* of these Crimes (however *Little in themselves*) is very Great, in that they pass *Unobserv'd*, are easily *admitted*, and insensibly *Steal* upon Us, grow frequent, ordinary, and at length *Habitual*; and tho' they make up in *Number*, what they want in *Weight*; yet passing thus for mere *Inadvertencies*, or *Infirmities*, seldom bring the Delinquent to a *particular Repentance*, which all *Voluntary Transgressions* certainly Require. But it is undoubtedly sure, that God's *Sovereignty* and *Authority* is equally *Impeach'd* and *Oppugn'd*, in the transgression of any *branch* of his Commands; there is no *Dispensation* for any part of Our Duty, as by way of *Commutation* for the rest; and whoever chuses finally to persist in any particular Sin, tho' *He shall keep the whole Law besides, and Offend in that One point*, James 2. 10. *is Guilty of all.*

Thus I have endeavour'd in as short a Compass, as this copious Matter would permit, to shew the *True Nature*, and Point out the *Several Sorts of Presumptuous Sins*. I proceed

## II. In the Second place to *Evince their Prodigious Guilt, and Dreadful Danger, that We may Avoid them.*

And first, as to *their Guilt*, which is set out in the Text, in the highest Expressions of *Aggravation*, the Sense whereof, I shall Comprehend and Draw out, in these following Particulars.

1. Because they are Committed against the *Light of Reason*, and the *Conviction of Conscience*.
2. Because they proceed from an *Open Contempt of God's Laws*, and do *Reproach his Power and Majesty*.
3. Because they strangely *lay waste* the Conscience, and in time, produce an *Habitual Necessity* of Sinning.
4. Because they *Judicially* draw down the *Wrath and Vengeance* of God upon Us, by *Quenching His Holy Spirit* within Us.

1. And first, *The Guilt of these Presumptuous Sins is very Great; because*

cause they are Committed against the Light of Reason, and the Convictions of Conscience. Sins of Infirmary Slide insensibly upon the Soul, and as 'twere Steal the Consent of the Will. A Vicious Thought rises up, almost imperceptibly in it, and Surprizes a Man into Evil. But these Outragious and Daring Sins Present their Over-grown and Monstrous Bulk in full view, at a Distance, they give Warning of their Approach, raise an Alarm and Up roar in the Understanding, and give it time to Recollect, and Muster its Forces, to Deliberate on the Danger, call in Divine Assistance, and having done all, to Withstand the Adversary, with a vigorous Resistance. Now in spite of all these Advantages, not only Cowardly to Submit to, but basely and Treacherously to Close in with the Enemy, notwithstanding the Representations, Advices, and Menaces, of that Faithful Monitor, God's Vice-Gerent within Us, is to do Violence to Our Nature, to Un-Man our Selves, and to Sink Us lower, than the very Beasts that perish. A Man must Enlarge his Conscience, as Hell, and his Appetite be as insatiable as Death, and the Grave, thus with his Eyes open, to Swallow Damnation in gross. And if Crimes committed thro' meer Ignorance stand in need of Mercy, and the

Hav. 2. 5. Propitiation of a Saviour's Merits, (as St. Paul tells Us in his Own Case)  
 2 Tim. 1. 13. what Judgment, what Condemnation must await that impudent and resolute Criminal, that dares to Stifle and Outface his Convictions, and to Break through all Bounds and Restraints? The Servant that  
 Luke 12. 47. knew his Lord's Will, and did it not, shall be Beaten with many Stripes.

2. Secondly, The Guilt of these Presumptuous Sins, is very Great, because they proceed from an Open Contempt of God's Laws, and do reproach his Power, and Majesty. And thus the Original Hebrew, with an Admirable Emphasis, and Significancy of Expression, calls it, in the Text, *Sinning with an high hand*, which we render *Presumptuously*. Now were such Crimes committed thro' an Actual Disbelief, or Atheistical Denial of God's Being, possibly they might seem to be less Presumptive; but to acknowledge his Sovereignty and Justice, and at the same time trample upon, and despise it, to spit upon him, with an *Hail King of the Jews*, to set at naught his Laws, and mock and ridicule the Almighty Creator, and Governour of all things, with a *Tush, God thou carest not for it*; to prefer the Service of the Devil, or an empty and transitory Enjoyment, or the Fears of Men, before the consideration of Heavenly Pleasures, and Eternal Vengeance; or like Judas, to sell our Saviour for the Price of a Slave; is such Folly, and Madness, such a Dreadful Affront, and Contumelious Disdain, and Provocation, from



*Dust and Ashes*, against the *Great God*, as did not his Infinite Mercy interpose, would *call down Fire from Heaven*, to strike the Daring Offender, dead upon the spot, for such unparallel'd *Rebellion*.

3. Thirdly, *The Guilt of Presumptuous Sins is very Great, because they strangely lay waste the Conscience, and in time, produce a sort of Habitual Necessity of Sinning*. It is the Opinion of some *School-Writers*, that a single Commission of a very Gross and Flagitious Crime is *Equal* to an *Habit* of the same, as containing in it the *Force* of many *Lesser Acts*, or a *Complication* of many *Enormities* together; as the Commission of *Adultery, Murder*, and the like; wherein, there can never be *Restitution* made: Whether this will absolutely hold *True*, or not, has been question'd by many *Learned Divines*, and I shall not pretend at present to *Determine*; but I think it can hardly be doubted, but that One single Commission of this *high Nature* implying a *deliberate* and *perverse Election* of the *Will*, may possibly prove of the same *Deadly Guilt*, even with an *Habit* of *Lesser Sins*, being as *Vicious* in its *Rise*, and *Principle*, as *that* is, in its *End*, and *Operation*. For, this is a sort of *Spiritual Apoplexy*, that at Once amazes, stuns, and stupifies the Conscience, so that the *Soul* is for a long while unable to *Recover* its *Sense*, and *Understanding*: And such *Exorbitant Sins* seem to be, as it were, a *Compendium* of the *Malignity* of many small Ones, which indeed gain Ground upon Us, by *little and little*; and by *multiply'd Acts*, and a *deceitful Custom*, are render'd *Easy* and *Familiar*, and so *Gradually* and *Insensibly* *Decoy* the Sinner into their *Yoke*, and *Slavery*: But, such swelling *Presumptuous Sins*, like an *Impetuous Torrent*, Break in upon the *Soul*, overturn its *State*, and bear down its *Faculties*, with an irresistible *Violence*: At one *Stroke*, they gain so compleat a *Victory* over it, that 'tis almost *Irrecoverable* out of their *Dominion*: and having once gain'd the *Conquest*, they seldom fail to keep the *Captive* under their *Bondage*; and then, from frequent *Repetitions*, grow so *Habitual*, as at length to *Superinduce*, as 'twere, a *Necessity of Sinning*: For having *Eras'd* all the *Principles* of *Reason*, and *Distinctions* of *Good* and *Evil*, the *Lamp of the Lord* is quite *Extinguish'd* within, and the *Whole Man*, like the *Wandering Stars* in *Sc. Jude*, is *Eclips'd* with the *Blackness of Darkness* for ever; or to apply the beautiful Description of *Solomon*, of that *Emblem* of these Sins, the *Egyptian Plague*, *He is shut up as a Prisoner of Darkness, and fetter'd with the Bonds of a long Night, being exil'd from the Eternal Providence: he lies hid in his secret Sins, under a dark veil of Forgetfulness, being horribly astonish'd,*

and sleeping a sleep, which is indeed intolerable, and which comes out of the bottom of inevitable Hell. So that, Arguments and Demonstration, to one belotted under these *infatuating Circumstances*, are no better than a discourse of Colours to the Blind; they can make no Impression upon the *Intellectual Powers*, when they lye thus subdued, intoxicated, and confounded, by an headstrong, and Tyrannical *Will*; such an *abandon'd Wretch* obstinately resists and opposes all the best *means of Conviction*, and most proper *methods of Persuasion*, that God generally makes Use of to reclaim Sinners, and sets himself with a pervicacious Malice against the brightest *Evidence of Truth*, and strongest *Motives of Repentance*. The *Sense of Conscience* being thus lost as 'twere in the *Sin of Witchcraft*, the Man Commences a *Devil Incarnate*, gets into a *Love of*, and *Complacency* in Mischief, Embraces it *as such*, and is so far from Committing it with *Shame or Remorse*, that He arrives at that Superlative Perfection of Iniquity, even to *Glory in his Shame*, and Boast of his Folly. Men of such *harden'd Hearts*, and Whore's *Foreheads*, (as the Prophet speaks) *refuse to be Asham'd*, the *shew of their Countenance doth witness against them*, and they declare their *Sin*, as *Sodom*, they hide it not, they must stick at no Impiery, but take it in the Gross, and fall from *Sin to Sin*, add *Drunkenness to Thirst*, and (as the *Apostle* excellently Describes them) *having the Understanding Darken'd, being Alienated from the Life of God, thro' the Ignorance that is in them, because of the Blindness of their hearts: Who being pass'd feeling, have given themselves over unto Lasciviousness, to work all Uncleanness with Greediness*. Thus do these Mortal and Portentous Sins, *Naturally*, and in their *usual, and genuin Effects*, first *Debauch*, and then *Murder the Conscience*; and from an *Habitual perseverance* in Sinning, induce a sort of *Necessity* of it, and so bring a Man at length to a *Final Impenitency*. Which will further appear if We consider,

4. Fourthly, *That these Presumptuous Sins JUDICIAALLY draw down the Wrath and Vengeance of God, upon Us, by Quenching his Holy Spirit within Us*. Every presumptive Crime We are Guilty of, is said to *Grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby We are Seal'd unto the Day of Redemption*; and our Blessed Saviour has told Us, that his Grace shall be taken away, from even such as *Neglect and Abuse*, and therefore much more, from such as *Despise, and Reproach* it. Tho' it cannot be denied that there is no *Degree or State of Sin or Infidelity*, howsoever tremendous, resolute, and provoking, but the extraordinary, and miraculous Influence of the Divine Grace, is at any times able and sufficient

cient to break through and subdue it, and in this case, upon Conviction and Repentance, Remission must certainly follow; yet for all that, God has expressly declar'd, that *his Spirit shall not always strive with Man*, and that He will withdraw the Necessary Aids and Supports of it, where they are Oppos'd with an opprobrious, and incorrigible Obstinacy; that *He will give his Grace only to the Humble, and that he resisteth the Proud*, and Contumacious; and consequently, it is a Position as highly consistent with the strictest Rules of Reason and Justice, as with the infinite Mercy and Goodness of God, that such Persons are *given over to a Reprobate Mind*; and being deserted by the Divine Grace, the onely Means of Reformation, are irrecoverably abandon'd to go on and continue in a State of Damnable Sin, and utter Impenitency; and so exclude themselves, and are excluded by God, out of the Terms of Forgiveness, *both in this World, and that which is to come*. And there seems not any Truth more clear or capable of Demonstration, from the Holy Scriptures, being of such vast Importance for the cautious Conduct of Human Life, than that dreadful Period of Grace, that *Limitation of a certain Day, or Time*, Hebrews 4. 7. wherein the *Measure of Our Iniquities is fulfill'd*, the *things which belong to Our Peace hidden from Our Eyes*, the Covenant Seal'd up, and no Admission or Acceptance granted to such *profane Persons*, who *fall from the Grace of God*, and like Esau, have sold their Birth-right for a morsel of Meat; who when they would inherit the Blessing, are rejected, and can find no place of Repentance, tho' they seek it carefully, with Tears. Such Men may in vain seek the Lord when he cannot be found, and call upon him when he is not near; because He has called, and they refus'd, stretch'd out his hand, and no Man regarded; but they have set at naught all his Counsel, and would none of his Reproof. I also (says God) will laugh at their Calamity, and mock when Your Fear cometh; when your fear cometh as Desolation, and your destruction cometh as a Whirlwind, when Distress and Anguish cometh upon You: Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer; they shall seek Me early, but they shall not find Me, for that they hated Knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord. From these, and many other plain Passages of the Scriptures, the Primitive Writers have asserted the Doctrine of a Man's being under a final and fatal Dereliction of the Blessed Spirit of God; whereby he was consign'd over to the power of his Own Lusts, and the Possession of the Devil, who never fail'd to Enter with his Hellish Retinue, and Lodge in the forsaken Mansion. Tho' it is not so easy to Determine precisely, when this Terrible and Severe

Gen. 6. 3.

Jam. 4. 6.

Mat. 23.

32

Luk. 19.

42.

Heb. 12.

15, 16, 17.

Isa. 55. 6.

Prov. 1.

24. &c.

Curse happens to any Person; yet as 'twas certain, in the first Ages of the *Church*, for some time, after *Excommunication*; so 'tis more than Probable that it may now befall Men, after a long *Repetition* of many *Habitual*, and *Presumptuous Sins*, persever'd in, contrary to the frequent Threats and Commands of the *Holy Ghost*. And what a dismal Condition is this, to be *left naked* (as the Scriptures express it) both of the  
 5. Protection and Providence of God; to be Bereav'd of the onely Prin-  
 2. ciple of Vertue and Goodness in Us, and have Our *Blessed Comforter* and  
 10. *Advocate*, turn'd to be our *Enemy*, and to fight against Us, as the Prophet  
 10. describes it! What else can be the Deplorable Consequence of this  
 10. frightful State, wherein Men *despise the riches of God's Goodness*,  
 Rom. 2. *forbearance*, and *long-suffering*, which should lead'em to Repentance, and  
 4. 5. *after their hardness and impenitent heart*, treasure up unto themselves *Wrath*  
 against the Day of *Wrath*, and revelation of the righteous Judgment of God; but that he should permit such willful and Obdurate Wretches to fall into a *total Desertion*, and *final Apostacy*, that great *Transgression* which the *Psalmist* probably means, as the usual Result of being under the Do-  
 minion of *Presumptuous Sins*; and which seems not obscurely pointed out in that Grievous Sentence pass'd upon them in our *Text*, in that Variety and Gradation of Expression, as *that Soul shall be Cut off, from among his People*, *that Soul shall be utterly Cut off*, and *his Iniquity shall be upon him*. Which as the *Rabbinical Writers* generally understood of *Apostacy*, so it matters not, whether it was Punish'd, as some interpret this Place, with a *Temporal Death*, by the *immediate hand* of God, or his *Vice-Gerents*; or an *Eternal*, as others; both being easily consistent and reconcilable together, and perhaps, the consequence of each Other. However, by its Penalty, it appears to be one of the Greatest Crimes, that Man can commit against God, or God can Punish with the severest Vengeance: it is that *Capital Offence*, that *Summ-Total* and *Abridgment* of Guilt, that must make a Man Renounce his Baptism, Deny his Saviour, Defy and Despise all Law, enter into an *Actual Hostility* against, and utter Abhorrence and Detestation of, God and his Providence. It is, in a Word, the Last, Superlative, *finishing Stroke of Sin*, which (as the Apostle says) *bringeth forth Death*;  
 15. Death here, and without God's infinite and *Uncovenanted Mercy*, Death for ever in the World hereafter. Which brings Me,

Lastly, in a very few Words, to shew *the Prodigious Danger of these Presumptuous Sins*, both, *first*, in *Regard to this Life*; and, *secondly*, in *regard to that which is to come*.

1. Now were We here to Enumerate the many fearful Judgments and Calamities, the strange and unaccountable Disasters, that God's Providence has brought upon Men, in *this Life*, for these stupendous Sins, either in *Personal Visitations* on themselves, or *Vicarious Plagues* on their Posterity, inflicted on their *Souls, Bodies, Estates, or Reputations*, both Your Patience, and the Time would fail Me. Let that Notorious Example of *David*, in those *Presumptuous Sins* of *Murder*, and *Adultery*, suffice for All; whose *Repentance*, as well as *Punishment*, in all these Instances, were as eminently *remarkable*, as his *Crimes*. When God, by the *Mission* of a *Prophet*, had rous'd his Conscience out of that sad *Lethargy*, these Execrable Acts had cast it into, for the space of, an whole Year, what a dismal Series of Afflictions, with the Delivery of his Pardon, at the same time, were Denounc'd as the *Natural Consequences* of that *Crying Guilt*, upon himself, and his wretched Family, *from whom the Sword was never to depart!* Inasmuch, that his <sup>2 Sam. 12. 12.</sup> Whole Life after, together with the *Bloody Sacrifice* of his House, were as 'twere one continued Expiation of it; and happy was it for him, that God, by a *Peculiar* and almost *unprecedented Grace*, accepted his Penitential Sorrow in *this World*, in exchange and prevention of everlasting Misery in the *Next*; and suffer'd him, for a while, to lose his *Temporal Crown* here, that he might not forfeit his *Eternal one*, hereafter.

2. To conclude, *It is the greatest Hazard, and a very important Question, not easily to be resolv'd, Whether any Person, under the Absolute Dominion of these Presumptuous Sins, ever comes to Repentance, or consequently, to Pardon for them.* The Holy Ghost speaks of this Lamentable Condition, as if it were in some measure Desperate and given over, and next to a *Moral Impossibility* to be Retriev'd, under that Figure (*Hyperbolic* only as We hope) of a *Leopard changing his Spots, and an Ethiopian his* <sup>Gen. 42.</sup> *Skin*; at least thereby intimating, the frightful Hardship and Danger of conquering the power of these *Habitual Presumptuous Vices*. I have already shewn, how difficult this Matter is, with regard to *Natural Causes and Effects*, wherein We find the *Reason subdued*, the *Conscience Obliterated*, and the *Will* contumaciously bent on *Evil*: as well as with regard to the *future Dispensations of slighted Grace*, which seem to leave no room for any thing but *Despair*, and horrid Resolutions of *Persevering* in Sin, without Recovery. To which I need only add, by way of Illustration, some dreadful Denunciations of the Holy Scriptures relating to this purpose, which can never be too often In-

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culcated on Our thoughts ; and which seem not onely to refer to, but run Parallel with, the Text. *St. Peter tells Us, if after We have escap'd the pollutions of the World, thro' the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, We are agen therein intangl'd and overcome, the latter End is worse with Us, than the beginning. For it had been better for Us, not to have known the way of Righteousness, than after We have known it, to turn from the Holy Commandment deliver'd unto Us.* And *St. John* calls this a Sin unto Death, that is out of the reach of Our Prayers. But the *Author* of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* raises this point to a more Exalted Strain. *It is impossible (says He) for those who were once Enlighten'd, and have tasted of the Heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the World to come ; If they shall fall away, to renew them agen unto Repentance ; seeing they Crucify to themselves, the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the Earth which drinketh in the rain, that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them, by whom it is dress'd, receiveth Blessing from God : But that which beareth Thorns and Bryars is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burnt.* And that We may not mistake the Apostle's sense, 'tis agen repeated and illustrated, *Chap. X. vers. 26, &c. If We Sin wilfully after that We have receiv'd the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins : But a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries. He that despis'd Moses's Law, dyed without Mercy, under two or three Witnesses : Of how much sorer punishment, suppose Te, shall he be thought worthy, who hath troden under foot, the Son of God, and hath counted the Blood of the Covenant, wherewith He was Sanctify'd, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace ? For We know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompence, saith the Lord ; And agen, the Lord shall Judge his People. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.* From all which Passages, some Learned Interpreters have drawn this Conclusion, That if in the *Mosaick Law* there was no *Attonement*, by *Sacrifice*, for *Presumptuous Sins*, but the Guilt of them was to rest upon the head of the Offender ; by *Analogy*, it follows, that under the *Christian Dispensation*, of which that was a *Type*, there can be by the *Merits of Christ*, no *Expiation* made for them, habitually continued in, or not retracted by a bitter, thorough, and PARTICULAR Repentance, a Repentance not to be repented of ; without which, our Blessed Saviour's sufferings can never be apply'd to the Criminal thus *Dying in his Sins*, who must

must be thereby inevitably deliver'd over to Eternal Destruction. This Doctrine, at first sight, may seem very Terrible, and Severe; and it may be reply'd, if these things are so, *what Flesh can be sav'd?* It must be confess'd indeed, that this is the Rigour of the Law, and *tho' this seems impossible or very hard, with Men, yet all things are possible with God*: We must remember, there is no *Abatement*, or *Dispensation* in the *Conditions* of the *Covenant*; and if there may be any *Extraordinary Instances* of God's *superabundant* and *unpromis'd* Mercy, in *snatching some, like Firebrands out of the Fire*, by his *mighty Hand and stretch'd out Arm*, as in those wonderful Examples of *David*, and *Solomon*, yet are such surprizing and Singular *Présidents* to be look'd upon as the *Miraculous and Transcendent Over-flowings* of the Divine Grace, willing to display its Omnipotence and Glory, in its *Exceeding Riches and Power*; and no more to be depended on, in the *ordinary Course* of Providence, than that of the *Penitent Thief* on the Cross; or that a Man should *Presumptuously* expect to be heal'd of a *Plague*, or a *Feaver* by *Inspiration*, or a *Voice from Heaven*. Repentance is the *Gift of God*, not the *Power of Nature*, and sad Experience will tell Us, that where one Man has, in these Desperate Cases, happily obtain'd it, a Thousand for ought we know, have sunk into Eternal Perdition, without it.

Mat. 19. 26.

Eph. 2. 7.

Rom. 11. 3.

Gen. 4. 10.  
Hab. 1. 2.

What is here urg'd ought to be so far from deterring Us in the Pursuit of Repentance for these Sins, that it should be the strongest Motive to *incite* our *Zeal*, and *quicken* our *Industry*, and to *awaken* our *Consciences* out of this fatal Repose, to shake off this deadly *Spirit of Slumber*, (as the Apostle expresses it) and to view the dreadful Danger we are encompass'd with; lest these clamorous Iniquities, like the *Voice of Abel's Blood*, *cry aloud* to Heaven for that Vengeance, which nothing can stop but *his Blood*, *that speaketh better things than that of Abel*. The Sense whereof should engage our utmost Endeavours to *prevent*, or *recover* our selves out of them, by a constant and vigilant Attention to the *Voice of God*, speaking in the *Conscience*; by a steadfast and unshaken Adherence to the great Principles of our Duty and Religion; by despising the vain Poms, empty Allurements, and deceitful Pleasures and Enjoyments of this World; by mortifying the Craving and Importunate Commands of our *Pride*, *Ambition*, *Lust*, or *Avarice*; and denying our *Passions*, even sometimes, in *things Lawful*; by abstaining not only from *lessor Sins*, but the very first *motions* and *Appearance of Evil*; and never trusting our selves within the *Contagion*

of

of Vice, or the *Purlieus of Death*. And, Lastly, since We are *not able to do any thing as of our selves*, and God permits sometimes the Wisest and Best of Men, to fall into *this horrible Pit*, this direful and amazing Guilt, We must have a *continual, and fervent* Recourse to his *Grace*, which *alone can Govern the unruly Affections of sinful Men*; that out of his infinite Mercy, and Compassion to *Human Frailty*, He would kindly prevent and assist us, under all the deluding Wiles and Power of the Devil, and his Temptations; and that in the excellent Prayer of the Penitential Psalmist, *Keep back thy Servants, O Lord, from Presumptuous Sins, and let them not have the Dominion over Us; so shall We be Upright, and Innocent from the Great Transgression: And God grant, that*

*13. We may all hear, and fear, and do no more Presumptuously.*

FINIS









