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Practical Discourses
In UPON THE *Saints*
PARABLES
OF OUR
Blessed Saviour.

WITH
Prayers annex'd to each Discourse.

By FRANCIS BRAGGE, B. D. Vicar of
Hitchin in Hertfordshire.

The Second Edition with Amendments.

L O N D O N,

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

RESEARCH REPORT

NO. 100

BY

ROBERT R. WATSON

AND

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PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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TO
The Most Reverend Father in God

THOMAS
Lord Arch-Bishop
OF
CANTERBURY.

May it please your Grace,

TO permit me once more to present You with this Little Book, and to Beg that You would Receive it with the same Goodness at *Lambeth*, that you were pleased to do at *Buckden*.

'Tis very much owing to the Countenance it had from Your Grace, that it met with so Favourable a Reception

The Epistle Dedicatory.

at first, as to be Encourag'd to Appear again Abroad; And which Emboldens me to renew the Dedication of it to Your Grace: Tho' otherwise, I am sensible I should have presum'd too far, to desire so Great a Patronage, for a Thing so Inconsiderable.

May God Almighty long continue Your Grace a Blessing to this Church; And may Your Clergy know how to Value the Happiness of having so Excellent a Governour! And may the the Great Shepherd and Bishop of our Souls give Your Grace the Reward of a Good and Faithful Servant at Last!

I am, with the Greatest Respect,

My Lord,

Your Graces,

Much Oblig'd, and

Most Dutiful Servant,

Fr. Bragge.

THE

T H E
P R E F A C E.

THE Parables of our Saviour being full of Excellent Instruction, and in a Familiar way teaching the Greatest and most Necessary Truths; I thought it would be a very useful Undertaking to Discourse Practically upon them: And by explaining them, and enforcing the Sense couch'd under them, to make them serviceable to the great Ends for which they were design'd: The engaging Men in a Hearty Love and Obedience to our Great Master Jesus, and in an Industrious Provision for the Happiness of the other World.

But before I proceed to consider the Parables themselves, I think 't will be convenient to give a Brief Account, why our Saviour so often spake in that Mystical Manner to his Hearers? And 'tis a Question which his own Disciples ask'd him, after he had deliver'd his first Parable of a Sower; they came unto him and said, Why speakest thou unto them in Parables? Mat. 13. 10. To this our Lord gives a double Answer in the 11th and following Verses, thus. I speak to the People in Parables, because it is given to you, that are true Believers and my faithful Disciples, to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, or of the Gospel; but to them, that is, as they are described in the 15th Verse, whose Heart is waxed

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Gross or *Obdurate and Obstinate*, and their Ears dull of hearing, and who have closed, or willfully shut their Eyes against the Light and Truth that I manifest to the World, least at any time they should see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and understand with their Heart, and should be Converted and I should Heal them: to such as these, as very Unworthy of the Favour, it is not given to have the Mysteries of Religion plainly reveal'd to them but only Mystically, and Covertly by way of Parable. That is, 'Twas by way of Punishment for their Infidelity and Hardness of Heart, and Despising and Rejecting His former Plainer Discourses on the Mount and in other places; and their Averseness to believe in him notwithstanding the Miracles he did, and Blasphemous Attributing his casting out a Devil from one possessed who was Blind and Dumb, to the Power of Belzebub the Prince of the Devils: 'Twas by way of Punishment for this strange Obduracy of theirs that he took upon him that more Obscure way of Instructing them than he before had used; and which new Practice of his, was a tacit Intimation of his Displeasure against them, and did threaten a Total Concealment of those glad Tidings from them which he came to bring unto the World, if they persisted in their Obstinacy and Disbelief.

And this is manifest from the whole of what St. Matthew records of our Lord's Discourses before this 13th Chapter; which we find to be very plain and expressed in the usual manner, till the Pharisees with Hellish Malice would disparage the
great

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great Miracle he wrought upon the possessed Man, by ascribing it to Art-Magick and the Power of the Devil: And from that Time, after Confoounding that Objection and sharply reprov'ing their Perverseness and great Obstinacy, he very frequently express'd himself by way of Parable in his publick Discourses, and afterwards in private explained all to his Disciples: and he gives this reason for his so doing, ver. 12. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more Abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. That is, He that upon my former Plain and Open Instructions hath Believed and Obeyed me, shall have still more and more as plain Manifestations made to him of the Mysteries of the Gospel: But hee that hath made no good Use of what was then so clearly made known to him, but continu'd still Faithless and Obstinate, shall for the Future be depriv'd of that full Light and Sun-shine of the Gospel, and be afforded only some Obscurer Glimmerings of it, and behold it as through a Veil. A Punishment this, had they understood it, very Great; and which was enough to cure them of their Stubbornness, and make them more ready to embrace that Heavenly Discipline before it was too Late; For that Eclipse of that Glorious Light, was a certain fore-runner of that Eternal Night which was to follow, unless they speedily Repented and Believ'd. And this should be an Admonition to us likewise to Fear and Tremble and walk with the greatest Circumspection, lest we fall after the same Example of Unbelief and Disobedience; lest we so long Reject

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that Light which is come into the World and prefer Darknes before it, as to become utterly unworthy of it, and it be quite hid from our Eyes, and out of Darknes at last become our Portion.

This is one Reason our Lord gives of his speaking to the People in Parables; it was by way of Punishment, and as an Expression of his Displeasure at their hardned Infidelity.

There is another, and that a very Merciful one, as respecting a sort of People not Maliciously faulty as those before mentioned, but chiefly to blame for Heedless Inadvertency: 'tis thus express'd, v. 13. of this 13 ch Therefore speak I to them in Parables, because they seeing see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. That is, because his Plainer and more Common Discourses were but little regarded by them, and not consider'd and attended to as they should be, but forgotten as soon as heard; therefore the more to engage their Attention, and induce them to look close into and dwell longer upon what he said, he put his Discourses into a more Mystical and uncommon Dress; that their desire of understanding his hidden Meaning, might employ more of their Thoughts about it, and put them upon making a further enquiry than otherwise they would do, and by that means his Doctrine make a deeper Impression upon their Minds and Memories. For Men are naturally desirous of finding out Mysteries and Hidden Meanings, and more than ordinary Attentive to what is unusual and out of the common road of talking, and will take Pains to discover what is under the Disguise of a Parable, and
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be much more pleased and affected with the Discovery of such a hidden Treasure, to which our Lord elsewhere resembles the Gospel) than if the same thing had been offer'd them at an easier Rate. And accordingly St. Luke, after he had recorded several of our Saviour's Parables, subjoyns that all the People were very Attentive to hear him; and no Doubt but they were as Inquisitive to Understand what they had heard.

And indeed, tho' this be a Mystical way of Instruction, and hath something of Obscurity in it, yet as it may be manag'd, nothing can be more Familiar, or more suitable to the Capacities of the Meanest Auditors. For the vulgar sort are but little Receptive of Abstracted Notions, and Nice and Lofty Speculations, and that is most likely to take with them, which is cloathed in a Dress they have been well acquainted with, and Illustrated by some Material Representation: For by this means, a Truth which otherwise deliver'd they would either not Apprehend, or not Consider and Attend to; being express'd by way of Resemblance to what they have been much used to, and understand very well, is presently entertain'd, and becomes familiar and Easie to them, and they can as well remember and attend to it, as to other common Concerns of Life. And accordingly we find our Lord's Parables taken either from some common and known Actions of Mien, such as of a Husband-man sowing Corn in his Field, and the springing up of Weeds with the good Corn, of a Fisher throwing his Net into the Sea, of a Man looking for a lost Sheep, and the Extravagancies and Repentance

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of a Prodigal Son, and the like; or from some common Accidents and Events, such as of a Treasure found that was hid in a Field, the Plentiful Product of a Man's Ground, the Unfruitfulness of a Tree, the Reckoning of a Master with his Servants, the Importunacy of a Poor Widow for Justice, and such like. Relations of this Nature are easily Remembred, and People are Naturally apt to listen and attend to them, and the meanest Capacity can understand and apprehend them, and if well-manag'd, they make what is represented by them appear very Lively and Affecting, as if 'twere Acted before our Eyes, and by this means the Truths deliver'd under that Disguise insensibly Insinuate themselves, and work upon the Mind even before a Man is aware of it, or can set himself to make Resistance.

And as these Parables of our Lord were drawn from the most Familiar things, they were so Apt likewise, and so excellently Manag'd, and there was so great Analogy between the things represented and the Representations of them, that a little Thought and Reflection of even an ordinary Understanding, would discover what was hid under so thin a Veil: And accordingly we find several of our Saviour's Parables taken presently by the Auditors in their true and naked meaning, and no doubt but more were so than the Evangelists took notice of. But lest they should not be apprehended aright, we find our Lord, when in Private, explaining them to his Disciples, and giving them command to speak in the Light what he told them in Darkness;

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Mat. 10. 27. and by this means, that Impression which the Parable made upon the Fancy and Imagination of the People at the first relation of it, would afterwards either by Mens own Interpretation, or the Apostles, have its due effect upon their Understandings, Wills and Affections.

Besides this General Usefulness of Parables, there is one thing they are more peculiarly proper for, and that is Reproof; which is a thing Men are most of all Impatient of, and that must be manag'd with great Prudence and Nicety, or it will do much more Harm than Good. If it be too Plain and Open and Severe, it often Hardens an Offender still more; and if it be too Cool and Lifeless, it loses its Force and makes no Impression.

In an Effectual Reproof then, there must be sufficient Strength and Smartness, and likewise so much Privacy and Secrecy in it, as may not exasperate the Man too much from a Sence of the great Shame and Ignominy that attends the laying Open his Faults to the World. Now Reproving by way of Parable does all this. There may be Strength and Smartness enough in it if it be well chosen and applied; and yet there is so much of a Disguise and Covering upon it, as makes it very Private, and not to grate so much upon that Tender Passion of Shame, as a more publick and barefac'd Reproof would do. 'Tis as one handsomely expresses it, like Lancing a Sore with the Lancet wrapt up in a Sponge; when under Pretence and shew of nothing but smooth and gentle Usage, the place is unexpectedly open'd and the Corruption let out; which the Patient would not have suffer'd to be done, if attempted

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attempted Roughly and without that Stratagem. And there is a notable Instance of this Parabolical way of Repeating, mention'd 2 Sam. 12. Upon David's Murder of Uriah, that he might enjoy his Wife without Disturbance, the Prophet Nathan was sent to Reprove him for it, and denounce Gods Great Displeasure against him: And that he might do this the more effectually, did not Flatly and Immediately tell him, of his great Wickedness, but frames a Parable of a Rich Man that had great Flocks and Herds of his own, who yet to entertain his Guest, took the Only little Ewe Lamb of a Poor Neighbour of his, which he had bought and nourish'd up with great Tenderness and Pleasure; and dress'd it for the Man that was come to him. And David's Anger, the Story says, was greatly kindled against the Man, and he said unto Nathan, as the Lord liveth the Man that hath done this thing shall surely die, and shall restore the Lamb Four-fold, because he did this thing, and because he had no Pity. When the Prophet saw that his Design had so far taken effect, he immediately follows his Blow, takes Advantage of the Kings Displeasure, and makes the Application home, Thou art the Man. And this Mystical Reproof struck David so deep, that without making any Excuses, he presently confesses his Guilt, that he had sinned against the Lord; when 'tis very likely a Rougher and more Downright Reprimand would have exasperated the King into Rage and Impatience at his being so expos'd by the Prophet, rather than have melted him into so humble and pungent a Remorse as this.

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This Course then our Lord took, not without great Wisdom; and by Parables apt and well chosen and very expressive of his Meaning, reprov'd the Obstinacy, Hypocrisie, and other Vices of the Jews, who were Men Stubbörn and Refractory, and Impatient of too open a Rebuke: Especially the Pharisees, whose Pride and Haughtiness, and great Repute with the People, made them not able to endure any thing of Reproof, tho' wrap'd up in the Disguise of a Parable, much less when publick and open, and in plainer Terms. Tho' as to the Pharisees, when this milder way would not do, he more plainly and sharply rebuk'd and expos'd their Great Wick-edness and Vile Hypocrisie.

These are the Reasons why our Lord spake so much in Parables; and 'twas a Course which many of the Greatest and Wisest Men had taken before him. The Prophets in the Old Testament, and several of the Heathens, express'd their Instructions and Reproofs in such a Mystical manner, and by way of Fable or feigned Relation of some Action or Occurrence that bore Resemblance to what they would Inculcate; as is very evident to such as converse with their Writings. Which Course, had it not been very Effectual to the Ends for which it was design'd, it would not have been so much in Reputation as it was; and if it was so effectual then, why may it not be so still; if not to frame new Parables, yet to explicate and inforce the Old? Especially those which our Lord, with admirable Wisdom and Judgment, made use of to reprove Vice by, and encourage a Sincere and Persevering Piety?

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The Truths that are couch'd under these Parabolical Expressions, are of the greatest Importance, and such as it nearly concerns us to attend to, and Practice accordingly; and the manner of expressing them is such, as illustrates with great Advantage, and very movingly recommends them, and that in such a Familiar way, as fits them to all Capacities tho' never so Indifferent; and may be of great use to work upon the meaner sort, who I fear are too little apprehensive of what is delivered in more Abstracted Terms.

I have therefore Practically consider'd the most, and most useful of our Saviour's Parables, passing by those only that wholly relate to the Jews, and that Infant State of the Gospel, and can't without Violence be made Serviceable to the Improvement of Religion amongst Christians, especially now at this Distance from the Times wherein they were spoken. But of this sort there are but Three or Four; and the rest that are not Particular'y Discours'd of, are Co-incident and of the same Sense with those that are. And I hope this may not be an Unprofitable Undertaking thro' his Blessing who Alone can give the Increase; to Advance whose Honour in promoting the Good of Souls they are made publick.

I desire only that two things may be further observ'd: The one is, That these Discourses are on Purpose design'd to be Purely Practical, as I have stil'd them in the Title Page, and as every Intelligent Reader will discern, when he finds me make many Fair Opportunities of Controversie that lie in my way; and my Reason for so doing, I think, is
very

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very sufficient, (viz.) Because 'tis too Observable that the great Defect of Christians now-a-days is in their Practice, which yet is the One thing Necessary. The other is, that, According to the excellent Advice of * Maimonides, the Reader expect not (Rationem & Applicationem omnium ver-

* More New-chim in the Preface.

borum & rerum in Parabola Contentarum ad Rem Significatam, &c.) a Minute and Particular Application of every Word and Thing in a Parable, to the Sense that is couch'd under it; but be contented with a more General Explication of the Sum and Scope of it. For otherwise either the main Intention of the Parable will be quite lost, or at least the Mind will be tir'd in hunting after an Explication of what cannot be explain'd; and nothing be the Result of such Fruitless Study, but that Empty Vexatious Disappointment, which all those Experience, who make it their endeavour to find out, or rather force from the Words of an Author, that which the Author himself never dream'd of. All therefore that a Man should propose to himself in the Explication of the greatest part of any Parable, is to find out what is the main Drift and Design of it; and what it is which the Author of it would Instruct Men in, by that Allegorical Scheme of Speech.

But tho' this be Excellent Advice, and I have endeavour'd to observe it in the following Discourses; yet, where it could be done without unnatural Straining and Violence, I have been very Particular in my Explication: And indeed, most of our Saviour's Parables are so aptly express'd in the
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Parts as well as in the Whole, that they not only will Bear but Require a Minute Application of the Allegory to that which is represented by it, and which receives a great Advantage from it; as may be observ'd in the Perusal of what is now offer'd to the Reader's View.

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 PARABLE I.

Of the Sower that went forth to sow his seed.

Matth. xiiij. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

*Behold, a Sower went forth to sow.
 And when he sowed, some Seeds fell by the Way-
 side, and the Fowls came and devoured them up.
 Some fell upon stony places, where they had not
 much Earth; and forthwith they sprung up,
 because they had no deepness of Earth:
 And when the Sun was up, they were scorched, and
 because they had not Root they withered away.
 And some fell among Thorns; and the Thorns
 sprung up and choaked them.
 But other fell into good Ground, and brought
 forth Fruit; some an Hundred-Fold, some
 Sixty-Fold, some Thirty-Fold.*

THIS Parable is very fitly placed
 first, as giving account of the Causes
 of Mens Fruitfulness or Unfruit-
 fulness in Christianity; and con-
 sequently, shews what is to be avoided, and
 directs to what is to be done, in order to
 Mens being better'd by the Sermons of the
 Gospel: Which is a thing first of all to be
 B taken

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taken notice of, by such as would be *Christians indeed.*

Our Lord's *Interpretation* of this Parable, from a Collation of the Three Evangelists that record it, *Matth. 13. 19. Mark 4. 14. Luke 8. 11.* is this:

The *Seed* is the *Word of God*, or the *Word of the Kingdom*; that is, the *Gospel*, the *Religion* that *Christ Jesus* came to teach the *World*. When any one heareth this *Word*, and *understandeth* it not, then cometh the wicked one or *Satan* immediately, and catcheth away that which was sown in his *Heart*, lest he should *believe* and be *save'd*; this is he who receiv'd *Seed* by the *Way-side*. But he that receiv'd the *Seed* into *rocky* or *stony* Places, is he that heareth the *Word*, and presently with *Joy* receiveth it, yet hath not *Root* in himself, and so endures or believes but for *a while*; for when *Tribulation* or *Persecution* ariseth because of the *Word*, he is soon offended or discouraged, and falls away in *Time of Temptation*. He also that receiv'd *Seed* among the *Thorns*, is he that heareth the *Word*, and goeth forth, and the *Cares* of *this World*, and the *Deceitfulness of Riches*, and the *Lusts* and *Pleasures* of this *Life* entring in, *choak* the *Word*, and it becometh *Unfruitful*, or at best bringeth no *Fruit* to *Perfection*. But, He that received *Seed* into the *good Ground*, is he that having heard the *Word*, *understandeth* or *considereth* it,

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it, and receiveth and *keepeth* it in an *honest* and *good Heart*, and bringeth forth Fruit with *Patience*, according to his *Ability*, whether *Thirty*, *Sixty*, or an *Hundred Fold*.

From the Parable thus interpreted by its Divine Auther, it appears, as was said, that the Design of it is to shew what are the *Causes* of Mens improving or not improving under the preaching of the Gospel; that so we may know what to *avoid*, and what to *embrace* and *endeavour after* in order to our being *fruitful* under those Means of Instruction we enjoy.

We shall now consider each Part of this Parable with its Interpretation.

The First is, *Behold, a Sower went forth to sow: And when he sowed, some Seeds fell by the Way-side and were trodden down, and the Fowls of the Air came and devour'd them up: The Interpretation is, that the Seed which is sown is the Word of God, and when any one heareth this Word, and understandeth it not, then cometh the Devil, or the wicked one immediately, and catcheth away that which was sown in his Heart, lest he should believe and be saved. This is he that receiv'd Seed by the Way-side, or this is that Seed which fell by the Way-side.*

The Word of God is compared to *Seed*, because of its *fruitifying*, growing and increasing Nature; because it hath in it an *Active Principle*, and will when sown, (unless kill'd and made unfruitful by Accidental

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Injuries) spring up into excellent Fruits, and in great Abundance, to the *Glory of God*, and the nourishing, strengthening, nay, the *immortalizing of Men*; for of this Divine Seed consists that Heavenly Bread, *which who-so eateth of shall live for ever*. 'Tis this Seed that bringeth forth those Graces of Christianity, which keep up the *Divine Life* in the Soul; 'tis this that makes it grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge and Love of the best and noblest of Objects, our *Lord Jesus*: 'tis this that is its Preparation for Heaven, and an Earnest of that Immortal and Glorious Inheritance. For, wheresoever that Seed is sown, and springs up, and *brings forth Fruit unto Holiness, the End most certainly will be Everlasting Life*, Rom. 6. 22.

And this Word of God is not only, for these Reasons, compared to *Seed*, but to *Seed sown*: 'Tis not only *potentially* fruitful, but the Powers of it are now call'd forth into *Act*; 'tis *actually sown*, the Gospel is preach'd and made known to the World, its excellent Precepts are *openly declar'd*, and *planted in Mens Hearts*, by the Proposal of infinite Rewards and Punishments to such as *do or do not* obey and practise them. And, this Seed thus sown, is *water'd* with the Dews of Heaven, with the Distillations of the Divine Grace and Blessing, which are in sufficient Plenty afforded to every Man; so that God, the great *Husbandman*, is not wanting in any thing

thing that is necessary to the Flourishing and Encrease of that Seed, which he hath thus committed to their Hearts : And therefore he expects (and 'tis but reasonable he should) to see it grow and bring forth Fruit where-ever 'tis planted ; wherever the Word is preach'd he expects the Fruit of Righteousness. The Seed is good, and most of all agreeable to the Soil wherein 'tis sown (for Religion is the best Reason, and therefore most natural to a reasonable Soul) and 'tis sown in great Plenty ; there is no scarcity of God's Word among us, and 'tis water'd sufficiently with the Dew of Heaven, the Grace of God, which is not wanting to any Man that will receive it, and therefore at our Peril we must all be fruitful ; none of us must appear before our great Lord empty, lest the Punishment of Barrenness be our Portion, and we be burnt up with unquenchable Fire.

This Seed then, or the Word of God, being thus actually sown, the Christian Religion planted in the World, and all things done on God's Part, in order to its being fruitful, and which accordingly he expects it should be ; it highly concerns us, in the next Place, to take care that it be so, and that nothing make it otherwife.

That is, that in the First Place, it be not like Seed sown or scatter'd by the Way-side, which is trodden down by the Feet of Men and Beasts, or devoured by the Fowls of the

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Air. We must not be thoughtless and *inconsiderate* after we have heard the Word, and suffer our Souls to be like a *High-way*, laid open and exposed to *all Comers*, to all sorts of wandering, useless and wicked Thoughts, which thronging in abundance, will trample down the Good Seed that was sown, that it shall never more appear, be no more thought of, or remembered by us. Nor must we leave it to the Mercy of the *Fowls of the Air*, the Devil and his Legions, who, like Birds of Prey, hover over us continually, and are always ready to catch away immediately those good Instructions instill'd into our Minds, lest they should grow into Faith and Salvation, and which they see lye scattered and unregarded by us, and *unobserved*, throw in their Places, the Seeds of Sin and Misery, which, like ill Weeds, will flourish any where and grow apace. Thus *heedless* of so great a Treasure must we by no means be, but by *recollection* of Thought, advert closely to the great Truths of the Gospel, and exclude all wandering and vain Imaginations, and carefully gather up those Notions of Religion which lye scattered in our Minds, and reduce them to some Order and Connexion, and infix them by Meditation still *deeper* in our Souls; and instead of a dry, barren and *common Way*, for all Temptations and Injections of the Devil, for numerous and vain and incoherent Phancies, we should
by

by serious Attention to those concerning Truths, that we have read or heard, make our Souls (as Solomon expresses it) a Garden enclosed, a Spring shut up, and a Fountain sealed, Cant. 4. 12. And then no fear of the Seeds being trodden down or devour'd by the Fowls of the Air; but 'twill remain rooted and grounded in our Hearts, and will bring forth its Fruit in its Season.

Secondly, We must take care that the Word be not like Seed sown in stony and rocky Places, where there is no Deepness of Earth; lest, it spring up too hastily, and when the Sun is hot it be scorch'd and wither away because it hath no Root. That is, as our Lord interprets it, we must be careful not only to receive the Word with Joy, and have an extempore superficial Religion, and believe and obey only for a while; but likewise to endure, and not be offended or discouraged though Tribulation or Persecution arise because of the Word, nor to fall away in time of Temptation.

I doubt there are too many of these Rocky Hearers, that perhaps are well enough pleas'd to be handsomely told of their Duty, to hear a well-penn'd Sermon, and for the present readily assent to the Truth and Reasonableness of what is discours'd to them; and believe it their Interest to live as becomes Christians, and rejoyce at the News of being freed from the Tyranny of the Devil,

and their own unruly Lusts and Passions, of being made Children and Heirs of God, and Coheirs with Christ of an Eternal Inheritance, and that there are never-fading Crowns of Glory, reserv'd for them in the highest Heavens; and are resolv'd to set about the Performance of that Duty immediately, which is so excellent in it self, and shall be so infinitely rewarded. And indeed, the Christian Religion is so highly reasonable in its own Nature, so conducive to the Comfort and Happiness even of *this* Life, and the sure Way to such endless Bliss hereafter, that it can't but be very pleasing in the *Theory*, to any Man of Sense and Reason.

But after all this, I fear there are too many Hearers, that like *Rocky* Places, have only a *Surface* of good Earth, and retain this good Affection to Religion but for a *while*, and at the bottom are impenetrable as a Rock, and will not suffer the good Seed to shoot so *deep* into their Hearts, and take so *firm* a Rooting as is necessary to its Fruitfulness and Increase.

Their Spring is quickly over, a *Blade* or a *Stalk* is the farthest Progress their Religion makes, and never arrives to the *full Corn in the Ear*; but when they meet with any Difficulty in the practice of it in it self, or any Opposition to it either *without* from *Men*, or from the Devils Temptations *within*; For want of Deepness of Earth and Moisture they fall and wither away. If there were
nothing

nothing else for them to do but to *receive* the Promises; they would with Joy indeed give ear to the glorious Descriptions of the Happiness of a Christian: Nay, that Happiness is so exceeding great, that *at present* they may very well be glad to hear of the *Way* to attain it, and for a spurt set cheerfully about it, and a shallow *Crust* of Earth will be sufficient to make some Shew and *Appearance* of Fruitfulness and Increase. But, unless the Heart be *thoroughly* plyable, and there be *Deepness* of Earth, an humble Sense of the great Need we have that this Divine Seed should take Root, and grow up in our Souls, and likewise the *Moisture* of a sincere *Repentance* for our former Barrenness and stony Hardness of Heart, the Word will take but shallow Rooting for all our suddain Raptures, and upon every Difficulty and Temptation be ready to languish and wither, especially when the Heats of *Persecution* strike upon it; and then, too often, the latter End is worse than the Beginning, and the Men grow more hardned and insensible than ever.

Those therefore that find themselves of this *rocky* Temper, so difficult to be perswaded to be Christians indeed, so ready to look upon the *smooth* Side of Religion only, and please themselves in the *Theory* of it, admire the *Promises* of Christianity, but find *great Resistance* in their Breasts when the Word
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would take *deeper Root*, and they are exhorted to a still more and more excellent and fruitful *Piety* : These Persons are by all means to endeavour still more and more to *soften* their Hearts, and make them *pliable* to the Impressions of the Word of Life ; that it may sink *deep* into their Souls, and be fix'd there beyond the Danger of yielding to every Temptation, and withering when Adversity shall come. They must not boggle at any thing that appears to be their Duty, but be diligent and industrious in ridding their Minds of their former Evil Habits and Inclinations, and *inure* themselves to the Obedience of Christ ; not pretending Hardship or Impossibility when *He commands*, not endeavouring to *lessen* the Obligation of any of his Precepts, or shifting it from themselves, nor expecting Heaven upon easier Terms : But, *knowing* their Lord's Will, endeavour to *do* it in Sincerity, upon such Obedience only, through the Merits of Christ, hoping for the Promises.

And this Course, like good *Tillage* and *Manuring* of our Ground, will soon mollifie the Heart, and make it not only *superficially*, but *intirely Plyable* to the Word of God, receptive of its Impressions to the very *Bottom*, so that it shall *dwell in us richly*, and bring forth Fruit, not only in Times of Security and *Peace*, but even then when *Tribulation* shall arise because of the Word, and take
still

still deeper Root, and bring forth greater Abundance, notwithstanding all the Storms and Scorchings of Persecution, or even a *fiery Tryal*.

Thirdly, In order to the Fruitfulness of the Word, we must be very careful that it be not like Seed that falleth among *Thorns*, lest the *Thorns* spring up and choak it, so that it yield no Fruit. That is, that after the hearing of the Word we go not forth, and suffer the *Cares of this World*, and the Deceitfulness of *Riches*, and the *Lusts* and *Pleasures* of this Life to enter in and choak the Word, and it become utterly *unfruitful*, or at least, bring no Fruit to Perfection.

'Tis by a lamentable Experience, too true, that the Love of *this World* very much hinders our Provision for the *next*; and 'tis as true, that this is the greatest *Folly and Madness* in Nature, because the *World to come* is upon all Accounts, so infinitely to be preferr'd before the *present*, that there cannot be the least Competition between them: For, how can a *World of Cares and Vexations, of Misery and Affliction of all Sorts, of Hazards and Uncertainties, of Sickness, Pain and Death*; as *this* is, compare with a *World of eternal, unmix'd and uninterrupted Happiness*, as is the *other*! And therefore, one would think Men should be so *wise* and so much their *own Friends*; as to bestow their greatest Endeavours in pursuit of their main Interest; and
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not on the contrary such egregious Fools, as for the Gain of an *empty Bubble* to forfeit an *happy Eternity*.

So far as is consistent with the Care of the *Soul*, 'tis very allowable to mind the Affairs of *this Life* : Nay, 'tis a *Duty* of our Holy Religion for every Man to be industrious in his Calling, and to enjoy with Thanksgiving the Portion that God hath given him here below : But to *invert* God's Order, and place that First in our Esteem which should be *Last* ; when he says, seek ye *First* the Kingdom of God and his *Righteousness*, and then all *needful* things of *this World* shall be added unto you, to run quite counter, and *First* provide for Abundance *here*, and *then* (and that but very coldly, God knows) think a little of the *Kingdom of God and his Righteousness* ; this is such a preposterous Course as can never end in any thing but *Shame and Confusion*.

If it be true, that the Gain of even the *whole World* would be a very unprofitable exchange when compared with the *Loss of the Soul* ; and if it be true, that the Loss of the Soul will follow upon the Unfruitfulness of the Word of God, for Faith alone will not save, but must bring forth the Fruits of the Spirit : And finally, if it be true, that a too great Love and eager Prosecution of the things of *this World* will choak the Word of God, and make it unfruitful, as our Lord in
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this part of the Parable affirms it will: If all this be true, I see not how it can be avoided, but that such as have a Desire that the Word of God should be fruitful in their Souls in order to the eternal *Salvation* of them, must love the World *less*, and their Souls *more*; must be careful in the *First* place to *grow in Grace and be rich towards God*, and clear their Minds of these Worldly Thorns and Briars, lest the Divine Life be stifled and that Seed choak'd which alone can fructifie to a happy Immortality. We must *use* this World, yet so as not to *abuse* it; but certainly he *abuses* it and all the Blessings that God affords him in it, who so immoderately *doats* upon it, as to prefer it before the Service of his great *Benefactor*, and spends most of his Thoughts and Endeavours about the encreasing Wealth, and the Enjoyment of these sublunary Pleasures, and can spare but very little, if any of his Time and Pains, to prepare himself for the Enjoyment of God in Glory.

And yet, as plain as this is, Men are generally so little affected with it, as not only to neglect Religion as much as ever, and love the World still more and more; but even to plead the *Cares* of the World as an *Excuse* for their Coolness in Religion, and the Unfruitfulness of the Word of God in their Souls. We would be oftner at the Sacrament, and more constant at the Prayers of
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the Church, and in reading and meditating upon the Holy Scriptures, but that the Cares of the World, and the Hurry of Business, takes up most of our Time and Thoughts. But for God's sake, let such consider; is that an *Excuse*, which is it *self* as great a *Fault* as any? Will God accept such an Excuse at the Day of Judgment? Has he not plainly forewarn'd us of the Danger of too much worldly Mindedness? Has not St. *John* said plainly, *Love not the World nor the things of the World, for who so loveth the World, the Love of the Father is not in him,* 1 John 2. 15. And our Lord as plainly, *Ye cannot serve God and Mammon?* How strange a Plea then is it for the Neglect of Religion, to say we are deeply engag'd in the pursuit of *this* World's Good!

If we believe we have Souls to be saved, methinks we should take care of *them* in the *First* place; and as for *this* World, a *moderate* Industry, such as does by no means intrench upon Religion, is all that can be justified. And what our Lord said to the Scribes and Pharisees about their taking care of lesser Matters, and neglecting the *weighty* things of the Law, should be our Rule in providing for our Families, and providing for our Souls. *These things ought ye to have done, and not to have left the other undone.* He that provides not for his own House, according to the Measures of Necessity and Moderation, is worse than an Infidel, 'tis true; but he that provides

vides not for his own *Soul*, is still more un-naturally cruel.

These are the things that our Blessed Lord sayes make this Heavenly Seed, the Word of God, *unfruitful*; and therefore these should with the greatest Care and Application possible, be provided against; nothing being of so great Importance to us as the Flourishing and Encrease of the Word of God.

I come now to consider the last Part of this Parable, *viz.* what it is that will make this holy Seed to *thrive*, and bring forth plentifully the Fruits of Righteousness; and which Course consequently, it highly concerns us all to take, that we may not be barren under the Means of Instruction that we enjoy.

Our Lord expresseth it thus: *But, other Seed fell into good Ground, and brought forth Fruit, some an Hundred-Fold, some Sixty, and some Thirty.* That is, he that receiv'd Seed into the *good Ground*, is he that having heard the Word *understandeth it, and receives and keeps it in an honest and good Heart, and brings forth Fruit with Patience according to his Ability, whether Thirty, Sixty or an Hundred-Fold.* In this Part of the Parable there are *Five Things* to be consider'd.

First, That the *good Ground* in which the Seed of the World will take deep Rooting, and bring forth Plentifully, is an honest and good Heart.

Secondly,

Secondly, That that which *infixes* the Seed of the Word in this good Ground, is *Consideration*, translated *understanding the Word*.

Thirdly, That the Seed so planted in this good Ground, must be diligently *kept* and *preserved* in it.

Fourthly, That we must expect the Increase of it with *Patience*, and take care that the Fruits come to *Perfection*: And,

Lastly, That this Increase must be proportionable to the *Quantity* of the Seed that is sown, and to the Strength and Power of the *Soil* in which it is sown; that is, to every Man's *Ability*, and the Opportunities he has had of Improvement, whether Thirty, Sixty, or an Hundred Fold.

First, The *good Ground*, in which the Seed of the Word will take deep Rooting, and bring forth plentifully, is an *honest and good Heart*; that is, a Heart sincerely desirous to be *inform'd* in its Duty, and that cordially *proposes* to *perform* it, and is truly *humble*, and of a *modest teachable* Temper.

St. Paul tells us, that *though he plants and Apollos water, yet 'tis God alone that giveth the Increase*, 1 Cor. 3. 5, 6. Now, can any Man imagine that God will make that effectual to our Good which we despise and value not, and force those Favours upon us, which we neither now *desire*, nor if we had them should do other than *neglect*? The Graces of Religion are too precious to be bestow'd upon
such

such brutish Natures, and none but those that have Hearts earnestly *desirous* of his Divine Assistance, that they may be purified and renewed by his Blessed Spirit, and instructed in his Holy Will, that they may know how to pay a more acceptable Service to him; none but those that have such *honest* and *good* Hearts can expect the Word should flourish and grow fruitful, and they only that thus *hunger and thirst after Righteousness* shall be filled.

And this those would do well to consider, who frequent our Religious Assemblies in compliance to Custom only, and because their Neighbours do; or to learn new *Modes* and *Dresses*, or to shew their *own*; or to while away the Time that lies useless upon their Hands, or to meet a Friend, or please their Ears with some new Notion, or to gratify their Curiosity, or the like: Let not such Persons be deceiv'd, God is not mock'd; let not such think they shall receive any Thing of God but the Fierceness of his Displeasure, for their prophaning to such vile Purposes what he intends as a Means to their Salvation. Those only shall receive *Advantage* by God's Word, that sincerely and earnestly desire its *Nourishment that they may grow thereby*.

This *honest and good Heart*, is likewise *Modest* and *Teachable*; and indeed, this Disposition is very necessary in order to the Fruitfulness of the Word.

For, Pride and Conceitedness are naturally the greatest Hinderers of Improvement in all Sorts of Acquirements whatever ; but in Religion they do the most Mischief of all, and are the great Destroyers of whatever is religious and good.

For, besides that a high Opinion of ones own present Endowments cuts off all Endeavours of growing better, and renders all spiritual Advice *barren* to him that thinks he hath no need of it : Besides, that *Reproof* frets and intrages one that thinks *Commendations* rather belong to *him* ; and Instruction, in Cases of Difficulty, is thrown away upon a Man that thinks himself *Wiser* than his Teachers : Besides these and several other *Natural* Ill Consequences of an over-weening Opinion of ones self, which might be mentioned, there is this yet above all, that it utterly bars and shuts out God's holy Spirit ; it deprives the Soul of his gracious Influences, and diverts the Streams of his Grace and Benediction from watering our Hearts : For *Pride is an Abomination unto the Lord, Prov. 16. 5.* a thing that he hates and detests above all things : And *St James* tells us, that instead of *assisting*, God *resists the Proud, Jam. 4. 7.* who is his profess'd Enemy. And no wonder if that Soul be barren, which is thus *curst of God*, and denyed those refreshing Dews of his Favour which alone can make it fruitful. Let us therefore lay our Founda-
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Parables of our Blessed Saviour. 19

tion low in Modesty, Sincerity and Humility, and God will build us up to Life everlasting. We shall then be like Trees planted and deep rooted by the Rivers of Water, that bring forth their Fruit in their Season; our Leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever we do it shall prosper, Psal. 1. 3.

Secondly, That which infixes the Seed of the Word in the good Ground of an honest and good Heart, is *Consideration* and *Meditation*, render'd in our Translation *understanding* the Word. The Word in the * Original signifies *weighing, pondering* and *considering*: And St. James says agreeably, who so looketh into the perfect Law of Liberty, and continueth therein, that is, as the * Words in the Greek signify, has look'd close and dwelt upon it by serious *Meditation*, he being not a forgetful Hearer, but a Doer of the Work, this Man shall be *blessed* in his doing, Jam. 1. 25

He therefore that desires the Word should encrease and multiply, must not only receive it in an honest and good Heart, but *infix* it there by serious *Consideration*; and be not like those compar'd to thorny Ground in the Parable, who, having heard the Word, go forth and think no more of it, but suffer the Cares, and Pleasures, and Riches of the World to enter immediately into their Minds, and choak the Word, so that it becomes unfruitful:

ful: But by after *Meditation* and *Recollection* of Thought make it sink still *deeper* into their Souls, and strike a Root to the very *Bottom* of their Hearts.

And indeed; without such *Consideration*, there can be very little Hope, if any, of its Fruitsfulness. For, in all Learning, 'tis *Meditation* that gives a Root to what is read or heard, and fixes it deep in the Mind; 'tis that which makes it a Man's *own*, and serviceable to him upon occasion; and *without* it, the most accurate Discourse would tickle the Ear only, not inform the Understanding; and truly, the more *excellent*, the less *Beneficial*, unless it be weighed and examined by a serious and near Inspection.

Thus, the Doctrine of Christianity, tho' the most excellent in it self, as proceeding from the *Divine Word*, the Wisdom of the Father, is seldom embrac'd as such by Persons of a trifling *unthinking* Spirit, but rather appears harsh and unreasonable; or at best is but faintly approv'd of, and for a short Continuance. For, the Beauties of Holiness, like other chief Excellencies, are not to be clearly seen, and *fully* discover'd by a slight and cursory *Glance*, but by a diligent and curious *Search*; like *Gold*, that is not to be found upon the *Surface* of the Earth, but lies further in, and is treasur'd up within her *Bowels*. Wherefore, as we tender our Perseverance in the Faith and our Eternal Salvation, we must

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not think our Task is over when we have heard the Word, but always set some time apart (and the sooner the better) to meditate and lay it to *Heart*, and frequently *revolve* it in our Minds, consider it in all its *Relations* and *Tendencies*, its Nature, and its happy and glorious Effects; and then we shall be intirely satisfied that 'tis our most *reasonable* Service, and above all things our Interest to practise its Divine Precepts, and that it flourish in our Souls, and bring forth Fruit in Abundance.

Thirdly, This Seed so planted and fixed in this good Ground, must be likewise diligently *kept* and *preserved* in it.

Sloth and Idle Carelesness always have an ill Effect; and many hopeful beginnings are nipp'd and crush'd, and come to very deplorable conclusions, for want of that care and Industry, which was necessary to promote and further them to Perfection.

But above all they are most Dangerous in Religion. For besides that they *Naturally* tend to make Virtue weak and degenerate; they give a fair Occasion to our *great Enemy* to assault us, (that infernal Bird of Prey, who is ready immediately to catch away the good Seed, if unregarded, and throw his wicked Suggestions into their Place) and who is glad to find us thus weak and unarm'd, and careless of our Safety; and is too wise not to improve such Opportunities to his best Advantage. And what Hopes, but we shall be

shamefully plundered of that Precious Seed which God has sowed in our Hearts that it may spring up to *Immortality*, when we are thus careless and negligent, and unable to make any great Resistance!

Therefore the Wise Man advises to keep the Heart with all *Diligence*, *Prov. 4. 23.* and *St. Peter*, to give all *Diligence* to add to our Faith Vertue, &c. *1 Pet. 1. 5.* that so these good things may be in us and abound: And our Lord tells us, in the next Parable to this, that 'twas while Men *slept* that the Enemy came and sow'd Tares, *Matth. 13. 29.* Wherefore, *'awake* to Righteousness, says *St. Paul*, *1 Cor. 15. 34.* be sober, be *vigilant*, says *St. Peter*, for your Adversary the Devil goeth about like a roaring Lyon, seeking whom he may devour, *1 Pet. 3. 8.* Let us therefore endeavour, as *St. Paul* advises *Timothy*, *1 Tim. 6. 2.* to keep that which is committed to our Trust, and to walk *circumspectly*, not as *Fools* but as *Wise*; lest as the *Serpent* beguiled *Eve* through his *Subtilty*, so our *Minds* should be corrupted from the *Simplicity* that is in *Christ*: We must be wise as *Serpents* as well as innocent as *Doves*; lest, when the Word has begun to thrive and prosper in our Souls, it be at length rooted out by the *Temptations* of that old *Serpent*, and bring no Fruit to *Perfection*.

Fourthly, We must expect the Encrease of this good Seed with *Patience* and *Perseverance*,

rance, and take care that the Fruits come to full Maturity.

We must expect the Increase of this good Seed with *Patience*, because all Improvement is a thing of *Time*: Men can't arrive at Perfection, even in *Vice*, in an *instant*, much less in *Vertue*. There are many *intermedial* Steps and Advances to it; and as when Seed is sown there first appears but a tender *Blade*, which, in process of *Time* improves to a *Stalk*, which every day grows taller and stronger; and at length appears the *Ear* and the *Grain* in the Ear; and even after that compleat Formation of the Plant, there is yet some *considerable* *Time* before it comes to perfect *Ripeness*; and all this while the Husbandman waits with *Patience* till the *Time* comes of gathering the ripe Fruits of the Earth: So in Religion, there are *gradual Advances* to Perfection. The *Beginnings* of Religion, the first Sproutings of this Heavenly Seed are and will be tender and unconfirm'd, but *Time* will strengthen and improve them; every Day will make some Advance to Perfection, where there is an honest and good Heart, and Sincerity at the Bottom: But these Advances may be very leisurely, and like the Growth of Plants, scarce discernable in their *Progress*, and yet at length the Word of God brings forth its genuine Fruits in great Abundance. And this, though perhaps slow pace in Religion, must be born with *Patience*

and *Hope*; for *in due Time*, for all this, we shall reap if we faint not.

And this those should consider who expect to be compleat Christians in an *instant*, and are impatient of Delays, and disheartened by every Rub and Difficulty; and because their Practice can't keep pace with their too forward and passionate *Wishes* and *Desires*, are apt to despair of ever coming to that *Ripeness* of Christianity, which will fit them for their great Masters Garner; and too often let slip what they have already attain'd, and give over in much Dejection after they have made a very hopeful Progress. But this is a cunning Artifice of the Devil, and ought, with the greatest Care imaginable, to be provided against; and a Man's best Defence in this Case is *Patience*, or a calm and resign'd Expectation of Increase and Blessing from God in his due Time, when we have done our own best Endeavour; a *waiting* God's *Leisure*, a confiding in his Goodness who only gives the Increase. And (as St. James expresses it) *as the Husbandman waiteth for the precious Fruit of the Earth, and hath long Patience for it, until he receive the early and latter Rain*; so should we be also patient, and in *Patience* possess our Souls and establish our Hearts. For there is a *latter* Distillation of the Divine Grace as well as that which is *early* and at *First*; and which, when God pleases to afford, we shall then grow up to

Perfection: And though sometimes it may not be so plentifully show'd down as we could wish, yet will not be *finally* wanting in a sufficient Degree, to such as sincerely embrace it and co-operate with it.

And as our Lord expresses it in another Parable, *Mark 4. 26.* (which, for its near Resemblance to this and the next, I think it needless particularly to Discourse of) *The Kingdom of God, or of Grace, is as if a Man should cast Seed into the Ground, and should sleep and rise, Night and Day, and the Seed should spring up and grow he knoweth not how, from the Blade to the Ear, and to the full Corn in the Ear; and when the Fruit is ripe, he putteth in the Sickle because the Harvest is come.* That is, tho' good Men's Progress in Religion oftentimes be not so quick and hasty as they may wish; yet, though almost insensibly, it may daily grow and increase, and at last the perfect Fruits of Righteousness be visible in their Conversations.

Therefore let not a slow Improvement discourage any Man, that is sincerely desirous of making still *higher* Advances, but let him hold fast what he already hath, do his best Endeavour still to grow in Grace and the Fruits of the Spirit, and then with Patience wait upon God for a more plentiful Increase.

In the last place, this Increase of the Word must be proportionable to the *Quantity*

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tity of the Seed that is sown, and to the *Strength* and Powers of the *Soil*, in which it is sown; that is, it must be according to every Man's *Ability*, and the *Opportunities* he hath had of Improvement; in some *Thirty*, in some *Sixty*, and in some an *Hundred-Fold*.

When a Husbandman sows his Seed, if he sows in great *Plenty* and upon good Ground, we know he expects to reap in a *proportionable Abundance*; and when he sows more *sparingly*, and the Soil be not *capable* of so great an Increase, his Expectations are accordingly. And so it is in Religion; from such as are of *pregnant* Parts and Abilities, able to entertain and consider and make the best Use of the Word of God that is sown in their Hearts, and likewise enjoy the great Blessing of excellent Instruction, and have the whole of Christianity set before them in a true Light, all the Duties and Rewards and Punishments of it, so that there is all that can be done in order to an abundant Increase; from such Men as these, God will expect *much* Fruit, even the Increase of an *Hundred-Fold*; they *must abound* in every good Word and Work; and the Word of God dwelling so *richly* in them, Line upon Line, Precept upon Precept, Treasures of Instruction heap'd one upon another, a *scanty* penurious Increase will not be accepted, much less a Total and Intire *Barrenness* excus'd. For so St. Paul, Heb. 6. 7, 8. *The Earth that drinketh in the Rain that cometh of*

oft upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth Blessing from God; but that which beareth Thorns and Briars, is rejected, and nigh unto Cursing, whose End is to be burn'd. And our Lord in very plain and express Terms says the same, Luke 12. 48. *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required, and to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.* But because all Men are not of Abilities alike, nor have the same Opportunities of Instruction and Improvement; where there is any Defect either in the sowing of the Seed, or in the Capacity of the Soil, God will proportionably abate in his Expectations of Increase. But, though he will not expect the same Degree of Increase from every Man, yet he will expect some; if not an *Hundred-Fold*, yet *Sixty*; or if not *Sixty*, yet at least *Thirty*.

And, if this be true, in what a miserable Condition are Myriads of the Hearers of the Word, who receive the Seed in great Plenty and Abundance, and are able likewise to bring forth a considerable Increase; and yet are as unfruitful as if their Souls had lain always fallow, and were never cultivated and impregnated by the Means of Spiritual Instruction! Let such be entreated by the Love of God and their own immortal Souls, to look about them, and shake off that stupid Numness and Insensibility that so fatally besets them, and bethink themselves how sad their Condition

dition will be, when at the great Harvest, the End of the World, when God will gather the ripe Fruits and dispose them in his Heavenly Garner; when at that great Day our Lord shall expect Fruit from the Seed that he hath sown upon their Hearts, and shall find nothing but Briars and Thorns, Wickedness and Impurity: Let them bethink themselves what a sad Condition they will be in, when their Unfruitfulness shall be punish'd with everlasting Burnings, and the Number and Sharpness of the Torments of Hell increas'd upon them, because when they *knew* their Lord's Will, they did not prepare themselves to do according to it.

Let them consider, that though God bears long with them, and frequently importunes them to a more serious Reflection upon their Ways, that they would *turn their Feet unto his Testimonies*, and be no longer *unprofitable Hearers*, but *Doers of his Word*; yet it will not be always so, there will be an End of this Day of Grace and Forbearance, and how soon God alone can tell; and perhaps this Discourse may be the last Invitation to a new Life, which some that hear it may ever have, or at least, the last that shall be attended with that Divine Grace and Assistance which alone can make it fruitful. Wherefore, *now while it is call'd to day, harden not your Hearts, lest God should swear in his Wrath, that you shall never enter into his Rest.*

Consider

Consider what our Lord says upon this Account, in this of *Mat. 13. 12.* *Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more Abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath,* The plain Meaning of which is this, He that hath made good Use of the Grace he hath already receiv'd, and the Instructions he hath already heard, shall receive abundantly more Grace, far greater Assistances, and much larger and more frequent Showers of the Divine Blessing than ever formerly he did: Christ will come in to him and sup with him, and he with *Him*, as 'tis express'd, *Rev. 3. 20.* that is, will freely communicate to him of his Divine Favours and Refreshments; and there shall be mutual Festivity and Joy between them; his Saviour will take him into the nearest Relation to himself; for he hath told us, that *whosoever shall do the Will of his Father which is in Heaven, the same is his Brother, and Sister and Mother;* that is, as tenderly regarded by him as those dearest Relatives.

And, how must that Soul thrive and flourish which is thus plentifully water'd with Showers from above, and enrich'd with streams issuing from the Fountain of Goodness! But on the contrary, How intollerable will be his Misery that neglects and disregards these Sermons of the Gospel, and is not a Doer of the Word, but a careless Hearer only; deceiving,
sadly

sadly deceiving his own Soul ! From him shall be taken away even that which he hath, he shall be deprived of it to enrich his industrious Brother and add to his Abundance. What Grace he had before shall be *with-drawn*, and he naked and defenseless, left to the Fury of his Spiritual Enemies ; the Dews of Heaven shall no longer drop upon his *barren* Soul, but parch'd and sap less it shall be reserv'd to Eternal Burnings. Consider this, all ye that forget God, and are unfruitful under all his Care and Fatherly Nurture and Admonition ; lest at length he pluck you away and there be none to deliver you. And remember the words of Solomon, Prov. 29. 1. *He that being often reprov'd still hardneth his Neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without Remedy.*

And thus have I done with the first of our Saviours Parables, in which is set before us a Blessing and a Curse ; a *Blessing*, if when the good Seed is sown, and we have heard the Word, we receive it into honest and good Hearts, and according to our several Abilities bring forth Fruit to Perfection ; that is, Obey and Practise it with Constancy and Perseverance : And a *Curse*, if we remain still barren and unfruitful, not Doers of the Word but Hearers only, deceiving our selves into Eternal Perdition. It becomes us all therefore, to *take heed how we hear* ; and not be like the *High-way side*, suffering our Thoughts to wander from the Instructions we have heard, and
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leaving the good Seed unregarded to the Mercy of the great Enemy of Souls ; and exposing our Minds as a common Tract to vain and wicked Fancies and Imaginations, and Diabolical Suggestions ; nor like the *stony* Ground, impenetrable to any *deep* and lasting Impressions of the Word of Life ; nor like that overrun with *Thornes* and *Briars* and *noxious Weeds* such as are the *Cares* and *Deceitful Riches* and Pleasures of this Life, which will choak the Word and render it unfruitful : But, that we treasure up this Divine Word in our Memories, ponder and consider it, and set our Love and Affections upon it. So shall it grow and prosper and bring forth Fruit, in some Thirty, in some Sixty, in some an Hundred-Fold ; to the Honour and Glory of God, and the Eternal Salvation of our immortal Souls. Which, God of his infinite Mercy grant for Jesus Christ his Sake.

Now, He that ministreth Seed to the Sower,
2. Cor. 9. 10. *both give us this Heavenly Bread for our Food, and multiply the Seed that is sown, and encrease the Fruits of our Righteousness ; that being enrich'd in every good thing to all Bountifulness, there may be given through us, Thanksgiving unto God.*
Amen, Amen.

The PRAYER.

I.

MOST Holy Jesus, thou blessed Author of the best Religion, who hast in great Plenty sown among us the Seed of a happy Immortality, thy holy Word, and watered it with the Dew of thy Heavenly Grace, and art wanting in nothing on thy Part to cause it to flourish and bring forth abundantly the Fruits of Righteousness; I, thy unworthy Servant, unfeignedly bless thee thy infinite Goodness, and tender Care for the Children of Men: but must with Shame confess, that hitherto thy Care has been in too great Measure defeated by my Inconsiderateness and Obstinacy. My Soul still remains barren as the High-way-side, impenetrable to the Sermons of the Gospel, or at best, flitting and unconstant in Religious Purposes, which have been short-liv'd as the Grass that grows upon the Top of the Rocks, or else choak'd with the Briars of Worldly Cares and Distractions, with covetous and sensual Desires. Thus have I courted Death in the Error of my Life! But now, being awaken'd by thy Mercy, and become sensible of the Danger I am in, and the sad Consequence if my Barrenness continues, I humbly beg, and earnestly at the Throne of Grace, that Thou, from whom is all our Sufficiency, wouldst aid me with thy Blessed Spirit, and help my Infirmities, and strengthen me mightily in
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the inner Man, that thy Word may ever hereafter take so deep a Rooting in my Soul, as to produce the genuine Fruits of Christianity.

II.

I am sadly sensible, O Lord, that the Heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? Do thou therefore, who art the Searcher of our Spirits, purge my Soul of all larking Hypocrisie, and Pride, and Self-conceit, and every thing that will hinder the Growth and Increase of this Heavenly Seed; and make me apt to receive and cherish it, by creating in me an honest and good Heart, and renewing a sincere and right Spirit within me. Grant that I may so seriously attend to, and consider the great Truths thy Goodness hath revealed to us in the Gospel, as intirely to assent to them, and heartily endeavour to conform my Practicè to my Belief; and may I always heedfully preserve those Divine Instructions, and moving Arguments to a persevering Piety, which I have learned from thy Word, lest the infernal Bird of Prey deprive me of the good Seed, and in its room plant devillish Affections. And, O that Patience and Hope, and an humble Dependance upon thee for Direction and Defence may be my Support in this my Pilgrimage! That so, chearfully running the Race that is set before me, and thankfully acknowledging the early Influences of thy Blessed Spirit in my tender Years, and waiting for the later Distillations of thy Grace,

which will bring my Fruit to Perfection, and always endeavouring to proportion my Increase to the Means and Opportunities of it; thy Goodness hath vouchsafed me; I may at last escape the Intolerable Punishment of Unfruitfulness, and having my Fruit unto Holiness, the End may be Everlasting Life, through thy Merits and Mercies, O Blessed Saviour Jesus. Amen.

P A R A.

PARABLE II.

Of the Tares.

Matth. xiiij. 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

Another Parable put Jesus forth unto them, saying, The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a Man that sowed good Seed in his Field:

But while Men slept, his Enemy came and sowed Tares among the Wheat, and went his way.

But when the Blade was sprung up, and brought forth Fruit, then appeared the Tares. also.

So the Servants of the Householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then hath it Tares?

He said unto them, an Enemy hath done this. The Servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

But he said nay; lest while ye gather up the Tares, ye root up also the Wheat with them.

Let both grow together until the Harvest; and in the time of Harvest I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them: But gather the Wheat into my Barn.

THE Interpretation of this Parable is thus set down, Ver. 37. of this Chapter, *He that soweth the good Seed is*

the Son of Man, the Field is the World, the good Seeds are the Children of the Kingdom, but the Tares are the Children of the wicked one; the Enemy that sowed them is the Devil, the Harvest is the End of the World, and the Reapers are the Angels. As therefore, the Tares are gather'd and burnt in the Fire, so shall it be in the End of the World. The Son of Man shall send forth his Angels, and they shall gather out of his Kingdom all things that offend, and them that do Iniquity, and shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth. Then shall the Righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

From this Interpretation of this Parable, it appears, that the Design of it is to shew, for the Encouragement of the *sincerely* good, and Terrour of the *Hypocritical*; that though there may be many *wicked* Professors of Christianity, that are Christians only in *Name* and *Out-side*, and who in this World may be confusedly intermix'd among the good, and go *undiscover'd* of Men, and *unpunish'd* of God; nay, *thrive* and *prosper* here more than the good, and to all outward Appearance be the *Favourites* of Heaven, whilst the *sincerely* good undergo many *Afflictions*, and appear to Men to be under God's *Displeasure*: Yet, in the great Harvest that shall be at the End of the World, there shall be a Distinction made between the one and the other, the *hypocritical* shall be separated from the *sincere*, and the

the former consign'd to everlasting Burnings, and the latter received into the Heavenly Regions, the Place prepared for them from the Beginning of the World.

This is the *Design* of the Parable. We shall now briefly consider how *aply* expressive it is of this Sense, and then discourse upon the several Parts of it.

The planting of the Gospel in the World in order to the converting Men to Christianity, is compared to the *sowing of Seed*, because (as was said upon the former Parable) the Gospel, like *Seed*, is that *Principle* of a future great *Increase* of Piety and Holiness in this World, and of Glory and Happiness in the next: 'Tis that, which if sincerely embrac'd, and its Growth and Progress not hindered, will spring up to *Glory, Honour and Immortality*: And 'tis said to be like *Seed sown* or committed to the Furrows, and then left to its own *seminal Powers* and the favourable Influences of *Heaven*; because the Gospel, being *actually planted* in the World, is, as to *particular Persons*, left to make its Way by its own *Power and Efficacy*, the *Excellency* of its *Precepts*, and its *transcendent Rewards and Punishments*; together with the constant Dews of the *Divine Grace* that attend it; without any more *extraordinary Means*, unless upon some *extraordinary Occasion*, to make it take Root and fructifie. 'Tis generally propos'd to *all*, in its whole *Latitude*; which is

the sowing of it, and then Men are left to their own free Choice, whether they will embrace it with its *Promises*, or turn their *Backs* upon it, and run the Hazard of its *Threats*, without any *irresistible Force* to the one or the other; only the *small still Voice* of God's Spirit in Mens Hearts, and *Grace* descending like the *gentle Dew*, to soften and incline them to *cherish* this good Seed, which is the leaving the Gospel to its *own seminal Powers*, with only the benign Waterings of the Divine Grace and Blessing.

Our Lord is call'd the *Sower* of the good Seed, because he is the *Author* and first Teacher of this holy Religion; and its Validity to the great Purposes to which it is design'd, depends upon the Merit of his bitter Death and Passion, and the *invigorating* Vertue of his *precious Blood*. For, 'twas upon his satisfying the Divine Justice by his *Death*, that he receiv'd Authority to mark out to us *this* Way to Life and Reconciliation, as the only Principle and Seed of Immortality.

The *World* is call'd the Field where this Seed is sown, because this blessed Religion is *catholick* and *universal*, not confined to any *particular Place* or *People* as the Jewish Religion was, but *whosoever*, of what *Nation* or *People* soever, shall believe in Jesus, and *repent*, shall be saved. And agreeably in another Parable (which, for its great Analogy to this, I shall not particularly discourse of) the Gospel,

Gospel, or Kingdom of Christ is represented by a Net cast into the *Sea*, *Matth.* 13. 47. not any particular *Lake* or *River* : And *this* World is stiled the *Field*, because *this* is the only Place of receiving this Seed, and bringing forth the genuine and expected Fruits of it ; and he that shall refuse to receive this Divine Seed *now* while he continues *here*, or not suffer it to grow, and increase, and bring forth *Fruit*, shall never have the like Opportunity *again*, but suffer for ever the Punishment threatened to *obstinate Infidelity*, or *barren Unfruitfulness*. *This* World is the only *Field*, *this* Life the only *Seed-time*, and at the End of it comes that one great *Harvest*, which shall consign Men to an *eternal* Condition, either happy or miserable, according to their Barrenness or Fruitfulness, during this Time, and in this Place of Growth and Increase.

The Children of the Kingdom, or those that are *sincere* Christians, intirely devoted to the Service of their great Master, and have receiv'd the good Seed of the Gospel into *honest* and *good Hearts*, as 'tis expressed in the preceding Parable : These are themselves likewise compared to *good Seed*, because they have a *substantial* Piety, the *Power* as well as the *Form* and Appearance of Godliness, and bring forth the genuine Fruits of their holy Religion. That Divine Seed that was sown in their Hearts, has produced, not only the

Blade, but the *full Grain* in the Ear ; the same Kind of Seed that was sown, appears in their Lives and Conversations ; the Seed of the Spirit brings forth the *Fruits* of the Spirit, and the Seed of *Holiness* produces *real* and *substantial Holiness* ; so that the Gospel is called *good Seed*, as 'tis the first *Principle* of Holiness ; and truly *pious Men* are likewise call'd *good Seed*, as the genuine *Product* and *Increase* of that first Principle. The Gospel is the good Seed sown, and the sincerely *religious* are the good Seed as *springing* from it and being *produc'd* by it.

The Children of the wicked one, or the *hypocritical Professors* of Christianity, are compared to *Tares* or *Cockle*, because they have only a *Shew* and *Appearance* of Religion as *Tares* and *Cockle* have of *Corn* ; but like them, no *Substance* of good *Corn*, none of the *real Excellencies* of Religion, nothing but *hurtful* and *vicious Qualities* as *Tares* are said to have ; hurtful to *themselves* in the final *Consequence*, as bringing them to so miserable an End ; and hurtful to *others* by their ill *Neighbourhood* and *Converse*, as *Tares* to *Wheat* ; and likewise injurious to the *holy Religion* they profess, as reflecting *Dishonour* upon it by their *scandalous Conversation*. Upon all Accounts 'tis *infelix Lolium*, as the Poet calls it ; *unhappy Tares* they are, that bring *Dishonour* upon *God*, and *Destruction* upon *themselves* and *others*.

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The *Devil* is very fitly stiled the *Enemy* that *sows* these Tares; because he is the busie Prompter to Vice and Hypocrisy, and the great Encourager of it, by his sly and wheedling Insinuations and Wicked Injections: He is that great Enemy of God and all things heavenly and good, and whose constant Endeavour it is to oppose and weaken the Kingdom of Righteousness, and upon the Ruins of it to establish his infernal Dominion.

The *End of the World* is compared to the *Harvest*, because then is the Time of God's gathering all Men from off the Face of the Earth, and disposing them according to their Deservings, into a new State of endless Happiness or Misery, as *good Corn* at Harvest, is taken from off the Ground, and carried away, and laid up in Repositories of Safety; but the Tares and other noxious Weeds sever'd from the rest, and bound up in Bundles to be burnt. And the *Angels* are said to be the *Reapers* at this great Harvest; because 'tis by their Ministry that God will execute his most equal Sentence, whether of Absolution or Condemnation; the *Righteous* shall by them be caught up into the Clouds to meet their Lord in the Air, and like good Corn be laid up, and that for ever, in God's Heavenly Garner, *for they shall ever be with the Lord*: And the wicked and *hypocritical* shall by them be separated from the good, and like vile Tares, be thrown into a *Furnace of Fire unquenchable*. And thus
much

much in short for the Aptness to express the Sense that our Lord conceal'd under it.

I shall now proceed to consider its several Parts; And it will inform us of six things.

First, it will inform us of the *State* of the Christian Church in *this* World; that there will be both good and bad under the general Name of *Christians* (as Tares and Wheat together, go under the Name of one Field of Corn) and that the Two first Planters of this Good and Evil respectively, are *Christ* and the *Devil*.

That there will be both good and bad in this World under the general Name of *Christians*, will be no wonder to any Man that considers how many there are that are Christians by *Custom* and *Education* only, because their Fathers were so before 'em, and in their tender years procur'd their Reception into that Communion; but, seldom look any further into the *Reasons* and *Inducements* to such Belief, and trouble themselves but very little to be *inform'd* in, much less to *practise* the Duties that are bound upon them by that holy Profession: And for the same Reason would have been Mahometans or Jews had their Parents been so, and Educated them in that Way, and therefore are *Christians* by *Chance*, not *Choice*.

And, this those would do well to consider who spend the whole Six Days of the Week in drudging for the World from Morning un-

til Night; and then, like tir'd Beasts, when they have fill'd their Bellies, without any further Thoughts, lay them down to rest; and when the Lord's Day comes (which is design'd for the Nourishment and Improvement of their Souls in Piety and Goodness, and their *Instruction* in the Religion they profess to be of) make little better use of it than their Horses do in the Stable, rest from bodily Labour, and saunter and prate and drink away the Day; but seldom come at the Places of Divine Worship and Instruction; and if *they do*, are as little the better for it as if they were absent. Let such consider, before it be too late, whether *this Sort* of Christianity will bring 'em to Heaven or no? Whether their being *baptized* in their *Infancy* will save 'em without any *more to do*? Whether their telling our Lord at the Day of Judgment, that they happen'd to be born in a Country where his Holy Religion was profess'd, and of such as call'd themselves Christians, and were by them presented to a Minister of Christ who receiv'd them into the Pale of the Catholick Church, and that they continued to call themselves Christians all their Lives, and now and then came to Church as other Christians did: Let them consider, whether at that great Day such an empty Plea will be accepted, when the Judge comes to enquire into what *Obedience* they have paid to his *Commandments*? If it *will* be accepted, why does our Lord say,
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Not every one that saith Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven? Mat. 7. 21. And why is the Way said to be narrow, and the Gate strait that leads to Life, and that few there be that find it? Mat. 7. 14. But, if it will not be accepted, as most certainly it will not; Doubtless, it highly concerns such Men to consider more seriously of Religion, than they have done hitherto; unless they think their Souls not worth taking care of, or that the everlasting Pains of Hell, are not so great as those of Repentance, and living a new Life. And tho' for the Reason assign'd above, it is no Wonder that many ill Men here, go under the common Name of Christians, and that Title be all the Christianity they can boast of; yet, 'twould be a very great Wonder indeed, if such empty Tares as these should be laid up with the good Wheat, and get to Heaven as much by Chance as they became Christians.

Further, 'tis no strange thing to find ill Men amongst a Society of Christians, because Men are free Agents; and Religion does not force, but only by proper Methods incline and persuade: And those, who in their Infancy were devoted to the Service of God, and Educated in his Discipline in their tender Years, may yet, through the Predominancy of their Lusts and vile Affections, and the Temptations of the wicked one, together with their own
care-

careless *Inadvertency*, be, when grown up, inclined to live at quite another Rate than Christianity allows: And though, for Fashion's sake, they may retain the *Name* of Christians, yet choose to be indeed the Servants of their own *Passions*, and of the *Prince of Darkness*.

And therefore, 'tis very unreasonable for the Enemies of Religion to conclude as they do, that because many that *profess* Christianity, live in direct *Contradiction* to it; therefore the whole is a *Cheat*: Since, did they believe what that Religion teaches, to be true, they would not dare to live in such continual *Opposition* to it.

Indeed, this should make all Christians very careful and circumspect in their *Conversation*, lest they bring so great a Scandal as this upon their Holy Religion (remembering our Lord's Words, *Woe be to him, by whom the Offence or Scandal cometh* :) But it will not at all follow, that because some of a Profession live contrary to its Precepts and Doctrine, that therefore the whole is a *Forgery*.

For, *believing* and *doing* are Two very *different* things; and a Man may *habitually* assent to the Truth of a thing; and yet not *actually attend* to it: As a Man may be very well assured that there is a dangerous *Pit* in his Way, and yet be so taken up with *mind*-ing other things, as not to *attend* to the Danger, and heedlessly *fall into it*. And so a
Man

Man may *habitually* believe that there is a Pit of Bottomless Destruction, which will at length swallow up the incorrigibly wicked; and yet, be so deeply engag'd in the Pleasures and Follies of the World, as not to attend to it till 'tis too late.

But, suppose *some* that call themselves *Christians*, do not at all believe any thing of the Christian Religion; there are innumerable more that *do* believe and live accordingly; and the Harmony of their Belief and Practice, methinks should be a better Argument in the *Affirmative*, than the Infidelity and Debauchery of a few *Titular* Christians should be in the *Negative*. And though to a Man that stiles himself a *Christian*, and yet believes not a Word of the Matter, to *him* the Whole of Religion is as nothing, yet certainly it cannot be from thence concluded, that therefore 'tis *really* and indeed a *Fiction*. For, that may be assuredly *true*, and that to their *Cost*, which some Men *don't care to believe*.

Thus we see 'tis no strange thing that there should be both good and bad that go under the general Name of *Christians* in *this* World; and that though some are much scandaliz'd at it, and raise an Objection from it against the Truth of the Religion, yet there is no Reason so to do; for 'tis not the *Name* that makes a *Christian*; he only is a Christian *indeed*, that to a *right Belief* adjoins *good Works*.

The first *Planters* of the good Seed or the Tares, the bad or good Professors of Christianity respectively, are *Christ* and the *Devil*. *Christ*, by teaching a Holy Religion to the World, such as shall conduct Men to Glory and Immortality, and by the good Motions and Inspirations of his Holy Spirit, inclining 'em to imbrace it, does endeavour to make all Men *happy*, to deliver 'em from the Miseries of *this* World, (for if *Sin* were weeded out of it, there would be no *Misery* in it) and to prepare 'em for the eternal and ineffable Felicities of the Kingdom of Glory ; in which, after a persevering Righteousness here, they shall be actually instated. The Devil, on the contrary, that great Enemy both to God and Man, makes it *his* great Endeavour, by all Sorts of Wiles and Stratagems, to *obliterate* the Divine Impressions of this Holy Religion upon Mens Souls, to divert 'em from *attending* to its great Beauty and Excellency, and the Nature and Durarion of its Rewards and Punishments ; to perswade 'em that *here* lies the only Scene of Happiness, and that a *future* Felicity or Misery is only fit to amuse and frighten Children withal ; that the Desires of the Body are given us that we might gratify them to the *full*, and that to *deny* and *mortify our selves*, is the most unnatural Cruelty in the World ; that we must make our selves happy, while we have *Opportunity*, and not to trust too much to uncertain Reversions.

And,

And, when he can't wholly blot out the Belief of another World, then he endeavours to corrupt it, by perswading us that a very little Religion will serve turn, seeing we have to do with so merciful a God.

And, if by these Means or the like, of which he has great Variety, he can incline Men, if not intirely to *Apostatize* from Christianity, yet, like *Tares*, to rest satisfied with the Name and *Appearance* of Christians, and live at loose and random, and follow the Stream of their own Passions and Desires, and his sly Insinuations and tempting Delusions; then he has his End, and will at length cheat 'em of the Happiness that Christ design'd 'em, and decoy 'em into his own Possession, and so bring them to the Portion of Tares and noxious Weeds, that *Furnace of Fire prepar'd for himself and his Angels*.

And therefore, as we tender our Eternal Welfare, we must be very watchful and observant, that we may discover the sly Insinuations of this our great Enemy. Whatever would disparage Religion, or lessen the Obligation to a good Life, comes certainly from that infernal Tempter. The Temptations to an excessive Gratification of our bodily Appetites, assuredly come from *him*; the *Opportunities of Vice* are of his disposing, and 'tis he that engages us in so great a Love and earnest Pursuit of the *World*. And therefore every thing of this Nature must be rejected with
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the greatest Abomination, as the Endeavours of our great Enemy, to deprive us of our Happiness, and involve us in his own Ruine.

And, on the contrary, those blessed Motions that we all of us often feel to a more pious and holy Conversation, must be thankfully embrac'd, and chearfully follow'd; as the Directions and Excitations of our dear Saviour, to what is conducive to our Eternal Happiness. They are those heavenly Dews which will refresh our Souls, and improve their Growth and Increase in Holiness; and if sincerely co-operated with, will at length bring the Fruits of our holy Religion to Perfection.

And thus much for the first thing this Parable informs us of, namely, That the state of the Gospel in *this* World is such, that there will be both bad and good under the general Name of Christians (as good Corn and Weeds together go under the Name of one Field of Corn) and that the first Planters of this Good and Evil respectively, are Christ and the Devil; together with the Improvement of each Consideration to the Interest of Religion.

But, before I quite leave this Particular, I shall, from what has been said of the promiscuous Mixture of bad and good Men in the Christian Church, and God's suffering it to be so without any extraordinary Discrimination: From this I shall observe how un-

reasonable 'tis for some to object, as too many do, against the Reception of the Lord's Supper in our Church, because, as they say, we admit any that will come, even those that have been scandalous Livers, and by that Means the Solemnity is prophan'd, and made less beneficial to the good.

But now, *supposing*, though not *granting*, that we admit any that will come, though Men of ill Lives, (I say, not *granting* this, for the thing is evidently false, as appears from the *Exhortations* to the Communicants before, and at the Solemnity, and from the *Rubric* of that Office: And from the 26, 27, and 28th *Cannons* of our Church, in which Ministers are expressly forbidden to admit *notorious Offenders*, *Schismatics* and *Strangers* to the Communion.) But *supposing* this, which is so evidently *false* as to the *Church*, to be *true* as to some *particular Ministers*; why must communicating with such Ministers, and, as we think, in such prophane Company, be unchristianly abstain'd from, and the Ministers declaim'd against with so much Bitterness? At this rate they may as well desert the Communion of the *whole Church of Christ*, and refuse to join in *any* part of Divine Worship; for no Doubt but ill Men are intermix'd in *all*, though they may not be *discover'd*; and if their Company will unhallow and make ineffectual *one* Duty of Christianity, I can't see why it should

should not do the like to all the rest. And, if a Separation were admitted upon such Accounts as these, there would be no such thing as an *external Communion of Saints*, because such is the state of the Gospel in this World, that the bad will be intermix'd with the good, as Tares are in a Field of Wheat.

And as to the Practice of particular Ministers, I charitably hope none do admit of *notorious* Offenders to the Communion, without receiving satisfactory Marks of their *Repentance*, or at least by previous Discourse or Writing: When they know of their Intention to communicate, let 'em know the great Danger of receiving unworthily, and urge them to an immediate sincere Repentance, or else forbid 'em at their Peril to approach the Holy Table. And if after all this they will come, we are to suppose in Charity that they have *repented*, except we are sure to the contrary.

And, if a Minister sees one at the Table, whose Life has, in many Instances, to his Knowledge, been very faulty, unless the Crimes have been very *great* and very *notorious*; to reject such an one, I think, (with Submission) would be arrogant and uncharitable, and might exasperate the Man to so high a Degree, as to make him throw off *all* Regard to Religion for the future; and in such a Case the Exhortation appointed to be read at the Time of celebrating those

Holy Myſteries, ſhould, one would think, be Warning ſufficient for ſuch an one, if *unrepentant*, to *withdraw*; and if he *ſtays*, Charity would incline one to believe that he was *penitent*. And, if a Perſon kneeling by, who perhaps knows much more of the Man's Courſe of Life than the Miniſter, ſhall be offended at his communicating, one that receives ſo *unworthily*, and ſpeak hard things of him, and abſtain from that bleſſed Ordinance upon this Account for the future, as prophan'd by ſuch mix'd Company at it; this is highly unreaſonable, uncharitable and unnatural. 'Tis *unreaſonable* with Relation to their hard Thoughts and Cenſures of the Miniſter, becauſe *Charity* obliges *him* to think *well* of ſuch as preſent themſelves at the *holy Table*, unleſs there be great and undeniable *Evidence* of their *obſtinate* and *continued* Wick- edneſs; and in ſuch a Caſe I dare ſay no pious Miniſter would prostitute thoſe holy Symbols to ſuch Swine: And, where there is not ſuch Evidence, Miniſters can ſearch Mens *Hearts* no more than other Men, and therefore muſt hope the *beſt*, and judge according to the *outward Appearance*; and ſhould they communicate, ſome that receive *unworthily*, by this Means (as 'tis to be fear'd they too often do) why ſhould they be blam'd for that which 'tis impoſſible for 'em to help; and *aſpers'd*, and all further Communion with them deſerted, for ſuffering that *ignorantly*, which

which God, though the *Searcher of all Hearts*, permits in his Church without any open Discrimination; namely, the bad to join in all holy Offices with the good? And this Practice is as *uncharitable* as 'tis unreasonable, because 'tis judging and condemning those as *Reprobates*, obstinate, unrepenting Sinners, whose *Hearts* we cannot see; and who, tho' formerly egregiously wicked, yet now, through the mighty Efficacy of God's converting Grace, may, for ought we know, to the contrary, be better than our selves. And, 'tis an *unnatural* Practice too, because 'tis the depriving our selves of the *Comforts* that attend the Reception of that holy Sacrament, and those of *Union and brotherly Love*, meerly upon a *groundless Nicety*.

Let us all rather learn not to judge others before the Time, but leave every Man to stand or fall by the unerring Judgment of our great Master at the last Day; lest by judging others we condemn our selves who do the same things, and it may be worse. And, instead of abstaining from the Sacrament, because some come and are admitted to it, whom we think, and it may be not without Reason, are not so well prepar'd as they should be; endeavour to make our selves still more and more fit for so holy an Ordinance by a dayly Amendment of Life; and then our *Fleece*, like that of *Gideon*, shall be *moistned*, though other Mens be *dry*. The

Apostles were never the *less* dear to our Saviour for *Judas* his being amongst 'em, but the *more* so rather; and though, through the Wickedness that was in his Heart, Satan enter'd into him after he had receiv'd the Sop our Lord gave him at the Celebration of the Passover, and in all Probability did partake of what he consecrated in Memory of his succeeding Death and Sufferings; yet the rest receiv'd miraculous Assurances of the Holy Ghost, and were faithful to the Death, and for certain have receiv'd the Crown of Life. And I hope this will satisfie for the future, such as upon this Account have abstain'd from the Blessed Sacrament, and censur'd the *Ministers* of our Church, and (tho' without all Reason) our *Church* in self. And as what has been said upon this Matter, has been no *impertinent* Digression, so I hope it may be a *beneficial* one.

Let us now proceed to the *second* Thing this Parable informs us of, namely, The *Time* when God's and our great Enemy the Devil sowes his Tares among the Wheat, and that is while Men *sleep*. For so the Parable, *while Men slept the Enemy came and sow'd Tares among the Wheat and went his Way*. Then is the Time of his injecting his wicked Insinuations into Mens Hearts, whereby to make 'em become like *empty Tares*, Christians in Name and *Appearance* only, but devoid of the *substantial* Graces and Vertues of that holy Profession.

By

By Mens *sleeping* is here meant a careless *Inadvertency* and Neglect of the Things of *Religion* ; a stupid Security in a *thoughtless* Way of Life. And this is a Metaphor which the sacred Writers have often made use of to this Purpose ; and 'tis so expressive of what they would represent by it, that 'twill be worth our while briefly to consider, wherein the Likeness of such thoughtless Inadvertency in Religious Matters to *sleep*, does consist.

It is like it, in the first Place in its Cause : For, as *Toil and Labour*, and any thing that brings *Weariness* and consumes the Spirits, disposes the *Body* to *Sleep*, and makes it desire Rest and Ease that it may have a *Recruit* ; so this *moral* Drowsiness or Hebetude of the *Soul*, generally begins to creep upon Men, when they find *difficulty* in Religion ; a little striving soon puts 'em out of Heart, their Hands fall, their Knees grow feeble, their Soul *faints* within 'em, all Hope of Victory is then laid aside, and they sit them down as Men quite spent, and *then* steals that *deep Sleep* upon them, which too often ends in *Death*.

Thus we often see Men set very briskly upon the Practice of Religion at *First*, and seem wondrously pleas'd with their new Choice, and admire at their Stupidity that they did not *sooner* discover the transcendent Beauties of Holiness, and are resolv'd to re-

deem their mis-spent Time, and talk of nothing but Raptures, and of reaching great *Hights* and *Eminencies* of Piety; when all on the suddain they are at a *Stand*, there's a *Lyon* in the *Way*, a *right Hand* must be *cut off*, or a *right Eye* put out, *i. e.* some *Favourite Vice* must be cashier'd if they move any *further*, and that's a *hard Saying*, and the Men begin to *cool*, a *Stifness* seizes their over-heated *Limbs*, and a senseless *Torpor* invades every Part of 'em; and like the young Man in the Gospel, *Mark* 10. 21. whom our Lord began to love for his discreet Answers and towardly *Disposition*, when they must part with their *Riches* to the *Poor*, and *deny* themselves, their corrupt *Desires* and *Inclinations*, and take up their *Cross* and follow their *Saviour*: Then they become *sad*, and with *Grief* and *Dissatisfaction* leave him, and fold their *Hands*, and return again to their *Dream of Vanity*. Just like those in the former Parable, compar'd to *stony Ground*, who receiv'd the *Word* at first with *Joy*, but having not sufficient *Deepness* of *Earth*, *i. e.* for want of *through Consideration*, and beholding the *smooth Side* of *Religion* only, endure but for a *while*, and in *Time* of *Temptation* and *Difficulty* fall away, and their former *Piety* becomes *dry* and *wither'd*. Or like those mention'd in another Parable, *Luke* 14. 28. (which was spoken upon this very *Account*, and which, for its great *Affinity* with this Part

of the Parable we are now upon, I shall not particularly discourse of) who *begin to build, and sit not down first and count the Cost whether they be able to finish,* and so proceeding no further than *Foundation* become the Scorn of all Men. But,

Secondly, as a State of careless Inadvertency to the things of Religion, is like *Sleep* in its *Cause* and *Beginning*; so likewise is it, in its *Progress* and *Effects*. For, like *Sleep*, it *locks up* all the Powers and Faculties of the Soul, and *suspends* their *Action*; it *dulls* its *Apprehension*, and makes it take Evil for Good, and Good for Evil; it *vitiates* its *Reasoning*, and makes it draw false and fantastick Consequences and Conclusions; and therefore *corrupts* its *Will* and *Affections*; and makes its *Choices* strangely *foolish* and *ridiculous*, such as preferring *Earth* before *Heaven*, a little *Ease* and *imperfect Pleasure* here, before *Rivers* of *ineffable Pleasures* that are at *God's right hand* for evermore; and the like. The *lower Life* is in this *Case* *predominant*, and wild *Dreams* and incoherent *Fancies*, make up such Men's *Divinity*, and their *Rule of Life* and *Manners*. In short, the *Life* of such Men is but a *Dream*; their *Notions*, like those of Men in a *Slumber*, dark, hovering and uncertain; their *Discourse* about *Religious Matters*, broken, disjointed, unconcluding, full of *Fallacies* and dangerous *Sophistry*, to cheat themselves of all *Expectation* here and *Enjoyment* here-
after

after of what is their greatest, nay, their *only Happiness*. Their Actions are like those done in a *Dream* too, extravagant, brutish, and unaccountable; startled at *Chimera's* and the *Shadows* of Danger, and *insensible* of the Approaches of *real* and *substantial* Misery, tho' just ready to overtake them; *fond* of a Bundle of *Feathers*, in *Love* with an *Airy Nothing*, whilst their *true* Interest is not in all their Thoughts. And, to *compleat* the Parallel, they are as *Deaf* to all *Reproofs* as Men asleep; as little affected with good Instruction and Advice, and so bewitch'd with the *Fancy'd Sweetness* of their Slumber, that they are as *Loath* to be *awaken'd*: And when by *Ruder* Applications they *are*, like Men that have taken too large a Dose of *Opium*, they are presently overcome with *Heaviness*, and shut their Eyes against all *Conviction* and fall asleep again. And the final Event is this; that as *Natural* Drowsiness Cloaths a Man with *Rags*, so the *Moral* will Cloath him with *Shame* and *utter Confusion*.

And now, from this short Parallel which I have drawn between the Sleep of the Soul and the Body; as we may see the Fitness of the Expression in the Parable, so we may learn what Guard to keep upon our selves to prevent our infernal Enemies sowing his *Tares*, or making *us* become as such, by his *Wicked* Insinuations and Suggestions. 'Tis while Men thus *Sleep*, are thus

thus Thoughtless and Inadvertent to Religion, and taken up with the Gaieties and Pleasures of the World, which, like pleasant Dreams, entertain the *Fancy* and *Imagination* with much Delight, but soon vanish and become utterly unprofitable; *then* it is that this subtle Enemy makes use of his Opportunity, and unobserv'd, *Steals* in his wicked Injections, which divert the Soul still *more and more* from attending to her main Interest, and promote this Spiritual Slumber so long, till too often it becomes Chronical and Habitual, and an utter Oblivion of all Religious Obligations, an incurable Numness and Stupidity of Soul, God knows, too often follows; and Men become like *Tares*, empty of all substantial Goodness, and at best but Christians in Name and Shew, and fit for nothing, but when God shall see fit, to be gathered up from among the Wheat and burnt.

Wherefore it highly concerns all those that hope to be sav'd, *not to sleep as do others, but to watch and be sober; to awake to Righteousness, and walk circumspectly, not as Fools* diverted by every Feather and gay Appearance, but, as Men that are wise to Salvation, always in a Posture of Watchfulness and Defence. Fixing our Attention upon our Duty and the exceeding great Reward of it, and often reflecting upon that intolerable Misery, which will certainly be
the

the Consequence of such fatal Slumberings, and still pressing on with greater Courage as the Difficulties of Religion increase upon us; and daily endeavouring still more and more to shake off Dead Stupidity to Religion which so easily besets us, and to rouse up our Faculties and employ 'em upon those noblest of Objects, patiently receiving Instruction and Reproof; rejecting every Notion and Opinion that would destroy the Necessity of a good Life, and studiously avoiding *Idleness* and *Sloth*, and, according to our Lord's most excellent Advice, adding *Prayer* to *Watchfulness*, that *we enter not into Temptation*.

This Course if we take, we shall defeat this generally prevailing Stratagem of the subtle Tempter; and being always in a Readiness to resist him, make him fly from us with Shame and Disappointment. And our Souls will then grow more and more *Substantial* in Piety, and abound in it as the good Corn; and at length, being grown ripe for the Glories and Felicities of Heaven, be gather'd in Peace, and laid up in Repositories of Eternal Rest and Safety, as in the blessed *Garner of our Lord*.

Thirdly, this Parable informs us of the Time of *Discovery* of the Tares, the *Hypocritical* Religionists; namely, the Time of *bringing forth Fruit*: When the Blade was sprung up and brought forth *Fruit*, or when the

the *Grain* appear'd in the Ear, *then* appear'd the Tares also. *Then* appear'd the Difference between the good *Corn* and the *Cockle*, which at first coming up look'd as flourishing and promis'd as fair as the good *Corn*; but when the Time drew nigh that the *Corn* should appear and come to Ripeness and Perfection, then there was a manifest Disparity, and what appear'd so well at first was then found to be an *empty noxious Weed*. And thus it is too often in Religion.

Many Men make a fair Shew and *Semblance* of Piety; attend the Place of Divine Worship, with much seeming Seriousness and Devotion; and to all outward Appearance, listen to the Sermons of the Gospel, and Beg the Divine Aid (as that Dew of Heaven, which alone can make 'em fruitful) as earnestly as others do; And this *looks* very well, and is (as far as Men or Angels can discern for the present) as hopeful a Beginning as need be desir'd. The *really* good Seed can send forth nothing more promising at first; and hitherto the Tares grow *undiscover'd* among the Wheat; by any Eye but that of God.

But after this first *Blade* has appear'd, and that for some considerable Time; after they have begun to make this *Shew* of Religion; instead of advancing further and further to *Perfection*, as the good Seed does;
and

and abounding in every good Work like the full Grain in the Ear; these have nothing but a *Blade* and *Stalk* of Religion, no *Fruit* appears, there is no *Real Substantial Vertue* attends this *Shew* of Piety, but rather the Works of the *Flesh* are discernable in their *Lives* and *Conversations*. And this is a plain Discovery to themselves and others, that they are but *formal*, not *sincere* Christians; vile *Unhappy Tares*, but not *good Seed*; for every *Tree* is known by its *Fruits*.

Wherefore, let no Man flatter himself with vain Hopes from a formal *Customary Religion*, when there are no real *Fruits* of *Righteousness*, but on the contrary, much *Wickedness* and *Folly* and *Vanity*; for, unless his Religion makes him *grow* in *Grace* and *Vertue*, and is seen in all his *Conversation*, 'twill be to no purpose to make an *Hypocritical Shew* of it at *Church*; and is no better than the most provoking *Mockery* of God, and an unnatural *Starving* of the *Soul* with such *Fantastick Food*, and will consign to the lowest *Hell*, which is the *Portion* of *Hypocrites*.

And as a *Hypocritical Religion* will have a very sad *Consequence* in the *other World*, so it exposes Men to much *Shame* and *Contempt* in *this*. For every Man that sees such great *Shews* of Religion, such *Pre-tences* to *Christian Vertue*, will *Naturally* expect

expect to find the Man *all of a Piece*, and that to his *Devotion* and Shew of *Godliness* at Church, be added *Sobriety* and *Righteousness* in his Conversation and Intercourse with Men. As when Men see the first Sproutings and Flourishing of a Field that was sown with good Grain, they expect to find Increase of the same good Fruits. But, when after all this fair and florid Shew of Piety and Goodness, there appears nothing but *Tares*, and the Man that is over-run with Wicked Habits and Vile Affections, little or no Sign of a real *Sense* of Religion upon his Mind, but rather the hidden Works of *Disbonesty* in his Dealings; *Lying and Collusion* instead of *Sincerity and Truth*; Lewdness and Intemperance, Pride and Malice, instead of Purity both of Flesh and Spirit: When such *Vileness* as this treads upon the Heels of a Mans Shew of Religion, any Man may discern that he is a *Christian Pharisee*, like a whited Sepulchre, beautiful *without*, but *within* full of Rottenness and all Uncleanness; that his Religion is *confined* to the *Chnrch*, whither he goes sometimes for Fashion's Sake to *visit* it, but always leaves it there *behind* him, and will not be troubled with its Company *abroad*.

Now, such Hypocrisy as this, is certainly one of the most *hateful* things in the World, and instead of gaining *Reputation* to a Man; is the ready Way to make him a

common

common Scorn: Men can't but *discover* the abominable Cheat, and they can't but *hate* and *detest* it. Tares *will* at length appear to be Tares, and the sooner for being among the good Corn. 'Tis therefore certainly the greatest Folly in the World, to pretend to conceal under a fair Appearance, what will in a very short Time discover it self, and will bring a Man to nothing but Shame and Hatred in this World, and the Flames of Hell in the next. And it concerns every Man that desires to be happy here or hereafter, to lay aside all *Guile* and *Hypocrisy* in Religion, and sincerely endeavour after the *Power* of Godliness as well as put on the *Form* and Appearance of it. And thus much for the third Part of this Parable, *viz. when the Blade was sprung up and brought forth Fruit, then appear'd the Tares also.*

The next thing it informs us of, is the Holy *Angels* Observation of the Actions of Men, especially of *Christians*, and their Diligence and Watchfulness in doing God Service, and Zeal for his Glory: For thus 'tis said, *the Servants of the Householder*, that is, the *Angels*, as 'tis in the Interpretation, *came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good Seed in thy Field? From whence then hath it Tares? He said an Enemy hath done this. They answered, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? They observ'd by the loose Lives of some Professors that there were ve-*

ry ill Men that went under the Notion of Christians; which they knew would reflect *Disbonour* upon *Christ* the great Planter of that holy Religion, and would be injurious to the *Progress* of the Gospel; and therefore they haste to tell him that they may have his further Commands, and with *Zeal* for his *Glory*, and Intentions of great *Charity* to us poor *Mortals*, they offer their best Endeavours to rid the Church of those scandalous hypocritical Members.

That the blessed *Angels*, are, by God's Appointment, Observers, and that for excellent Purposes, of the Lives and Actions of Mankind, especially of *Christians*; is evident not only from this Part of this Parable, but from many other Places of Scripture, as an attentive Reader of the holy Writings must often have observ'd: Of which, some few of the New Testament only that give most Light to this Matter, I shall at present mention. *St. Paul*, in *1 Cor. 11. 10.* giving Directions for the more decent Service of God in the Church; for this Reason says he, according to the Custom of that Time, ought Women to be *veil'd* or *cover'd* (as the true Sense of the Place is) in their publick religious Assemblies, because of *the Angels*: That is, lest any thing indecent should be observ'd by those pure Spirits, who are present as God's *Spies* upon the Actions of Men. The last Verse of the First Chapter to the *Hebrews* is

likewise very plain to this Purpose; where the Apostle, speaking of the *Angels*, *Are they not all* says he, (as assur'd of the Truth of what he said) *Are they not all ministring Spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of Salvation?* That is, to take notice of their Behaviour in the World, in order to prevent their running into Courses ruinous, and to shield 'em from the mischievous Assaults of wicked Spirits. And, to mention but one Place more, St. Paul charges Timothy, 1 Tim. 5. 21. *Before, or as in the Presence of God and of Jesus Christ, and of the elect Angels*, that he would observe those things he had taught him without Prejudice or Partiality: Which plainly supposes that there were *Angels* then present, as Observers and Witnesses of what they were doing and discoursing.

It being then thus plain from Scripture, that the *blessed Angels* are Observers of Mens Lives and Actions, especially of those of *Christians*, as by God's Appointment, and as Ministers of his divine Government; I shall not trouble my self to make curious Enquiries into the Reasons *why* God appoints *Angels* to observe and minister to us, since nothing escapes his *own all-seeing Eye*, and his *own all-mighty Arm* can do whatsoever he pleases in Heaven and in Earth, in the Sea, and in all deep Places? Nor of what Rank and Order those *Angels* are, and how *many*, that are thus employ'd? And whether every Man has

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a particular Angel assign'd him as his Guardian and the Inspector of his Actions? Which things are too *high* for us *Mortals*, we cannot attain unto them: But shall make this good Use of this particular relating to our Practice, That since we are under the Inspection of such *pure* and *holy* Spirits, and whose Concern for our Happiness is very great; since they are Witnesses of our most secret Actions, and tho' *invisible* and unobserv'd *themselves*, are our *curious* Observers: Methinks, we that are our selves but in *one Rank* of Being *below* 'em *here*, and shall hereafter be *equal* to them, should not endure to be found by 'em wallowing like *Swine* in the *Filth* of *Sin*, *degrading* our selves to a Level with the *Beasts* that perish, and in *vase* Hypocrisie *pretending* to be *Christians*, when indeed we act like *Infidels*: Nay, too often, like *Devils incarnate*. How do those good Spirits, tho' they may *pity* our *deplorable* Condition, yet withal, *despise* and *abominate* the *servile Baseness* of such *excellent* Natures! Who, notwithstanding they have such glorious *Hopes*, yet quit their *heavenly Reversion*, for the low Enjoyments of this *contemptible Earth*! Methinks *Shame* should deter us from vile and impious Actions, if nothing else; and the Thoughts of the Dignity of our Nature, not suffer us to act so much *beneath* our selves; and a Man not *brutishly impudent*, should not endure to expose himself to the Observation of an *Angel*

in such *vile* Circumstances, as he would be loath to be found in by any *Man* he reverences and respects, nay, by a *Servant* or a *Child*.

And as the *Angels* are *Observers* of *Human Actions*, so are they *God's Intelligencers* to give him account of them; not that *God* needs such *Information*, for every thing lies naked and open to his own *all-seeing Eye*, but for the greater *Order* and *Decorum* of his *Government*. And this their *Office*, they perform with great *Diligence* and *Watchfulness*, and ardent *Zeal* for his *Glory*; for no sooner were the *Tares* discerned by 'em to be among the good *Corn*, the formal empty *Christians* to be intermix'd with the sincerely good, but they hasten to give *Account* of it to their great *Master*, and as not being able to indure the great *Dishonour* reflected upon *God* and the purest of *Religions*, by their base *Hypocrisie* and impious *Conversation*, they offer, with his *Permission*, to remove those evil *Doers*, those not only *unprofitable*, but *wicked* *Servants*, as unworthy to continue any longer in so *sacred* a *Society* as that of *Christians*. *Wilt thou that we gather them up?* say they; wilt thou permit us to *weed* this thy great *Field* of those noxious *Tares*, to cull out the *empty nominal* *Christians*, and exert that *Power* thou hast given us, to their deserved *Ruin*; that the *Residue* of thy *Servants* may see it and fear, and keep from their *Abominations*? And that those blessed *Spirits*, that angelick *Hoft*,

Hoft, is able to perform this Service, no Man can doubt that remembers how *one* Angel in *one* Night destroy'd all the First born in *Egypt*.

Now this *their* Diligence and Watchfulness in the Service of God, and Zeal for his Glory, should put *us* upon a holy *Emulation* of doing *God's Will on Earth, as it is done in Heaven* : That is, that we, who here on Earth, are but a *little lower* than the Angels, *Luke 20. 36.* and shall in Heaven be *equal* to them; should now endeavour to be as like them as we *can*, and with the utmost Chearfulness, Alacrity and Diligence, perform the Duty our great Governour has set us; and with a prudent Zeal endeavour in our several Stations, by *discountenancing Vice, and encouraging* and promoting *Vertue* to the utmost of our Power, to advance the Glory of God, and the Interest and Reputation of our holy Religion. If *Magistrates* would take due Notice of those that live scandalously and wickedly, and not bear the Sword in *vain*, but be, as they ought to be, a *Terrour* to *Evil-Doers*, and *praise* and *encourage* those that do *well*; if the Governours of the *Church*, who are stil'd *Angels* in Scripture, would act like the Angels in this Parable, and curiously inspect the Religion of their Charge, and by such Methods as the Laws allow, either turn the Tares into good Seed (which, though impossible in *Nature*, yet *may be*, and I hope,

often is done in Religion) or pluck 'em up, if stubborn and irreclaimable; if Governours of *private Families*, warm'd with the like holy Zeal, would take the like Measures, and either *reform* their irreligious Servants and Dependents, or else rid themselves of 'em, and bring 'em to due legal Punishment: If this wholesome Course were taken with due *Diligence, Watchfulness and Prudence*, Vice would soon be *dishearten'd*, and *Vertue* more and more thrive and *Increase*; God's Honour would be vindicated, the *Credit* of Religion *redeemed*, our own *temporal Happiness advanced*, and innumerable Souls sav'd, that otherwise would for ever have *perish'd*.

And *this* would be a Work truly *worthy* of *Christians*; 'tis an *angelick* Undertaking; and every Man that prays, *Hallow'd be thy Name, thy Kingdom come, thy Will be done in Earth as 'tis in Heaven*, is bound in his own *Sphere*, and according to his best *Ability*, to *promote* what is contain'd in those *Petitions*, to the *Glory* of God and the *Interest* of Religion; as he expects and hopes to have an *Answer* of the *following* *Petitions*, and *receive* his *daily Bread*, and *have* his *Trespases forgiven* him, and *to be preserved or supported in Temptation*, and *delivered from Evil*.

The *fifth* thing this Parable informs us of, is the Reason why God will not *suffer* the *Angels* as yet to *gather out* the *Tares* from among the good Seed, to *discriminate* *Hypocritical*

critical from sincere Christians, and give 'em their due Punishment ; namely, *lest while they gather up the Tares, they root up also the Wheat with them* ; and therefore he suffers both to grow together until the Harvest. That is, in other Words, the Reason of God's *Forbearance* of the *Wicked*, and not suffering the Angels, those Ministers of his Justice, to punish them in *this World* according to what they *deserve* ; is his great Care and Tender-ness, even of the *temporal* Quiet and Safety of the *Righteous* : Which, by Reason of their *Intermixture* with the *wicked* here, would at least be very much *disturb'd* through the rooting up a wicked Generation ; and without the Help of a Miracle, many a good Man might perish in so great a Ruin. But Miracles we find God has never thought fit to work, but upon urgent *Necessity*, when his own *Glory*, and the Interest of *Religion* and the *Church* cannot *otherwise* be secur'd ; now there being *no* such *Necessity* of punishing the wicked by destroying 'em in *this World*, nor consequently of *miraculously* preserving those that are truly good from a general Ruin ; for the End of the World, that great Day of Recompence, is not far off, and both may live together until then ; God, for the Sake of the sincerely good, *lest the Rod of the wicked should come into the Lot of the Righteous*, does generally restrain the Zeal of those blessed Spirits the Angels, and forbears the Tares till

that universal Harvest, when the Earth shall be eas'd of its Burthen, and then the *good Seed* shall be gather'd together in *Safety*, and the *Tares* left to be *consum'd* in that great Conflagration, when the World and all that remains in it shall be burnt up with Fire unquenchable. And when, in Case of almost a *total* Corruption of a City or Nation, and to strike a Terror into others, and convince the obdurate World that God *sees* and is able to *punish* obstinate and irreclaimable Sinners, God thinks fit to suffer his bright Host of Angels, utterly to *destroy* such wicked Places as sometimes we know he hath done; we have several Instances in Scripture, and other Histories of the *miraculous* Preservation of the *good*; and that, as the Psalmist expresses it, *though Thousands have fallen by their Side, the Destruction has not come nigh them; for he gives his Angels Charge over them, to keep 'em in all their Ways,* Psalm 91.

Of this great Care of Providence over the good, either in preserving for their Sakes, *Communities* destin'd to Ruin, or else covering *them* under the Wings of *Providence*, and shielding them from Danger till the Storm was over; there is an Instance in the 18th of *Genesis* so very remarkable that I can't pass it by. In the 23. Verse of that Chapter, we find *Abraham* interceeding with God for *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* (which he had resolv'd to destroy for the abominable and

incurable Wickedness that was in them) and he begins with what he thought would most prevail with God to spare the Place, and tells him the *Safety* of the *Righteous* would be hazarded, and that they would share in the common Destruction; and therefore lest he should slay the *Righteous* with the *Wicked*, which he knew the Judge of all the Earth would be far from doing, he pleads with him for the Sake of *Fifty Righteous* that should be found there (a small Number one would think, and easie to be found in such *populous*, tho' *wicked Places*) and at length (being encouraged by God's wondrous Goodness, who comply'd with him in every Request, and as he *sunk* the Number promis'd him he would not destroy) he, by degrees, descends to *Ten*; which was as far as ever his Modesty would reach, and one would think far enough to secure the most wicked City upon Earth. Peradventure *Ten* be found there: *And God said unto him, I will not destroy it for Ten's Sake.* Rather than those *Ten* should be in danger of perishing in the general Ruin, he will *recall* the destroying Angel, and at least *respite* the Execution of his Vengeance; and for *their* Sakes *reprieve* the condemn'd Place of their Abode. And when, through the *extream* Wickedness of those Cities that *small* Number of good Men was not found in them, and God therefore proceeded to shower down his fiery Indignation upon 'em, yet, he remembers *Righteous Lot* and his

his small Family, and sends two Angels to conduct 'em safely out of that accursed Place, who *hasten'd Lot*, lest he should be consum'd in the Iniquity of the Cities, and upon his Request spared *Zoar*, which he fled to, and bid him make haste thither, for that they could not do any thing till *he* was escap'd out of Danger; as you may read *Gen. 19. 22.*

And what a boundless Ocean is the goodness of God! That he should, not only so graciously accept the *imperfect* Services of his own People, as to take *them* into his peculiar Care and Protection; but for their *Sakes* likewise (that Destruction might not so much as come *nigh* their Dwellings) to spare *those* that have justly *merited* the severest Expresses of his *Displeasure!* This does indeed verify the words of the Psalmist, that his *Mercy is over all his Works.*

And this, as it should be a new Motive and Encouragement to *true* Holiness, which will be so great a Security in perilous Times both to our selves and others; and demonstrates the great *Ingratitude* and *Baseness* of the *World*, in hating and despising and afflicting the good, who yet are as so many *guardian Angels* to it, and shield it from the Expresses of God's just *Vengeance*: So it will silence that *Objection* against *Providence*, drawn from the continued Safety and Prosperity of the wicked, notwithstanding their living in open *Defiance* of God and his Commands. For we see, they are but *repriev'd* for the Sake of the Righteous,
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lest *they* should be involv'd in the Ruin pour'd upon the ungodly: Their Punishment is but *respited* for a *little* while, and at the great Affize God's Justice will have its full Course, and sink 'em into everlasting Ruin. And as the *Husbandman* may *observe* the Tares that are among his good Corn, and resolve at length to bind 'em up in Bundles and burn them, tho' his prudential Care of the good Corn inclines him to let them alone till the *Harvest*, and not pluck 'em up whilst the good Corn is standing and growing to Perfection, lest it be rooted up together with them; So *God sees* and resolves in due Time to *punish* according to their Demerit the vile hypocritical Christians, but in a wise and tender Regard for the safety of the *sincerely* good, *with-holds* his Judgments during their Abode in the World, but will surely repay the wicked Wretches what they have deserv'd, in the great Day of *Recompence*.

And this brings me to the *last* thing this Parable informs us of, namely, that though these vile unhappy Tares are forborn for a while, and let pass without bearing any publick Marks of God's Displeasure *here*; yet there shall most certainly be a Time of Discrimination, even at the great *Harvest*: and then shall *all Men discern between the Righteous and the Wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not.* Mal. 3. 18.

For, then will the great Husbandman the *Lord Jesus*, as at the Time of Harvest, say to his

his Angelical Reapers, gather ye first together the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them, but gather the Wheat into my Barn. And accordingly they shall gather out of his Kingdom all that have been a Scandal to it, and under the Disguise of Christianity have done Iniquity, and shall cast them into a Furnace of Fire, where shall be wailing and gnashing of Teeth: And then shall the Righteous shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father.

That is, when the Close of the World shall come, and the whole intelligent Creation be met together at the Summons of the Trump of God; Men to receive their several Sentences, whether of Absolution or Condemnation, according to their several Deserts; and Angels to execute these Sentences: Then shall the sincerely good Christians indeed and in Truth, be plac'd by the blessed Angels of God on the right Hand of the Glorious and Just Judge, and after a Display of their excellent Piety and Charity to all the World, hear this joyful Sound, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepar'd for you from the Foundation of the World;* and then, be immediately caught up into the Clouds to meet their dear Lord in the Air, and from thenceforth be for ever with him; and shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father, having Crowns of Eternal Glory plac'd upon their Heads, and loud and rapturous *Halleluja's* in their Mouths. Whilst those miserable Wretches, that knew no more of Christianity

Christianity than the *Name*, in whom Religion was only Shew and *Formality*, having no real Influence upon their *Lives*, and bringing forth no *Fruits* of Piety, whilst *these*, shall find to their *Confusion*, that God is not to be *mock'd*, and be plac'd on the *left Hand* as Vessels of *Wrath*, and be doom'd to *depart* for ever from the *Fountain of Happiness*, into eternal *Burnings*, prepar'd for the *Devil and his Angels*.

Then will the good find by a *happy Experience*, that there is indeed a *Reward for the Righteous*, and that, however they were *laugh'd* at and *discourag'd* here, *their Labour is not in vain in the Lord*. And then will the Mock Hypocritical Christians be sadly assur'd, notwithstanding all their Plea of having eaten and drank in the Presence of the Judge and at his Table, and of his having taught in their Streets; that without *real and substantial Holiness* no Man shall see the Lord. And instead of being receiv'd into their Master's Joy, for *cringing* and *sawning* upon him, and giving him magnificent Titles, *Lord, Lord, Jesus, Saviour*, but heeding little his Commandments, they shall be rejected with *I know you not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity*.

And then will God be *justified* in the Face of the whole World, and found to be, not an *unconcern'd Spectator* of the Affairs of Mankind; but a *wise, all-knowing* and *just* Governour of the Universe: And though *Clouds and Darkness* seem here to be round about him, yet
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Righteousness and Judgment are the Establishment of his Throne. Then will there be eternal Joy and Exultation of the blisful beautify'd Souls of the Righteous, and weeping and wailing and gnashing of Teeth in the wretched Companies of the damn'd for ever. Behold, the Day cometh, saith the Prophet Malachi, that shall burn like an Oven, and all the Proud, and all they that do wickedly shall be as Stubble, and the Day that cometh, saith the Lord of Hosts, shall burn them up, that it shall leave them neither Root nor Branch. Mal. 4. 1. And in that Day shall Men seek Death and shall not find it, and shall desire to dye, and Death shall flee from them. Rev. 9. 6.

And now for a Conclusion of the whole Matter : Since from this Parable of our Lord's, it appears, that though an empty *Shew* of Religion may pass well enough in this World, and meet with no open Discrimination or Punishment from God here ; yet there shall most certainly be an *after* Reckoning, when all the *Thoughts* and *Intentions* of Men's hearts shall be *reveal'd*, and their vile *Hypocrisy* and *secret* Impiety laid open before Men and Angels, and an *irreversible* Doom of greatest Severity past upon them according to their Deservings, Since *this* is true, it nearly concerns us all to be Christians in *Reality*, as well as in *Name* and *Appearance* ; to obey the *Commands* of Christ, as well as call him *Lord*, and to approve our selves true Disciples of this holy Institution

stitution, by leading our Lives in all Holy Conversation and Godliness; diligently endeavouring to be found of this great Judge in Peace, without Spot and blameless. Remembering that God shall bring every Work into Judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or evil; and that the wicked shall go into everlasting Punishment, but the Righteous into Life Eternal.

The PRAYER.

I.

O Holy Saviour, Jesus, from whom are deriv'd all our Possibilities of Salvation, the Means of Grace and the Hopes of Glory; but who expectest our Concurrency with thy gracious Endeavours for our Happiness, and for the Tryal of our Sincerity, permittest thine and our great Enemy to scatter his Hellish Injections where thou sowest thy Heavenly Doctrine: I earnestly intreat thee, so to assist me with thy Life-giving Spirit, that my Faith and Obedience, which thou hast made the Condition of my Happiness, may be so Vigorous and Active, as to manifest that I am thine, not only in Word and in Show, but in Deed and in Truth. Grant that I may ever esteem those inward Motions which I feel to a progressive Holiness, to be what indeed they are, thy gracious Endeavours to promote my Eternal Welfare; and may I always thankfully and cheerfully embrace and follow them. And whatever Thoughts
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and inclinations tend to discourage sincere Religion, and perswade to rest in the Formality of it; for thy Mercies Sake, help me to reject them with the greatest Abhorrence and indignation, as the Endeavours of Satan to involve me in his own Ruin And since 'tis while we sleep that our great Adversary sowes these his Tares: Give me Grace, O Blessed Jesus, to awake to Righteousness, and rouze from my Thoughtless Inadvertency, and shake off my Dreams of Vanity, lest this Spiritual Slumber at length prove fatal and betray me into Eternal Death.

II.

Thou hast assured us, O Lord, to whom the Father hath committed all Judgment, that this Life is the only Time of our Probation: O therefore grant, that now, in this our Day, all we that name the Name of Christ may depart from Iniquity, and imbrace the things that belong to our Peace before they be hid from our Eyes! That by serious Consideration, we may make Religion our Choice, and adhere to it firmly, with all our Powers and Faculties, and be in Reality thy peculiar People, zealous of good Works; remembering thy blessed Words, Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I command? And that, though here the Wicked go unpunish'd, it will not be always so, and at last Hypocrisy shall meet with its Deserts. And may I always so attend to the Dignity of my Nature, and the constant Inspection of thy Holy Angels and Glorious
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Self in all my Ways, as not to dare to play the Hypocrite in thy Presence, who seest the inmost Secrets of my Heart, and be asham'd to expose my Vileness to those excellent Spirits, and reflect upon the Confusion I shall be in at the Day of Judgment, when the Goat and the Swine shall be discover'd under the Profession of a Christian.

And, O that the Zeal and Alacrity of these ministring Spirits in thy Service, and for thy Glory, may put me upon a holy Emulation to do thy Will on Earth as it is done in Heaven! That so, when the great Harvest shall come, and thou shalt say to the angelick Reapers, Gather ye together first the Tares, and bind them in Bundles to burn them; but gather my Wheat into my Barn, I may find Mercy at that terrible Day, and be receiv'd to a Participation of the Glories of thy Heavenly Kingdom.

Which grant, O blessed Jesus, I most earnestly beseech thee. Amen.

PARABLE III.

Of the Pearl of great Price.

Matth. xiiij. 45, 46.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a Merchant-man, seeking goodly Pearls :

Who, when he had found one Pearl of great Price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

BY *this*, and the Parable immediately before it, of a *Treasure hid in a Field*, which, when a Man hath found he hideth, and for Joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that Field : The transcendent Excellency of the Christian Religion above all things in the World, is represented : And that 'tis the greatest Wisdom to part with every Thing that this World can afford, all the Pleasures, Honours and Riches of it rather than be without the inward Power and Life of this holy Religion ; which is a *Pearl of so great Price*, so immense a *Treasure*, that nothing here below
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can stand in Competition with it. 'Tis as *David* expresses it, *more to be desir'd than Gold, yea, than much fine Gold,* Psal. 19. 10 and he professes that himself had *more Delight in God's Commandments than in all Manner of Riches.* And *Solomon* sayes (almost in the Words of these Parables) *Happy is the Man that findeth Wisdom, or Religion; for the Merchandise of it is better than the Merchandise of Silver, and the Gain thereof than of fine Gold,* Prov. 3 13, &c.

She is more precious than Rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compar'd unto her: Length of Days is in her right Hand, and in her left Hand Riches and Honour: her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace.

Such great things as these being spoken of Religion, by those that best knew its Excellency; and the World being so very backward in the Belief of their Testimony, and so foolish as to prefer every little worldly Good before this inestimable Treasure, to which, all that the *whole Creation* can afford is not comparable; and the *Consequence* of this Delusion being so *fatal*, no less than the eternal Ruin of both Body and Soul: It highly concerns us by due Consideration to rectifie our Apprehensions in this Matter, and no longer childishly doat upon empty *Gayes* and *Trifles*, and neglect what is of infinite Excellency, and the most *substantial* Good.

It is therefore the Design of this Discourse upon the Parable above recited, to weigh the Excellency of *Religion* against all that the *World* can afford in the Ballance of *Reason*, that upon a fair Experiment we may see which does preponderate, and accordingly be convinc'd which of the Two is most worthy our Choice: And then, if we still retain our Affection for the *World* against the Judgment of our *Reason* in behalf of *Religion*; we shall likewise be convinc'd that we act more like *Brutes* than *Men*, and that we deserve to feel the Consequences of our unreasonable and wicked Choice, and taste no other Happiness than what this *unsatisfying empty World* can afford; and in the next *World* be for ever miserable, because we would not be for ever happy when we might.

First then, let us see what the *Whole* that this *World* can afford will amount to. All that is in the *World*, St. *John* tells us, is the *Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eyes, and the Pride of Life*, 1 *John* 2. 16. i. e. to these Three may be reduc'd the Whole of what is valuable in the *World*: And by the *Lust of the Flesh* is meant *Pleasure* of all Sorts; by the *Lust of the Eye* *Riches*, great *Plenty* and *Abundance*; and by the *Pride of Life*, *Honour*, *Power* and *Dominion*. This is that *Trinity* which the generality of *Men* adore, and impatiently desire and place their greatest Happiness in the Enjoyment of; and of each of these Particulars,

we will now enquire what they amount to, and consequently what is the sum total of the World.

And first, to observe the Apostles Method, we will begin with the *Lusts of the Flesh*, or the *Pleasures* of the World, and which are generally *first* in Mens Esteem, and for which they are often content to part with the other Two. Now these may be rank'd in this Order, *viz.* the Pleasures of *Lust* and Unclean-ness, of luxurious *Eating and Drinking*, and of great *Jollity and Mirth*; all agreeing in the Character of the Lusts of the Flesh, that is, all highly grateful to the Desires and Appetites of the Body. And in the first Place I observe this in general of all worldly Pleasures, that the longer a Man *lives* to enjoy them, the more *insipid* still they grow to him; and that, not only upon Account of their own *empty Nature*, but by Reason of the Decays of our own *Faculties*, and consequent *Disability* to enjoy them. As old *Barzillai* said to *David*; *Can I discern between Good and Evil?* &c. *2 Sam.* 19. 35. when he invited him to the Pleasures of his Court. And what Happiness can be expected from that which is very unsatisfying in its own Nature, and which, were it *not* after a few Years we shall be incapable of enjoying? But to be more *particular*: As for the Pleasures of *Lust* and *Uncleanness*, whatever Mens *Expectations* may be of receiving great Satisfaction from them, they can't but

find by their Experience, that there is much of *Disappointment* in 'em, and the Pleasure much greater in *Imagination* than *Reality*: They are indeed *deceitful* Lusts, and often make Men *miserable*, even *here*, but never happy. And for the Truth of this (that it may not be look'd upon as a thing only *said*, not *prov'd*, and the cynical Conclusion of a frozen dispirited Student, whose narrow Course of Life has made him a Stranger to such Sort of Enjoyments, and caus'd him to give a worse Character of them than they deserve) I shall vouch the Testimony of *Solomon*, who fill'd the Throne of a rich and flourishing Kingdom, and was accountable to none but *God* for Actions of this Nature, and his Desires perfectly without any *humane* Restraint; and who made it his Business to find out what was the greatest Happiness of Man in this World, and *whatsoever his Eyes desir'd he kept not from them; he with-held not his Heart from any Joy*; and who, amongst other Delights, had great Numbers of *Wives* and *Concubines*, to the Number of *Seven Hundred Wives* that were *Princesses*, and *Three Hundred Concubines*, 1 Kin. 11. 30. and these the fairest, doubtless, that could be met with: Variety enough, one would think, to take off all possibility of *loathing* and desire of *Change*. But now, what says *Solomon* after so full and *uncontroul'd* Enjoyment of these carnal Pleasures? Why truly in the very beginning of his Book of *Proverbs*, Chap. 2. 18, 19. he tells

tells the World, that the *House of the Strange*, or *Whorish Woman inclineth unto Death*, and *her Paths unto the Dead*: *None that go unto her return again*, neither take they hold of the *Paths of Life*. And *Prov. 5. 3.* *The Lips of a strange Woman drop as an honey-comb, and her Mouth is smoother than Oyl*; but her *End*, or the *End of having to do with her*, is *bitter as Wormwood*, sharp as a *two-edged Sword*. Very frequent are his *Invectives* against this *Vice*, and deliver'd with more than ordinary *Earnestness*: And in the *7th Chapter of Ecclesiastes* (the *Book of his Recantations*) he publicly declares, that he *finds* (as by his own *Experience*) *He finds more bitter than Death, the Woman whose Heart is Snares and her Hands as Bands*; *whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her, but the Sinner shall be taken by her*. *Ver. 26.* As if 'twere a *peculiar Providence of God*, to protect a *good Man* from falling into so great a *Mischief*, and that he suffers the *wicked* to be ensnar'd by it as a *severe Punishment* and great *Expression of his Displeasure*: And in the next *Verse*, *Behold, says the Preacher, this have I found, counting one by one to find out the Account, which yet my Soul seeketh, but I find not: One Man among a Thousand have I found, but a Woman among all those have I not found.* That is, he did at last meet with a *Man* that answer'd his *Expectations* as a *Friend* or *faithful Servant*: But among all his *Concubines*, not *one* but who baulk'd and

disappointed his fond Hopes of Happiness from the Enjoyment of her, and *depriv'd* him of more Satisfaction than she gave him.

And thus we see, from the Confession of *Solomon* himself, who gratified his *carnal Appetite* to the *full*, and experienc'd the utmost of what *Lust* and *Wantonness* could afford; that this sort of Pleasure amounts to no more than this, *Disbonour* and *Disappointment* always, and not seldom *Diseases* and *Death*.

Let us now proceed to enquire what the Pleasures of *luxurious Eating*, and *intemperate Drinking* will amount to. All that it can *pretend* to is the Gratification of the *Taste* and *Palate*: For, as for true *Nourishment*, High Feeding falls far short of more *ordinary* Diet; and as for refreshing and *cherishing* the *Spirits*, a *moderate* Quantity of Wine is sufficient, and what is more than *that*, ends in a Fit of Madness, and *impoverishes* Nature. Now, the Pleasures of the *Palate*, make the *best* of them, are of very *short* Continuance, no sooner tasted but they vanish; and the *Stomach* will not *bear* a long *Repetition* of this Pleasure, and is soonest *cloy'd* and *surfeited* with what is of the *richest* Gust and Relish: And the *Inconveniencies* that attend this *short-liv'd* and very *imperfect* Pleasure, are *great* and of very *long* Continuance. For, suppose a Mans Revenues to be so large that he can bear the *Expence* of *Luxury*, without weakening his *Fortune* in the least, and so that very

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usual ill Consequence of it, cannot in this Case be charg'd upon it, yet others full as great may. As first, the more a Man indulges his Palate, the harder he will find it to be pleas'd, and at length 'twill grow so *troublesomely* nice, that its *Disgusts* will be more frequent than its *Pleasure*; and so, instead of procuring a constant *Gratification* of the Palate, Luxury is the ready Way to make a Man *disrelish* almost every thing: Which must needs make his Life a continual *Vexation* and Uneasiness; and a *Plowman* with his coarse Fare, and no other *Sauce* to it but a good *Stomach*, will experience far greater and more *lasting* Pleasure in *eating and drinking*, than the greatest *Epicure* in the World. And therefore, Luxury is indeed the *wrong* Way to procure an intire *Gratification* of the Palate, and *destroys* what it pretends to *create*. Another very ill Consequence of Luxury is, that it mightily weakens and *impairs* Health, and makes a Man a *living Hospital*, full of Diseases, and very often cuts his Days off in the *Midst*. And thus does an *over-Indulgence* to the Body cruciate and destroy it, and by an extravagant Care to *please* the Palate, Men bring upon themselves a Necessity of taking such *Medicinal* Compositions, as are abundantly more *Nauseous* to it, than ever the most artificial Dishes or richest Wines were *grateful*.

And by this Time we perceive what Luxurious Eating and Drinking amounts to;
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truly no more than this, a very *short imperfect Pleasure*, attended with *great and durable ill Consequences*, which abundantly out-weigh the *Pleasure*, and would do so were it *greater and more lasting* than it is.

Another Desire of the Flesh is *Mirth and Jollity*, a thoughtless Course of Life, spent in *Recreations*, in Laughter, and an *Aery Facetious Way of Conversation*; and this is very taking with abundance of People, and he counted the happiest Man that can spend his Days in this Manner, and has little else to do. Well then, suppose a Man so intirely disengag'd from the Fatigues of Business, as to have his Time wholly at his own Disposal; suppose him to be of a brisk lively Temper, and free from all Care and Trouble, and that he has the Conversation of such as are as sprightly as himself, so that the Day seems too short for their Mirth and Pleasantry, their Pastimes and Recreations: Suppose all this, that is, suppose a Man to have all of this Kind of Pleasure that the World can afford, we shall find upon a nearer View, that there is as great an *Alloy* here as in the Instances before mention'd.

Solomon, who was a very competent Judge in this Matter, and for a considerable Time made Jollity his Business, and tasted as much of it as 'tis possible for a Man to do; was so much of this Mind, as to pronounce it not only *Vanity*, but *Vexation of Spirit*. He gave
himself

himself wholly up to *Mirth* (as he tells us, *Prov. 2. 1*, &c.) and the Pleasures of *Wine*, with *agreeable Company* ; He planted beautiful Gardens, Vineyards and Groves, interwoven with artificial Streams ; to improve the Relish of those his Delights, and as the Crown of all, he had all Sorts of *Musick* attending him, both Vocal and Instrumental ; so that he had whatever his Heart could desire to make himself happy this Way if this could do it. And what was the Result of all this ? Why truly, a few serious reflecting Thoughts discover'd to him, that *All was but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*. I said of *Laughter*, it is mad, and of *Mirth*, what doth it ? And what doth it indeed ? 'Tis profitable for nothing, and when *excessive*, and attended too *extravagantly*, 'tis naturally as well as *morally* an Evil ; It *unmans* and effeminates the *Soul*, and *dispirits* and hebetates the *Body*. The most *profuse Laughter* ends in a *Sigh*, and *Uneasiness*, and looks much like *Madness*, and is a certain Indication of *Folly*. A *decent cheerfulness* is commendable upon many Accounts ; but to make a Trade of *Jollity*, to be always upon the *Laugh*, and spend the *greatest* Part of a Man's *Time* in *Recreations* and *Diversions* ; as 'tis a very *childish* thing, and looks much like the Behaviour of *Naturals* and *Changelings*, so 'tis a very *unease* thing too, and grows from a *Pleasure* into a *Toil* and *Burthen*. Witness such Persons frequent shifting and changing
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one Diversion for another, how at a *Loss* sometimes they are, how to dispose of their Time, and what Sport to go to next, and how quickly tir'd they are with their idle Employment? And, it may be very truly said, there is *less* of Pleasure in a Course of Life that is always *hunting* after Pleasure, and intent upon nothing else, than in a more severe serious Way of living, which *but now and then*, and sparingly tastes of Mirth and Recreations, and soon returns to things of more Weight and Concern. And the Reason is, those *light* Sort of Enjoyments are so empty of what will gratify a *Rational Soul*, that they presently grow *flat* and *insipid*, and become *tedious* rather than *diverting*, when *too long* dwelt upon, and suck'd too *dry*. A *short transient* Enjoyment is most agreeable to their *fading* perishing Nature; and as he enjoys the Fragrancy of a *Rose* both *more* and *longer*, who smells of it *gently* and with frequent *Intermissions*, than he that uses it more *roughly*, and presses it too *constantly* and too *hard*; so he experiences much *more* of the *Sweet* of *Mirth* and *Pleasantry* who but *seldom* and *moderately* uses it, than he that makes it his *Business*, and follows it as *close* as others do their *Callings*. Even in *Laughter* (when extravagant) says the *Wise King*, *The Heart is sorrowful, and the End of that Mirth is Heaviness*, Eccles. 7. 2. Nay, he says, 'tis better to go to the *House of Mourning* than to the *House of Feasting*; for that
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may have some substantial good Effect upon a Man, Death being the End of all Men; and the living, at such serious Times, may be inclin'd to lay it to Heart; whereas Follity and Mirth wholly evaporate into Folly, and leave nothing behind them that is any Way profitable, unless it be Repentance. Sorrow and Seriousness make Men consider, and become receptive of wise Instructions; but a light, frothy Temper, both exposes a Man's Folly, and fatally prevents his growing Wiser: It shews that he is a Fool, and that he is like to continue so. For, as the crackling of Thorns under a Pot, so is the Laughter of a Fool; there is much of Noise in it, but it serves to no other purpose than to shame himself. And thus we have seen what the Heighth of Mirth and Follity amounts to; namely, Disappointment, Vexation and Uneasiness, Shame and Vanity, Madness and Folly.

Having thus summ'd up the true Value of one of the Three things in which consists the Happiness of the World, the Lusts of the Flesh, or those things which more immediately gratifie our bodily Appetites; let us now look into the

Second, which is call'd by the Apostle, the Lust of the Eyes; that is, Riches and great Abundance of this Worlds Good, such as ample Possessions, magnificent Structures, a Splendid Equipage, glorious Apparel, and the like: Which are call'd the Lust of the Eyes, because

cause 'tis the Sense of *seeing* that these things affect with the greatest Pleasure.

Now, suppose a Man to have *all* of this Nature that the *World* can help him to; suppose he has Riches enough to answer all these things, to *provide* all this Splendor and Magnificence, and to *support* and *maintain* it: What more will it amount to, than, as *Solomon* expresses it, *the beholding of it with our Eyes?* Eccles. 5. 11.

For, as for great Treasures of *Gold and Silver*, though they may procure many things to delight the *Eye* and please the *Fancy*, yet the Man that hath 'em remains still as *Nature made him*, none of the Powers or Faculties either of his Soul or Body receive any *Improvement* nor Alteration unless it be for the *worse*. But Money will erect *magnificent* and stately *Buildings*, 'twill purchase *rich Furniture*, and all that Art can do to adorn and beautify them. 'Tis true, it will so; but, will those stately Structures preserve a Man better from the Injuries of the *Air* and *Weather* than more ordinary Houses? Shall a Man *sleep better* in a *costly* than a *meaner* Bed? And, will a Fever handle him more gently that lies within Curtains of *Velvet*, and has his Chamber adorn'd in the most costly Manner, that one that is contented with a cleanly Meanness? If not, still 'tis the *Eye* that receives all the *Pleasure*.

As for the splendid *Equipage* of the Men of great Possessions, a Croud of Attendants following them, in gay Liveries, glittering Coaches, and the like; this may please the *Eye* too; but what more does it effect? 'Tis but Two or Three of those Attendants that can be *serviceable*, the rest are own'd to be for *State* only, and are kept for little else than to eat and drink and be troublesome; and the Experience of all Men will tell us, that he is the happiest Man that stands in need of the *fewest* Servants, and retains no more than he stands in *need of*. As for fine Coaches and glorious Apparel, if *Gola* upon a Coach, and *costly Trappings* would make a Journey more safe and easie, and if rich Cloths would keep one *Warmer* or last *longer*, or be less *troublesome* than a more ordinary Habit, there might be something said for them: But, since there is nothing of this in them, nay, rather they are *less* serviceable to the Ends they were at first design'd for, and that *over-Niceness* and *Curiosity* in *Dress* or any thing else is the Occasion of much *Disturbance* and *Uneasiness*: The beholding these gay things with the *Eye*, is all that is considerable in them. And, what does the *beholding* of all these splendid Sights amount to? Is there any *through* and *lasting* Pleasure in it, any thing that will make a Man *happy*, or so much as *promote* his Happiness? Why truly, *Solomon*, who experienc'd all of this Nature to the *full*,
gives

gives us this Account of it; *He that loveth Silver shall not be satisfied with Silver, nor he that loveth Abundance with Increase, Eccl. 2. 4, 11. When Goods are increased they are increased that eat them, and what Good is there to the Owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their Eyes? Eccl. 5. 10. A Pleasure very empty and unsatisfying (for the Eye is not satisfied with seeing) and which their meanest Servant may have as well as they.*

Content is least of all in the Breasts of Persons of the *highest Rank*; he that has much would still have *more*, and is in frequent Fears of *losing* what he has; for Riches are known to be very *uncertain*, and unaccountably take to themselves Wings and fly away: and to be in fear of *losing* Riches, and yet *dissatisfied* in the Possession of them, carries much more of *Uneasiness* with it, than the *beholding* of them with ones Eyes does of *Pleasure*; and a Stranger or a Servant may take not only as *much*, but *more* Pleasure in the Sight, than the Proprietor and Master that *hath*. So true is that of the Apostle, *They that will be rich fall into Temptation and a Snare, and pierce themselves through with divers Sorrows*; 1. Tim. 6. 9, 10. and *Contentment* with only Food and Raiment is a much greater Happiness. To so very little in reality does arise the *Second* thing, in which consists the Happiness of the *World*, the Gratification of the *Last of the Eyes*; even to no-
thing

nothing but *Dissatisfaction* and *Disquiet*, *Vanity* and *Vexation of Spirit*.

Come we now to examine the *third Part* of this World's Treasure; the *Pride of Life*, or, *Honour, Power and Dominion*. And very fitly is this stil'd the *Pride of Life*, it being the Aim of most men to be *great*, to *command and govern*, and to have much of *Honour and Respect* paid to them, and in this they *pride* themselves more than in any other *Worldly Good* that they possess. But what is there in all this that a Man can justly value at so high a Rate? Suppose a Man to be Monarch of the *whole World*, and to be without *Controul* from any one on Earth, and to give *Laws* to every Man besides; suppose many *inferiour Princes* tributary to him, and that he is honoured like a *Mortal God*; suppose all this, yet, however glorious it may appear at a *distance*, we shall find, upon a closer *Inspection* that *this* likewise is *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*.

For, as for even an *universal Dominion*, unless the *Subjects* were as willing to *obey*, as the *Monarch* is desirous to *govern*, a *Catholick Crown* would sit as *uneasie*, nay, *more so*, than that of *lesser Princes*. The further a *Man's Dominion* extends, the more *Difficulties* in *Government* will occur, the more *ambitious and discontented Spirits* will there be to *tame and keep in order*; the more *secret Conspiracies* and *Underminings* of Men *aggriev'd and*

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unoblig'd, and that are as desirous of Government as he that sits in the Throne can be: And which, will often break out to shake and discompose, if not to overturn the present Establishment. And the more extensive a Princes Dominions are, the more must there be employ'd in the Government of them, and those Men of different Interests and Inclinations, *jealous* of one another, and *envious* at the *Supreme*, and more ready to carve for themselves and advance their own Families, than sincerely to endeavour the Prosperity of their Master. This is found very true, and the Occasion of much Trouble and Disquiet, to Princes that have Affairs more in their *own View* than this *universal* Monarch can be supposed to have; and therefore much more dangerously must *he* sit than *they*, and receive much more *Disquietude* and Trouble if he takes *Notice* of the Motion of his great Orb; and if he does *not*, where is the Pleasure of governing?

So that the most *ample* Dominion is thickest set with Thorns and Briars while enjoyed, and in continual Danger of a Ruin; which must perplex him that is *sensible* of it, with Numberless Fears and Jealousies, and anxious Thoughts how to secure his Throne; And he that is *careless* and *unsensible*, and leaves the Fatigues of Government to *others*, and spends his Days in nothing but Ease and Luxury; is an Emperor in Title only, and may soon, for any thing he knows, be not so much

as that. The one leads a Life of *Vanity*, the other of *Vexation of Spirit*.

That 'tis easier to obey than to govern, is an usual and very true Saying; and would be so, were Thrones not near so *slippery* as they are; and I am sure 'tis very much happier for a Man never to have had such Height of Power and Dominion, than ever to see himself thrown down and laid in the Dust. The very *Danger* of so great a Fall, is enough to fill ones Breast with great *Disorder*, so great as that all the Gauderies of Grandeur shall lose their Taste, and become *insipid* to him, and *actually* to fall (as many glorious Princes have already done) is the greatest Misery that can be experienc'd upon Earth.

The short is, Empire and Dominion, fancy it how great soever, is at best very *troublesome* and *disquieting*; and so *uncertain*, as that it not seldom ends in the very *Depth* of *Ruin*. And as for the *Honour* that goes along with it, *glorious Titles*, *low Obeisance*, and the like; all of this Nature is so perfectly *empty*, and utterly ineffective of any thing that's truly good and *Profitable* to a Man, that 'tis of all things the most *despicable* and of least Regard: And though 'tis fit Inferiours should pay it where 'tis due, yet unless an inward Veneration of the *Mind*, attends that outward Respect of the *Body*, a great Man is so far from being *honoured* by it, that 'tis the greatest *Mockery* and *Abuse* that can be. And because

no great Man can tell whether he is *inwardly* revered or no, neither can force any Man so to honour him against his Will; 'tis a very great Weakness for him to set any great *Value* upon *outward* Respect, which for ought he knows, nay, in all likelihood may be, an *Affront* rather than an *Honour* to him. And this is what *Honour, Power and Dominion* amount to.

Having thus given in an Impartial Account, and that confirmed by the experience of *Solomon*, who enjoy'd it all to the *Full*, of the *Sum Total* of what *this World* can afford, that can pretend to be of any *Worth and Esteem*; by examining the *Three Particulars* in which is contained all that is *valuable* in it; namely, *the Lust of the Flesh, the Lust of the Eye, and the Pride of Life*: Let us now weigh *Religion* against it, and see which does *preponderate*, which is the most *weighty and substantial* Good, and consequently, whether the *Merchant* in the Parable did *wisely* or no, in selling *all that he had* that he might purchase *this Pearl*, and be Master of this *Treasure*? And we shall consider *Religion* in a two-fold Respect, with Relation to *this World* as well as the other.

And first, as for the *Value of Religion* with Relation to *this World*: what is of greater *Esteem* than *Peace and Quietness, Contentment and Satisfaction of Mind, a Long and Healthy Life here*, and a comfortable *expectation* of a much *better endless Life* in the *Regions of Glory*?

Glory? And all this, Religion is the only sure Way to attain.

What the World it *self* affords we have seen cannot make us happy in it; its Riches, and Pleasures, and Honours, and Power, and Dominion are empty and unsatisfying; and indeed, the Parent of nothing but *Vexation of Spirit*: And therefore I shall wave the Enquiry how far Religion is conducive to *these* things; though it might be made apparent, that this is the surest Way even to become *rich*, to live *Pleasantly*, and with *Honour* and *Respect*: and as for Dominion, to govern a *Mans self*, which Religion only teaches, is more than to govern the *World*.

Now, as to Peace and Quietness, which are Blessings of the first Magnitude, and indeed give a Relish to every thing else; for without them neither Riches, nor Honour, nor even Health and Life it *self* sits easie: That Religion is the only sure Way to procure these great Blessings, and that both in *Private* and in *Publick*, Abroad with others, and at Home in a Mans own Breast, will soon be evident.

As for Peace and Quietness in our Intercourse with *others*, Religion does manifestly tend to procure that, upon these two Accounts.

1. Because it forbids the *offering* any Injuries.
2. Because it forbids *returning* any. Now that which embroils the World, and is the Occasion of all Contention, being the *doing* and *Retaliating* Harms and ill Turns, and

Religion so strictly commanding us to love our Neighbours as our selves, to do *to others* nothing but what in like Circumstances we would be willing to receive *from others*; and to *forgive* if any have done injuriously by us, as we hope to be forgiven by God at the Day of Judgment: 'Tis plain that were our holy Religion sincerely embrac'd, and had its due Influence upon the Minds of Men, the World might (in the Literal Sense of the Words) *beat their Swords into Plough-Shares, and their Spears into Pruning Hooks, and need not learn War any more; nothing would then hurt in God's Holy Mountain*: And the World would be what God at first design'd it; a Paradise of Happiness, and Mankind a Family of Love. And as for Peace and Quiet at *Home*, in a Mans own Breast, and without which all other Peace would lose its Relish, Religion is the only Way to attain that Blessing. For as long as there is such a thing as Conscience (which there will be as long as a Man is in any Possibility of Salvation) it will do its Office freely and impartially, and lash the Soul that sins, as often as it sins, and fill it full of Horror and Confusion and dreadful Apprehensions of the just Vengeance of God at the Day of Retribution. *There is no Peace, saith my God, to the wicked; but their Souls are like the troubled Sea which cannot rest, and whose Waters cast up Mire and Dirt.* But a good Mans Breast is quiet and serene, full of the Joys of Innocence, and

and the Applauses of a *Conscience void of Offence both towards God and Man.*

And as Peace and Quietness, so *Contentment* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, is the natural Product of Religion, and of that only.

Without Contentment of Mind, no Condition how good soever in its self, is pleasing, and *with it, every Condition* is. For Happiness consists in the *Proportion* of the *Object* to the *Desire*, and he that has the *whole* of what this World can afford, if he desires still *more*, and thinks his present Condition not good enough, is by many Degrees less happy than he that must *drudge* for his living, but yet is *contented* with his Lot, Happiness consists not in *Abundance*; he only is indeed a *happy Man*, that is so wise as to enjoy his present Portion, and knows how *patiently* to endure a *worse* Condition, and dreads a base and wicked Action, however gainful and advantagious it may be, even worse than Death. And he'll for ever be a Slave that can't be satisfied with a little.

But the *contented Man* is always easie under his present Lot; and if his Fortune will not *rise* to what he could *desire*, he will bring his Desires *down* to his *Fortune*; and so be sure of Happiness, because by this means his Desires and his Fortune bear a due Proportion to one another. And truly, so various are the Turns of Fortune here, so many unexpected Accidents that make great Changes for the worse in Mens Circumstances of Life, and which 'tis utterly

out of their Power to have any Influence upon so as to amend; that were there not this Remedy of making our Minds *comply* with the Event, and taking out the Sting and Venom of it by Acquiescence and Contentment and *Contraction* of our *Desires*, Man would be the most miserable Creature upon the Face of the Earth. But he that has learned and can apply this Remedy, whatever he may suffer from without, has a Power still ready of turning it into *Good*; and though he can't prevent the *Accident*, yet he can prevent its doing him a *Mischief*.

Now this excellent Remedy for the Calamities of Life, Religion best of all teaches us. For in the first place it teaches us that God is the great Governour of the World, and with the exactest Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness disposes all things; and consequently, that all Events are as they should be, and upon the whole Account ordered for the *Best*: For there is no Possibility of *amending* what is done with infinite Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness. And secondly it teaches us that our *Interest* does least of all lie in *this* World, where we are but *Strangers* and *Foreigners*, and are to continue but for a *little while*; and that our *Treasure* and *Inheritance* is in *Heaven*, which is our Native Country, and to which e're long we shall be recall'd, and our Glory and Happiness there be the more increas'd, as we have more patiently and contentedly submitted to
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God's Pleasure here upon Earth. And a hearty thorough Perswasion of these two things, will certainly teach a Man *to know*, with St. Paul, *How to abound and how to want, and in every Condition to be content.* And for this, Christianity gives the clearest *Evidence*, even the Word of God himself, *who cannot lye*; as no Man can be to learn that has read the Scriptures.

But *Irreligion* on the contrary, is the great *Destroyer* of Content, and fills the Soul with continual Vexations, and makes every cross Accident doubly evil by Impatience. For first, the ungodly have not *God in all their Thoughts*, are wholly taken up with *second Causes*, and look upon things as the Effect of *Chance* and *Fortune*; and so when Crosses come upon them, or *ill Fortune* as they call it, they grow querulous and out of all Patience; and as for *Divine Providence*, that's wholly unregarded, unless it be to *revile* it and impiously to call in question the Goodness and Justice of its Disposals. And so, *that* which in Affliction is the greatest Cordial of all, Irreligion either wholly *deprives* the Soul of, or turns it into Poison; and instead of *disarming* a Misfortune by humble Submission to the infinitely wise, and just, and good Disposals of the great Governour of all things, adds a thousand sharper stings to it, and makes that become *intolerable*, which Religion would have made to sit *light* and *easy*.

Again, Content is destroyed by Irreligion,
because

because it perswades Men that their whole Interest lies here below; either by making them believe there is no such thing as another World, or else by engaging them so fast to this, as to hinder their attending to any thing beyond this Life: And the Effect of this is great eagerness in acquiring these lower goods, impatient Desires of still more and more of the World, as that in which is concentrated their whole Happiness. And what else can be the Consequence of this amidst the great Uncertainties that attend these sublunary things, but a World of Trouble and Discontent, answerable to those numerous cross Accidents and Disappointments which every Condition is full of from the highest to the lowest? Every unlucky Hit to such Men is like a Dagger stabbing to the very Heart; for that which a Man looks upon as his *chief Good* he can by no means endure to have lessened and impaired: And the World being so full of such vexatious Mishaps, how full of Wounds must be the Spirit of an ungodly Worldling!

And as *Content*, so *Satisfaction* of Mind, which is much more than a submissive *Acquiescence* in our present Condition, and supposes a Happiness that is *complete* and *full*. This is a Blessing which nothing but sincere Religion can ever make the Soul experience: And he only that has learned to make God the chief Object of his Affections and Desires, can indeed know what *Satisfaction* is.

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For every thing besides God is unsatisfying, because flitting and momentary, and very imperfect, and empty of that infinite Good which is the only adequate Object of that infinite Desire of Happiness which is in the Soul of Man. This is the Reason that Men are so constantly disappointed in their Expectation of Happiness from the Enjoyment of this World's Good; let them continually have what they desire (which yet is too much to be rationally supposed of any Man) and enjoy it fully and without Controul, yet still there will be something wanting to compleat their Happiness, something that they desire still further; and so the Soul is continually baulk'd of her Expectation, and still at a Loss for Happiness, and continual Longings and Desires, and as continual Disappointments, are her Portion in this World. And what's more uneasy and vexatious than such a Condition as this? What more deplorable than even by Fruition it self to be made unhappy? What other Refuge has the miserable Soul in this Case, than to take off her Affections from these empty Nothings here below, and as Religion directs, fix them upon him who is the *Supreme Good*, and will abide the Test of an *Eternal Fruition*. In the Enjoyment of *him* must needs be *Infinite Satisfaction*, because there is no real Good that we can possibly desire, but is in the Divine Nature in the highest Degree of Excellency and Perfection; and that not only for a Time, but

to

to all Eternity. All the Capacities of the Soul must needs be fill'd with an infinite Good, and intirely rest in it as in the Center of Happiness.

Thirdly, Religion is of very great value with respect to this World, because 'tis so greatly conducive to a *long and healthy* Life in it.

Long Life and Health is that which all People naturally covet, and is indeed a very great Blessing; and that not only because the longer Men live and the more vigorous they are, the longer and more fully they enjoy, or at least hope to enjoy the good things of this World (which yet with too many is the main Consideration) but likewise and *chiefly* because they have more Time and greater Opportunities to provide for the Happiness of the Eternal Life to come, and heap up still greater Treasures of Glory in the Kingdom of Heaven. Now this great Blessing nothing is more likely to help a Man to than Religion. For,

First, it engages Men to live regularly and temperately, moderates the Appetites of eating and drinking, and curbs the exorbitant Desires of the flesh; and by allowing no more than is necessary to the Comfortable Support of Nature, makes no Provision for those many destructive *Diseases* which are always the Attendants of *Excess*. How many of the meaner Sort by *Labour* and *course* Fare protract their Days, than of the Rich who live in Ease and Luxury? And the Reason is plain, because the poor Man's scanty Fortune will not

not allow him to *exceed*, but keeps him within the Bounds of Moderation and Temperance, and forces him to be content with a *little*; whereas the rich have many and great Temptations to Luxury and Excess, and seldom are so Religious as to *resist* them, and so too frequently feel the sad Effects of Intemperance and live out but half their Days. But now, Religion is a kind of *Voluntary Poverty*, and helps Men to all the *Blessings* of a mean Condition, though rich and out of Danger of the *Sting* of it; and by introducing *Temperance* and *Moderation* into the Families of the Wealthy, brings with it Health and long Life, which otherwise would seldom be found but in the Cottages of the Poor.

Again, Religion is greatly conducive to a long and healthy Life, because it regulates the *Passions*, keeps the Soul quiet and in a *Calm*; which has no little Influence upon the Health and Welfare of the Body. That the Passions of the Mind do very much affect the Body, is undeniable; and when they are *excessive*, nothing more shakes and discomposes the whole Man. Even *Joy*, which one would think should be Innocent enough, has sometimes been so violent as to overcharge Persons and leave them Dead, and *Grief* has been often fatal, and *Envy* is the worst Sort of Consumption, and leaves visible Tokens of it upon the Countenance, and *Love* has had many Martyrs, and *Anger* is a great Impoverisher of the
Animal

Animal Spirits, and oftentimes makes a Man his own Executioner, and engages in such Scuffles and hot Inconsiderate Actions, as not seldom end in *Wounds* and *Death*. Every Excess of Passion of what kind soever, is naturally a great *Impairer* of Health at least, and the often Repetitions of it, the ready Way to *destroy* it; Nature not being able to bear such violent Concussions long, without being much weaken'd and shatter'd by them: Like the Walls of a Castle, which, how strong soever, will receive Damage by every furious Battery, and unless reliev'd, must at length fall before the Cannons Irresistible Force.

But now, Religion prevents all this Mischief; and by regulating and reducing to *Moderation* these Passions of the Soul, makes the Mind calm and quiet, and keeps the Spirits in an *Æquipoise*; and the Body consequently is undisturb'd, feels no Violence, nor is hurried on to dangerous and destructive Actions; but Nature goes on *evenly* in making Provision for its Health and Support, and it enjoys its Strength and Beauty as in the Times of Quietness and Peace.

In the last Place, a comfortable Expectation of a much better and endless Life in the Regions of Glory, can spring from nothing but sincere Religion; and therefore Religion is of very great Value with Respect to *this* World. For what can be of greater value and more to be desired in this Valley of Tears, this World
of

of Sin and Sorrow, and Ignorance, Vexation, and Disappointment, than to have a well grounded Hope that 'twill not be *always* so with us? That there will be a Time when all Tears shall be wip'd from our Eyes, and Sin and Misery be at an End for ever? That we shall one Day be disentangled from the Clog of Flesh, the Prison Doors set open, and our captiv'd Souls set free, and with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory, return to the great Father of Spirits, and with the full Vigour of all their Faculties contemplate and enjoy the only satisfying Good? That instead of Floods of *Tears*, there shall then be Rivers of *Pleasures* flowing in upon us to all Eternity; *Halleluja's* instead of Groans and mournful Accents; the Triumphant Rejoycings of Eternally Beatified Spirits instead of the bitter Complaints of miserable Mortals; and in a word, *Love* in its Perfection instead of Quarrels and Discontents, Envy and Hatred, and Malice, and Revenge, and all the dire Attendants of them? That instead of spiritual *Blindness* and *Ignorance* of the most *concerning* Truths (for here we know but in Part, and see through a Glass darkly) we shall e're long, be admitted to contemplate *Truth it self*, and *know as we are known*, and shall see *God as he is*, and in him all things? For *God is Light*. What can be more valuable than such a cheering expectation as this! How will it sweeten all the Troubles of this Mortal Life and be a sensible

sible Foretaste of the Glory that shall hereafter be revealed!

But now, nothing can create such a Hope as this but *sincere Religion*; for God is infinitely *pure and holy*, and into his Presence no *unclean* thing can enter. And 'tis expressly said in the Revelations of his Will, *That without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord.* A wicked Mans Breast that is not *scared*, can be full of nothing but the dire Reflections of an enrag'd Conscience, and dreadful forebodings of the Wrath to come. The Miseries he feels in *this World* are but as the Beginnings of his Eternal Sorrows; and while he *continues* in his Rebellion against God, he can expect nothing but new Expresses of his Indignation here, and to be doom'd to the Portion of the Devil and his Angels at the Day of Judgment. He only that has liv'd piously in this World can with any Comfort think upon a future State: But to him that has led this *First Life* by the Rule of Religion, and serv'd his Maker in Sincerity of Heart, no Joy comparable to that which he experiences when he thinks of being dissolv'd, and conducted to the Embrace of his Saviour, in the Kingdom of Heaven, where he shall be for ever with him, and unspeakably happy in the Joy of his dear Lord.

And thus much for the Value of Religion with Relation to this World. It is the Parent of the most perfect *Peace* and *Quietness*, *Content* and *Satisfaction* of Mind, of a long
and

and *healthy* Life here; and of a comfortable Expectation of a glorious Immortality in the Regions of Blessedness. And were this all that could be said of it, I question not but to any considering Man, it would appear to be a *Jewel of inestimable Price*; that nothing the whole World can afford is comparable to it; and that he is the wisest Man, who, with the Merchant in the Parable, immediately parts with *all* that stands in Competition with Religion, and would hinder him in the Performance of the Duties of it.

But this is far from *all*; Godliness has not only a Promise of the Life that *now is*, but also, and chiefly of that which is to *come*: And, if it appears to be so inestimable a Treasure when we look no further than this Life, what shall we think of it when we contemplate that exceeding Weight of Glory which shall be its Reward in Heaven!

The Happiness that will crown Religion in the other World; springing from the same Fountain from whence do flow the Felicities of *God himself*; (*i. e.*) it consisting in an intimate View and full Enjoyment of the Beauties and Perfections of the Divine Nature (for so *St. John*, 1 *Joh.* 3. 2. *We shall see God as he is,*) it must needs be *inexpressible*: Nay, the very *Contemplation* of it is too bright for Minds darkned with Flesh, the Splendors of it flash too strongly upon our feeble Sense now we are in the Body, and too long and

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closely

closely gaz'd on will rather dazle than enlighten our Understandings. No Mortal Man can see God's Face and live; and therefore most true is that of the Apostle, *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive the things that God hath reserv'd for those that love him, 1 Cor. 2: 9.* Indeed, this includes all that can possibly be imagin'd of Excellence, and much more than we poor ignorant benighted Creatures can imagin.

For God is the Fountain of Being, and consequently of Perfection: All that is charming and truly desirable in Nature, to our Senses, or to our Understandings, in the visible or invisible Creation; is but a Stream from this Divine Fountain, and is in *him* in infinitely greater Excellency. For, he is Beauty, and Goodness, and Harmony *it self*. And therefore since Religion will bring us to such a Happiness as the Vision and Enjoyment of this chief Good; what can compare with it for Value? *The Depth says, 'tis not in me, and the Sea says, 'tis not with me; Man knoweth not the Price thereof, neither is it found in the Land of the Living. It cannot be valued with the Gold of Ophir, with the precious Onyx or the Saphire; no mention shall be made of Coral or Pearls, for the Price of Wisdom is above Rubies, Job 28. 13, &c.*

Such then being the Excellency of Religion, that it is above all things conducive to the Happiness of Man in *this* World, and will

will bring him to the Enjoyment of God himself to eternal Ages, when this short Life is ended; and the whole that the *World* can afford, amounting to no more, by the Confession of one that enjoy'd it all to the Full, than *Emptiness* and *Disappointment*, *Vanity* and *Vexation of Spirit* here; and if the Word of God be true, an eternal *Banishment* from the *Supreme Good* shall at last be their Punishment, who love this worthless *World*, more than Religion and their Maker: These things being duly weighed and considered, let any Man in his Wits say, which is of greatest Value, *Religion* or the *World*? And which is the wisest Man, he that ruins his Soul for the Gain of even the whole *World*, or he that counts all these sublunary things as *Dung* in Comparison with *Religion*, and is ready to part with *all* that this Earth can afford him for the Joys of a good Conscience here, and the Glories of Heaven hereafter? He that prefers the *World* in his Choice, deprives himself of the greatest Comfort of this *present* Life, and parts with the certain Reversion of eternal Happiness in *Heaven*, for Pleasures that don't deserve that Name; they are so *empty* and *unsatisfying*; he brings most exquisite and everlasting Misery upon his *whole* self Soul and Body, for a very short-liv'd imperfect Gratification of his *brutal* Part only, and purchases the Torments of the other *World* by making himself *unhappy* in this.

In a Word therefore, as much as to be like God in *Holiness* and *Happiness* is to be prefer'd before being like the *Devil* in *Sin* and *Misery*; as much as *Satisfaction* is better than *Disappointment*, *Peace*, and *Quietness*, and *Content*, than *Vexation* and continual *Disturbance* and *Perplexity* of Mind, a confirm'd Health and long Life, than the *Diseases* and *hasty* Death that follows *Debauchery*, and the comfortable Expectation of being for ever happy with *Saints* and *Angels*, and the blessed God in the *Cœlestial Paradise*, than the confounding Dread of the Judgment of the Great Day: As much as *Immortality* is more to be prized than a Life of a Span long, and the Enjoyment of the *chief Good*, than the Pleasures of a *Swine*; of so much greater Value is Religion than all that this World can afford, and indeed the only desirable *Treasure*, and a *Pearl* of *inestimable Price*.

And now, if what has been hitherto discours'd be true, the Application is easie. If Religion be of all things the most precious, let us make it more and more our Endeavour to *enrich* our Souls with this *Treasure*, to *adorn* our rational Nature with this *Pearl of great Price*; and with the Merchant in the Parable, think nothing too much to part with, that we may purchase that Heavenly Wisdom which will make us wise to Salvation. For, *sound Wisdom*, as the wise King expresses it, is a *Tree of Life* to those that lay hold upon her, and
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happy is every one that retaineth her, Prov. 3. 18. She shall give to thine Head an Ornament of Grace, and a Crown of Glory shall she deliver to thee, Prov. 4. 9.

But, he that would have this Wisdom, and find this Pearl, must not only *wish* and *desire*, but, with the Merchant in the Parable, diligently *seek* it; *seek and ye shall find*, says our Lord; and Solomon assures us, *That if we seek Wisdom as Silver, and search for her as for hid Treasure, then shall we understand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God*, Prov. 2. 4, 5.

Religion is not acquired without *Diligence*; for though it be the Gift of God, yet the Soul must be prepared to receive it; all evil Habits must be broke and rooted up, and pious Dispositions planted in their room, and the Temper of the Mind changed by Repentance, and all the Powers of the whole Man become pliable to the Motions of the Spirit of Holiness before the Divine Likeness can be formed in the Soul. And though 'tis the Grace of God that enables us to go thus far (for without it we can do *nothing*) yet our own Concurrence and *Co-operation* with his Grace is necessary to bring the blessed Work of Regeneration to *Perfection*. An obstinate *Resistance* of preventing Grace will grieve and *quench* that Life-giving Spirit; and such a Soul shall know no more of Religion, than that it was invited to it, but rejected the Offer, and *might* have

been happy in the Enjoyment of so great a Treasure, but it *would* not. But, when a Soul with Joy embraces the Motions of the Holy Spirit to a new Life, and makes it her great Endeavour to remove all Obstacles out of the Way, that they may make a due *Impression*, and hungers and thirsts after *new* Degrees of Righteousness; This Soul shall be *fill'd* with the Treasures of the Divine Grace, and the Power of Godliness will be visible in all manner of holy Conversation. But this can't be perform'd without a *watchful persevering Diligence*; there is so much Opposition from within and without to this great Business, that like *Nehemiah's* Labourers, we must work with our *Swords in our Hands*, Neh. 5. 17, and fight and strive, that we may carry on the Building of a living Temple for our God, and make our Souls Houses of Prayer, adorn'd with Religious Affections, and fit to receive him that hates Iniquity. He that is thus diligent shall grow *rich towards God*, and daily increase in the Knowledge and Love of him, 'till Mortality shall be swallow'd up of Life; and then all the *Labours* of Religion shall for ever be at an End, and nothing remain for the happy Soul to do but to enjoy to all Eternity the glorious *Rewards* of it.

Let us all therefore be *steadfast, unmoveable, and always abound in this Work of the Lord, for as much as we know our Labour shall not be in vain*; and to our diligent Pursuit of this

inestimable Treasure of Religion, let us add frequent and earnest Prayer to God, who is the only Giver of every good and perfect Gift, that he would send down Wisdom from his Holy Heaven, that being present, she may labour with us, that we may know what is pleasing in his Sight, and set our selves to do it with all Alacrity, running with Diligence and Patience the Race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our Faith; who for the Joy that was set before him, endur'd the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the Right Hand of the Throne of God, Heb. 12. 1, 2. Remembering that we also shall reap in due Season, if we faint not: And if we part with all vile Affections for the Sake of Religion in this World, and are ready in Preparation of Mind to suffer any worldly Loss, even to that of Life it self for the Sake of Jesus and his Truth; we shall find such a Recompence of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven, as will abundantly compensate all our Sufferings here; for our light Affliction which is but for a Moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory.

Happy is the Exchange of all that this world can afford for a Jewel of so great Price as Religion, and for such inexhaustible Treasures of Bliss as are reserv'd to Reward it in the presence of God. What is our greatest Interest therefore let us before all things pursue, and where our Treasure is, there let our Hearts be also.

The P R A Y E R.

I.

O Merciful Jesu! Who hast prepared for us a Treasure in Heaven, and taught us the Way to attain it, and warn'd us of the Emptiness of this World's Good, that we may not be allur'd by its Temptations to leave the Way to Life; enable me I intreat thee so steadfastly to attend thy Divine Instructions, that I may more and more daily take off my Love from that which does not, cannot satisfy, and is indeed but Vanity and Vexation of Spirit, and fix it upon that which is above all things valuable: That so, I may be convinc'd by a happy Experience, that true Pleasure, and Freedom, and Happiness, is only to be met with in thy Service; and that I am so little design'd for the Delights of the World and of Sense, that the longer I live to prove them, the less capable I shall be of their Enjoyment. O may that Peace and Tranquility within my own Breast, that Quiet with others, that Health and Length of Days which is in the Left Hand of Religion, and the durable Riches and true Honour that is in her Right, and that chearing Expectation of Heaven when this frail Tabernacle shall be dissolv'd; may this which is the natural Off-spring of true Piety leave so lovely an Idea of it upon my Soul, that I may value it as indeed the greatest Treasure, and a Pearl of inestimable Price! And may I be so wise, as where my Treasure is, there to fix my

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Desires, and thither to direct my Endeavours, and part with every thing that is my Hindrance in the Acquisition of it! And since this Pearl is not cast before Swine, and this Treasure must be diligently sought for e're it be found: Do thou so purify and refine my Affections, that I may above all things, hunger and thirst after Righteousness, and search for this saving Wisdom as for hid Treasure; and may thy blessed Spirit, which leadeth into all Truth, so guide and direct me in my Search, that seeking I may find, and having found, never more part with that inestimable Jewel, though for the Gain of the whole World, but rather sell all, even Life it self to secure my Possession of it. And this Wisdom I earnestly beg of thee O Lord, who art the Giver of every good and perfect Gift, through the Merits of Jesus thy beloved Son, our only Saviour. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE IV.

Of a Merciful King, and his Unmerciful Servant.

Matth. xvij. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a certain King, which would take Account of his Servants.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him Ten Thousand Talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his Lord commanded him to be sold, and his Wife and Children, and all that he had, and Payment to be made.

The Servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord have Patience with me and I will pay thee all.

Then the Lord of that Servant was moved with Compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the Debt.

But the same Servant went out, and found one of his Fellow Servants which ought him an Hundred

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dred Pence : And he laid hands on him and took him by the Throat, saying, pay me that thou owest.

And his Fellow Servant fell down at his Feet, saying, have Patience with me and I will pay thee all.

And he would not ; but went and cast him into Prison, till he should pay the Debt.

So when his Fellow Servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their Lord all that was done.

Then his Lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all that Debt because thou desiredst me :

Shouldst not thou also have Compassion of thy Fellow-Servant, even as I had Pity on thee ?

And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the Tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my Heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Trespases.

THis Parable was spoken upon St. Peter's asking our Lord, how often shall my Brother Sin against me and I forgive him? Till Seven Times? ver. 21. To which Question the compassionate Jesus first answers directly, I say not unto thee till Seven Times, but till Seventy Times Seven : ver. 22. And then illustrates that his Answer, and shews how great
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an *Obligation* we have to *forgive Injuries*, and how sad will be our *Punishment* if we do not, in the Parable above written. In which Parable, there are two things in general to be considered.

First, The merciful *Example* of Gods dealing with us miserable Sinners, who lay under a vast Debt to his Justice ; express'd by a King's taking account of his Servants, &c. and forgiving, &c.

Secondly, His great *Displeasure* against those that will not *imitate* that his compassionate *Example*, in *forgiving* such as have been *injurious* to them, express'd by the Kings being wroth with his unmerciful Servant, who, though he receiv'd so much Kindness himself, would shew none to his Fellow Servant who owed him a Trifle in Comparison ; but, without the least Compassion, threw him into Prison till he should pay it ; upon which his Lord *delivered him over to the Tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.*

Under the *first* General, there are three Particulars to be considered.

First, the Greatness of the Debt which by Sin we have contracted to the Divine Justice, expressed by *Ten Thousand Talents.*

Secondly, the Impossibility of our ever clearing this Debt, and the sad Consequence of it still should have remain'd upon Account, express'd here by the King's Debtor *having nothing to pay*, and the King's commanding that therefore

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he should be sold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, that so Payment might be made.

Thirdly, The wondrous *Compassion* of our good God, in *pitying* our miserable Condition; and *forgiving* us all our Debt; expressed by that King's being mov'd with *Compassion* at the deplorable Condition of his insolvent Servant, and *loosing him and forgiving him the Debt*.

Under the *second General* there are likewise three *Particulars* to be consider'd.

First, What it is to forgive one another as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us, and the great Obligation we have to imitate this Example of our merciful God.

Secondly, Our great *Baseness* if we do not; and,

Thirdly, The miserable *Consequence* that will attend that *Baseness*, we shall provoke God to *recall* his Pardon to us, and *be deliver'd over to the Tormentors till we shall pay all that is due unto him*.

The first *General* to be consider'd in this Parable, is God's *Example* in dealing with us miserable Sinners, who lay under a *vast Debt* to his *Justice*; express'd by a *King's taking Account of his Servants*, and freely *forgiving one that was deeply indebted to him*. And the first *Particular* to be consider'd under it, is, the *Greatness* of the *Debt*, which by *Sin* we have contracted to the *Divine Justice*.

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By contracting a Debt to the Divine Justice is meant the having *violated* the just and holy *Laws of God*, and thereby becoming *obnoxious* to his just *Anger*, unless we satisfy his Justice some other Way. As a *convict Criminal*, we say, has not *satisfied*, or is *indebted* to the *Law*, till he has suffer'd the *Punishment* for his *Crime* which the *Law* thinks fit to *inflict*; or else finds *Favour* and has it *remitted* him.

As for the *Greatness* of the Debt which Mankind by his Sin has thus contracted to the Divine Justice, 'tis express'd in this Parable by *ten thousand Talents*; which, according to our Way of Reckoning, is above a *Million of Pounds*. A vast Sum this, but yet far short of what we owe to the Justice of God by Reason of our Iniquities; which are, not only *Millions*, but *innumerable*, even as the *Stars in Heaven*, and the *Sand upon the Sea-shore*: Nor are they only *numberless*, but very *great*; not only many *Thousands*, but many thousands of *Talents*. Every Sin, as 'tis a wilful Violation of the *Laws of God*, has Weight enough (*if God should be extreme to mark what is done amiss*,) to sink a Soul into eternal Ruin: And the Reason is because *God's* is the *highest Authority*, and his *Laws* most *just and equal*, and we have an *infinite* Obligation to *obey* him, both as his *Creatures* and *Dependents*, who *live* by his *Favour* and *Bounty*, and have received *numberless* and *inestimable Blessings* from

from him ; and likewise as *rational* Creatures, that we may *perfect* our own *Nature*, by the Practice of those *Virtues* which will *conform* us to the *Image* and *Likeness* of *God* himself. And therefore, *Sin* being an *Opposition* to the *highest Authority*, a *Violation* of the *best* *Laws*, a *Breaking* through the *strictest* *Bonds*, those of *Submission* to the *Author* of our *Being*, and of *Gratitude* to the *Giver* of *all the Blessings* we enjoy ; and likewise of *Self Love* and *Preservation*, in rejecting the *Means* of advancing our own *Nature* to the *Similitude* and *Enjoyment* of *God*, which is our *chief Happiness* : *Sin* being *all this*, must needs be *exceeding sinful*, and indeed the *greatest Evil*, and in no case *eligible*. And therefore, the oftner 'tis repeated, and the more of *Choice* there is in the *Commission* of it, and the more *heinous* the *Instances* of it are, and the greater *Obligations* Men are under by Reason of *God's Bounty* and *Goodness* to them (whether as to natural or spiritual *Endowments*) to *serve* and *obey* him ; the *higher*, proportionably rises the *Guilt* of *Sin*. And he that *often* and *wilfully* commits *great Impieties*, notwithstanding *infinite Obligations* to the contrary (which *was* and *is* the *Case* of every *Sinner*) is indebted to *God's Justice*, not only *Ten Thousand Talents* ; but *Ten Thousand Millions* of *Talents* ; *i. e.* his *Debt* is *infinite*, and unless some *Miracle* of *Mercy* intervene, the *divine Justice* cannot be satisfied but by his undergoing an *infinite Punish-*

Punishment. And all the World must acknowledge it *just*, that *Sin* being the *greatest possible Evil*, should be repay'd with the *greatest Possible*, that is, *Eternal Punishment*.

So *vast* a Debt then, lying upon all Mankind by reason of their Sins; it is most true in the

Second Place, That 'twas utterly impossible for them of *themselves* ever to *clear* this debt, and make Satisfaction to the Divine Justice; and the sad Consequence, should it have still remain'd upon *Account*, would have been no less than *eternal Misery*. Which is represented very *lively* in the Parable, by the King's Debtor having *nothing to pay*, and the King thereupon commanding *that he should be sold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, and Payment made*, 2. Kings 4. 1. According to the Custom of the *Jews* in so using Debtors that were not able to pay.

'Tis utterly impossible for Mankind of *themselves* ever to have paid this vast Debt, because *every* individual meer Man is deeply engag'd and always will be so in the same Account; so *deeply*, that he can never clear *himself*, much less make Satisfaction for *others*: Nor is there any thing valuable enough in all the Treasures of Nature to buy off this Sentence, *just*, though *sad*, *The Soul that sinneth shall Dye. Wherewith shall I come before the Lord*, says the Prophet *Micah*, when he had a Controversie with the People for their Sins,
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and wherewith shall I bow my self before the high God? Shall I come before him with Burnt Offerings, with Calves of a Year old; will the Lord be pleased with Thousands of Rams or Ten Thousands of Rivers of Oil? Shall I give my First-born for my Transgression, the Fruit of my Body for the Sin of my Soul? Micah 6. 6. As if he had said, what's all this to him that is the Creator of every thing, the Lord and great Proprietor of all already; and whose Glory and Happiness is infinitely above even our most exalted Thoughts and Conceptions? He that is an Ideot that does not confess that all the Riches of the Universe are utterly insufficient, as the Psalmist expresses it, to *redeem the forfeited Souls of Mankind, so that that must be let alone for ever*: All therefore that is in Man to give being, far from sufficient to commute for the Punishment his Sins have deserved; God's Justice must be satisfied by his *undergoing* that Punishment; that is, eternal Death; for ever *dying* yet never dead, *extremely* miserable and *for ever* so. A Punishment so inexpressibly great, that *Annihilation* is much to be prefer'd before it; for who can dwell with *everlasting Burnings*! Who can bear an *eternal Banishment* from the *supreme Good*, and Confinement to the dire Abodes of the Devil and his Angels, those merciless Executioners of the Divine Justice, who will exact the Pains we are to suffer with the utmost Cruelty! Who can bear the *Gnawings* of that

never dying Worm, Remorse of Conscience, for *forfeiting* such infinite *Happiness*, and plunging our selves headlong in such a *bottomless Misery*, and that for the Sake of what was always *empty* and *unsatisfying*, even when we did *enjoy it*! And who can bear the Horrors of *Despair* of ever seeing an *End* of such Torments as these, which yet might have been intirely avoided if we would! *This is indeed* an unconceivably *miserable* Condition, and all Men that ever lived must have been involv'd in it, had not the *Wisdom* and the *Goodness* of God found out a means both to satisfy his *Justice*, and at the same Time to be *merciful* to his miserable Creatures: To *forgive* the Debt to those that had nothing to pay, and yet to have full *Satisfaction* made him for it. 'Tis what could never have enter'd into the Heart of *Man* to *conceive*; 'tis the great Mystery of Divine Love, which even the Angels desire to look into, and 'tis that which is and shall be the Subject of Eternal Hallelujah's in Heaven.

Thirdly therefore, let us consider the wondrous *Compassion* of our good God, in pitying our sadly deplorable Condition, and *forgiving* us all that Debt which we could never have *paid*, though we had *suffered* the Pains of Hell, for *those* shall never have an *End*; and this is express'd in the Parable by the King's being mov'd with *Compassion* at the miserable Condition of his *insolvent* Servant, and *loosing him* and *forgiving him the Debt*. The

The King in the Parable was very merciful, who, upon the *humble Entreaty* of his poor Servant, and his Promise if he would have Patience with him at length to *pay him all*, was moved to Compassion and forgave him: But God is infinitely *more* merciful in compassionating *our* Condition, and forgiving our great Debt, as will appear from the following Considerations.

For first, *Our* Debt is infinitely greater. Ten Thousand Talents, in Comparison of the *numberless* Number of the heinous Sins of Mankind, are but as the Sand of an *Hour-Glass*, compar'd with that of the *Sea-Shore*; and *one wilful* Violation of *our* Obedience to God, is a *far weightier* Debt to the Divine *Justice*, than Millions of Talents would be from one Mortal to another. And the Reason is plain, because the *distance* between God and Man is *infinite*; and for a *Beggar* to spurn at a *Prince*, is certainly a Crime of much higher Aggravation, than to do the like to one of his own ragged Gang.

All that is culpable (as was said) is met together in a *wilful Sin*; and therefore infinite and amazingly great must be the Guilt of all Mankind, who have heap'd up Transgressions without Number; and have *no way* left of *paying* this great Debt, but by suffering without End the *Pains of Hell*. And such a dreadful Punishment as this, being annex'd to Sin by him who is infinitely *good* and *just*; is Ar-

gument sufficient, that there is no Debt comparable to that which a guilty Sinner owes to the Justice of God. And therefore, when God gives *Mercy*, so great an Exaltation as to forgive so *vast* a Debt as this; 'tis Compassion impossible to be parallel'd.

Secondly, God's Compassion in forgiving us is infinitely greater than that good King's in the Parable, because we less deserve God's Favour than that poor Servant did his Lord's. *He* acknowledg'd his Debt, and was griev'd for his not being able to discharge it and humbly *submitted* himself to his offended Lord; but 'tis quite otherwise with us, *we* add *Obstinacy* and *Pride* to our long Score, are still in actual Rebellion against God, and daily more and more provoke him by *new* Impieties: *We* make what haste we can, as the Prophet expresses it, to *fill up* the Measure of our *Fathers* Iniquities and our *own*, rather than by *Repentance* and *better* Life, to *lessen* the great Account that is against us.

And this is to enflame God's *Anger* rather than to move his *Compassion*, and does indeed deserve *quick Vengeance* rather than *Forgiveness*. And yet, so boundless an Ocean is the *Divine Goodness*, even in this *rebellious* State God pities his poor unhappy Creatures, and is full of *Compassion*, *long-suffering*, and of great *kindness*, and *repenteth him of the Evil*; and when we deserve nothing but the *severest* Punishment, thinketh upon *Mercy* and *forgiveness*;
and

and proposes very easie Conditions of Reconciliation and Readmittance to his Favour, and even *courts* us to accept them: *Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways, for why will ye dye O House of Israel!*

Now for the great and infinitely *happy* God, to treat such *hardned Rebels* at so tender and compassionate a rate; to be so ready to forgive those who not at all *deserve* it, but rather the utmost Expresses of his *Vengeance*; is doubtless a Mercy *infinite* and beyond Comparison.

Thirdly, The poor Debtor in the Parable *humbly besought* his Lord's Pity and Forbearance, he fell down on his Face and worshipped him, and by that his *humble Behaviour* and *earnest Intreaty*, inclin'd his Lord to commiserate his sad Condition. But instead of this, we are not so *little* sensible of, or afflicted with *any* thing, as that great Debt we owe to the Divine Justice. So *far* from passionately *begging* for our Pardon, that we spend but very few *Thoughts* about it, and *most* of us are very *little*, and some not at all *apprehensive* of the Need we have of being again receiv'd into God's Favour, and the sad Consequence if we are *not*: And are far more sollicitous about *promoting* some *petty* Interest in *this* World, than about the *Pardon of our Sins*, which is the One Thing necessary in Order to our Escape from *Hell*.

And this is so great a *slighting* and *undervaluing* God's Forgiveness, expresses so much

indifferency whether he does it or no; that one would think it should be enough to provoke God to *resolve* their *Destruction*, and swear in his Wrath that they shall never enter into his Rest.

And yet, so wondrously compassionate is our good God, *unsought* to, *undesired*, he of his own meer *Tenderness*, intirely forgave the *past* Offences of his thoughtless Creatures, and for the *Future* still promis'd Forgiveness to such as should offend anew, upon this only *easte* Condition, that they should no more *wilfully* break his holy Laws, and immediately *repent* when through *Surprize* or *Inadvertency* or the Force of *Temptation* they should do amiss. And to be thus merciful notwithstanding so much Provocation to the contrary, is Compassion that has no Parallel.

Fourthly, God's Goodness in pitying and forgiving *Sinners*, is infinitely greater than that of the King in the Parable in forgiving his poor Debtor; because the *Misery Mankind* is delivered from by this Mercy of God, is infinitely *greater*, than *that* which the poor wretch in the *Gospel escap'd* by the Compassion of *his Lord*.

His Punishment, had his Lord dealt *rigorously* with him, would have been, that he should be sold, and his Wife, and Children, and all that he had, that so, in some Measure at least Payment might be made; and the *utmost* that this could amount to was *Poverty*
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and *Slavery*, both of *himself* and all his *Family*, all the *Days* of his *Life*: Which though indeed a very *sad* Condition, and such as no *Submission* could be too great, no *Entreaties* too earnest to *avoid*; yet certainly, comes infinitely short of these *eternal* Miseries in the *Regions* of *Darkness*, and in the *Society* of the *Devil* and his *Angels*, which would have been the *Portion* of the *whole Race of Mankind*, had not *God's* merciful *Forgiveness* prevented it, and given us better *Hopes*.

Now the greater the *Necessity*, the greater the *Charity* that *relieves* it; the greater and more *general* the *Danger*, the more valuable the *Rescue*; the more extream the *Misery*, and the greater the *Number* of those that were condemn'd to suffer it, the greater the *Compassion* that relents and delivers from it. It being therefore absolutely *necessary* that *God* should *pardon* Sinners, that they might escape the *Punishment* due to *Sin* (for they had nothing to pay) and the *Danger* of those *Punishments* being *imminent*, the *Measure* of *Mens* *Iniquities* rising to so *great a Height*; and the *Misery* that would have involv'd all *Man kind* had *God's* *Vengeance* had its free *Course*, and *Sin* its due *Reward*, being no less than that of *Hell*, and that *forever* too: That *Compassion* of *God* that inclin'd him to forgive so *many* wretched *Debtors* as the *whole Race of Mankind*, and prevented such otherwise *unavoidable, endless* and *unconceivable* *Misery*; was certainly

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Fifthly, The *Consequence* of God's forgiving Sinners is infinitely *happier* than that of the Forgiveness of the poor Debtor in the Parable.

He, after his Lord's loosing and forgiving him, was out of Fear indeed of that sad Misfortune which otherwise must have fal'n upon him; he enjoy'd his Liberty, and that of his Wife and Children, and continu'd still in Possession of what he had, 'till he forfeited all again by his Cruelty to his Fellow Servant, which was no mean Comfort; but then this was all: We read of no *new Favours* confer'd upon him, or that he was entrusted with any more of his Lord's Revenue, or the like.

But now, the compassionate *God*, has to *Forgiveness* of Sinners, added innumerable and inestimable *Favours*; dignifi'd them with the Title of his *Sons*, communicated to them fresh Assistances of his blessed Spirit to help and guide them in the Way to Happiness; and promised them Crowns of eternal Glory, and everlasting Inheritances in Heaven, and an intimate Vision and Enjoyment of *himself* (who is the Center of Felicity) provided they continue sincerely obedient to him for the Time to come. There is no Happiness which a rational Creature is *capable* of, but God, in his infinite Mercy freely and bountifully confers upon Mankind, now that his Compassions have reconciled them to him; and in the

Words

Words of St. Paul, *He gives us richly all things to enjoy*, 1 Tim. 6. 17.

And for God, not only to *forgive* obstinate Rebels against his Divine Government, to pass by their vile *Ingratitude* to *him* their greatest Benefactor, and base Abuse of his Blessings to his Dishonour; but to confer upon them *Favours* of the greatest Value, to receive 'em into his own *Bosom*, and make 'em Coheirs with his eternal Son, and advance 'em to his heavenly Kingdom: This is such an admirable Expression of the Divine Goodness and Love of Mankind, as could never proceed from any other but him who is *Goodness it self*.

In the last Place, that which exalts the Compassion of God to the highest Degree, and makes it indeed *miraculous*, is the amazing Course he took thus to shew *Mercy* in the *Pardon* of Sinners, and yet *satisfie his Justice* too.

The King in the Parable was at Liberty to dispose of his *own* as he pleased, and he might have forgiven, without further Regard to any thing of *Justice* in that Case, a *greater Debt* if it had been owing to him: But in the Case of God's forgiving *Sinners* it was otherwise. God had before solemnly declar'd to our first Parents, and very often afterwards, that *the Soul that sinned it should die*; and his Justice was concern'd to see that Sentence executed; and in the Nature of the thing likewise 'twas perfectly *just* that the Violaters of God's holy and good Commands, ungrateful Rebels
against

against their *Creator* and greatest *Benefactor*, should receive a due *Recompence* for their *Wickedness*.

Now *Justice* is as essential to *God* as *Mercy*; and though his infinite *Goodness* mov'd him to have *Compassion* upon *Sinners*, yet his *Justice* pleaded for their *Punishment*; *Mercy* would remit the *Debt*, but *Justice* required *Satisfaction*. A Difficulty this, which mortal *Wit* could never solve. But *God*, who is infinitely *wise* as well as *good* and just, that the *Work* of his *Hands* might not perish, nor his *Image* and *Likeness* be for ever miserable, and that his *Justice* likewise might be fully *satisfied*; contriv'd a wondrous *Way* for the *Redemption* of *Sinners*, by freely forgiving 'em their vast *Debt*, and yet making full *Satisfaction* to his *Justice* for the *Sins* of the whole *World*. And that was, by the *Incarnation* of his blessed *Son*, and substituting him in our *stead*, to suffer, as the *Representative* of *Mankind*, the *Punishment* due to their *Iniquities*, and by his spotless *Blood* to make an universal *Atonement*, and through the *Merit* of that his *precious Sacrifice* (for what's above the *Merit* of the *Blood* of the *Son* of *God*?) to purchase for them *Pardon* and *Forgiveness*, the *Love* and *Favour* of *God* in this *World*, and the eternal *Enjoyment* of him in the next. And by this means, as the *Apostle* expresses it, *to declare his Righteousness, that he might be just; and the Justifier likewise of him that believeth in Jesus, Rom. 3. 26.* Thus

Thus *Mercy* and *Truth* are miraculously met together, and *Righteousness* and *Peace* have kiss'd each other. And for ever blessed be that infinitely *wise* and *just* *Compassion*, which in so wondrous a *Manner* contriv'd the *Forgiveness* of our *vast Debt*, and the *Satisfaction* of the *Divine Justice* too! What *Love* can be greater than this, that *God* should send his eternal *Son* into the *World* to be the *Propitiation* for *Sinners*! And that while we were *Enemies*, *Christ* should dye for us, and bear our *Sins* in his own *Body* on the *Tree*, that through his *Stripes* we might be healed! *Wonderful art thou, O Lord, in thy Doings towards the Children of Men, and thy Mercy is over all thy Works!* And *O* that our *Hearts* might be warm'd with the same *divine Flame*, and *we might love much, to whom so much hath been forgiven!*

And thus much for the first thing to be consider'd in this *Parable*; namely, the glorious *Example* of *Forgiveness* that *God* has set us, in his dealing thus mercifully with us miserable *Sinners* who lay under a *vast Debt* to the *Divine Justice*, and had nothing to pay; and how infinitely this *Compassion* of *God* to *Sinners* exceeds the greatest and most generous *Expression* of *Forgiveness*, that can be shewn by one *Man* to another. 'Tis greater than the *King's* forgiving *Ten Thousand Talents* to his poor *Servant* in the *Parable*, because he entreated him and had nothing to pay.

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I proceed now, to the *second* General to be consider'd in this Parable, which is, God's great Displeasure against those that will not *imitate* this his compassionate Example, in forgiving such as have been injurious to *them*; but like that wicked Servant to whom the King had been so *gracious*; rigidly requiring full Satisfaction for little *Trifles* and *Puntilios*. As he, no sooner out of the Presence of his compassionate Lord, *but took his Fellow-Servant by the Throat, who ow'd him an Hundred Pence*, and though intreated to have Patience, as earnestly as he had but just before intreated his offended Lord, yet without the least Pity, threw him into Prison till he should pay the Debt. The *Consequence* of such a *vengeful* Temper will be like that of this cruel Servant, who was not only severely *rebuked*, for his Wickedness, but had the Pardon his Lord gave him *recalled*, and *was deliver'd over to the Tormentors till he should pay the uttermost Farthing*. So likewise *shall my heavenly Father do unto you*, says our Lord, *if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Trespases*. And under this General there are likewise, as was said, Three Particulars to be considered.

First, What it is to forgive one another, *as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us*; and the great *Obligation* we have to imitate this Example of our merciful God. To forgive one another in Imitation of the Divine Example,

ample, is *first* to forgive such as have injured us, *freely* and without *Reserve*; and that tho' they still continue to shew themselves our Enemies, and are ready to do us fresh Mischiefs when it lies in their Power. For *this*, as we have seen, God dealt with us miserable Sinners; he *first* loved us, and while we were yet Sinners, and consequently in open Hostility and Rebellion against him, even then he sent his Son to dye for us, and be the Propitiation for our Sins: He took pity upon us when we were still adding new Wickednesses to our long account, and when we *deserved* nothing but Eternal Misery, thought upon Mercy.

And in Imitation of this our Lord commands us to love our *Enemies*; not to render *Evil* for *Evil*, but contrariwise *Blessing*; that *so we may be the Children of our Father which is in Heaven*. For, to use our Saviours Enforcement of this; if those only share in our Affections or Esteem, who are as beneficial and kind to us as we to them, what Thank have we? Self-Love and Interest may there be the Motives, and very little of True Piety and Goodness; nay, even the very worst of Men may be as eminent for such Sort of Charity as the best, Publicans and Sinners, as our Lord observed, doing the same. But *Christians* should be of a more *Godlike* Temper, their Charity more free and disinterested; the greater and more frequent *their* Injuries, the more ready should they be to pardon and *forgive*; and

and not only be reconciled after a *seven-fold Wrong*, but after one repeated *seventy-times seven*. And our Saviour has likewise further enforced this by his *own Example*, who with his last Breath pray'd for the Forgiveness of his *cruel Murtherers*.

Secondly, We must not only forgive such as but little *deserve* it, but likewise in Correspondence to our *Divine Pattern*, whether they *desire* it or no: For thus it was in God's Forgiveness of Sinners, he *prevented* us by the Riches of his compassionate Goodness, and entreated his *Rebellious Creatures*, first by his Prophets, then by his only Son, to be reconcil'd to him, and embrace their Pardon. And thus, *those that will be Imitators of God as dear Children*, must likewise do. Rather than Enmity should continue we must *seek* to our Enemies to be reconcil'd, though they were the first that *offered* the Offence. And this, however hardly it may sound, is not only our Duty, by Vertue of that *general Command* of forgiving one another *as God has forgiven us*, but is expressly commanded by our compassionate Saviour, *Mat. 18. 15.* (which occasion'd that Question of *St. Peter*, verse 21. *How often shall I forgive my Brother?* Upon which our Lord deliver'd this Parable) his Words are these, and deserve our serious Attention. *Moreover, if thy Brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If thy Brother trespass a-*
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gainst thee, or as we usually express it, first did the Injury, or gave the Affront, go thou to him, stay not till he comes, and acknowledges his Fault to thee, for that's a thing Men are very backward in doing, either for fear or for Shame, or out of Pride and Greatness of Spirit, as it must be term'd, or for other Reasons; and Time usually wiaens such Breaches, and encreases Strangeness and Aversion: But go thou therefore to him in Meekness and the Spirit of Forgiveness, and with Resolutions of passing by all further Unkindnesses, and it may be reproaches for your good Will, calmly tell him his Fault, expostulate the Case with him, and in all Likelyhood he will hear thee, a right Understanding between you will ensue, and thou shalt gain thy Brother. This is indeed to be like God in this great Excellence of forgiving Injuries, and is, as a most noble Expression of Christian Charity, so we see very plainly commanded by our Lord, and should be taken into our serious Consideration in order to our agreeable Practice.

Thirdly, We must not only so far forgive as not to revenge, but in Imitation of the Divine Pattern of Forgiveness set before us, be ready to do all Acts of Kindness and Beneficence to our Enemy, as Occasion shall serve, and his Needs require: remembering the Words of our great Master: Do good to them that hate you, and pray for those that despitefully use you and persecute you, for so shall ye be the Children of the Highest, who

is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. And we must endeavour to confirm the new made Agreement, by more than ordinary Expressions of good Will, that we may heap Coals upon our Enemies Head to melt him into a Correspondent Charity; and likewise that there may be no Place left for our Enemy or our selves to *doubt* the Sincerity of our Forgiveness. For the *smoothest Words* may be rotten and deceitful, and the not *revengeing* an Injury may be for want of *Power* or *Opportunity*; but when to good Words, *beneficial Actions* are added, then may a Man well be thought to love and forgive, not in *Word* only, but in *Deed and in Truth*.

This is *Christian* Forgiveness of Injuries, or, in the Apostle's Words, *the forgiving one another if any have a Quarrel against any, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us; Ephes. 4. ult. i. e. freely and intirely*, though their Malice *still continues* against us; nay, to go and *offer* 'em Forgiveness and Reconciliation tho' they neither *desire* nor *deserve* it, and to accompany our Forgiveness with Acts of *Kindness* and *good Turns*.

But what has been said upon this Account must have a *Limitation*; lest if bound indiscriminately upon *all Men* and at *all Times*, that is, in *all Instances* of Wrong, in thwart and run Counter to other Duties of our holy Religion. Now in order to our being inform'd of the just Limits of this great Duty, we must consider

consider that Injuries may be of three Sorts ; affecting either Men's *Persons*, their *good Names*, or their *Estates* : And each of these may be either in Danger of *Ruin* by the Injuries of a wicked Man, or only greatly *damag'd*, or the Injury may be but *small* and *trifling*, and such as brings no *considerable* and *lasting* Ill Effects along with it. Now such Injuries as threaten *Ruin* to a Man in any of those *Respects*, ought not to be silently let pass, nor the Man *so* forgiven as to have no Notice taken of him ; and such a legal *Prosecution* of him as is necessary to *secure* a Man's *Person*, or to *vindicate* or recover his blasted *Reputation*, and to preserve his *Estate*, all or either of which would be *ruin'd* by the injurious Person if tamely let alone ; a legal *Prosecution* in such Cases as these, is allow'd by the Law of *God* and *Nature*, as well as *that* of the *Land*. And the Case is proportionably the same as to Injuries that *greatly endamage* a Man in any of those *Respects* before mentioned : And were *all* Wrongs, how great soever, to be submitted to and put up in Silence by Christians, by *Ver-* tue of the *Command* of forgiving Injuries ; 't would be to betray the *Sheep* to the *Wolves*, to expose the *Disciples* of *Christ* to the *Malice* of all the wicked *World* ; which is not consistent with the *Wisdom* and *Goodness* of the great *Shepherd* of the *Sheep*, *Christ Jesus*. And *St. Paul* says expressly, *He that provideth not for his own House, i. e.* for the comfortable

Subsistence of his Family, *has deny'd the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel: i. e.* Acts contrary to the Obligations both of *Nature* and Religion. But *he* will soon ruin, instead of *supporting* his Family, who suffers ill Men, without Interruption to make what Havock they please of his *Person, Reputation* or *Estate*.

But now as for *smaller* Injuries in any of these Respects, such as make no *great* Alteration in our Circumstances, and may be born without any *great* Inconvenience; these are to be pass'd by, and the Injury forgiven according to the Measures before described: And 'tis observable that the Instances our Saviour makes use of in this Matter, are of the lesser Sort of Injuries, such as a Blow on the Cheek, the taking away of a Garment, and the like; and 'twas for being rigorous about a few *Pence*, that the King in the Parable was so wroth with his Servant: And rather than a Christian should embroil himself in Law-Suits, and run the Hazard of losing the Ornament of a meek and quiet Spirit for such small Matters, he should suffer a Repetition of *such* Injuries. And indeed, as Religion is in all Respects the greatest *Prudence*, so particularly in forbidding *Litigious* Quarrels, unless a Man's *whole* Interest, or at least a *great* Part of it be at Stake; for *Law* is now become a *boundless* Ocean, and generally very rough and Stormy, and swells Men's Passions to an exorbitant Height, and shipwrecks their *Charity* as well as their *Estates*.

And

And as to those greater Injuries our Saviour mentions, *Mat. 5.44.* of Men's being our *Enemies* profess'd, and *hating*, and cursing, and *despitefully* using, and *persecuting* us : Neither he nor his *Apostles*, there or any where else forbid *Christians* endeavouring in a legal manner to secure and defend themselves, and recover their own, but only not to return Evil for Evil, and to be so far from Purposes of *Revenge* or *retaliating*, such Injuries, as rather to *love* and *bless* and *pray for*, and do *good to*, upon Occasion, those that deal so maliciously by them ; and to manage the Suit or Contention with them with *Charity*, having no *Rancour* or *Malice* in their Hearts against the *Person* of their Adversary. That is, in short, our Holy Religion does oblige us in *lesser* Injuries intirely, both to pass by the Offence, and forgive the *Offender* according to the Measures before described ; but in *greater* Injuries of any Sort, where Ruin or insupportable Damage will follow, though it permits, nay, obliges to endeavour a legal Reparation, and so *not* to forgive the *Offence*, yet *Christians* must as intirely, and according to the same Measures forgive the *Offender*, as in the smallest Instances of Wrong. And by this Means they will become the Children of their Heavenly Father, who though in infinite Mercy he forgave the World of *Sinners*, and moreover bestowed on them richly all things to enjoy ; yet in the Person of his blessed Son their Representative, he severely express'd

his Displeasure against their *Sins*, that they might be deter'd from persisting in them afresh, to the *Ruin* of their immortal Souls.

Besides those Injuries that terminate upon a Man's *self* and his own Concerns, there are others done to our *Neighbour* and the *Publick*, which must not be pass'd by without animadverting upon them according to their Deserts. As for Instance, if a bloody Villain Murders a Man's Friend or Neighbour or Relation, and he knows who is the Murderer, it may be he *only*; in this Case, whatever Inclination he may have to conceal it, whether out of Natural Compassion, or Unwillingness to be the Occasion of the Man's Execution, since nothing can recall the murder'd Person to Life, and the Murderer may live to repent, or the like: Because he is a Member of Society, and obliged, as much as in him lies, to promote its Safety and Happiness, which by such Villains is much *disturb'd* and *lessen'd*, and would be *ruin'd* should such Men pass *unpunish'd*; 'tis his Duty to endeavour by all lawful Means to bring so heinous an Offender to condign Punishment, that so *corrupt* a Member being cut off from the Community, the Health of the whole may be better secur'd. And so in all Cases of the like Nature. Always remembering that if any thing of *private Revenge* be intermix'd, it pollutes the Action, and makes the Man doubly guilty of *Malice* and *Hypocrisy*.

What

What has been hitherto said concerning the *Limits of forgiving Injuries*, concerns Men only as *private Persons*: As for *Magistrates* and *Governours*, they being constituted by God to be a *Terror to evil doers*, to be *Revenge-ers to execute Wrath upon them*, and to *praise and encourage* those only that do well: Rom. 13. 3, 4. The Measure of their Forgiveness of publick Injuries, is the publick Good; so far as is consistent with their Obligations as *Magistrates*, as is conducive to the common *Weal*, according to the Judgment of *Prudence* and *unprejudic'd Reason*, they may, and do well to incline to Lenity and Compassion; but a *foolish* and a *mercenary Pity* is a betraying their Trust, a *bearing the Sword in vain*; and such *Magistrates*, instead of being *Fathers* of their Country, are indeed the *Perfidious Destroyers* of it. And thus much for the Nature of *Christian Forgiveness of Injuries*, in Imitation of the Divine Pattern God has set us, with its general Limits.

As for the great *Obligation* we have to *Copy* after this admirable Pattern of our Merciful Heavenly Father; it is two-fold, 1. With Respect to *God*. 2. To our *Selves*.

First, With Respect to *God*, our Obligation to forgive *one another* as he has forgiven us is very great, because 'tis what he has declared will be highly *pleasing* to him, as a Resemblance of that Perfection of his Nature which he seems most of all to take *Delight* in. For

so, *Exod. 33. 19.* when *Moses* desired to see his *Glory*, he told him he would make all his *Goodness* pass before him; and *Chap. 34. 6.* The Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, abundant in Goodness and Truth, keeping Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, Transgression and Sin.* And accordingly, *St. John* gives the Definition of him, *God is Love.*

Now certainly, those that have receiv'd such infinite Favours from this good God, and have been forgiven so vast a Debt, as we Sinners have; have the greatest Reason in the World to endeavour to the utmost of their Power, to please this their greatest Benefactor in every thing. And nothing being more pleasing to him than to see the Image and Reflection of his Divine *Love* and *Philanthropy* upon the Souls of his Creatures, to see 'em love and compassionate one another according to his glorious Example; we are infinitely obliged to imitate his Pity and Forgiveness towards us, in passing by the Offences of our *Fellow-Servants*. Further, those to whom God has forgiven so vast a Debt as that which miserable Sinners ow'd to the Divine Justice, are questionless bound, and that with the strictest Ties to love him infinitely again; but now *St. John* says plainly, that *he that loves God must love his Brother also, and if a Man say, I love God, and yet hateth his Brother, he is a Liar, and the Truth*

Truth is not in him : 1 John 4. 20, 21. For as he says, Chap. 3. 17. *He that shutteth up his Bowels of Compassion from his Brother, how dwelleth the Love of God in him ?* And therefore as much as we are bound to love our good God, who has forgiven us our *numberless Iniquities*, so much are we bound to *manifest* that our Love to him, by being pitiful and gentle to our *brethren* that have injur'd *us*, and ready to *forgive* them : For so says our Lord, shall ye be my *Disciples*, and so shall ye be the *Children* of your *Father which is in Heaven*. And doubtless that wicked Servant in the Parable, had not so due an Apprehension of his Lord's great Compassion to *him*, nor so *grateful* a Sense of it as he ought to have had, who could immediately forget the miserable Condition he was so lately in *himself*, and how much he dreaded lest his Lord should rigidly exact his great Debt of him, and how importunately he begg'd that he would have *Patience* with him ; and yet use so much *Cruelty* to his Fellow-Servant for a Debt very inconsiderable. He could not but know that such *Barbarity* would be very contrary to the compassionate Temper of his Lord ; and therefore was bound in *gratitude*, if upon no other Account, to imitate his Lord's Example, and not immediately act what would be so displeasing to him. And so it is in our Case ; God is *Love*, and has wondrously *manifested* his *Love* in forgiving us miserable Sinners ; and therefore

we are bound in *gratitude*, and because 'twill be *pleasing* to him, were that all, to imitate that his Charity, and mutually to love and forgive one another. But when besides, we have our Saviours exprefs *Command* for it, *Mat. 5. 44.* and *Luke 6. 37.* and that, *not until seven times only, but until seventy times seven*, as in the Verse before this Parable: As much as Men are obliged to obey the *Commands* of God their Saviour, so strong is their *Obligation* to forgive Injuries with respect to God.

Secondly, Our *Obligation* is very great to imitate God's *compassionate Example* with respect to our *selves*. For 'tis the best Way to *secure Quiet, and Peace and Happiness*; and as much as every Man is bound to provide for his own *Quiet, and the Peace and Happiness of Society*, and of his own Soul too in the other World; so much is every Man bound not to be malicious and revengeful, but of a Temper ready to *forgive*.

For however *sweet Revenge* may seem to be to malicious Spirits in the *Execution*, it must needs make the Mind very *uneasie* before 'tis executed, and bring great *Calamities* along with it *afterward*, and is the most base *devilish* Temper in the World, and makes a Man a *Fiend incarnate*. Whereas as an *Aptness to forgive*, is a *Godlike Disposition*, for God is *Love*, the *Spring* of Kindness and *Compassion*, of *Mercy and Forgiveness*; and as *his*
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Happiness is the Result of the Excellencies and Perfections of his *Nature*; so those who resemble him in the most *glorious* of those Perfections, must needs likewise enjoy a great Share of Tranquillity and inward Bliss. But if *God* be the great Exemplar of *Forgiveness*, how groundless is the usual Objection against this excellent Vertue of Christianity, that it betrays a *mean servile* Spirit, and is a thing much *below* a Gentleman! Can any Man of common Sense think it a Disgrace to be like *God*, and that in his most *glorious* Perfection too? If *God* be the Fountain of Honour, we must allow it to be rather, the most *noble generous* Action in the World.

It is the best Way likewise of *ending* Strifes, and *overcoming* our Adversaries by rendring *Good* for *Evil*. It eases the Mind of those great *Disquietudes* that constantly attend Desires of Revenge; it prevents all the Mischiefs that *follow* it, such as *fresh* Injuries from the Party we revenge our selves upon; if we leave him his Life, and the Stroke of Justice if we persue him to the Death. But besides these evil Consequences of Revenge, and many others which *Forgiveness* prevents, there is more true *Pleasure* and *Sweetness* in the *Act* of Forgiveness and *Reconciliation*, as was hinted above, than in that of *Revenge*.

For however the Devil may hurry Men on in an eager Pursuit of Revenge, and flatter 'em with the Hopes of great *Satisfaction* when

when 'tis *perfected*; yet there is a secret *Horror* and *Aversion* to it from *within*, which, as 'twere pulls *back* the Hand when going to strike; or what other way soever it be expressed, endeavours to *hinder* it, and makes the Heart recoil and repent of the Undertaking, and *execute* it with *trembling* and misgivings of Soul; and immediately *after* come dire Forebodings of the Vengeance of him to whom Vengeance belongeth, and a Kind of Hell upon Earth. But *Forgiveness* is attended with *Applauses* of Conscience, and the *Approbation* of Reason, and *Chearfulness* of Spirit: There is an inward Pleasure and *Satisfaction* of Mind quite throughout the Action, and when 'tis *completed*, no Man can express the silent *Joy* that runs through the whole Soul, and it seems a Foretaste of the Joys of the Blessed in *Heaven*.

Even that Part of *Forgiveness* which seems most of all impracticable, and contrary to Flesh and Blood, that of *swing* to a Man to be reconciled that has *done* the Injury, and still *continues* to be one's Enemy; *this* does of all yield the *greatest* Pleasure to the Soul: And that, not only because 'tis the *nearest* Resemblance to the Mercy of God, who sent his Son to mediate between him and us, and by his Death to reconcile us to himself, when 'twas *we* miserable Wretches that had *offended*, and were then in *actual* Rebellion against him; but from the Nature of the thing *it self*.

self. For 'tis a kind of *surprizing* a Man into Charity before he is *aware*. When Men *do* Injuries, they generally stand upon their *Defence*, and expect to *receive* Injuries again; but when a Man finds, instead of this, Acts of Friendship and Good-will, and Readiness to forgive, and Peace and Quietness *offer'd* so *freely*, and upon such easie Terms, without the *Shame* and natural Regret in *seeking* it, and *asking* Pardon, and making *Satisfaction*, and the like: How pleas'd must the Man needs be, to find a *Friend*, when he fear'd and expected an Enemy? Few Men love Strife for *Strife's sake*, and many a Man injures another in suddain *Heat* and *Passion*, and in cooler Blood *repents* of it, though he can't prevail with himself to *ask Forgiveness*: And sometimes a Man injures another in retaliating something that he took amiss from *him*, tho' perhaps far otherwise *intended*; and it may be *false Reports* may have made the Difference. But now, *this* Way of Reconciliation presently sets all right again; it creates a right Understanding between Party and Party, it nips Quarrels in the very *Bud*, and leaves no room for further Malice and Ill Will. And what a holy *Triumph* will there then be in the forgiving Soul, thus to have softned his Enemy, and overcome *Evil* with Good!

And such *happy Effects* of Forgiveness of Injuries as these, methinks should engage every considering Man to put it in *Practice*, were *this*

this *all* ; but when besides all this so great a Mercy as the perfect Recovery of the Favour of God, the Forgiveness of our *own vast Debt*, and the Enjoyment of the Glories and Felicities of *Heaven* shall be the *Reward* of it ; Surely no Man in his Wits, but must think himself as much obliged to *forgive Injuries*, as to make himself eternally happy if he can. And that this exceeding great *Reward* shall attend the hearty Practice of this *Vertue*, is plain from our Lord's own Words, *Luke 6. 37. Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.*

And, as it appears from what has been said, that we have upon all Accounts great *Obligation* to imitate the compassionate Example of our merciful God ; so in the

Second Place, Our *Baseness* will be very great if we do *not* : And that both with Respect to God and Man. With respect to God, not to forgive a *petty Injury* from our Brother, when God has forgiven such *infinite Provocations* as ours against *himself*, is the vilest *Baseness*, because, as was said before, 'tis the vilest *Ingratitude*, and *Forgetfulness* of his great Mercy to us. I say a *petty Injury* from our Brother ; for *every Injury*, how great soever, that one Mortal can do to another, is indeed, but of *no regard*, in compare with those mountainous Heaps of Wickednesses which we have been guilty of against God ; and bear not so great Proportion to them, as an *Hundred Pence* does to *Ten Thousand Talents* ; as
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the Parable expresse both Debts, that which the compassionate *King* forgave his *Servant*, and that which that *wicked Man* would not forgive his *Fellow-Servant*. The infinite Goodness of God to *us*, if it has made its due Impression upon our Spirits, will leave so charming an Idea of Forgiveness upon our Souls, as will incline us to a suitable Practice upon all Occasions, especially since we know from God's great Compassion towards us, how *pleasing* to him Compassion is in others. But, notwithstanding God's unspeakable Kindness to *us*, to cherish a Temper of Mind which we can't but be sensible he *infinitely hates*, and endeavour to make those miserable as far as our Malice will reach, to whom God has forgiven as much as he forgave *us*, and for whose Redemption Christ dyed, and for whom are reserv'd Crowns of Glory in Heaven, through the wondrous Mercy of God; and all this unmercifulness for a *small Matter*, for the Debt of a few *Pence*: This shews the basest of *Ingratitude*, and *weak Sense* of God's Compassion shewn to us, that is possible. Well may our Lord say to such Men, with a little Variation, as the King in the Parable said to that cruel Servant of his; *O thou wicked Servant, I forgave thee all that Debt, and that though thou didst not desire it of me; shouldst not thou also have had Compassion on thy Fellow-Servant, even as I had Pity on thee?* Obligation sufficient there was no Doubt; and that his

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Ingratitude, and Forgetfulness of God's Favour, and his cruel hardned Temper was very provoking, will appear in the Sequel. But,

Secondly, To be revengeful and implacable after such Mercy receiv'd our *selves*, is the greatest Baseness with Respect to *Men*.

For we are all *Fellow-Servants* of the same great *Lord*; and his *Mercy* has been the same to all of us; we are all of us through *Christ*, under the same *Covenant* of *Grace* and *Reconciliation*: Now *this* methinks should *endear* us to one another; and our mutual Joy for each others Happiness, should put an End to all other *petty Quarrels* and *Animosities* between us. But instead of this, to hate and mischief one another, to endeavour by all means to make one another as *unhappy* as we can here below, and with him in the Parable, pluck out Throats for *Trifles*, and become *inexorable* to any that have injur'd us; this is such an *unnatural* Piece of *Barbarity*, and betrays so much *dewillish* Baseness of Spirit, as that every sensible *Man*, when he considers it, will *abominate*. 'Tis as if a *Man* should escape to Shoar from a *Wreck* at *Sea*, and there meet one whom *Providence* had bless'd with the same *Deliverance*; and instead of *congratulating* his *Safety*, and joyning with him in praising and blessing the *Mercy* of their great *Deliverer*, endeavour to knock out his *Brains* in pursuance of some *old Grudge*. Nothing can be more *base* than this, nor more
justly

justly provoking to the God of Mercy and Compassion. Which leads me in the

Last Place to consider the miserable Consequence of this Baseness, viz. We shall thereby provoke God to recall his Pardon to us, and deal with us as the King in the Parable did with his wicked ungrateful and cruel Servant, and deliver us over to the Tormentors, till we shall have paid all that is due unto him. For so likewise, says our Lord, shall my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye from your Hearts forgive not every one his Brother their Trespases.

God's Pardon to Sinners, though it be very full and free, and given in infinite Mercy; yet is not pass'd in such a Manner as that it can never be revok'd; 'twas given at first upon Conditions, and may be again forfeited if we fail of performing what God requires, in order to his final ratifying it.

Now Forgiveness of Injuries is expressly mention'd by our Saviour, as Part of what God expects from us in order to his confirming his Pardon to us; for thus, Matth. 6. 14, 15. If ye forgive Men their Trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your Trespases; but, as 'tis in the Parable, his Wrath will again wax hot against you, and he will make void his former Pardon, and deliver you over to the Tormentors till you shall pay all that is due unto him. That is, will consign you to the Por-
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tion of the Devil and his Angels, Spirits of like malicious and revengeful Tempers, who, as the *merciless* Executioners of God's Vengeance, will not for ever spare to torment and cruciate those wretched Souls, who might have escap'd those Miseries, and had their Pardon *seal'd* with the Blood of their Redeemer, but *forfeited* it again by indulging to that devillish Temper of *Malice* and *Revenge*.

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. If we are touch'd with a due Sense of the wondrous Compassion of God to us miserable Sinners in forgiving us the vast Debt we had contracted to the divine Justice by Reason of our Sins, and which 'twas impossible for us ever to have discharg'd our selves; whereby we are deliver'd from the intolerable and endless *Punishment* of them; and moreover made *Sons of God*, and Heirs of celestial Glory: If we are duly touch'd with a Sense of this infinite Goodness of God to *us* (which to effect was the Endeavour of the *first* Part of this Discourse) let us express our deep Resentment of his gracious Forgiveness of *us*, by imitating so excellent an Example, and *forgiving one another*. Let us consider the great *Happiness*, that both here and hereafter will attend the Performance of this Duty; and reflect upon the endless Misery that will closely follow the contrary. We must *forgive*, if we would be *forgiven*; we must shew Mercy and Compassion to our Brethren that offend

us, if we hope to find any at the Hands of God. And let us remember, that, how sweet soever we may fancy *Revenge* to be now, we shall find the *Consequence* of it, if not speedily repented of, to be *eternal Damnation*.

From which sad Condition, and that hellish Temper that will bring us to it, let us pray earnestly that the good Lord would deliver us, through Jesus Christ our merciful Saviour.

The P R A Y E R.

I.

O Holy and most merciful King of Heaven, who hast forgiven a World of miserable Wretches an infinite Debt, and deliver'd those who had nothing to pay from the extremest and eternal Misery, and hast commanded that in Return we do to others as thou hast done to us; I who am a happy Sharer in thy wondrous Compassion, do praise thee from the Bottom of my Soul, and earnestly entreat the Assistance of thy Grace, that I may never be wanting in a sincere and cheerful Imitation of thy blessed Example, but delight to copy after so lovely an Original, and freely and intirely forgive, nay love and do good to my most inveterate Enemies. And since thou loved'st us first, and didst prevent us with the Riches of thy

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Goodness, O that I could in this resemble thee too, and even court my Injurers to Peace and Reconciliation, and with a Christian Bravery of Spirit, offer them that forgiveness which they will not ask ! This is indeed a hard Saying to my deprav'd Nature, and Revenge seems sweeter far to Flesh and Blood ; and though my Reason, I confess, is satisfied of the great Excellency of the Performance, yet my Passions, I must with Shame own likewise, run violently the contrary Way, and bear me down with their rapid Course. Thy Aid I therefore beg, Almighty God, and that thy Spirit may enable me to stem this dangerous Current, and strenuously to resist and master all Motions to revenge, remembring that this is the Condition of my own Forgiveness at thy Hands, and that Judgment without Mercy shall be my Portion if I shew no Mercy.

II.

Convince me daily more and more of my base Ingratitude to thee, and inhumane Barbarity to my Brethren, in bearing Malice and Rancour for trifling Injuries (such are the greatest we can offer to each other, in Compare with what thy Mercy hath forgiven us :) And do thou, O meekest Jesus, sweeten our Tempers, and turn all Bitterness of Spirit into Love and mutual Endeavours to promote each others Happiness ; and may we all conspire in offering up our joint Praises to our merciful God, who has remitted to every one of us infinitely more than Ten Thousand Talents. O that this thy Mercy may be

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imprinted in lively and everlasting Characters upon my Soul, so as powerfully to incline me to transcribe it in my intercourse with Men! Then shall I experience the blessed Influence this thy Commandment will have upon my Happiness even here, and in the most acceptable Manner express my Thankfulness for thy Pity shew'd to me; and at the last by bearing this thy Badge upon my Soul, be own'd by thee as thy true Disciple, and receiv'd into the Joy of thee our dearest Lord. Which grant O most compassionate Jesus for thine own Mercies Sake. Amen, Amen.

 PARABLE V.

*Of a King that made a Marriage
for his Son.*

Matth. xxij. 2, 3. Luke xiv. 18, 19, 20.

Matth. xxij. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12,
13, 14.

Matth. 22. 2. *The Kingdom of Heaven is
like unto a certain King, that made a Mar-
riage for his Son,*

*And sent forth his Servants to call them that
were bidden to the Wedding: And they would
not come.*

Luke 14. 18. *And they all with one consent be-
gan to make Excuse: The first, said unto him,
I have bought a Piece of Ground, and I must
needs go and see it; I pray thee have me excused:
And another said, I have bought five Yoke of
Oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee
have me excused.*

*And another said, I have married a Wife, and
therefore I cannot come.*

Matth. 22. 4. *Again he sent forth other Ser-
vants, saying, Tell them which are bidden,
Behold I have prepared my Dinner: my Oxen
and*

and my Fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the Marriage.

But they made light of it, and went their Ways, one to his Farm, another to his Merchandise : And the Remnant took his Servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.

But when the King heard thereof, he was wroth : And he sent forth his Armies, and destroyed those Murderers, and burnt up their City.

Then saith he to his Servants, the Wedding is ready, but those that were bidden were not worthy.

Go ye therefore into the High-ways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the Marriage.

So those Servants went out into the High-ways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good : and the Wedding was furnish'd with Guests.

And when the King came in to see the Guests, he saw there a Man that had not on a wedding Garment :

And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding Garment ? And he was speechless.

Then said the King to the Servants, Bind him Hand and Foot, and take him away and cast him into outer Darkness : There shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.

For many are called, but few are chosen.

THIS Parable, I suppose, was in its first Intention, designed to reprove the hardened Infidelity of the Jews, their obstinate-

ly rejecting the Mercy of God to them in *Christ Jesus*, and their vile *Ingratitude* to him for his *peculiar* Care of them, in so ordering it, that the Gospel should be *first* preach'd to *them* (to which Purpose also was spoken the Parable of the wicked Husbandmen in *Mat.* 21. 33. which, for its great Affinity to the first Part of this Parable, and intire Relation to the Jews, I thought fit to pass by) and it was likewise intended to shew God's great *Anger* against them for that their *Stubbornness* and malicious Treatment of *Christ* and his Apostles, and how sad the Consequence of it would be, both in this World and the next: And withall, to declare God's Purpose of receiving the *Gentiles* into the Fold of *Christ*, upon *their* despising and rejecting that inestimable Favour, and moreover, that *whoever* makes Profession of *Christianity*, must live agreeably, and be conformable to all its holy Laws, or else their Condition will be more deplorable than ever. This, I think was the *first* Intention of this Parable.

But besides this, it has another Aspect which is intirely *Christian*, and is full of Reproof and Instruction to us that have *already* embrac'd the Discipline of *Christ*, and is very aptly expressive of these Four Things, which I shall make the Subject of the following Discourse.

First, It is lively expressive of the *Nature* of the Gospel or *Christian* Religion, as representing it by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the

poor

poor and the maim'd, the halt and the blind being call'd in to partake of the *Wedding Supper*.

Secondly, Of God's great Care in having this Religion *publish'd* and made known to all Men, and his repeated *Invitations* to all Men to embrace it ; represented by that King's sending forth his *Servants* to call them that were bidden to the *Wedding*, and again sending forth other *Servants*, and commanding them to tell those that were bidden that he had prepar'd and made all things ready, and therefore to urge them to come unto the *Marriage*.

Thirdly, It very aptly expresses, what kind of *Reception*, this *holy Religion*, and the Teachers of it are like to meet with in the World ; represented here by Mens making *light* of the Invitation to the *Marriage* of the King's Son, and offering *Excuses*, such as, of having bought a *Piece of Ground*, and a *Yoke of Oxen*, and of having married a *Wife*, and that these things would engage their *Time*, and therefore they could not come : And accordingly, going their own Way, one to his *Farm*, and another to his *Merchandise*, and the rest taking those *Servants* that came to invite them, and *intreating them spitefully*, and *slaying them*.

Fourthly, It expresses how sad their Condition will be, that either when they are invited to, yet *reject* this *holy Religion*, and abuse the *Preachers* of it ; or else, though they do *profess* it, yet *live not agreeably* to it. The *latter* of which is represented by the

King's finding a Man at the Marriage Supper that had not on a *Wedding Garment*, and saying unto him, *Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a Wedding-garment?* And the Man's being *speechless* upon it, and the King's commanding his Servants to *bind him Hand and Foot and take him away, and cast him into outer Darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth*: And the former is express'd by the King's being wroth with those that *sighted* his Invitation, and pronouncing them *not worthy* of it, and resolving that they should *not taste of his Supper*, and sending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding, and commanding his Armies to go forth and *destroy those Murderers*, that had spitefully entreated and slain his Servants, and to *burn up their City*.

And then after all, there is a general Observation drawn from hence, namely, *That many are called, but few are chosen*. Of each of these I shall discourse in their Order.

First, this Parable does very *lively* express the *Nature* of the Gospel or Christian Religion; represented here by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in as Guests to partake of the *Wedding Supper*.

St. Paul, in his Epistle to *Titus*, Chap. 2 Verse 14. says, that *Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all Iniquity, and purifie to himself a peculiar or purchas'd People* (as

(as 'tis in the Original) *zealous of good Works*; and *Ephes. 1. 14.* Christians are called the *purchas'd Possession*: In Allusion, I suppose, both to the *Jewish Custom* of the Man giving a *Dowry* to her whom he made his *Wife*, thereby *purchasing* her to himself as his own *Peculiar*; and likewise to a *Custom* of the *Gracians*, who had an *Officer* on purpose to *educate*, and *form*, and *refine* Women design'd for *Marriage*, and then to present them to those that were to be their *Husbands*: Agreeable to which is that of *St. Paul, 2. Cor. 11. 2.* *I have espous'd you to one Husband, that I may present you as a pure and chaste Virgin unto Christ.* And accordingly, our Lord often compares himself to a *Bridegroom*, and his *Church* to the *Bride*, and his *Disciples* to the *Children of the Bride-Chamber*, or the *Friends* and *special Attendants* of the *Bride* and *Bridegroom*. And *Ephes. 5. 35.* *Christ lov'd the Church and gave himself for it, that he might sanctifie and cleanse it by the washing of Water by the Word, that he might present it to himself, a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without Blemish:* And then, *Verse 30.* *we are Members of his Body, of his Flesh, and of his Bones* (according to what is said of Man and Wife, *Gen. 2. 24.* *They two shall be one Flesh*) and *Verse. 32.* *This is a great Mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.*

The Gospel then, or Christian Religion being likened to a *Marriage* made by God, the glorious King of Heaven, for his *eternal Son*; and *Christ* the Promulger of this Gospel, the first Teacher of this Religion, being that *Son of God*, and that Divine *Bridegroom*, and the *Church*, or those that believe this Gospel, and embrace this Religion, being the *Bride*; it informs us in *general*, that the *Nature* of the Gospel, or Christian Religion, is like that of *Marriage*, and makes the *same Relation* between *Christ* and *Believers*, as *Marriage* does between a *Man* and his *Wife*; and intitles to like *Priviledges*, and obliges to like *Duties*, and is productive of like *Effects*.

First, the Gospel or Christian Religion makes the *same Relation* between *Christ* and *Believers*, as *Marriage* does between *Man* and *Wife*, i. e. the *nearest*, the *dearest*, and likewise an *inseperable Relation*: For, that *Marriage* is the *nearest* Relation, is evident from what is said *Gen. 2. 24*, that a *Man* shall *leave Father and Mother, and cleave to his Wife*; 'tis the *dearest* Relation, because a *Man's Wife* is as *himself, Bone of his Bone, and Flesh of his Flesh*, as *Eve* was of *Adam*, and no *Man* ever yet *hated his own Flesh* (as *St. Paul* has it) but *nourisheth and cherisbeth it*; and *Men* ought to *love their Wives as their own Bodies*; and he that *loveth his Wife still loveth himself*: And 'tis an *inseperable Relation* likewise; for though *God* permitted *Divorce* to the *Jews* for the *Hardness*

ness of their Hearts, and *Christ*, in some Cases, and for the same Reason permits it to us *Christians*, yet from the *Beginning* it was not so; and those whom God had so *nearly* joyn'd together, were not at *first* intended ever to be *put a-sunder* but by Death.

In like manner the Gospel or Christian Religion does 1. create the *nearest* Relation between *Christ* and Believers; it makes us *Members of his Body, of his Flesh, and of his Bones*; as was before quoted from *St. Paul, Ephes. 5. 30. i. e.* it makes us as *near* to him as the *Members* are to the *Head, the Flesh and Bones* to the *Body*; or as our Church expresses it, it makes us *one with Christ, and Christ with us*: 'tis so near a Relation that nothing can sufficiently express it but what expresses an *Union*. It creates likewise 2. the *dearest* Relation, for thus our Lord, *John 14. 21. He that hath my Commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me, and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest my self unto him*; and Verse 23. *We will come unto him and make our Abode with him*, and Chap. 15. 14.. *Ye are my Friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. And Rev. 3. 20. Behold, says our Lord, I stand at the Door and knock; if any Man hear my Voice and open the Door, i. e. by Faith and Obedience, I will come in unto him, and sup with him and he with me*; he will shew the greatest Expressions of Dearness and Affection to him. And as the Gospel makes

makes the *nearest* and *dearest* Relation between Christ and Believers, so that Relation is *inseparable*; *i. e.* unless we wilfully divorce our selves from him by *Apostacy* or *Disobedience*. Thus a little before his Ascension he tells his Apostles, and in them all faithful Believers that observe whatsoever he hath commanded, that he will be *with them always, even to the End of the World*: And because he was to ascend to *his* Father and *their* Father, to *his* God and *their* God; therefore says he, *I will not leave you comfortless, but will pray to the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, John 14. 16.* and in the 2. and 3. Verses of that Chapter, *I go to prepare a Place for you, and if I go and prepare a Place for you, I will come again and receive you to my self, that where I am, there ye may be also.* And *John 10. 27, 28.* *My Sheep hear my Voice and I know them and they follow me; and I give unto them Eternal Life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my Hand.* And St. Paul with great Assurance asks this Question, *Rom. 8. 35.* *Who shall separate us from the Love of Christ?* and after enumerating what in the esteem of the World was most likely to do it, he concludes verse the last, that *nothing shall be able to separate us from the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* And he is likewise in a *spiritual* Manner always with us in the Reception of those Mysteries which he instituted in *Remembrance* of him. The

The Gospel then, effecting so *near* so *dear*, and so *inseparable* a Relation between Christ and Believers, that nothing can so fitly resemble it as the State of *Marriage*; we may from hence collect in the next place, what *Privileges* the Gospel intitles Believers to, by reason of this their so *intimate* Relation to *Christ*.

As *first*, it intitles to the peculiar *Love* and *Tenderness* of Christ, such a Love as will incline him to promote the *Happiness* of Believers, and to *pity* and compassionate their *Infirmities*, Failures and Imperfections; for Love covereth a Multitude of Faults. Thus the Apostle, *Col. 3. 19. Husbands love your Wives and be not bitter against them*; be not extreme to observe every little Defect and Failing in them, but consider 'em as the weaker Vessel, and bear with their Infirmities. And accordingly the Author to the *Hebrews* says of our Lord, he is not one that cannot be touch'd with a Sense of our Infirmities, but knows and pities them, having been in all Points tempted as we are, though without Sin, *Heb. 4. 15.* And as for his *Tenderness* and Care of our *Happiness*, 'tis miraculously evident in that he gave himself for us, sacrific'd his very *Life* for our reconciliation to his offended Father, that he might sanctifie and cleanse us, and present us to himself a glorious Church, not having Spot or Wrinkle or any such thing; but that we should be holy and without Blemish; as the Apostle expresses it in the before cited *Eph. 5. 26. &c.*

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And he does continually *nourish* and *cherish* us by the Communications of his Grace in the blessed Sacrament (that spiritual Body of his, *which who so eateth of shall live for ever*) and by the Comforts and Assistances of his holy Spirit. And to lye thus in the Bosom of the *Son of God*, to have such great Degrees of his Love and Tenderness to us express'd in such *amazing* Instances; to be thus *pitied* and commiserated, and our Failures excus'd and *past by*, by him that is to be our *Judge*; and our *Happiness* in all Respects so carefully endeavour'd by *him* who is the *Fountain* of it: This is such a Priviledge as can never be enough valu'd, and is infinitely above the Reach of any Comparison.

Another Priviledge the Gospel intitles Believers to upon their so near Relation to Christ, is Christ's *Protection* of them from *Dangers*, and *Defence* against *Assaults of Enemies*. For, as in Marriage the Husband is the Shield and *Guardian* of his Wife, so Christ is the *Protector* and Defender of the faithful; he covers them from the Rage and Malice of unreasonable *Men*, and arms them against the Attacks of the Spirits of Darkness, by the Supplies and Aids of his blessed Spirit; *who helps our Infirmities, and strengthens us mightily in the inner Man*, so that the Gates of Hell, all the infernal Powers shall not be able to prevail against us. And accordingly says St. Paul, *I can do all things through Christ that strengthneth me, Phil. 4. 13. Rom. 8. 37. In all these things, Tribulation*

lation, Distress, Persecution, Famine, Nakedness, Peril or Sword, in all these things we are more than Conquerors. By what means? why through Christ that loveth us. And our Lord says expressly in the forecited John 10. 27. *My Sheep that bear my Voice shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my Hand.* And if the Almighty Son of God be for us, and takes us into his own Protection, and shields and guards us as a Husband does the Wife of his Bosom; who then can be against us? *We shall be hid under his Wings, and safe under his Feathers, his Faithfulness and Truth shall be our Shield and Buckler.* And, to dwell thus under Defence of the most High, and abide under the Shadow of the Almighty, is, no doubt, an inestimable Priviledge.

Again, as the Husband confers Honour upon his Wife, intitles her to a Share in that Honour that is due to *him*; so Believers, by their intimate Union with Christ, are advanc'd to the highest Step of Honour that Mortals can arrive at; For, what more honourable than to be in so near a Relation to the most glorious Son of God! Accordingly the Scripture exhorts us to walk *worthy* of our holy Profession, *Ephes. 4. 1.* and to have our Conversation as *becomes* the Gospel of Christ. And agreeably said our Lord to the Seventy Disciples, whom he sent as Harbingers to the Places whither he himself intended to come, *he that despiseth you despiseth me*; and 'tis in some Proportion true of all other sincere Believers. *Christianity* is a most
honour-

honourable Profession, and what David said to Saul, when he offered him his eldest Daughter to Wife for his great Services; who am I, and what is my Life or my Fathers Family in Israel, that I should be Son-in-Law to a King? 1 Sam. 18. 18. may with infinitely greater Reason be said by every true Christian, who am I, and what is my Life, that I should be taken into the nearest Relation to the eternal Son of the Majesty of Heaven and Earth! No Title comparable to this, no Relation so much to be glori'd in, nor any Care too great to live up to so august a Character. But,

In the last place, the Gospel intitles Believers, as to a Participation in some Degree of the *Honour* of Christ, so likewise of his *Glory* and *Happiness*. And, as a Husband is to provide for his *Wife* suitable to his own *Quality*, and make her a *Sharer* in his *Happiness* and *Prosperity*; so will Christ confer upon sincere Believers a *plentiful Share* of his *Glories* and *Felicities* in *Heaven*.

Thus, a little before his *Passion*, in my *Father's House*, says he, *are many Mansions, and I go to prepare a Place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to my self, that where I am there ye may be also. John 14. 2, 3.* And in that solemn *Prayer* to his *Heavenly Father*, *John 17. 22. The Glory*, says he, *which thou gavest me I have given them; and Verse 24. Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where*

where I am, that they may behold thy Glory which thou hast given me, i. e. may share in the Beatifick Vision, which is the Summit of all Happiness. And Rom. 8. 17. St. Paul says we are joint Heirs with Christ, and if we suffer with him, i. e. still continue faithful Believers notwithstanding the Discouragements and Temptations of the World, we shall be glorified together. And 1. Cor. 14. 23. Christ is call'd the first Fruits of a glorious Resurrection to immortal Bliss, which supposes a general Harvest to follow Christ the first Fruits, afterwards those that are Christ's at his coming. For the Lord himself shall descend from Heaven with a Shout, with the Voice of the Arch-Angel, and with the Trump of God, and the Dead in Christ shall be raised first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, and so shall we ever be with the Lord, 1 Thes. 4. 16 17. And if to all this we add, that this intimate Union of Believers with Christ, as of a Wife with her Husband, and these immense Priviledges that are consequent upon it, will be everlasting; that nothing can put a-sunder whom God has in infinite Mercy joyn'd thus close together, but our wilful Unfaithfulness to this our Divine Husband: As it will make up the Account of the Wonders of God's Love to the Children of Men, and should in Return, make us all over Love and Gratitude to that good God who hath done such great things for us; so it should

make us exceeding careful upon no Considerations whatever to divorce our selves from this our glorious Husband, but for ever pay all possible Love and dutiful Obedience to him. Which brings me in the next place to shew, that as the Gospel effects the same *Relation* between Christ and Believers as Marriage does between a Man and his Wife, and intitles to the like *Priviledges*; so it obliges likewise to the like *Duties*.

And first, As a *Wife* is bound to bear *unspotted Love* and *Fidelity* to her *Husband*, so is every *Believer* bound to demean himself towards *Christ*. That is, to love him above all things, and to be *intirely his*; not to suffer his *Affections* to wander after *strange Loves*, such as the *World* and the *Vanities of it*; not to be debauch'd by the Devil and his *Temptations*, and share his Heart between *Christ* and *Belial*. But, since *our Maker is our Husband*, as the Prophet *Isaiah* expresses it, *Isaiah* 54. 5. to be intirely faithful to him, and admit no Creature to that Dearness of Affection which he alone should have.

For this is that Crime which the Scripture calls *spiritual Fornication* and *Adultery*, and which St. *Paul* told the *Corinthians*, he began to fear they were guilty of; *I am jealous over you*, says he, *with a Godly Jealousie*, for I have espous'd you to one Husband, that I may present you as a chaste *Virgin* unto *Christ*; But I fear, lest by any means, as the *Serpent* beguiled *Eve*
through

through his Subtilty, so your Minds should be corrupted from the Simplicity, or Purity and Integrity, that is towards Christ, 2 Cor. 11. 1, 2. This is that Fornication for which Christ will give us a Bill of Divorcement, and for ever put us away from him; depart from me ye cursed, &c. Mat. 25. 41. This is in a spiritual Sense, to take the Members of Christ and make them the Members of an Harlot; and these spiritual as well as carnal Whoremongers and Adulterers, God will Judge. And therefore, as much as it concerns us to continue in this near and dearest Relation to Christ, which is attended with such inestimable Priviledges; so much it concerns us to bear an intire and unspotted Love to him; for he hath bought us with a Price, therefore we should glorifie him in our Bodies and our Spirits which are his.

Secondly, As a Wife is bound to submit her self to her Husband, to comply with his Government, and Reverence his Person and Authority; so, and much more is every Believer bound to do to Christ. That is, to be satisfied with the Disposals of his Providence, to submit to his Guidance and Conduct, to reverence all the Expresses of his good Pleasure, to be in Subjection to his holy Discipline, to have one Will with him, the same Likes and Dislikes, and in no Case to oppose or resist his Sovereign Authority.

This is no more than what the Apostles command from a Woman to her Husband, (as

every one that has read their Writings knows very well) and that though they are both alike, *frail sinful Mortals*, much more then ought we to be *subject*, and bear the profoundest *Reverence to Christ our Saviour*, who is the *King of Glory, the Son of God, who upholds all things by the Word of his Power and sits on the Right Hand of the Majesty on high*; whom all the Angels of God worship, and who besides, is most *tender and affectionate to us*, and his Government directed by *infinite Wisdom*.

Thirdly, As a Wife ought not only to be subject to the Disposals of her Husband, and *passively obedient*, but likewise *actively* so, and ready *cheerfully to obey his Commands*; so ought every *Believer* to be to *Christ*.

Indeed, *this* is the main Tryal of *true conjugal Affection*, and the best Demonstration of the *Sincerity* of all other Shews of Love and Fidelity, and Reverence and Submission. For where *true Love, Reverence and Submission* is, a *cheerful Obedience* will surely follow; and on the contrary, where there is no willing *cheerful Obedience*, there is but very *little, if any sincere Affection*. And therefore, says our dear Lord, *if ye love me keep my Commandments: And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?* And of Sarah 'tis said, she *obey'd Abraham* as well as call'd him Lord. And St. John agreeably, *1 John 2. 5. who so keepeth his Word, in him verily is the Love of God perfected; and hereby know we that*
we

we are in him. And therefore, *Obedience* to the *Commands* of this our glorious Husband, is above all things necessary to continue that our near Relation to him; and his *Commandments* are not grievous, but his *Yoke* is easie and his *Burthen* light. And 'twould be strange if we should not obey *him*, who commands us nothing but what is in its own *Nature* necessary in order to our *Happines* in both *Worlds*.

In the *last* place, the Gospel is productive of like *Effects* to those of Marriage, and from this so *near* Relation of Believers to Christ proceeds the Increase of such as shall be the *Children* of God, a numerous Progeny to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, and fill up the *Vacancies* left by the Fall of the *Rebellious* Angels.

Thus our Lord calls the becoming *Christian's* a being *born again*, *John* 3. 3. and teaches us when we pray to *God* to say *Our Father*. And *St. Paul* agreeably, in a Quotation from the Prophet *Jeremiah*, says, as in the Person of God, *I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my Sons and Daughters saith the Lord Almighty.* 2. Cor. 6. 18. And the *Jerusalem* which is from above, or the *Christian Church*, is said to be *the Mother of us all.* *Gal.* 4. 26. and Chap. 3. 26. *we are all the Children of God by Christ Jesus.* And if Children then *Heirs*, *Heirs of God* and *joint Heirs with Christ*, of that glorious Kingdom of his which is not of *this World*,

but eternal in the Heavens. *Well therefore may we cry out with Admiration, as St. John does, Behold what manner of Love the Father hath bestow'd upon us that we should be call'd the Sons of God! 1 John 3. 1. And every Man that hath this Hope in him, of being receiv'd into the Bosom of his Heavenly Father, and seeing him as he is; must purifie himself even as he is pure: And having such glorious Expectations, cleanse himself from all Filthiness, both of Flesh and Spirit, perfecting Holiness, in the Fear of God, 2 Cor. 7. 1.*

This then is the Nature of the Gospel; 'tis as a Marriage between Christ and Believers. There is one thing more to be consider'd under this first General, namely, who they are that are admitted to the Joys and Happiness of this blessed Condition? They are describ'd in the Parable by the poor and the maim'd, the halt and the blind. And truly, just such was Man's Condition, before God was pleas'd to call him to this happy Marriage. Despicably poor we were, and destitute of any real Excellency that could recommend us to the Favour of God; our Souls were like a parch'd and barren Wilderness, burnt up with vile Lusts and Passions, no Fruits of Holiness appearing, but drawing still nearer and nearer to everlasting Perdition. Maim'd we were in all our Faculties by our frequent desparate Falls from our Obedience to God, and full of Wounds and Bruises, and putrifying Sores; and

our

our best Performances very *lame* and imperfect like the *Haltings* of a Cripple; and our *Understandings* withal *blinded* by the Deceitfulness of Sin, which put out that Candle of the Lord, and made it incapable of directing us in the right Way that leads to Happiness, so that we lay groping in the *Dark*, surrounded with *Terrors*, rack'd by *Uncertainties*, miserably poor and indigent, and utterly unable to help our selves. When lo! There arose up a *Light* in this Darkness, and through the infinite Mercy of our God the *Day-spring from on high* did visit us, we were pitied and commiserated by the Father of Mercies, and in this forlorn Condition, call'd to partake of the ineffable Joys and Felicities that attend the nearest and dearest Relation to the *Son of God*. The Lord *anointed him to preach the Gospel to the poor; he sent him to heal the broken-hearted, to preach Deliverance to the Captives, and Recovery of Sight to the Blind, and to set at Liberty them that are bruised, Luke 4. 18.* Accordingly, he *enrich'd* our Poverty, *restor'd* our Sight, *heal'd* our Bruises, and *confirm'd* our Strength, and of his *fulnes* have we all *receiv'd*; and nothing for the Future can ever make us miserable but *our selves*.

Wherefore, as we should adore and magnifie, with all our Souls, the wondrous Goodness and Compassion of God and our Saviour, in receiving such wretched *polluted* Creatures as we were by Nature, into so *intimate* a Re-

lation to himself; and making us Partakers of the Comforts of his blessed Spirit in this World, and providing Crowns of Glory for us in the next: So above all things should we dread to fall back into the same Condition again, *and work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling.* For otherwise, 'twould have been better for us never to have tasted of the Divine Compassion in so extraordinary a Manner as we have done, and our latter End will be worse than our Beginning.

And thus much for the first thing to be consider'd in this Parable, namely, the *Nature* of the *Gospel* or Christian Religion, represented by the *Marriage of a King's Son*, and the *poor* and the *maim'd*, the *halt* and the *blind* being call'd in to partake of the Joys and Festivities of that great Solemnity. I proceed now to the

Second thing to be considered, namely, God's great Care in having this *Gospel preach'd*, this Religion publish'd and *made known* to all Men, and his repeated *Invitations* to all Men to *embrace* it; represented by that King's *sending forth his Servants* to call those that were bidden to the *Wedding*, and again *sending other Servants*, and commanding them to tell those that were bidden, *that he had prepar'd and made all things ready*, and therefore to *urge them to come unto the Marriage.*

How great God's Care has been that this *Gospel* should be *publish'd*, and how repeated his

his Invitations to Men have been, that they would embrace it ; is evident from the whole Story of the *first* planting of the Gospel, and from the Course, that by God's Appointment has been taken *ever since*. At *first*, many were endow'd with very extraordinary Abilities for this Purpose, such as the Gift of *Tongues*, whereby they were enabled wherever they should go, to preach the Gospel to Men in their own Native Language ; and a Power of working Miracles to confirm the *Truth* of their Doctrine ; and with this Message and these supernatural Abilities, were they sent to the most remote Corners of the Earth ; even our *Britain*, as little *known*, and as *barbarous* as *then* it was, receiv'd, and that very *early*, the glad Tidings of the Gospel. And for a Supply of the *Mortality* of the first Teachers of this holy Religion, that no Age might want those that should instruct Men in, and invite them to it, there was an Order of Men set apart on purpose for this great Work, and empower'd to ordain others that should tread in their Steps when they were gone, and those likewise *others*, and so down successively till Time shall be no more ; as so many Ambassadors from the great King of Heaven to persuade Men to hearken to the Proposals of Reconciliation made to them through the Merits and Intercession of his Son, and to partake of the infinite *Happiness* that will follow upon that blessed *Agreement*.

These,

These, like the King's Servants in the Parable, are to let Men know, what *Bliss* will be the Result of their coming to this spiritual Marriage, and entring into so near a Relation to the eternal Son of God; that all things are ready to compleat that glorious Solemnity, the Feast prepar'd, the Oxen and Fatlings kill'd, *i. e.* Heaven and the ineffable Pleasures of it ready to receive those that shall sincerely enter into this near Relation to Christ, and continue always faithful in it; and in the meantime the secret Joys of a good Conscience, and the enraviſhing Expectation of the Time when those Felicities shall be enjoy'd, shall unspeakably cheer and refresh the Soul, and be as so many *Antepasts of Glory*.

This is like the Course that the Lord took with the obstinate Jews, mention'd *Jer. 25. 4.* *He sent unto them all his Servants, the Prophets rising early and sending them, they cry'd, Turn ye again now every one from his evil Way, and from the Evil of your Doings, and dwell in the Land that the Lord hath given to you, and to your Fathers for ever; for why will ye dye O House of Israel! Many the like patherick Expressions there are in Scripture of God's great Desire of the Happiness of Mankind, and as earnest Intreaties that we would accept of those inestimable Favours he would confer upon us, as if we were to confer the Favours, and he to receive them.*

Now,

Now, when we consider the infinite Distance between God and us, what despicable Creatures comparatively the best of us are, poor and maim'd, halt and blind, as the Parable expresses it; how infinitely perfect and happy the Divine Nature is, and would for ever be, though the whole Creation were annihilated; so that our Righteousness will not reach to him to make any Addition to his Felicity, nor will it be in the least profitable to him that we make our Way perfect; and if we consider likewise our great Rebellions against him, obstinately persisted in even until now, the little Desire we have of his Favour, the many Sights that we have made of his Overtures of Peace, and the like: We shall soon perceive, that his Mercy is indeed over all his Works, and that his Compassions fail not as long as there is any Hopes of our complying with his gracious Intentions for our Happiness. And such stupendious Goodness as this, to Creatures in our vile Circumstances, can never be enough ador'd and magnified. Only let us remember, that the greater the Expressions are of God's Love and Tenderness to Sinners, the greater will be his Anger, the more severe his Vengeance to such as finally reject it, and obstinately persist in their Rebellion against him.

The Third Thing express'd in this Parable, is what Kind of Reception the Gospel and the Teachers of it are like to meet with in the World,

World, represented by Mens making *light* of the King's Invitation to the Marriage of his Son, and offering frivolous *Excuses*, such as *of having bought a Piece of Ground, and a Yoke of Oxen, and of having married a Wife*, and that these things would engage 'em so that they could not come; and accordingly going their Way, *one to his Merchandise, another to his Farm*, and the rest taking those Servants that came to invite them, and *intreating them despihtfully, and slaying them*.

In general, *slighting and undervaluing the glad Tidings of the Gospel, was, and is still*, and is too like *to be the Reception* of it; Mens Lusts and vile Affections dissuading them from embracing so *holy* a Religion, and the *Evil of their Deeds*: making them *love Darkness rather than this glorious Light*, which will *discover and reprove* them. And Men having so little Relish for the *Religion*, have as little *Respect* for those that *preach and enforce* it, and endeavour to *silence and discourage* them by their malicious ill Treatment of them; like those in the Parable, who took the King's Servants and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. And, as in this Case it seems very strange, that those who came upon so *friendly* an Errand as to invite to the Pleasures and Festivities of so great a Marriage as that of a King's Son, should be treated so inhumanely in Return; so methinks, 'tis as strange that those whom God has sent to invite Men

to their *Happiness*, and to prepare them for the Enjoyment of himself in Glory, should be us'd like so many *Enemies*, and despis'd as the *Pests* of Society, and the *Off-scouring* of the *Earth*.

But so it is too generally, and the Reason must be this, as *St. Paul* expresses it, *we are therefore look'd upon as Mens Enemies because we tell them the Truth*. Because we tell 'em they must love God above all things, and not be too fond of the *World*, and deny and mortifie the unruly Passions and Desires of the Body, and lead this present Life in *Sobriety*, *Righteousness* and *Godliness*, if they hope to partake of the Joys of Heaven; therefore we are the *Troublers* of *Israel*, as King *Ahab* said to *Elijah*, and as such, made the Object of Mens *Scorn* and *Hate*. But, as our Lord takes all the *Kindness*, *Reverence* and *Respect* which his Ministers receive as done unto himself, (the Treatment of an Ambassador being look'd upon as the Treatment of the Prince that sends him, and we are the *Ambassadors* of *Christ*) so on the contrary, he that shall treat *despightfully* the least of these his Servants, 'twere better for him that a *Milstone* were hang'd about his Neck, and he cast into the midst of the Sea. But of this something more in the Sequel.

Let us now consider the *Excuses* those in the Parable made for their not going to the Marriage of the King's Son (and which are offer'd

offer'd *still* by irreligious Men) and the great *Weakness* and Invalidity of them.

The first two, of having bought a Piece of Ground, and a Yoke of Oxen, and going to see the one and prove the other, are much the *same*, and so shall be consider'd together, and they both amount to thus much, that they prefer'd the minding their own *petty* Affairs (and which might have been as well let alone till another Time) before that great Honour the King did them in inviting them to the *Marriage of his Son*: And they might well believe such Excuses would serve to no other Purpose than to provoke the King to *Anger*, when he should see his Favour made thus light of, and Mens common Business prefer'd before it.

In like manner, too many *now adays* are so weak as to plead *Business*, and the Affairs of the World, in excuse of their great Neglect of the things of *Religion*: Our Callings must be follow'd, Business must be done, our Families must be maintain'd, and therefore it cannot be expected that we can be *much* at *Leisure* for *Religion* at the *present*; when the Fatigues of *this* World begin to be *over*, and we draw near the *other*, then we'll give our selves up to the making *Provision* for it. And this, though few Men will *speak it out*, is the Sense of too many, as is evident from their *Practice*; and truly some make no Scruple to declare

declare this *openly*. Now, though it be very true that Business must be minded, and our Families maintain'd, and *Industry* is as much a Christian Duty as any other, and is it self a Part of Piety; yet it is but a *Part*, and will not commute for a Neglect of all the rest; nay, this *Sort* of Industry we are speaking of, is one of the *least* Parts of Piety, and provided the *Necessaries* of Life are secur'd, 'tis not only *lawful*, but very *commendable* to abate of our Industry in the Pursuit of *this* World's Good, and lay it out upon the greater Concerns of the *next*. Thus when Jesus came to the House of *Martha* and *Mary*, and *Martha*, out of a commendable Zeal to entertain him well, was busied in making ready Provisions for him, while *Mary* sat at his Feet listening to his Divine Instructions; when *Martha* complain'd to him that her Sister had left all the Trouble to her, and desir'd him to order that she should help her: Jesus answer'd and said unto her, *Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things, but one thing is above all needful, and Mary hath chosen that good Part which shall not be taken from her,* Luke 10. 40, &c.

And accordingly, in his Divine Sermon on the Mount, *Mat. 6. 24, 25. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon,* says our Lord, *therefore take no Thought, i. e. no anxious over eager Concern, for your Life, what ye shall eat or drink, or wherewith be clothed; but Verse 33.*
seek

seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, let it be your *principal* Endeavour to be rich towards God, and abound in good Works, and then a moderate Care for the Things of *this* Life, will, with God's Blessing, which alone can give Prosperity, be sufficient. And therefore, to do as is too commonly done in the World, and first provide, with great Care and Industry, for Abundance *here*, and then at last think a little of the *Kingdom of God and his Righteousness*, is such an ungodly and unreasonable Course, as can never end in any thing but bitter Remorse at last, and utter Confusion; so vain and frivolous is this first Excuse Men offer for their not entertaining Religion so affectionately as they should do, namely, that they have bought Farms and Oxen, and must look after *them*, *i. e.* are deeply engag'd in the Affairs and Business of *this* Life.

The other Excuse offer'd in the Parable for absenting from the Marriage of the King's Son, was the having *married a Wife*; the Man was so taken up with the Pleasures of his *own* new Condition, that he had no Appetite for those at the King's Son's Wedding.

And *this*, as little of Validity as it has in it, is in Effect very often pleaded by Men,
against

against their meddling with *Religion* at least at present. They are *young* they say, and in the Age of Pleasure and Jollity; the Enjoyments of the *World* are very *sweet* to 'em; and Religion is too *austere* for them as yet; what *Pleasures* are said to be in it are of a Nature *contrary* to their *Propensions* and Inclinations; and therefore they desire to be excus'd if they don't leave these present Satisfactions but enjoy them while they can, and *afterwards* 'tis likely they may advert to the Pleasures of *Religion*, which, though they have heard so much *Talk* of, they can't frame any so lovely Idea of them, as to incline them to leave what by *Experience* they find so grateful to them. And this, not only the *Practice* of most younger Persons expresses, but many are so forsaken of Reason as to *own* it *plainly*.

But, since they talk of *Experience*, I dare appeal even to *themselves*, whether they have not met with more *Disappointment* than *Satisfaction*, from the greatest sensual Pleasures they have enjoy'd? The thing is too *notorious* to be *deny'd*; and they *tacitly* confess it by *shifting* Pleasures so often as they do; for where there is *Satisfaction*; what need of *Change*? and I may likewise *boldly* assert *this*, from the Experience of very many that have tasted both Sorts of Pleasures, those of the *World* as well as of *Religion*, that there is no Comparison between the one and the other, and that the Satisfaction that flows from a

sincere Religion, is infinitely to be preferr'd before the most *studied* Gratifications of Sense; nay, even those Pleasures of Sense relish much better for being season'd with Religion: So that to neglect *Religion* out of a Fondness for *Pleasure*, is as if a Man should run from a *Fountain* because he is parch'd with *Thirst*. No Pleasures certainly like those of *Religion*, and he that once drinks of those Rivers of Delight that flow from *her*, will never thirst again after the tainted Puddles of *brutal* Enjoyments, for *her* Ways only are Ways of sincere and *unmix'd* Pleasure, and *all* her Paths are *Peace*.

But supposing the Pleasures of this World to be *indeed* as great, as some Men, after all their *Baulks* and *Disappointments*, will still *fancy* them to be; and that Religion is an *austere* and *rugged* thing, and but little or no Delight and Satisfaction to be met with in the Practice of it; yet, since the Pleasures of the *World*, how *great* soever, are very short and momentary, and must certainly *die with* us, and generally leave us long *before* we die; and since *Religion*, how unpleasant soever here, will secure to us the Enjoyment of unconceivable Pleasures that are for ever in the Presence of God: No rational Man but will think it a very childish Excuse for the Neglect of *Religion* to plead our Fondness of the Gaieties and Enjoyments of *this* World. 'Tis like a Child's slighting a Wedge of Gold, and rather pursu-
ing

ing an empty Bubble because it shines and glitters.

So utterly without Excuse are those who despise and reject the Offers of the Gospel and the Invitations to *Religion*, upon Account of the Riches and Pleasures of the *World*; or indeed upon any other Account whatever: For, Religion is our *chief* Interest, and therefore nothing can stand in Competition with it. Those that put by the Thoughts of it till a more convenient Time, that is, till they are fit for nothing else, are no doubt very highly displeasing to the great Author of it; but those are much more so, who totally and *insultingly* reject it. To defer the great Business of Religion is a very heinous Provocation; but Atheistically to oppose and vilifie it is certainly much worse. Which leads me to the

Fourth thing express'd in this Parable, namely, the Sadness of their Condition, who, when they have heard of, either totally reject this holy Religion, and abuse those that invite them to embrace it; or else, though they profess it, are negligent of its Duties, and live not agreeably to it. The first of these is represented by the King's being *Wroth* with those that made light of and complied not with his Invitation to the Marriage of his Son, and pronouncing them unworthy of that Favour, and that they should not taste of his Supper, and sending his Servants to invite others to the Wedding; and commanding his Armies to go

and *destroy* those Murderers, that had *spitefully entreated and slain his Servants*, who brought the gracious Invitation to them, and to *burn up their City*.

And indeed, well may God's Wrath be kindled against those that reject these wondrous Expressions of his Love, and trample under Foot the Son of God, and despise and vilifie his holy Religion, and undervalue all his Condescensions, and use his Ambassadors despitefully, and call the whole a *Trick*, a State Juggle, and glory in their Infidelity, and too often *blaspheme* that blessed Jesus, by whom alone cometh Salvation.

These Men will do well to consider, that if it should prove *true*, that there is no other Name by which we can be sav'd, but that of *Jesus*, their Case will be infinitely miserable who have *not believ'd* in that Name, but made it their Business to prophane and *ridicule* it as much as was possible; but should it prove *not true*, their Belief in it will not at all be *injurious* to them either in *this* World or in the *next* should there be any after this. And therefore, since the wittiest Infidel in the World cannot prove but that 'tis *possible*, and *may be true*, that Jesus is the only Saviour of the World, and the Consequence of *not believing* in him, being so sad should it at length prove indeed to *be true*; certainly it must be the most *prudent* Course to be of the *surest* Side, and embrace that Faith, which if *true*,

is the only Way to Happiness; and if *false* will not however leave a Man in any Respect in a worse Condition than it found him.

How *sad* the Consequence will be of not believing in Jesus as the only Saviour of the World, and of rejecting the Religion he taught, is express'd in this Parable by the King's pronouncing those that would not come to the Marriage of his Son, to be *unworthy* of that Favour, and resolving that they *should not taste of his Supper*, and sending his Servants to invite *others* to the Wedding: Which was *literally* verified upon the *obstinate Jews*, and will be as *effectually* upon all *other Infidels*. That is, Men's obstinate Infidelity shall at length be repay'd with God's *withdrawing* that Favour which he so long *tender'd* them and they *refus'd*, and putting an End to their Day of Grace and Salvation, and *sealing* 'em up (as irreclaimable) to Destruction. *Because I have called and ye refused* (says Solomon, personating Christ or the Divine Wisdom) *I have stretch'd out my Hand and no Man regarded, but ye have set at nought my Counsel, and would have none of my Reproof, I also will laugh at your Calamity and mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Destruction 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,* Prov. 1. 24. *The things that belonged to their*

Peace, which *once* were tender'd and made known to them, *shall then be hid from their Eyes*. And no Condition can be so miserable as theirs, who by obstinate Infidelity, put themselves out of all Possibility of Salvation.

The sad Consequence of using those spiritual Persons contumeliously and despitefully who come as *Ambassadors* from God with these glad Tidings of Salvation, is express'd in the Parable, by the King's *sending forth his Armies to destroy those Murderers and to burn up their City*; which was likewise *literally* fulfill'd in the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and shall be as effectually verify'd upon those wicked Men who vent their *Spleen* against the Religion upon those that *preach* it, and vilifie and abuse and trample upon the one because they hate the other. But Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord; and a fiery Destruction, even that of Hell, shall (without a deep Repentance, which we beseech God to grant them) be the Portion of those whose Malice was so inveterate against Men sent from God to invite them to *Salvation*.

This is the Case of such, as when they have heard, totally *reject* this holy Religion, and *abuse* and vilifie those that perswade them to embrace it. And their's is as bad, who tho' they *profess* it, are negligent of its *Duties*, and live not *agreeably* to it: Which is express'd in the Parable by a King's finding a *Man at the Marriage Supper that had not on a Wedding Gar-*

Garment, and saying unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a Wedding Garment? And the Man's being speechless upon it, and the King's commanding his Servants to bind him Hand and Foot and take him away and cast him into outer Darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.

This is in Allusion to what was customary in those Eastern Countries, the having peculiar florid Sort of Garments, on purpose to grace such festival Solemnities, and none being permitted to taste of those Feasts, but who had such Garments on.

So in Christianity, Repentance and Reformation of Life are the *Wedding Garment*, without which none, let them make never so specious Professions, shall taste of that Happiness which is propos'd as the Reward of believing in Jesus. Faith without Works is dead, the Soul without Repentance is polluted, whatever it professes to believe; and without real and substantial Holiness no Man shall see the Lord. And when at the great Scrutiny in the last Day, God shall take a View of every Man, of the State and Condition of his Soul, that every Man may be disposed of according to his Deserts; and shall ask those formal Professors who have liv'd like Heathens, or as if Faith alone could save them, and took no Care of good Works, How came you in hither? How came you into this Society of Christians not having on the Wedding Garment? What

will they be able to say in their Excuse? Will they not be like him in the Parable, confounded and ashamed, and utterly *speechless*! What will they have to plead in Bar of that dire Sentence which will then be past upon them, *bind them Hand and Foot and take them away*, &c. certainly *nothing*, but with inexpressible Horror and Despair and *Self-Condernation* must submit to their sad Punishment.

From all this, there is in the *last Place* this general *Observation* drawn, that *many are call'd, but few chosen*. The plain Meaning of which I suppose, to be this.

That though the Gospel is preach'd to Myriads of People, and all that hear of it are *invited* alike to *embrace* it, and 'tis God's good Pleasure that *all* should be *sav'd*, and come to the *Knowledge of the Truth*: Yet the *most* will make a very ill Use of their Liberty of Choice, and *many* utterly *reject* this Invitation; and more, though they do *embrace* it, yet become never the *better* for it, by not leading their Lives agreeably to their holy Profession. And by this means, among the *many* that are *call'd*, there will be but *few* that will approve themselves to God as *elect* or *choice* and *right good* Christians, and but *few* consequently, that will enter into the eternal Joy of their Lord; according to what our Lord said in another Place, *strait is the Gate and narrow is the Way that leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.*

Where-

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. As we have all of us been *call'd* and *invited* to a sincere Faith in, and intire Obedience to the holy Jesus, and do make open *Profession* of such *Faith*, and *Shew* of such *Obedience*; it concerns us as much as our Souls are worth, and as we would avoid that *outer Darkness* where is eternal *weeping and gnashing of Teeth*; to take all possible Care that our Faith be so *sincere* and *lively* as to produce *good Works*, such as may *make our Calling and Election sure*. Not to rest contented with the *Form* of Godliness, or outward *Profession* of Christianity, but to endeavour after the *Power* of it and lead our Lives according to our Belief; to imitate our Lord's most blessed Example, and obey all his holy Precepts, and submit to the Disposals of his Providence chearfully, and bear unspotted Love and Fidelity to him through the whole Course of our Lives. And by this means shall we be reckon'd among his *choice Jewels*, *elect and precious*, and be receiv'd into the *nearest and dearest*, and even an *inseparable* Relation to him; and when this Life's at an End, be conducted by his Angels into his *glorious Presence*, there to share in his *Happiness* to eternal Ages.

The P R A Y E R.

MOST blessed God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in infinite Merc, and
amazing

amazing Condescension hast invited me miserable Creature (though poor and maim'd, halt and blind, and destitute of every thing that may recommend me to thee, except it be my Wretchedness) to the most intimate Union with thy glorious Son; and as the Bride of that Divine Bridegroom and enjoy his Love, and be blessed with his tenderest Regard, his Protection and Defence, and to partake of his Honour and Glory and Happiness: How can I enough praise and magnifie this thy wondrous Goodness! And with what Transports of Joy should I embrace so inestimable a Favour! But I alas! stupid as I am, and bewitch'd with the Cares and Business and Gain and Pleasures of this World, have hitherto stood in the Way of my own Happiness, and disregarded this most gracious Offer, and prefer'd every thing before this spiritual Marriage with the Son of God; or at best have deferr'd it still till some other Time, provoking thereby most justly thy Wrath and Indignation against me, and deserving to be for ever excluded thy blessed Presence as infinitely unworthy. But now, O Lord, I do earnestly repent, and am heartily sorry for so ungrateful slighting such infinite Mercy: The Remembrance of this Vileness is grievous unto me, the Burden of it is intolerable; and with the utmost Earnestness of a troubled Spirit I beg thy Heavenly Aid, that now without the least Delay I may cheerfully embrace the glorious Invitations of the Gospel, and love and honour the Messengers which bring me those glad Tidings. And since

since my Maker is pleased to be my Husband, O may I be always mindful of my Duty to him, and bear him unspotted Fidelity and Love, be his intirely, and for ever submit without Reserve to his Heavenly Government, reverence his Authority, and glorifie him with my Body and my Spirit which are his. And grant, O merciful God, I humbly intreat thee, that the Spirit of Infidelity may never possess my Soal, lest I totally reject this blessed Invitation, -or having embrac'd it, and enter'd into so near a Relation to my Saviour, again divorce my self from him by entertaining strange and forbidden Loves. And since I am so highly honour'd by the Son of God, O may I always be careful to preserve the Dignity of so high a Calling, and not debase my self by low sunk brutish Actions; but, as befits the spiritual Spouse of Christ, be cloath'd with the Wedding Garment of sincere Purity and Holiness, that so I may never be separated from my dearest Lord, but ever enjoy the unconceivable Happiness of his Heavenly Kingdom. Which grant, O merciful Father, for the Sake of that blessed Jesus. Amen. Amen.

PARABLE

P A R A B L E VI.

Of the Ten Virgins.

Matth. xxv. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,
10, 11, 12, 13.

Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto Ten Virgins, which took their Lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish, They that were foolish took their Lamps, and took no Oil with them.

But the wise took Oil in their Vessels with their Lamps.

While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumber'd and slept.

And at Midnight there was a Cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him.

Then all those Virgins arose, and trimmed their Lamps.

And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your Oil; for our Lamps are gone out.

But the wise answer'd, saying, not so; lest there be not enough for us and you, but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for your selves.

And

And while they went to buy, the Bridegroom came, and they that were ready, went in with him to the Marriage, and the Door was shut.

Afterwards came also the other Virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.

But he answer'd and said, verily I say unto you; I know you not.

Watch therefore, for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour, wherein the Son of Man cometh.

THOUGH the *first* Intention of this Parable, as may be probably collected from the foregoing Chapter (which is a Description of the sad State that was e'er long to overtake *Jerusalem* for the Jews obstinate Infidelity, and their murdering their Saviour) was to urge the Jewish Christians to a Preparation and watchful Care against that Time of Sorrows; and that they would be so wise as to make Provision for their *Safety* by being very careful that that Time surprize them not in *wicked Courses*; but that living like faithful Disciples of Christ, in all Obedience to his *holy* Commands, his *Providence* might watch over them and *secure* them from *perishing* in that dreadful Destruction: Tho' this might be the *first* Intention of this Parable, yet I suppose it designed likewise to represent the Necessity of Mens constant Preparation for *Death* and *Judgment*, by a sedulous Care and Watchfulness over themselves, and diligent Practice of all Religious Duties and Obligations;

ligations ; Because 'tis very *uncertain* when God will summon any of us to leave this World and appear before his *just Tribunal*, and his Call may be very *suddain* and unexpected ; and because the Consequence of being *unready* and not *fit* to obey it, will be *inexpressibly miserable*. Watch therefore, says our Lord in the Conclusion of this Parable, *for ye know neither the Day nor the Hour when the Son of Man cometh*.

In my Discourse upon this Parable thus understood, I shall do *two* things.

First, I shall give a particular *Interpretation* of the Parable, and shew how aptly expressive it is of the *Sense* our Lord couch'd under it. And

Secondly, I shall urge *that* upon the *Practice* of Christians which is express'd by it ; namely, that they would *watch* and be *ready*, because they know not the *Day nor the Hour*.

First, I shall give a particular *Interpretation* of this Parable, and shew how aptly expressive it is of the *Sense* our Lord couch'd under it.

The Parable is an Allusion to a Custom among the *Jews*, of the *Friends* and Neighbours of the *Bridegrooms* when there was a Wedding, conducting him to the *Bride-Chamber* with *Songs* and burning *Lamps*, and partaking of an *Entertainment* that was prepar'd for them, and *shutting the Door* when the *Bridegroom* was *enter'd*, to keep out the intruding *Rabble*, and afterwards admitting *none* that were not
ready

ready to attend him at the Hour he came, which was *uncertain*. And the *Sense* which our Lord couch'd under this Representation is *this*: That 'tis highly necessary every Christian should be always *ready* and prepar'd by a *holy Life*, to attend the *Call* of Christ whenever he shall summon him out of this World by *Death*, in order to his final *Judgment*; because the *Time* of that great Summons is so very *uncertain*; and eternal Happiness or Misery respectively depends upon Mens being prepar'd or not prepar'd for it. Now, how *aptly* and *movingly* expressive this Parable is of *this* Sense will appear from the following *Interpretation* of it.

By the *Virgins* in the Parable is represented the Society of *Christians*, those that profess to *believe* in, and to be *Disciples* of the holy Jesus; who, like *Virgins*, ought to be *pure* and *spotless*, *innocent* and *modest* and *humble*, *sober* and *temperate* in all things, *pious* and *devout*, and the like: And as the *Want* of these or any of these good *Qualifications*, is to a *Virgin* the greatest *Blackening* and *Disparagement*, so the *Want* of them in *Christians* is likewise the greatest *Disshonour* to them; exposes them to the *Scorn* and *Contempt* of God and all *good Men*; renders them *unworthy* of that *holy Name* by which they are call'd, and *defiles* and *stains* those Souls which Christ *purified* with his *precious Blood*, that they might be his own *Peculiar*, *zealous* of good *Works*.

By

By half of those *Virgins* being *wise* and half *foolish*, is represented the great *Difference* there is among those that go under the same general Character of *Christians*; some *vain* and *idle*, *careless* and *unthoughtful*, taken up with the *Gaieties* and *Follies* of the *World*, lavish of their *Reputation*, and *loose* in their *Conversation* and *Behaviour*, while others are so *wise* as to consider the *Character* they bear, and live as those that make Profession of *Holiness*, that is, with *Care* and *Circumspection*, *Watchfulness*, and a diligent and *attentive* *Piety*: That so they may preserve their *Honour* and the *Dignity* of their *Profession*, inviolate and *unstain'd*, and be presented as *chaste Virgins* unto *Christ*, that *Divine Bridegroom*, whenever he shall come.

By the *Lamps* of those *Virgins*, is expressed the *Souls* of *Christians*, which are to burn with holy *Fires* of *Love* and *Devotion* to *God* and their *Saviour*, and make them as so many *Lights* in this *dark* and *benighted* *World*; for ye are the *Light of the World*, says our *Lord* to his *Disciples*, therefore *let your Light so shine before Men that they may see your good Works and glorifie your Father which is in Heaven*, *Mat. 5. 14. 16.* That is, as the *Souls* of *Christians* are *illuminated* by the *Spirit* of him who is the *Father of Lights*, and in whom is no *Darkness* at all; as they are *warm'd* by his *Influences* who descended upon the *Apostles* in the *Likeness* of *Fire*, and have *Divine Affections*, by his
holy

holy Breathings inkindled in them ; so they should influence the *whole Man*, and make those that name the Name of Christ like so many burning and shining Lights in the Midst of a crooked and perverse Generation, so many *eminent* Examples of Piety and *real* Goodness ; *such*, as by their own *Practice* should recommend their most holy Religion, and set before Man's Eyes the *Beauty of Holiness* by their own *Conversation*.

By the *Bridegroom*, whom these *Virgins* with their *Lamps* went forth to meet, is represented our dear *Saviour*, that Heavenly King's Divine Son, for whom he made so glorious a Marriage in the Parable I last discours'd of ; where the Reasons why the Gospel is compar'd to a Marriage and our Lord to a Bridegroom are particularly insisted on. And by going forth to *meet* this Divine Bridegroom is signify'd our *preparing* against his calling us from this world by *Death*, and providing against his Advent to *Judgment* ; that is, by frequently contemplating our *Mortality*, reflecting on the *Shortness* and *Uncertainty* of Life, and therefore making the best use of our Time while we have it, as not knowing how soon our Breath may be required of us ; and because after Death comes *Judgment*, therefore endeavouring to make *ready* our Accounts by frequent Self-Examination, and from the serious Consideration of the *errors* of that great Day, and the severe Scrutiny into our *Thoughts* as well as Words and Actions

that we must then undergo, collecting with St. Peter, *what manner of Persons we ought to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness, that we may be found of the great Judge in Peace, and, as Virgins, without Spot and blameless.* 2 Pet. 3. 11.

By the Oyl in the Virgins Lamps, and which they took with them in their Vessels when they went to meet the Bridegroom, is represented the *Graces and Vertues* of Christianity, which are the proper *Nourishment* of the Soul (that *Lamp of the Lord*, as Solomon calls it) and will brighten and enliven it as Plenty of Oyl does a Lamp, and make *the Way of the Just like a shining Light, shining more and more unto the perfect Day*; and which, when they fail, *Spiritual Darkness* will follow as in a Lamp gone out: *And if the Light that is in you be Darkness, says our Lord, how great is that Darkness!* But the Christian Vertues were very aptly represented by Oyl upon these further Accounts.

First, Because Oyl was generally reckoned in the eastern Countries as a great part of a Mans *Riches*; and when they would express great *Wealth*, they do it by magnifying the plenty of Oyl. Thus Job, when he reflected, in his Affliction, upon his former opulent Condition, the Rock (or the stone Jar that was made use of to preserve Oyl in) says he, *pour'd me out Rivers of Oyl*, Job. 29. 6 And the Prophet Micah, when he represented the Impossibility of appeasing his offended God, even by the most *rich and costly Offering*, *will the Lord be pleas'd*, says he, *with*
ten

ten Thousand Rivers of Oyl? Micah 6. 7. and in abundance of Places of Scripture the increase of Oyl signifies the Increase of Riches. And therefore, to have a Soul plentifully stored with divine Graces and Vertues, whereby we lay up a *Treasure in Heaven* and become rich towards God, being the *greatest* and only true and durable Riches; is very aptly represented by having Oyl in our Vessels and our Lamps.

Secondly, Oyl was likewise among the Easterns a Symbol of the greatest *Honours*, as is evident from the whole Story of the Bible, where we read that at the solemn Consecration and Inauguration of Kings and Priests Oyl was always us'd, and that among the Jews by the Appointment of God himself; and is still in Use with us at the Coronation of our Kings: And therefore, very fit to represent those Christian Vertues which so highly enoble the Soul as to render it like to God, holy as he is holy, pure as he is pure, perfect as he is perfect; and whereby through the Merits of Christ we become Kings and Priests to God, and shall reign with him for ever. Rev. 1. 6.

Thirdly, Oyl was an Emblem of Joy and Pleasure, and much us'd therefore in Feasts and Entertainments, as is evident not only from Heathen Writers, but from holy Scripture. There we read of the Oyl of Joy and Gladness; and our Lord in his Directions concerning fasting, bids his Disciples not make a vain glorious Shew of it by an affected Sullenness and

Down Look, disfiguring their Faces as the Hypocrites did : But thou, when thou fastest, says he, *anoint thine Head that thou appear not unto Men to fast ; i. e.* make Semblance rather by this means, as if thou wert going to a *Feast*. And *David*, when he recounts God's Goodness to him, says amongst other things, *thou hast prepar'd a Table for me, thou hast anointed my Head with Oyl and my Cup runneth over, Psalm 23. 5.* which signifies the Happiness of his Condition in general as well as his being advanc'd to the Throne of *Israel*. Many other Places there are of this Nature ; but these are sufficient to shew how fitly those Christian Graces are express'd by *Oyl*, which cause the greatest *Joy* and Satisfaction to a holy Soul, and the Practice of which is full of Pleasure and unspeakable Delight. *Sincere Religion* is the most *cheering* thing in the World, and a good Conscience a continual Feast ; Indeed, to *rejoyce* is only proper for a good *Christian*, whose Mind is clear and *undisturb'd*, and in constant *Hope* and Expectation of the Happiness of Heaven. But he, whose Mind is *rack'd* with a Sense of his *deep Guilt*, and feels the Lashes of an enraged Conscience, and is terrified with the unexpressible Fears of *Damnation*, has little Reason to have *Joy* or Comfort in any thing. *Oyl* therefore, or the Emblem of *Joy* and Chearfulness, is of nothing more aptly expressive than of the Graces of our holy Religion, whose Ways alone are indeed *Ways of Pleasantness and Joy*.

By the Virgins *all slumbering and sleeping* while the Bridegroom *tarry'd*: is signified the *Inadvertency* and *Frailty* of even the *best* of Men. Because this Divine Bridegroom delayeth his Coming, we are all of us too apt to *lay aside* the Thoughts of it; to think but little upon *Death* and *Judgment* as things a great Way off, and for which there will be Time enough to provide *hereafter*: And for want of due *Advertency* to these *rousing* Subjects, we are apt to grow *heavy* in our Religious Performances, and suffer spiritual *Drouziness* to creep too much upon us. This made holy *David* call upon God so often to *quicken* him in his Righteousness; and *St. Paul* to exhort his Corinthians to *awake* to Righteousness, and thus to rouse the Ephesians, *awake thou that sleepest*: Eph. 5. 14. And in this spiritual Slumber (though the unavoidable Frailty of humane Nature will in Part be accepted as our Excuse by our merciful Saviour, who *knows* and pities our *Infirmities*, yet) even the *best* of us indulge our selves too much, and enter into the Number of the *foolish* Virgins, and endanger the Extinction of our Lamp through the Decay of our Virtues, and expose our selves to many Dangers and Temptations, and frequent Falls. For this Inadvertency to that great Truth, *that the End of all things is at hand*, is one great Reason why even the *righteous* fall seven times a Day; whereas would we oftner *set our Lord before us* as coming to judge *the quick and the dead*, and

reflect, that perhaps the next Hour our Soul may be required of us by him that gave it, and so an End put for ever to our State of *Probation*, and an irreversible Sentence soon after be pass'd upon us according to our Deservings, we should not dare to be so often *mov'd* from our Duty, but be careful and circumspect and always upon our Guard, lest that Day surprize us *unawares*, and while we drowze away our Opportunity our *Lamps go out*, and the Bridegroom call before we are ready to enter with him into the Marriage Chamber, and so the *Door be shut*.

It therefore highly concerns even the *best* of us, *not to sleep as do others, but to watch and be sober, having our Loins girded about, and our Lights burning*, as our Lord expresses it, and our selves like unto Men that wait for their Lord when he will return from the Wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh we may open to him immediately. Blessed are those Servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find thus watching; verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them sit down to Meat, and (after the Manner of Bridegrooms) will come forth and serve them; Luke 12. 35, &c i. e. will impart to them the Joys and Felicities of his heavenly Kingdom. And if he shall come in the *second or third Watch*, that is, in the Time most addicted to Vanity and Inadvertency, as is *Youth and Manhood*; Blessed in a more especial

cial manner are those Servants. And what the Angel said to the Church of Sardis, Rev. 3. 2. is very necessary Advice even to the best Man living, *be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain which are ready to dye; for I have not found thy works perfect before God.* And what our Lord says, Rev. 16. 15. deserves to be seriously consider'd; *Behold I come as a Thief, blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his Garments, lest he walk naked and they see his Shame.*

By a Cry being made at Midnight, *behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him;* is very lively and movingly represented, how unexpectedly the Day of Judgment shall surprize the drouzy World; and how suddain, for any thing we can tell to the contrary, the Time of our Death may be, which is to us the Foreruner of it.

Midnight is a Time of great Silence, and destin'd to Rest and a Forgetfulness of the Toils and Troubles of the Day; and then, suddain Outcries and Alarums are doubly scaring and affrighting, and seize with an inexpressible Confusion, Horror and Consternation. And thus, when Men are in the *Midst* of their *Wickedness*, that spiritual *Night*, employ'd in Deeds of *Darkness*, given up to Ease and Luxury, and forgetful of the great Business of working out their Salvation; then shall that Time of Sorrows steal upon them as a Thief in the Night, the terrifying Cry shall be made, *behold, the great Judge of the World cometh, go ye forth to meet him*: For when they shall say, *Peace and*

Safety, says the Apostle, *Then suddain Destruction cometh upon them as Travel upon a Woman with Child, and they shall not escape, 1 Thes. 5. 3. Then shall the Kings of the Earth and the great Men and the rich Men, those that were thought happy upon Earth, instead of going out to meet this Judge, hide themselves in Dens, in Rocks and Mountains, and say to the Mountains and Rocks, fall on us and hide us from the Face of him that sitteth on the Throne and from the Wrath of the Lamb, for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand! Rev. 6. 15, 16, 17.*

And no wonder if a *guilty Wretch* dreads to go meet his *angry Judge*; and all on the *suddain* with all his *Stains and Pollutions* about him, appear before his *Tribunal* who *hateth Iniquity and into whose Presence no unclean thing can enter*: And, who is a *consuming Fire*, to those who by their *obstinate Impieties* have provoked him to become their *Enemy*.

And since all this is so, a *Man of any Thought*, and that has any *Apprehension* of the *sad Condition* of being thus *surpriz'd* and hurried into the other *World* by so quick and unforeseen a *Summons* (which no *Man* is sure shall not be his *Case*, since many have been call'd away with little or no *Warning*, that have no more expected than we do now) a *Man of any Thought* and *Apprehension* of things will surely be mov'd by such *Considerations* to *shake off* that fatal *Drouziness*

ness which too easily besets him, and by a constant Attendance to his Duty and Preparation for his Departure hence, be ready cheerfully to obey his great Master's Call, *whether at Even or at Midnight, or at the Cock-crowing, or in the Morning, lest coming suddainly he find him sleeping.*

By the *wise* Virgins arising and *trimming their Lamps* when that *Midnight Cry* was made, is represented the more than *ordinary* Care that even good Persons ought to take when by *Age* or the *Violence* of any *Distemper* the Time of their Departure hence seems to be near approaching, to *enliven* their Piety; and by putting a *Recruit* of Oyl into their Lamps, acquiring *new* Degrees of Sanctity, and warming their Souls with greater Ardors of Devotion and holy Love, prepare to go *cheerfully to meet their Lord.* Then is the Time, when every sincere Christian should endeavour to *adorn* his Soul with all the Graces of the holy Religion he professes, to improve every remaining Minute of his Time to this best of Purposes, to *redeem* the many Hours formerly mispent in Vanity and Folly; and by frequent Contemplation of the infinite *Glory, Sanctity* and *Bliss* of that heavenly World to which he then so sensibly draws near, inflame his Desires of being at the End of his wearisome Journey to it; and *fit* himself for the *spiritual unspotted* Enjoyments of that happy Place by having as little Commerce as is possible
with

with this World below, and have *his Conversation in Heaven*, which will so quickly be the Place of his everlasting Abode.

By the *foolish Virgins* saying to the *wise*; *give us of your Oyl for our Lamps are gone out*, is represented the *Want of Preparation* among the careless and *inconsiderate* for this so great and *suddain Change*; and their mighty *Consternation* upon it, and the vain and insignificant Courses they will take in their *Surprize*, to make up, if possible, their own *Defects*, by borrowing of others that have Souls better furnish'd with Piety than theirs. And by the *wise* answering, *not so, lest there be not enough for us and you*, and bidding them go rather and *buy for themselves*; is shewn that 'tis utterly *groundless* to expect at that great Day of Retribution, when every Man shall be rewarded according to his *own Works*, to fare the better for the Sanctity of *others*, and that every Man has enough to do to work out his *own Salvation*, and must keep his *Lamp* alive with his *own Oyl*, must *nourish* his *Soul* with his *own Vertue*; for there *was* never, nor ever *shall* be any *meer Man* so holy and excellent but must return this same Answer as the *wise Virgins* did, to such as should beg them to bestow some of their *Vertues* or *Merits* upon them, *not so, lest there be not enough for our selves and you*.

And if this be true, what will become of the *Popish Doctrine* of *Works of Supererrogation*? If the *best Man* in the World has but

Vertue

Vertue enough to secure his *own* Condition, (and that through infinite *Mercy* too, and upon Account of the all-sufficient Merits of Christ) where is there any left for him to bestow upon others? But this is one of those Doctrines that bring much *Money* into their *Coffers*, and therefore, right or wrong, they'll be sure to maintain it.

By the Bridegroom's *coming* while those *foolish* Virgins went about so unlikely an Employment as then immediately to furnish their Lamps with Oyl, which before were unregarded and suffer'd to go out, and the *Door* before they were provided *being shut*; is represented, the *Invalidity*, generally speaking, of a *Death-Bed Repentance*; that 'tis too *late* to *begin* to be good when the *Bridegroom* comes, and those that would enter with him into the *Marriage-Chamber* must be *ready* and prepar'd by a previous Course of holy Living, and that for some *considerable* Time.

This Hurry of the foolish Virgins at that Time to get Oyl for their Lamps, was only the Effect of the Terrors of that *Midnight Call*; had it not been for *that*, they would have drouz'd on still in their thoughtless Way of living, and in all Probability, had it prov'd a *false* Alarm, they would have return'd again to their Dream of Vanity, when this their *Fright* was a little over. And so it is with those that think not of Repentance till *Death* and *Judgment* stare 'em in the Face; they are
then

then wondrous sorry for having offended God, because they see they are like to be for ever punish'd for it with the Devil and his Angels; and *wish* they had liv'd *better*, and beg God to forgive 'em, and *promise* Amendment for the Time to come: But all this very seldom proceeds from Love to God or his holy *Religion*, as appears by their being as bad as ever, when God has been pleas'd to restore them to their former Health. But, such Repentance as this is but a Piece of *Mockery*, and will not be accepted; it must be a real and thorough Change of Mind express'd in an intire Reformation of Life and Manners that will incline God to pardon and forgive. Notwithstanding all the Hurry of the *foolish Virgins* to get Oyl for their Lamps upon this suddain Notice of the Bridegroom's coming; because their Lamps were before *suffer'd to go out*, we see the Door was *shut* upon them.

By the *wise Virgins* that were *ready*, their *going in with the Bridegroom* to the Marriage-Feast, is represent'd the great Happiness of the sincerely good, who by holy living are *ready*, and *prepar'd* for their Departure hence into the World of Spirits. That is, as there was great Preparation made to receive the Bridegroom among the Jews, and other *Easterns*, great Joy and Festivity, and which the *Children of the Bride-Chamber*, or those that attended the Bridegroom, did partake of, singing *Epithalamiums* or nuptial Songs in
Praise

Praise of the Bridegroom and his Bride, and rejoicing in their Happiness, and wishing them long Prosperity : So, the Joys of the *highest Heavens* (which are the Marriage-Chamber of this Divine Bridegroom our Saviour) in the Society of innumerable Saints and Angels and glorified Spirits, are prepar'd for those that love our Lord Jesus in Sincerity; and by a constant holy Life, are ready to leave these Earthly Habitations, and enter with him into that holy Place : Where they shall enjoy a most blisful Eternity, for ever singing Hallelujah's to the Praise and Honour of that *glorious Name*, in which all the Nations of the World are blessed; *praising God and saying, Let us be glad and joyce and give Honour to him, for the Marriage of the Lamb is come, and his Wife hath made her self ready; and blessed are they which are call'd to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, Rev. 19. 7, 9.* And well is that Care and Watchfulness and holy Preparation repay'd, which will procure an Entrance into that holy Place, where Christ is sitting at the right Hand of God; and make us Sharers in the Joys of Angels, and in the Happiness of our dear Redeemer!

In the *last* place; by the *foolish Virgins* coming after the Door was shut, and saying, *Lord, Lord, open unto us*, and his answering, *I know you not*; is express'd the sad and *remediless* Condition of those whom Death and Judgment surprize *unawares*, and that are not
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prepar'd by a holy Life. They may cry, *Lord, Lord,* long enough in the Bitterness and Anguish of their Souls, and profess that they believe in him and are his Disciples, and call'd by his Name, *that they have eat and drunk in his Presence, and that he hath taught in their Streets,* and the like: but yet, for all this, without a constant *persevering Piety,* Christ will tell them, *I know you not whence you are, depart from me all ye that work Iniquity.*

And, what inconceivable *Agonies* will those excluded Wretches then be in! What *Horror* and *Despair* will then take Seizure of their Souls! What *Outcries,* what hideous *Wailings* will there be! How will *some* frame fruitless *Excuses,* *Lord, we have eaten and drank in thy Presence, and thou hast taught in our Streets, &c.* while *others,* with deep Sighs in vain beg *Pity* and *Commiseration,* of him who never before *deny'd* it. What intolerable Anguish will they feel, to see those whom they *hated* and *despis'd* on Earth, then enter'd into the glorious Marriage Chamber of the Son of God; and *they themselves,* they who were prosperous here, and to all Appearance the *Friends* and *Favourites* of the Divine Bridegroom, eternally *shut* out from his Presence and the Joys of those celestial Regions, and left behind in unconceivable *Torments,* and in the Company of malicious *Fiends* and *Devils,* to linger under an Eternity of Misery! No *Words* can ever reach those Horrors, nor can
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our Thoughts *conceive* them; and may none of us ever be so unhappy as to *feel* them! But be so *wise* as to watch and be ready, and have our Lamps burning, and our selves always prepar'd for this great coming of our Lord, *for we know not the Day nor the Hour.*

And thus have I given a particular, plain and practical Interpretation of this Parable of the *Ten Virgins*, whereof five were *wise* and five *foolish*; and shewn as I went along how aptly expressive it is of the Sense our Lord couch'd under it.

I proceed now to the other thing to be done, which is to urge that *Watchfulness* and *Preparation* by all manner of holy living against this coming of our Lord, which is necessary to our being admitted into his Joy; and to shew, how great the *Wisdom* of so doing is, and how great the *Folly* of the Contrary: For those that were *ready* and *trim'd* their Lamps are called *wise* Virgins in the Parable, and those that were *not* ready, and their Lamps *out* are call'd *foolish*.

As for the *Folly* of not taking care to be ready and prepar'd against that great Change of *Death* it shall come; it is a thing justly to be wonder'd at, that Men who know that one Time or other they must surely *die*, and are wholly in the Dark as to the *precise Time* of their Death, and that they must die but once, and that, without any further *Probation*, after Death comes *Judgment*; it is much to be wonder'd at that those who know all this to be true, as
Christians

Christians are suppos'd to do, should live so much at *random*, and be so foolishly careless in managing their *last Stake*, so heedless in doing that *well* which admits of no *Repetition*, and which, if done *ill* they are for ever *miserable*. 'Tis the very Height of *Folly* this, and which, one would think, a Man of any Sense could not be guilty of. There is nothing that Men are more *afraid* of than dying, and yet, so strangely contradictory are they to themselves, they make the *least* Provision against this greatest Evil. In *other* matters Men are so *wise* as to endeavour to *secure* themselves against their Fears, they provide against *Poverty* by *Diligence* and *Parsimony*, against *Pain* and *Diseases* by proper *Antidotes* and *Preservatives*, against the Approach of *Enemies* by the best *Defence* they are capable of making, and the like; and this many times when there is only a *Probability* of these Evils coming upon them: And yet against *Death*, though they *dread* it above *all things*, and know that it will *certainly* come and are uncertain how *soon*, they make as *little* Provision as if they were *immortal* as the Angels in Heaven, what a Bundle of foolish Inconsistencies is here? They look upon *Death* as the *greatest* of Evils, and yet *regard* it the least of all things; they know it highly concerns 'em to make Preparation for it by a good Life, and they know the sad Consequence if it surprize 'em unawares, and they are not sure they shall not be surpriz'd the next Hour or Minute; and yet

y^et for all this they put the evil Day far from them, and by all Arts endeavour to remove such Melancholly Thoughts as if they were resolv'd not to avoid but suffer what they fear, and secure to themselves the Miseries consequent upon an untimely and unprepar'd Death. And what is this, but just the same Piece of Folly and Madness, as for a Man because he greatly dreads the Plague therefore to run into an infected House; because he is afraid of Poverty therefore to grow prodigal and squander away what he hath? And what can be more strangely foolish and contradictious than this? Indeed, a Sinners whole Life is the greatest Folly and Contradiction, but 'tis most gross and palpable with Relation to dying; for, because a Man loves his Body, therefore so to indulge it in this World as to make it become eternally miserable in the next; and live in such a course of sinful Pleasures as will be repaid with a double Death, is unaccountably foolish and against all the Dictates even of natural Reason.

I need not say more I think to expose the Folly of not making Preparation for so great a Change as Death will effect in every Man's Condition; or (in the Phrase of this Parable) of not keeping Oyl in our Lamps, nor watching against the divine Bridegroom's coming, but slumbering in a careless Inadvertency to those great things of Religion, Death and Judgment, till they overtake us as a Thief in the Night. And from what has been said of the Folly of

not preparing for that Time of Terrors and greatest Concern to every Man, we may in a few Words collect the great *Wisdom* of being always in a *Readiness* to obey the Summons of our great Lord with *Chearfulness*.

For in short, to be *ready* and *prepar'd to Dye* when God shall please to call us, has all the *Wisdom* in it of making a constant due Provision against the greatest and most *concerning* Change that can befall us; and which we must *certainly* undergo, and how *soon* we know not, and that but *once* neither, and which will be follow'd by the final *Judgment* without any *new Opportunity* being afforded, wherein to *amend* the Errors of our then irrecoverably past Life: 'Tis to make *such* a Preparation for this great Change as may render it *advantageous* to us whenever it shall come, than which no greater Piece of Wisdom can be imagin'd: For that certainly is the greatest Wisdom that makes a Man *wise to Salvation*.

Wherefore, to conclude this Parable. Since *it is appointed to Men once to dye, and after that the Judgment*; or, in the Stile of this Parable, since Jesus the divine Bridegroom will one time come to summon every particular Member of the Christian Church, his mystical Spouse, to leave *this* World and attend him in the World of *Spirits*, there to partake with him (if ready and adorn'd with the Wedding Garment, and their Lamps burning with the Oyl of Righteousness) of the everlasting Felicities
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of his heavenly Kingdom ; or else, if not prepar'd to appear before him *then*, to be for ever *excluded* his Presence, and thrust into the dire Abodes of the Devil and his Angels : Since this is so, let us all make it our sincere Endeavour, by a serious and hearty Observation of those holy Rules of living which our Lord has mark'd out to us as the Way to Immortality and a Preparation for his Appearance, to be always ready to go out and meet him ; that we may enter with him into the Marriage-Chamber before the Door be shut, and not hear that dismal Sound, *I know ye not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity.*

And because this great Coming of the Bridegroom will be but *once*, for 'tis appointed to Men but *once* to dye, and after that but *one final Judgment* ; let us by no means trifle away this *only* Opportunity of working out our Salvation in Folly and Impertinency, much less in *Wickedness* and *Vice* ; but often reflect upon the Agonies we shall feel when we shall find this *one only* Life which we have so wretchedly mispent, drawing to a *Conclusion*, and no Hopes of any further Opportunity to *recover* our selves in, but just as we *then* are in that deplorable *unprepar'd* Condition, be hurried away to give Account of our Works. Lord ! What Confusion must such wretches feel, what horrid Tortures must needs pierce their Souls, to see Hell gaping to receive 'em, and no possibility of *Escape* or so much as a *Reprieve*, but
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plunge they must into those *Lakes of Fire and Brimstone*, which yet they might have *avoided* if they would?

If this be a *Case infinitely deplorable* (and if this be *not*, certainly nothing is) then it nearly concerns us all while we have *Time*, that is, while this *one onely* Life does last, to make provision for a *happy Departure* out of it, by a more holy and circumspect *Conversation* in it. And because the *Time when* this one only Life shall end is wholly in the *Dark* to us, and we *know not the Day nor the Hour when our Lord will come*; let this awaken us into serious *Thoughts and Resolutions* of making the best *Use* of the remaining *Portion* of our *Lives*, and breaking off immediately our *sinful Course* of living, lest the *Opportunity* for so doing be gone before we think of it, and we be *surpris'd* into endless *Misery* e're we are *aware*. Let us always keep our *Lamps burning*, our *Souls* employed in holy *Meditations*, and our selves in a *Readiness* by a good *Life*; and then, though it is *appointed for us all to dye*, and that but *once*, and *after that the Judgment*, and we *know not the Day nor the Hour* when the *Summons* shall be given: We may with *Comfort* wait for our dear *Lord's* appearing, and say, *Come Lord Jesus, come quickly.*

The PRAYER.

I.

O Glorious Jesus! The Saviour and the Judge of Mankind, before whose just Tribunal we must all appear, but when, we know not, and there give Account of our Works, and be rewarded according to them; assist me, I beseech thee, with thy Grace, that I may make it my chief Care with Cheerfulness and Comfort to obey thy Summons to this great Audit whenever thou shalt call. And to that End, grant I may be frequent in the Contemplation of my Mortality; how short and frail my Life is here, how inevitably and closely Judgment follows Death, and how certainly the one will find me as the other leaves me. Thou holy Jesus, though a stern Judge to obstinate Rebels to thy Father, art yet the Bridegroom of thy Spouse the Church; and infinite is thy Love to those that preserve inviolate their Fidelity to thee, and happy will they be beyond Expression, who at thy glorious coming to receive thy Bride into thy Kingdom, shall be admitted into thy Marriage Chamber, and be for ever where thou art, and behold and partake of thy Glory. O may I therefore, like a wise Virgin, preserve my Innocence untouch'd, be cloath'd with Humility, and adorn'd with a meek and quiet Spirit, and sober and temperate in all things, having my Lamp full of Oyl, my Soul replenish'd with Vertue, and constantly burning with the Fires of Devotion and Love;

that so when the Cry shall be made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him; I may be ready to obey thy Call, though it be made at Midnight, and be found of thee our dearest Lord, as a Virgin in Peace, without Spot and blameless.

II.

I must confess with Shame and Sorrow, O merciful Jesus, that I am too prone to slumber and sleep, and forget to advert as I ought, to this thy glorious Second Advent, and the Forerunner of it, Death; and am apt foolishly to put that Day far from me, and to think thou delayest thy coming; whereby my Oyl is wasted, and my Lamp almost gone out.

O do thou therefore quicken me in thy Righteousness, blessed Redeemer, and grant that the Consideration of the surprizing Suddainness of thy Appearance upon the Throne of Judgment, and the great Uncertainty of the Time when I shall be call'd from hence and bound over to that great Assize, there to give Account of my Works and how I liv'd and how I dy'd: Grant that this Consideration may put an End to my Spiritual Drouziness, and engage me in Prayer and Watchfulness, and pious sober Conversation, because I know not the Day nor the Hour. And when by the Decays of Age or Violence of Diseases my Departure into the World of Spirits seems to be near approaching: O then enable me with thy prevailing Grace, to trim my Lamp with an extraordinary Diligence, to enliven my Religion, and not
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be to seek for Oyl then, when my Lamp should be best replenish'd with it, and burn most vigorously. O let me never trust to the great Uncertainty of a Death-Bed Repentance, nor vainly depend upon the redundant Merit of others, save that of my Redeemer which is my only Hope, but now in Time of Health provide for a happy Death, lest my Lamp being out when thou shalt call me to attend thee, Amazement and Horror seize me, and the Door be shut upon me. And well will my wakeful Preparation be rewarded, dearest Jesus, when I shall be admitted into thy glorious Presence, and enjoy the endless Bliss of thy heavenly Bride-Chamber. O therefore grant me thy Grace not to sleep as do others, but to watch and be sober, and so much the more as I see that Day approaching. Amen. Blessed Saviour, Amen, Amen.

P A R A B L E VII.

Of the good Samaritan.

Luke x. 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35.

A certain Man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among Thieves which striped him of his Raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain Priest that Way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other Side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the Place, came and look'd on him, and passed by on the other Side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: And when he saw him he had Compassion on him,

And went to him, and bound up his Wounds, pouring in Oyl and Wine, and set him on his own Beast, and brought him to an Inn, and took Care of him.

And

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out Two Pence, and gave them to the Host, and said unto him, take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

THIS Parable was spoken upon occasion of a Lawyer's asking our Lord, What he should do to inherit Eternal Life? Who, upon Christ's referring him to his own Law, and his Repetition of the two great Commandments of *loving God with all our Hearts, and our Neighbours as our selves*, and Christ's returning to him, *this do and thou shalt live*; being willing to justify himself, as an Observer of all this, ask'd this further Question, and who is my Neighbour? That so knowing our Saviour's Sense in that Particular, he might the better make it appear to him, that he not only *lov'd God with all his Heart*, which he thought he could safely affirm, but likewise *his Neighbour as himself*; and therefore stood fair for *eternal Life*. To this latter Question Jesus answer'd by the Parable above recited, and then ask'd the conceited Lawyer, *Which now of these Three thinkest thou was Neighbour to him that fell among the Thieves, the Priest and Levite that were his Countrymen, Children of the same Abraham, who yet took no Charitable Notice of him, but passed by on the other Side; or the Samaritan, who though a Schismatical Stranger to the*
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Common-wealth of *Israel*, and an Enemy to every *Jew*, yet had Compassion on him and reliev'd and succour'd him with Charity suitable to his Distress? To this the Lawyer answer'd, as he could not choose but do, *he was his Neighbour that shew'd Mercy on him*. Then said Jesus immediately to him, *Go and do thou likewise*. Which Words struck so home upon his Conscience, that they put a Stop to his intended *Justification* of himself, and we hear of no further Intercourse he had with our Lord; and may imagine how he sneak'd away ashamed and confounded.

The Design therefore of this Parable is to give us a true Notion of *Charity*, or Compassion and Relief of such as are in Distress; and that both with Respect to the *Object* of it, and the *Manner* and *Measure* of expressing it to such Object. And therefore in discoursing upon this Parable I shall do three things.

First, I shall shew who are the proper *Objects* of this Sort of Charity, according to the true Sense and Meaning of our holy Religion.

Secondly, How we are obliged to relieve them, in what *Manner* and in what *Measure*.

Thirdly, What great *Encouragement* we have to this excellent Duty, with respect both to *this World*, and that *above*; or what a Blessedness it is to be able thus to *give* rather than *receive*.

First, As for the proper *Objects* of this Charity, they are in general the *really Indigent* and

and Calamitous, and such as are unable to help *themselves*. And that (without *excepting* any) whether they be Strangers and Foreigners, or Enemies, or Heathens, or Hereticks, or wicked Persons: *All* that are *indeed* necessitous and helpless, are made by our holy and most merciful Religion, the Objects of our Compassion and Relief. Thus the Apostle, *As we have Opportunity, let us do good unto all Men*, Gal. 6. 10. and our Lord, *Do good to them that hate you*, Mat. 5. 44. and Rom. 12. 20. *If thy Enemy hunger feed him, if he thirst give him Drink*; and in this Parable our Lord proposes to our Imitation the Example of a Samaritan taking great Care of an unfortunate Jew, though there could be no greater Enmity than between the Jews and the Samaritans, and that grounded upon what of all Things makes Ill Will the most inveterate, *Diversity of Opinion in Religion*. And indeed 'twould be a barbarous Piece of Cruelty and Inhumanity, if I should let a Man *perish*, without any Commiseration or Help from me when I am able to give it him, because he has formerly, it may be, been unkind or injurious to me, or is of a different Religion, and of a Nation that is in Hostility with that to which I belong. This certainly is not doing as I would be done to, nor loving my Neighbour as my self, for every Man in a religious Sense is my Neighbour; 'tis more like the Rage of a Tiger than the Bowels of a Man, or the

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Malice of a Devil than the Charity of a Christian. As for Charity to Strangers and Foreigners, that is expressly commanded in several Places of Scripture, particularly *1 Pet. 4. 9.* where what we translate, *use Hospitality one to another,* is in the Original, *φιλόξενοι εἰς ἀλλήλους,* *Be kind to Strangers;* and by the Author to the *Hebrews,* *Heb. 13. 2.* the Probability of receiving *Angels* unawares in that Disguise, (as *Abraham* and *Lot* did, *Gen. 18. 3.* and *19. 2.*) is made the Motive to it. And how excellent a Piece of Charity this is, and how conducive to the Prevention of much Sin and Misery, I need not spend much Time to prove: There are few that have liv'd any considerable Time in the World, and have seen more Parts of it than one, but have some Time or other, either tasted the *Comfort* of an *hospitable* Disposition or *smarted* for the *Want* of it; and such Men are the fittest to tell their Thoughts of either: That is, how inhumane 'tis to be without Bowels to an indigent Stranger, and how happy Mankind would be in every Place, were the Orders of the great Governour of the World duly observ'd in this Matter. And as for *wicked* Persons, who *deserve* the least Compassion of any, if they are in other Respects real Objects of Charity, their Wickedness must not put a Bar to it; for we are to imitate the Example of the merciful God, who is *kind and Beneficent to the unthankful and to the evil.*

But

But all this is to be understood with Respect only to the *really* necessitous and helpless, whose Wants and Calamities are not feign'd; and who are unable to help *themselves* to better Circumstances.

For there are a very vile Sort of People, who make a Trade of going about from House to House and with doleful Accents, and a forlorn Appearance and formal Complaints endeavour to melt People into Compassion towards them; who yet are far from being Objects of this Sort of Charity; their Necessities being *counterfeit*, or at least they being very well able to supply them by their own Labour if they would. 'Tis well known how gainful they make this lazy Course of Life, how unwilling they are to *work* when any would employ them; how much abominable Debauchery there is in those vagrant Societies; and how great a Pest they are to the publick; they being no better than a Band of Villains and Robbers, and unprofitable idle Drones, that live upon the Labour and Spoil of others, and are no Way useful or serviceable themselves: And therefore to *relieve* their pretended Necessities is to encourage the worst Men living in a Course of Life highly dishonourable to God, injurious to the State, and ruinous to their own Souls. Nay further, 'tis to deprive those that *indeed* deserve our Charity of considerable Supplies, which are, though *insensibly* bestow'd upon those vile Wretches; and were it computed what

what some Charitable Persons give in a Year in Mony to common Beggars at their Doors or otherwise, 'twould amount to Sum big enough to cheer the Hearts of many *Fatherless* and Widows, and decay'd House-keepers that are in greater *want* than those Vagrants, tho' not so whining and so affectedly nasty and ragged. And 'twould be worth while for a Person that has us'd hitherto to scatter his Charity among those *counterfeit* Objects of it, to try the Experiment what such Gifts would amount to in a Twelve Month's Time, by laying *aside* what he would otherwise have bestow'd that Way, whenever he is importun'd by such Wretches for an Alms; and then see whether he can't dispose of it to better purpose.

Indeed, *Labour* and *Correction* is the best Sort of Charity to such kind of Beggars. And would Men in Authority resolve to do their Duty in this Matter, and other Persons resolve to send such Vagabonds away empty, and with Reproof and Shame, the Case would soon be altered, and they would find it better to work than starve, and look upon honest Industry more eligible than the Lash. Much Wickedness would by this means be prevented, and it would be a double and treble Charity; 'twould provide for the Happiness of both Body and Soul of such as should be reformed by it from such a Hellish Course of Life; 'twould be a great Benefit to the publick, and Men would find themselves more able to support such as

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are really oppress'd with Want, and utterly unable to help *themselves*. And such Behaviour as this to sturdy Vagrants, however harsh and severe it may seem to some indiscreetly compassionate Persons, is plainly commanded by the great Apostle, *2 Thes. 3. 10. He that will not work, neither let him eat.* He that *Will* not work, that is, that appears to be able to labour but rather chuses an idle wandering Life; and there is not One in Twenty of our common Beggars, but are of this Sort, hail and lusty and strong, and in more Heart and better fed than many honest and *industrious* People: And they that can travel as they do around the Kingdom, we can't suppose, whatever they may pretend, to be incapable of Labour.

Indeed, sometimes a *real* Object of Charity may present it self at ones Door or Abroad, such as the blind and aged and maimed, and the like, and these, no Question, ought to be *reliev'd*; but there being so many *Counterfeits*, and the ill Consequence of misplacing ones Charity upon them being so very great; He is very *indiscreet* in bestowing his Alms that will not be first very well satisfied whether they are what they *pretend* to be, and deserve his Charity or no.

But this Severity must be used with *Prudence*, and he that does deserve *Correction* as a Vagrant, may yet by some calamitous accident in following his lew'd Trade, be at present in
urgent

urgent Necessity of *Relief*; and here the Way is, first to supply the *Necessity*, and afterwards in due Time to superadd the *Correction*. For I must let no Man, how wicked soever, perish if I can prevent it? and as I am in Charity bound, by *Severity* when the Man is able to bear it, to provide for the Safety of his *Soul*, so by a timely *Relief* likewise when there is *urgent* Need of it to support his *Body*.

So that upon the Whole, all that want are to be reliev'd, but 'tis after a different manner; and the Charity must be adapted to the Necessity; to the Widow and the Fatherless, the Naked, the Hungry, the Sick and the Helpless must be ministr'd Comfort and Support; but to sturdy lazy Travellers (as they call themselves) the *Lash* and *Labour* and *rough* Treatment; and this, however harshly it may sound, is the greater Charity of the Two.

And thus much in *general* for the first Enquiry occasion'd by this Parable, *viz.* who are the proper Objects of this Kind of Charity, according to the Intent of our holy Religion, or in the words of the Lawyer to our Saviour, *who is our Neighbour* in this Respect? I proceed to the

Second Enquiry, *How* we are oblig'd to express this Charity to the proper Objects of it, in what *Manner* and in what *Measure*? And in *general*, as to the *Manner* of relieving, it must be adapted to the *Necessity* to be reliev'd, and as to the *Measure*, it must likewise be suitable to the *Degree* of the *Necessity*, and to the *ability*

of the Person that relieves it. But, to do Justice to this Enquiry, we must be more *particular*, and shall therefore reduce the Necessities of the Objects of our Charity to these three Heads, *Poverty, Sickness, and Loss of Liberty*, and shew the *Manner and Measure* of relieving each.

As for *Poverty*, it may be of several Kinds, and may consist either in Want of Meat and Drink, or of Cloaths, or of a Habitation, or in a forlorn Widow-hood, and Loss of Parents; *i. e.* in an urgent Want of Necessaries for Life, which the Persons are utterly unable, at least for the present, to supply themselves withal, and such a Loss of Husband or Parent, as leaves destitute of such Necessaries, and of Means to procure them.

Now in case of such Poverty, the Relief must be suited to the *most urgent* Necessity; he that is hungry must be supplied with Meat, and the thirsty with Drink, the naked with Cloathing sufficient to keep out the Injuries of the Weather, Strangers and distressed Travelers with Lodging, and Widows, and such as have been House-keepers but are fall'n to Decay, with convenient Habitations, and a competent Subsistence; and the Fatherless with good Education, and a Paternal Care in disposing of them to Trades and Employments, whereby they shall be enabled to provide for themselves. And if any should be so destitute of all Comfort as to want most or all of these Necessaries, they must be supply'd with all,

beginning with that of which there is the most need; or else with a competent piece of *Mony*, which, as the wise Man says, *answers all things*. Eccles. 10. 19 But this *last* must be understood only with respect to a poor Man that is in such Circumstances, as that, he can, without any great Inconvenience, shift for himself; and with the *Mony* given him provide what is necessary: But when a Man is in such present urgent necessity, whether of Food, or Drink, or Rayment, or Lodging, or the like; that he will be in great Danger of perishing, if his Wants be not *quickly* supply'd, and the distance from publick places of Entertainment great, and the Season extreme; in these and the like Circumstances, 'twould be but a mock piece of Charity to give *Mony* and take no farther Care of him; there must be *particular* Provision made for such a Man's *particular* Wants, and that *immediately* and without Delays. Thus for Instance, suppose a poor Man should come to any one's House in a sharp Winter, and dark Night approaching, cold and faint, and hungry and weary, and beg for Admittance, and that Pity might be had of his sad Condition, and some Relief afforded him; and suppose the Master of the House should refuse to take him in, or let him refresh himself with him, but withal give him a Piece of *Mony*, and tell him that two or three Miles off there is a Town, where for that *Mony* he may have Supply of his Wants, and to send him away;
and

and suppose this poor Wretch should either faint by the Way or miss of it, and in the weak Condition he is in, be forced to lie abroad, and by the Morning be found quite overcome by the rigorous Season, and starv'd to Death: In this Case what will the Man's *dry* Charity avail him? Or rather, shall he not answer for the Death of that distress'd Creature, when he could have prevented it but would not?

The manner of the good Samaritan's relieving and succouring the unfortunate Jew in the Parable, though by his different Way of Religion, quite estrang'd from the Jews is a remarkable Example of a *thorough* Charity. When he came near and saw what a sad Condition the Thieves had left the poor Man in, despoil'd of his Mony and his Cloaths, and wounded and left half-dead; he first applies himself to the Relief of the greatest Necessity, and binds up his Wounds, pouring in Oyl and Wine. And then, not thinking *that* a sufficient Charity to a Man in his Condition, he set him on his own Beast, and brought him to an Inn, and took farther Care of his Refreshment, and stay'd there with him till the morrow to see that he had what was convenient for him; and because his perfect Recovery would be a thing of Time, he leaves Mony with the Host, and a Charge to look well after him, and promises that whatever was spent more upon that poor Man's Account;

when he came again he would repay. This was indeed a *complete* Relief, and manag'd with as much *Discretion* as *Compassion*, and our Lord's Application is, *Go and do thou likewise*. In all Cases of this Nature, the Circumstances of the poor must be consider'd, and the Relief suited accordingly.

2. As to the Manner of expressing our Charity to the *sick*, 'tis in short to make frequent Visits of Comfort to them, to refresh their *Spirits* by Pious Discourses of the Power and Goodness and Wisdom of that God who sends the Affliction, who can *remove* it if he thinks fit, and whose *chastning* is an Argument of his *Love*, and that if he still *continues* it, his Wisdom sees it will be for the *best at last*; that so they may be inclin'd to hope and trust in God, and patiently submit to his good Pleasure: And 'tis to supply likewise what is necessary for their Attendance and Recovery. The poorer sort should express their Charity in this Instance by *personal* Attendance and Service; and the more wealthy by providing things necessary, and overlooking and directing to what is convenient. And this is a most noble Piece of Charity, and provides for the Health of the *Soul* as well as the Body, and nothing can be more seasonable and *well-tim'd*. For in Time of Sicknes the *whole Man* is dejected, and the Spirit which should bear up his Infirmity, is then it *self*, for the most part, *wounded*; through the near Prospect of the
other

other World, and the bold Accusations of Conscience, which *then*, unless quite feard is loud and clamourous. Then the Man is least of all able to help *himself*, and the Charge of Sickness is great; and he that was poor in *Health*, when *Sick* is doubly poor; and indeed there is no greater Object of Pity and Compassion than a poor sick Man. And as *all* Charity must be universal without excepting even *Enemies*, so in *this* case, our Enemies should be the Objects of our Charity to *choose*. For upon a sick-Bed 'tis most likely that they *will* be reconcil'd, and 'tis highly necessary that then they *should* be; for Sickness often ends in Death, and no Man can tell but *that* Sickness which his Enemy then lies under may be his *last*: And 'tis a miserable thing to die in *Enmity*. And therefore, before it be too late, whoever is at variance with a sick Man should go to him and endeavour a Reconcilement; if he hath injur'd the *Sick* in any respect he should ask his Pardon, and make him Satisfaction and Restitution; and if the sick Man has injur'd *him*, he should go to him to let him know that he freely forgives him, and desires that all Ill-Will may be at an End for the future. And at that Time, when the Spirit is usually more softned and compliant than in Health, and the Soul more awaken'd and sensible of her Duty, 'tis very probable he will hearken, and the Man will gain his Brother. And 'tis a great Charity indeed to ease a

sick Man's Mind of the devilish and tormenting Passions of Malice and Revenge; it provides for Peace and Amity for the future should he *recover*, and should he *dye*, it makes his Account much easier at the Day of Judgment.

3. As for Charity to such as are depriv'd of their *Liberty*, the *Manner* of it consists in visiting and discoursing comfortably to them, and in endeavouring by the best Methods we can to procure their Enlargement; and in the mean time, in helping them to Necessaries, and perswading their Keepers to be kind to them, and use them tenderly. And if they are imprison'd for *Crimes*, 'tis to endeavour to make them sensible of the Guilt of them before *God*, and that unless they sincerely repent of them, an eternal Bondage in Chains of Darkness, and in the lowest Hell, shall come in the place of the Dungeon, their Iron Shackles, and temporary Confinement. And the Objects of this piece of Charity are as before *all*, Enemies as well as Friends; Strangers and Foreigners, as well as Neighbours and Acquaintance.

Under this Head of the *Manner* of expressing our Charity to the Necessitous, it is proper to enquire what *Preference* may be made of one Object of Charity before another, if more should offer themselves than one Man can relieve, at least at the *same* time? For our Direction in this matter, *St. Paul* has left us two general Rules, the one, *Gal. 6. 10.* where he says, *as we have Opportunity let us do good unto*
all

all Men; but especially to those that are of the Household of Faith, in which we are taught to prefer Christians before Heathens and Infidels, when there is no Help but one must be prefer'd, and among Christians, to prefer in like Circumstances the pious and sincerely good, before such as live not agreeably to their holy Profession, for such only as have the Power of Godliness, are properly of the Household of Faith. The other Rule is in 1 Tim. 5. 8. in these Words, *If any provide not for his own, especially those of his own House, or Kindred, he has denyed the Faith, &c.* and here we are directed, if a Preference must be made, to make it in Favour of our Friends and Relatives before such as are Strangers to us.

But these Rules must be thus explained. As first, where 'tis impossible for us to comply with all Opportunities of doing good, there this Preference is to be made; but when we can we must do good to all. And secondly, When the Necessities of pious Christians, and our Friends and Relations are equally great and urgent with those of the impious and Strangers to us, there likewise our Charity should begin at Home: But thirdly, when the Distress of an Ill Man or a Stranger is greater and more urgent than that of a good Man or my Friend and Relative, so that the former will be in danger of perishing unless immediately reliev'd, and the latter will not, but may safely tarry longer: Then there must be no respect of Persons, but

the *greatest* Necessity, where-ever it be found must be *first* relieved.

I shall add but one thing more relating to the *Manner* of expressing our Charity, and that is what *St. Peter* advises, *1. Pet. 4. 9.* that it be done without *grudging*. The Word in the Original is *ῥογγυμῶ*, which signifies *murmuring* or *unwillingness* in doing any thing, as if 'twere torn and *forc'd* from one, rather than proceeded from a *free Inclination*. And this hateful churlish way of Alms-giving, *St. Paul* likewise expressly forbids, and says, our Charity must not be shewn *grudgingly*, or as of *Necessity*, *2 Cor. 9. 7.* and *Rom. 12. 8.* *He that sheweth Mercy, let him do it with Cheerfulness*; according to the Example which God himself hath set us, *Who giveth to every Man liberally, and upbraideth not.* *James 1. 5.*

And here, I can't but admire and adore the infinite Goodness of God; who has not only oblig'd us to the *Substance* of this Duty, but has so order'd the very *Circumstantials* of it; that the Necessitous may be relieved with as much *Decency* and *Ease* to themselves as can be, and the Alms of others look rather like their own *Propriety*, as the Payment of a Debt, or restoring of a Pledge, or bestowing a Reward; and that their *Souls* might not be griev'd by Frowns and Taunts, and unkind Language, when they receive Supply for the Needs of their *Body*! For Man as well as God loves a *cheerful* Giver;

Giver; and a Benefit that comes *hardly*, and with shews of *Unwillingness*, is much *lessened* in its Value; and a Man of a generous Spirit would prefer a *Mite* given with a *free* Heart and Words of *Kindness*, before the *Largess* of an *Emperour*, if he must suffer *Upbraidings* for it, and *opprobrious* Treatment. *Super Omnia, Vultus accessere Boni*, says the Poet: All the *Delicates* at his Friends Entertainment would have relish'd but very indifferently, had not a *cheerful Countenance* assur'd him of his *Welcome*. And if a *free* Charity be given in *secret* too, as our Lord himself directs, *Matth. 6. 4.* the poor Man will not be so much as put to the *Blush* for what he receives; and will come short of the rich in nothing that is *necessary*, and be free from the *Vexations* that attend an opulent Condition; and the Advantage of the Wealthy over the Poor would then consist chiefly in *this*, That they are by God's Providence enabled to be the *Supporters of the weak*; it being according to the Words of the Lord *Jesus, more blessed to give than to receive.* Acts 20. 35. Especially if we in the

Next Place, consider the *Measure* of this Charity. And in general, it must be equal to the *Necessities* of the Poor, or at least agreeable to every Man's *Ability*. A *great* Necessity must have a *great* Supply; as suppose a whole *Family* be in want, the Relief ought to be greater than to a *single* Person: If a *Foreigner* is distress'd, and has not wherewithal

to

to carry him to his own Country, *he* should be more plentifully reliev'd than a Traveller that is in his Native Country, and has comparatively but a little Way to go. He that is a Prisoner or Captive for a *great* Debt or Ransom, should receive more liberally of our Charity than one that may be releas'd for *less*; the Necessities of a poor Man that is *sick* being doubly great, the Relief that is given him should bear Proportion, and be more liberal than ordinary: And the more dangerous and lasting, and consequently *chargeable* the Sickness is, the Charity should rise the higher still, and greater Care be had of him, and Visits oftner made to him. He that is *utterly* helpless and incapable of working, ought to receive more largely of our Charity than one that is in some Measure able to help and provide for himself. In these and all other Cases of this Nature, he that has the greatest need must have the greatest *Supply*; and he that has the greatest *Ability*, his Charity must be answerable, and he must give *most*. But to prevent all unnecessary Scruples in this Matter, we should remember, that Charity does not consist in an *Indivisible* Point, *less* than which shall not be accepted; for a *Mite* given with a free Heart and good Intention by a poor Widow that could afford no more, was not only *accepted*, but the Charity highly *commended* by our Lord himself, and no doubt but was crown'd with a great Reward. The general

neral Rule in this Case is that of the Apostle I. Pet. 4. 11. *As every Man has receiv'd the Gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God.* That is, every Man's Charity must be proportionable to his Ability; he that has much must give plenteously, and he that has little must chearfully give of that little; and no Man that has any Share in this World's Good, must wholly shut up his Bowels of Compassion from his Brother that hath need. Remember, *That he that soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly, and he that soweth plenteously shall reap also plenteously,* 2 Cor. 9. 6. So that according to the Order of our good Creator, we see Riches are like our Blood, to *circulate*, and ought to be convey'd in due Proportions to every Part of the great Body of Mankind: The greater Channels are to supply the lesser, and the *fuller* they are the more they must *communicate*: And none must presume upon Pain of the worst of ill Consequences to *stop* this Course, or divert it to unprofitable Uses.

When our *own* Needs and those of our *Relatives*, are modestly and *reasonably* satisfied and provided for, all the rest God gives us to bestow upon the poor and needy, 'tis their Inheritance; and we shall be unjust in our Stewardship if we withhold it from them. And, in the Words of the excellent Bishop Taylor, *Certainly there is not any greater Baseness, than to suffer a Man to perish or be in extreme*

treme want of that, which God gave me for him, and beyond my own Needs. And it must ever be remembred, That as Mens *Estates* increase, their *Charity* must in due Proportion increase likewise; it must not lye an useles Lump in a Chest, or be improv'd only to increase the Hoard, or minister to Luxury and Excess, or the Extravagancies of a prodigal Heir; but this Blessing of God must be distributed according to the Will of God, to sweeten and alleviate the Miseries of Mankind.

And now, would Men but act according to this their Duty, what abundant Supply would there be for the Necessities of every one? That of *Isaiah* 49. 9, 10. would then be literally fulfill'd, *Say to the Prisoners, Go forth to them that are in Darkness, shew your selves; they shall feed in the Ways, their Pastures shall be in all high Places. They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the Heat nor Sun smite them; for he that hath Mercy on them shall lead them, even by the Springs of Waters shall he guide them.* How many bitter Complaints, how many Sighs and Tears, how much Misery, and how much Sin would by such Charity be prevented? How many more might most Men relieve than they do? How very many might a Mau of a large Estate take care of, and what vast numbers of Poor might have a very comfortable Subsistence, if all such Men would Conscientiously perform their Duty in this Matter? And with what *Ease* might this be done

done too? That which is every Day squander'd away to no Purpose, or consum'd in Vice and Vanity, could it be computed, would amount to a prodigious Sum; and were but *so* much bestow'd in *Charity* by every rich Man, as heedlessly and unaccountably slips from him, how many would enjoy a comfortable Maintenance, who now want Necessaries, and are ready to be starv'd, and all the while the rich Man be not discernably the poorer for it? And if so *little* when rightly dispos'd of would go so far in this blessed Work, what happy Effects should we soon see, if Men of large Possessions would be perswaded to obey their great Benefactor, and give *largely* of their Abundance! And in order to this they would do well to remember, that Riches are not properly and intirely Men's *own*, but *Talents* committed to them by God to improve, and lay out to his Glory. That 'tis he that is the great *Lord* and *Proprietor* of all, and *Men*, how opulent soever, no other than his *Stewards*; enrich'd on purpose that they may supply those that have need, and take care that none in this great Family of the World perish for want of what is needful for their Support: And that, of the *Discharge* of this their Stewardship, they must render an Account at the Day of Judgment, the general Audit of all Mankind; and then the faithful and good Stewards, that have fulfill'd their Lord's Command, and gave the poor of this great Family,

their

their Portion of Meat in due Season, shall be receiv'd into their Master's Joy: But the unfaithful and wicked Stewards, that were cruel and hard-hearted to their fellow-servants, and only feasted and pamper'd themselves, grew excessive and luxurious with their Lords Allowance, and did eat and drink with the drunken; their Lord will come in a Day when they look not for him, and cut them asunder, and appoint them their Portion with Unbelievers, where shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth, Luke 12. 42.

And thus much may suffice to be spoken to the second Enquiry, *How we are to express our Charity to the proper Objects of it, in what Manner, and in what Measure?*

But before I proceed to what remains to be done according to the propos'd Method, I think it will not be amiss to enquire whether in the Expresses of our Charity to the sick, Danger of *Infection* will not excuse from visiting them?

To this I answer, *first in general, that Danger of Infection will not excuse all from visiting the Sick: For 'twould be strangely inhumane, and contrary to this Christian Pity and Compassion which we are now discoursing of, to desert a poor helpless Creature in his greatest Necessity, only because there is a Probability of falling into the like Calamity: And would any Man be willing to be serv'd so himself? Some then ought, even in Case of Contagion, to visit and attend the Sick; but*

who

who are they, for every one will be ready to shift it from himself?

In the *first* place, I think the nearest *Relations* of the Party ought to do it, for they have a *double* Tye upon them, that of *Nature* as well as of Religion; and among these Relations, those that are the most disengag'd from *Business* and the Affairs of this World, and have therefore the least Obligation to come into other Company where there may be Danger of spreading the Infection further; and likewise such as have the fewest *Dependents* upon them: That is, *Private* and *single* Persons are oblig'd to this Duty before those that are of more publick Callings, and have Families; and among these, he that is *most* free and disengag'd, and capable withal, is the *most* oblig'd. If there be no *Relations* of the infected Person (whether he be Poor or Rich, Friend or Enemy, Good or Bad, the Case is the same) or none that will venture upon such hazardous Attendance; I think the nearest Neighbours are oblig'd to do it; *i. e.* the *single*, and disengag'd from a Necessity of *publick Converse*: For those that have Wife and Children and Families, their Charity must begin at *home*, to take care of their *own* Relatives is the prime Obligation; and the Safety of a whole Family is in most Cases to be preferr'd to that of a single Person. And those whose necessary Employments call them into *much Company*, are bound to avoid what would endanger

endanger their bringing *Infection* to that Company, and that for the same Reason as before, because the Safety of *many* is generally to be prefer'd to that of *one*: And those upon whose Life depends, under God, the Maintenance and Support of divers Persons, for the sake of those Persons, should be very careful to preserve *themselves*. Only this ought to be observ'd by such as upon these and the like Accounts, cannot *personally* visit and attend the infected Person, *viz.* That they take great care to procure *others* that may do it; and according to their Ability, and the Wants of the Person, to send Supplies of all things necessary. And there are very many, who, though they will not venture their Lives for *Conscience* sake, and to gain the Reward of being merciful in the other World, yet for *Money* they will do it; and therefore such Encouragements must not be wanting from those that are of Ability.

As for *Physicians* and *Clergy-men*, whose Professions engage them to converse with great Numbers of People; how far they are oblig'd in this Matter, I think may be resolv'd thus:

If *only one* Person in a Parish or Neighbourhood, or but a *few* in comparison with the whole *Body* of Men, be *contagiously* sick; to me it seems, that neither Physician nor Divine are in such case oblig'd personally to visit them, but rather to *forbear*, and only to convey to them, by other Hands, what is needful for their Bodily and Ghostly Health

respectively. The Reason is, because the Physicians and Divines being often sent for to divers Families, must either *not* go after they have visited an infected Person, and so neglect their Duty, and *many* suffer, and some perish for want of their Assistance; or, if they *should* go, would very probably endanger the whole Neighbourhood: And therefore, the Safety of *great Numbers* of People being to be prefer'd before that of *one* or but a *few*, they ought, I think, in this Case to keep at distance.

But when a Contagion spreads so that it becomes *epidemical*, and the *greater* Number of Persons are seiz'd with it, then the Case is *alter'd*, and then I think both Physicians and Divines are bound to visit *personally*. For in such Case, to send Relief by *other* Hands, whether Medicines or ghostly Comfort and Advice; would, by reason of the Numbers of the Sick, become *impracticable*; and 'twould be unreasonable for the sake of a *few* that were well, to deprive a greater Number that are sick of the great Benefit of personal Visits of Physicians, which for many Reasons prove more effectual than prescribing at a *Distance*; and of the Comfort of the Prayers, and more close and *particular* Discourses of Divines, which no doubt are much more beneficial, and make a deeper Impression upon the Soul, than *general* Advices and Exhortations sent in Writing.

And *Divines* in this Case seem to be more oblig'd than *Physicians* (though the Obligation

is very strong upon Physicians too) and that because the Safety of the *Soul* is infinitely to be preferr'd before that of the *Body*, And if it perishes it perishes for *ever*, and will at length involve the *Body* too in the same eternal Ruin. And, for a Shepherd to *desert* his Flock in their *greatest Necessity*, to *leave* the Care of their Souls when there is the *greatest Need* of his *Help*, and the infernal Lyon roaring about seeking whom he may devour: This, I think, is the *greatest Barbarity*, and most base betraying that great Trust, that is possible.

The good Shepherd, says our Lord, *giveth his Life for his Sheep*: And he, the great Shepherd, and Bishop of our Souls, set the Example; *but the Hireling fleeth because he is a Hireling, and careth not for the Sheep, and the Wolf catcheth and scatters and devours them*, John 10. 12, 13. We should remember, that God is infinitely *powerful* and can protect, even from the noisom Pestilence, if he thinks fit; and nothing more intitles a Man to the peculiar Protection of the Almighty, than a faithful Discharge of his Duty. And, however it may fare with us *here*, there is a glorious Recompence reserved for so great a Charity in a *better World*.

Proceed we now to the *third* and last thing to be done upon this Subject, which is to shew, what great *Encouragement* we have to this excellent Duty of Charity, or what a Blessedness it is to be able thus to *give*, rather than to *Receive*, and that both with Respect to *this World* and that to *come*. For,

For, in the first place, with Relation to this World, What can be a greater Pleasure to a Generous Spirit, than to be the Happy Instrument of rescuing others from *Misery* and *Want*, from perishing with *Hunger*, or by other Calamities, and restoring 'em to Life and Comfort, and Health and Liberty? What Delight more high and noble, than that which will arise from our changing the *Sighs*, and *Groans*, and *Laments* of the Miserable, into *Rejoycings*, and the *Curses* and horrid *Blasphemies*, and impious Reflections upon Providence, utter'd by those whom Extremity of Poverty has made desperate; into *Praises* and *Blessing* of God, and Acknowledgments of his *Goodness* and Care of the Children of Men?

What can cause greater Complacency and Satisfaction in the Soul, than for a Man to be as a *Father* to the *Fatherless*, not only in *maintaining* them, but in providing for them good and pious *Education*, and honest Trades, whereby these very Children become Men of Probity, and *useful* to the State, who otherwise, if left at loose and unregarded, would in all Probability have been the Pests and Disturbers of the Community: Miserable themselves, and the Occasion of much Misery to others. And what more grateful to a pious Man, than to relieve the forlorn Poverty of such as are at once depriv'd of their Husbands, and the means of providing for their Families, and to be blessed by those that were ready to perish,

and *cause the Widows Heart to sing for Joy?* Job 29. 31. This is *pure and undefil'd Religion*, says St. James, *to visit the Fatherless and Widows in their Affliction*; Jam. 1. 27. nay, 'tis a near Resemblance of the Charity of God himself, who *preserveth the Strangers, and relieveth the Fatherless and Widow.* Psal. 146. 9.

And indeed, every Expression of Mercy and Compassion resembles us to God, whose *Mercy is above all his Works*; and to the Compassionate Jesus, who so pitied the miserable Estate of Mankind, as to leave his Father's Glories, and take on him the Form of a Servant, and suffer in our stead, that we might be Partakers of Life and Pardon, and Immortal Happiness, and *who went about doing Good all the Days of his Humiliation.* And certainly, to be like God, and the great Redeemer of the World, Christ Jesus, and that in the most Amiable and Glorious Perfection, must needs fill a Man's Breast with *Heavenly Joy*, since the Happiness of that blessed place consists in the Souls being *transform'd into the Divine Image and Likeness from Glory to Glory,* 1 John 3. 2. 2 Cor. 3. 18.

But Secondly, (and which, with some may be the most prevailing Argument) there is great Encouragement to Charity, with Relation to *this World*, because 'tis the most *thriving* of all Christian Graces, and is always attended with *Prosperity*, and a Blessing.

David says expressly, Psal. 37. 25. *I have been*

been Young, and now am Old, and yet saw never the Righteous forsaken, nor his Seed begging their Bread, i. e. as it follows in the next Verse, the Righteous Man that is ever merciful and lendeth: And not only himself, but his Posterity is blessed. And this, a learned Author of our own, Extends to all Ages, and challenges any Historian of Past, or Observator of present Times to give one Instance of any Christian Alms Giver, that ever brought himself or his Posterity to Want, nay, that did not thrive and prosper the better by that means. And this is confirm'd by Solomon, Prov. 11. 24, 25. There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it tendeth to Poverty: The Liberal Soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth shall be water'd also himself. That is, as the same Author has it, unless by Negligence or Suretiship, or some other Sin that he lives in, he brings a Curse and Poverty upon himself, and Mercifulness prove not Antidote sufficient against all other Poison.

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And he that is thus assur'd of the peculiar Care of God concerning him, and that he shall always have a comfortable Provision as long as he lives, in Recompence of his liberal Charity to the Poor and Needy; has questionless very great Encouragement to perform the Duty. And as for the unavoidable Troubles of this Life which will mix with the most perfect Prosperity here, as Sickness, Vexation and Dif-

appointments, and Temporal Losses, and such like; *The Lord will deliver him that considereth the Poor, says David, in the Time of Trouble, and strengthen him upon the Bed of Languishing, and make all his Bed in his Sickness.* Ps. 41. 1, 3. And though many may be the Troubles, even of the thus Righteous, which God may permit them to be exercis'd with for many excellent purposes, *yet he will surely deliver them out of all.*

As for the Encouragement to this Charity, with Respect to the *next* World, it is thus express'd by our Saviour, *Mat. 5. 7. Blessed are the Merciful for they shall obtain Mercy*; that is, at the Time when every Man will stand in the greatest Need of Mercy, the Day of Judgment. For then there will be particular Enquiry made into the Discharge of every one's Stewardship, in Point of Mercy and Compassion to the Indigent and Calamitous; and the great Judge of all the World, has declar'd, that when he shall come in the Clouds of Heaven, to render to every Man according to his Works; he will esteem the Expresses of our Charity to his necessitous Servants as done to himself, and will reward the Merciful, not only with a *publick Commendation*, at that General Assembly of all the World, but will receive them to a Participation of the Glories and Felicities of his Eternal Kingdom: Saying, *Come ye blessed Children of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepar'd for you from the Beginning of the World, Mat. 25. 34.* And surely no Man can want Encouragement

to the Duty when it shall be rewarded in such a Manner as this.

I shall now infer some few things from the whole, and so conclude this Argument. And first, from the strict Charge that God has given, in the Revelations of his Will, to every capable Person, to supply the Necessities of *all* that want Relief, and that according to the *Wants* of the Needy, and in a Measure suitable to his *Ability*, and enforced this Charge with the most prevailing Motives that can be made use of: From hence I infer the great *Unreasonableness*, as well as *Impiety*, of charging God with the Miseries of Mankind in this instance.

For, what would they have God do more in this Matter than he has already done? Would they have him exercise his Omnipotence in *wholly preventing* Poverty? That is would they have him interpose in all the Contingencies of this Mortal Life, and immediately *command* the *Sea*, for Example, to be *calm*, when a Vessel is in Danger, whose Wreck would be the *undoing* of several; or send an Angel to steer her from Shelves and Quicksands, to preserve her from Pirates, and conduct her in Safety to the Haven? Would they have the *Land* miraculously secured from all Misfortunes too, from the Villanies of Men, from Casual *Fires*, from *Inundations* and *Earthquakes*; and would they have Men *forcibly* withheld from being guilty of such *Vices* as ruin Thousands, such as Pride and Luxury, and Wantonness and Excess?

Or if (as well they may) they think *this* too unreasonable to be desir'd, would they have God, when Men are thus *reduc'd to Poverty*, immediately work *Miracles* for their *Relief*? Would they have *Ravens* bring Food to the Hungry as they did to *Elijah*, 1 Kings. 17. 6. or would they have *every* Poor Widows Cruise of Oyl, and Barrel of Meal be as lasting as the Widow's of *Sarepta* was, *ver* 16. or would they have Water spring from *Rocks*, and be immediately turn'd into *Wine*, to cheer and refresh such as are parch'd with *Thirst*? Would they have our *Lord* come down a *second* time from *Heaven*, to heal *Diseases*, or an *Angel* always set open the *Prison* Doors when good Men are confined and macerated, or the like?

That such extraordinary things have been *sometimes* done, is sufficient to evince, that God is not an *idle Spectator* of Humane Affairs; but to expect it should be *always* so, is foolishly presumptuous.

But, it may be, those that are asham'd of *this* would yet, by all means, have God take a *severer* Course with his unfaithful Stewards than he does; and at least *displace* them, and *give their Riches to others*, that Men might see and fear, and do no more wickedly. Thus Man will be *re-plying* against God, and the Clay saying to the Potter, *Why hast thou made me thus?*

But, I would fain know, whether these Counsellours of the All-wise God, would have *all* that are unfaithful in their Stewardship,

ship, us'd in this Manner, or only *some* for a Terrour to the rest? If *all* the World would quickly be in *Confusion*, by such frequent Changes in States and Governments, and Private Families, as would then be made; if *some* only, in *Terrorem*, and to affright the rest into a more Conscientious Discharge of their Duty, why that is *often* done; nothing is more common than the Rise and Fall of Men and Families, and sometimes their Decay is made very remarkable by some *extraordinary* Accidents. Which, if Men would observe it, is warning enough to them to be faithful in their Stewardship: but if they will be thoughtless and regard it *not*, the Blame ought to be *their's*, not *God's*, and their's will be the *Punishment* too at the long Run, when he shall call every Man before him to make up his Accounts.

Wherefore, let no Man any more, for the future, pass Impious and Rash Censures upon the *All-wise* and *Good* Governour of the Universe, because his *Servants* neglect their Duty in this Matter; but rather, humbly and earnestly intreat him to incline their Hearts to a better Observance of his Holy and Just, and Merciful Commands: And if the Poor shall still go unpitied and unreliev'd, let us commit their Cause unto *him*, who, if with Patience they persevere in well-doing, will at length abundantly recompence their Sufferings *here*, with Glory, Honour and Immortality in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Secondly,

Secondly, From what has been said, I infer, the great Baseness and *Ingratitude* of those who thus wickedly betray their Trust, and thereby bring such Odious *Aspersions* upon their great *Benefactor*, and so much *Sin* and *Misery* upon Mankind.

Good God! That ever Men should be so low sunk, so vilely brutish and degenerate, as to prefer a Shining Coach and Gay Livery's, and Vanity and profuse Folly in many other Instances, before the Honour of their God, and the Comfort and Relief of a Poor Afflicted Christian! That they should be contented to hear the Groans of the Distressed, and the Blasphemies of Atheists, against that God who gave them all they have; rather than by *retrenching* any thing from their *Excessive* Way of Living, to silence either! 'Tis a Monstrous *Complicated* Impiety this, and will at last pull down a Heavy Vengeance.

Wherefore, from the whole, I infer, in the last place, how highly it concerns us all to imitate the Example of the *discreetly* and *thoroughly* charitable *Samaritan* in the Parable, and be more careful of this our Duty for the future. For if we prove *ill* Stewards of the Talents God has committed to our Trust for the Relief of the Calamities of our Brethren, we shall not only have the Sins of *Unfaithfulness* and base *Ingratitude* to answer for; but the *Prophane* Flouts and Cavils of the *Atheistical*, the *Curses* and *Imprecations* of the desperately
Mise-

Miserable, the Thefts and Murders, and other Villanies of such, whose *Unrelieved* Poverty forced to be thus wicked; and the Blood of such as dy'd for want of Succour: *All this* will be charg'd upon us, and overwhelm us with *Eternal* Horrour and Confusion.

Wherefore, to conclude; *while we have Time*, let us do good unto all Men, but especially to those of the Household of Faith; let us make Friends with the Mammon of *Unrighteousness*, that when all this World's Good shall fail us, we may be receiv'd into *Everlasting* Habitations: Let us lay up for our selves a good Foundation against the Time to come, and be Faithful Stewards of the manifold Grace of God committed to us; lest our great Lord should come in a Time when we think not of him, and place us on the Left Hand, and pass this Dismal and Irreversible Sentence upon us; *Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting Fire, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. For I was Hungry and ye gave me no Meat, Thirsty and ye gave me no Drink, a Stranger and ye took me not in, Naked and ye cloath'd me not, Sick and in Prison, and ye visited me not.*

From which terrible Condemnation, and that hardened Disposition that deserves it, and will inevitably bring it down upon us if not speedily amended, the Merciful and Good Lord deliver us all, for the Sake of his Compassion in Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen. Amen.

The

The P R A Y E R.

O Most Compassionate Jesus! Thou great Pat-
tern of Charity, who in the Days of thy
Flesh wentest about doing Good to Mankind, re-
lieving the Necessities both of Body and Soul, and
hast commanded thy Disciples to go and do like-
wise; give me the Grace, I beseech thee, accord-
ing to my Ability, to be charitable to all that are
really Necessitous, without excepting any, but al-
ways to guide these good Works with Discretion:
Lest by my ill-plac'd Alms, I encourage Debauche-
ry and Sloth, and have the less to give to those
that truly want. And since the Poverty and
Sickness of the Soul is of all the most dangerous
and deplorable, O that I may be so happy, as by
Fraternal Correption, and Seasonable wholesome
Counsel and Advice, according to my Opportuni-
ties and Capacity, to relieve the Spiritual Ne-
cessities of my Brethren, and convert a Sinner
from the Errour of his Way, and save a Soul
from Death! And may I always chearfully per-
form this Godlike Duty, and take Delight in the
Blessed Work of chearing the Hearts of the Di-
stressed, and making light the Burthens of the
Afflicted, and thereby vindicating thy Providence
from the Vile Aspersions of Wicked Men, and
occasioning much Thanksgiving unto God. O may
I never forget that I am the Steward only of
that Portion of this World's Good, with which
thou hast intrusted me, for the Good of thy great
Family:

Family : And that thou wilt one Day call me to give an Account of the Discharge of this my Stewardship, particularly enquire into my Acts of Charity, and infinitely reward me if I be found Faithful in this Trust, and for ever punish me with the Devil and his Angels if I be not. And that I may abound the more in this excellent Grace, Assist me effectually and immediately to cut off all Excesses and vain Superfluities of Life, and never let me be so forsaken of all Piety and Humanity, as to suffer my poor Fellow-Servants to want Necessaries, rather than retrench my vile Extravagancies ! And may this most excellent and royal Law of thine be always present with me as my Rule, to do to others as I would be done by in like Circumstance ; and in all the Expresses of my Charity, let thy Glory, and the Good of my Brethren and the Publick, be my sole End ; and remove far from me all Pride and Vain-Glory, for thy Mercies Sake. This and whatever else is necessary to the Perfection of this great Duty, grant me, I beseech thee, O most Compassionate Saviour Jesus. Amen.

PARABLE VIII.

Of the Talents.

Matth. xxv. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30.

The Kingdom of Heaven is as a Man traveling into a far Country, who called his own Servants, and deliver'd unto them his Goods. And unto one he gave five Talents, to another two, and to another one; to every Man according to his several Ability, and straightway took his Journey.

Then he that had received the five Talents went and traded with them, and made them other five Talents.

And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

But he that had received one, went and digged in the Earth, and hid his Lords Money.

After a long time, the Lord of these Servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

And

And so he that had received five Talents came and brought other five Talents, saying, Lord, thou deliver'dst unto me five Talents; behold, I have gain'd besides them five Talents more.

His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful Servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee Ruler over many things: enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord.

He also that had receiv'd two Talents came and said, Lord, thou deliver'dst unto me two Talents; behold, I have gained two other Talents besides them.

His Lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful Servant, thou hast been, &c.

Then he which had received the one Talent came and said, Lord, I know thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strew'd.

And I was afraid, and went and hid thy Talent in the Earth; lo, there thou hast that is thine.

His Lord answer'd, and said unto him, thou wicked and slothful Servant, thou knowest that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I have not strewed:

Thou oughtest therefore to have put my Money to the Exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with Usury.

Take therefore the Talent from him, and give it unto him that hath ten Talents.

For

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

And cast ye the unprofitable Servant into outer Darkneß; there shall be weeping and gnashing of Teeth.

THE Interpretation of this Parable may be this. By a Man travelling into a far Country, is represented our Saviour's leaving this World, and ascending into Heaven after he had finish'd the great Work of our Redemption; and by his calling to him his own Servants, and delivering to them his Goods, is signified his enabling his Disciples with sufficient Grace and the Assistance of his Holy Spirit, to perform that Duty and Service which he requires of them in his Absence.

By his giving to one *Five Talents*, to another *Two*, and to a third but *One*, according to their several Abilities, is expressed, that God affords his *Grace* according to Mens *natural Capacity* of serving him, (for there is a previous Ability first supposed, and suitable to that is the number of Talents that are given) and to the *Kind and Degree* of Service that he thereupon expects from them. He that by the previous Gift of God in his *natural Endowments*, is capable of doing him great Service, and of being an excellent *Example* to others; and is therefore by the Providence

of God design'd for, or actually plac'd in an *eminent Station*, and employ'd in a Service of great Weight and *Difficulty*; to him is given *greater Aid* from Above, because he is more capable of *improving* what he receives to God's *Glory* and the Good of the *Church*; and has likewise greater *Need* of the Divine Assistance, by reason of the *Difficulty* of the Duty he is to perform. And he that *naturally* is not so capable, receives proportionably *less Aid* from Heaven; but yet such as is sufficient to enable him to discharge *that Duty* which, according to his *natural Capacity*, is requir'd of him.

By *His Trading* that had received *Five Talents*, and gaining *other Five*, and his gaining *other Two* that had received but *Two*; is shewn that according to the *Measure of Grace and supernatural Assistance* that Men have received, so should their *Improvement* be, and that *faithful Christians* will be careful to *make* such Improvement: And by *His* hiding his Talent in the Ground that had but *One*, is represented the *inexcusable Sloth* and Idleness of wicked Men, who will not take so much Pains as to improve, tho' but *One Talent*, in order to their Salvation.

By the Lord of those Servants *coming after a long time and reckoning with them*, is represented the Coming of Christ to *Judgment* at the *End of the World*, then to enquire into every Man's Works, and Reward or Punish as there is just Occasion.

By His receiving the *Diligent* into his Joy, is express'd the Reward of the Righteous in the Blisful Kingdom of Heaven; and by the *Slothful* and *Wicked* Servant, (who was therefore *Wicked* because *Slothful*) by his bringing his *One Talent* to his Lord *unimprov'd*, and excusing his Unprofitableness by saying, that he *knew him to be a hard Man*, unreasonably griping, expecting to reap where he had not sown, and the like; and that therefore he brought him his own again as he gave it him, fearing to employ it, lest he should have lost it, and yet been oblig'd to make it good to his Lord: By this is represented the *Base* Thoughts too many have of *God* and *Religion*, as if it were impossible to bear his Yoke, and keep his *Commands*, he exacting such *unreasonable* Services from us; but this is only to excuse *one* Wickedness by *another*, and shews what wretched Shifts Ill Men are put to, to palliate their great Neglect of their Duty to their Master; as appears by his Lord answering and saying, *Thou wicked and slothful Servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, thou oughtest therefore to have put my Money to the Exchangers, that at my coming I might have receiv'd my own with Usury*. By which is represented the Necessity of Mens improving their Talent for *that very Reason* (were it true) which they are apt to plead in *Excuse* for their slothful Negligence. For to him that looks upon God as so *austere* a Being, there

there is more than ordinary Obligation to *improve* what he has committed to his Trust for that Purpose : And because a Man esteems God as an *hard* and *severe* Master, therefore to be idle and negligent in his Service, is a very *preposterous* Course, and looks as if he had a mind to provoke his Anger against him.

But indeed, *This is the Truth* : God is so very far from being an *unreasonably severe Master*, that He is a *most indulgent Parent*, and commands nothing but what is very practicable, and highly conducive to the Good and *Happiness* of his Creatures ; which should create a *Filial Love* and Reverence in us towards him, rather than a *slavish Dread*. But however, he is not so *unreasonably fond* neither, as to pass by the Provocations of obstinate *irreclaimable* Rebels, and clear those that are *Impenitent* as well as *Guilty*, that have heinously *offended* him, and yet take no care to *amend* and recover his Favour. Though *he does not reap where he did not sow, nor gather where he did not strew*, yet he expects a due Improvement of what he commits to our Charge, and is ready likewise proportionably to reward our *Industry*. And this is apt indeed to *quicken* and *encourage* us in our Duty, but by no means to *fear* and affright us from it : For nothing can be more *reasonable*, than for God to expect we should *improve* what he bestows upon us for *that very end*, and that we should obey those Commands of His

which are so highly *reasonable* in themselves; and which he likewise *assists* us to *perform*. Let no Man therefore say, God is an unreasonably *rigid Master*, and his Commands *intolerable Burdens*; for 'tis abominably *false* (as will appear more fully in the Sequel :) But were it *true*, it would be no Excuse for Sloth and *Idleness* in his Service, much less for wholly *deserting* it; but rather, an Argument for *double Care* and Diligence in it.

By the Lord of that Slothful Servant commanding his *One* unimprov'd Talent to be taken from him, and given to him who by his Industry had improv'd his *Five* Talents to *Ten*; is represented God's *depriving* those of his *Grace* and the Assistances of his Holy Spirit, who so much neglect it, and make no use of it to the great *Ends* for which it was given them. (viz.) *His Glory* and *Their own Happiness*; and making still greater *Additions* of his Grace to such as have well improv'd their former Stock. And by his commanding the *Unprofitable* Servant to be cast into *Outer Darkness*, where shall be *weeping and gnashing of Teeth*; is express'd their Deplorable Condition in the Regions of *Eternal Misery* and *Despair*, who make no Improvement of the Talents committed to them; the *Deprivation of Grace* in *this World*, being a certain *Forerunner of Perdition* in the *other*. It nearly concerns therefore, every Man carefully to *improve* the Talent committed to him; be-
cause

cause unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have Abundance, but from him that hath not, shall be taken away, even that which he hath.

This Parable, thus interpreted affords us these Six Heads of Discourse.

First, That Gods gives *sufficient Grace* to every *sensible Christian* wherewith to work out his *Salvation*.

Secondly, That God expects from every Man, that he should *improve* what Grace he has receiv'd, and that proportionably to the *Measure* in which it was given him, and make use of it to the *Ends* for which it was given.

Thirdly, That there will be a Time, when our Lord will come to take *Account* of Men's Improvement of the Grace that was given them, and reward every Man according to his *Deserts*.

Fourthly, That there shall be *Degrees* of Men's *Happiness* or *Misery* in the other World, according to the *Degrees* of their *Improvement* or *Negligence* and *Carelessness* in *this*.

Fifthly, That 'tis abominably *False* and *Impious* to charge God, as being unreasonably *rigid* and *severe* in *taking* this *Account* of Men's *Improvement*, and expecting to find a *Good Use* made of what he committed to their *Trust*.
And,

Lastly, That the Condition of the *Diligent* will be unspeakably *happy*, and that of the *Unprofitable* unspeakably *miserable*; and that both in *this World* and the *next*.

First, God gives sufficient Grace to every sensible Christian, wherewith to work out his Salvation. I say to every sensible Christian, because I would confine my Discourse to the State of such as are Christians; and such of them as have the Use of their Senses and their Reason: For as those that are out of the Pale of Christ's Church, though Charity will incline us to hope well of them, and that God's Mercy will extend even to Heathens that never yet heard of the Gospel of Christ, and his Spirit assist them to live according to that Natural Law written in the Heart of every Man; yet we can determine nothing in this Case with Relation to them, and have nothing else to do, but to leave them to the Infinite Mercy of God, and pray for their Conversion. And as for such as have been receiv'd into the Fold of Christ, and have afterwards prov'd Idiots, and without the Use of their Reason, their Case is likewise wholly in the Dark to us; and though we need not question, but God's Infinite Goodness will incline him to pity their Deplo- rable Condition, yet which Way he will express his Mercy to them we must not presume to say. Hidden things belong to God; the reveal'd are for us and our Children: Among which I take this to be one, That God gives sufficient Grace to every sensible Christian, wherewith to work out his Salvation.

And here not to enter into the Endless and most Abstruse Dispute about Predestination (which

(which the less Men trouble their Heads about, the better 'tis for 'em in all Respects) I shall only urge two or three *plain Places of Scripture* to confirm this Position, and add to 'em *one as plain Reason.*

The *Places of Scripture* are first, that in *2 Pet. 3. 9.* where the Apostle says, that *God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to Repentance*; to which is agreeable that of *St. Paul to Timothy, 1 Epist. 2. 4.* *God will have, or desires, that all Men should be sav'd, and come to the Knowledge of the Truth*; Now, the next Scripture I will quote, which is *2 Cor. 3. 5:* tells us, *That we are not sufficient of our selves, to think any thing as of our selves, but our Sufficiency is of God*; and *Phil. 2. 13.* 'tis *God that worketh in us, to will and to do of his good Pleasure*; and accordingly, says *John the Baptist*, speaking of our Lord, *of his Fulness have we all receiv'd, and Grace for Grace, John 1. 16. and Ephes. 4. 7. To every one of us is given Grace according to the Measure of the gift of Christ.* Which Scriptures put together make this Argument.

God is desirous of the Happiness and Salvation of every Man; but, without his *Assistance*, and the Aids of his *Grace*, and Holy Spirit, no Man can arrive at that Happiness: *2 Pet. 3. 9. 1 Tim. 2. 4. 2 Cor. 3. 5. Phil. 2. 13.*

Therefore, he gives *sufficient Grace* and Assistance to every Man, wherewith, if he be not *Idle* and *Wanting* to himself, he may work

out his Salvation. John. 1. 16. Ephes. 4. 7. For, we can't but allow, that what God *desires* for every Man, and which no Man, can attain without his *Aid* and *Assistance*, he will give every Man sufficient *Assistance* with his own *Industrious Concurrence* to *compass*. Otherwise, he would *desire* that for some, *i. e.* those to whom he should deny his *Divine Assistance*, which he knows 'tis impossible for them to attain to; which I think can't be consistent with his *Infinite Wisdom*. Supposing that desire of his to be sincere and in earnest, and if it is not where is his *Truth* and *Goodness*?

This seems to me to be sufficient *Scripture Proof* for this Position. And to this I shall add this one *Plain Reason*.

Namely, That since the *Commands* of Religion, in order to the attaining the *Rewards* of it, are given in *General* to every Man, and there is no *Exception* made, but every one that names the *Name of Christ* must depart from all *Iniquity*; therefore, every Man must be suppos'd able to keep and *observe* those *Commands*, unless we will be so *Blasphemous* as to say with the *Unprofitable Servant* in the *Parable*, that God is so *unreasonable* as to *reap where he did not sow*, to command *Impossibilities*; and then so *unjust* and *cruel*, as to punish Men *Eternally* for *not obeying* them. But now, that no Man is of *himself* able to keep the *Commandments*, is evident from the whole *Tenor* of

of Scripture, and from the sad Experience of even the *Best* of Men; and consequently, this Ability must be allow'd to proceed from the Aid of some *other*, namely, from him who is the *only Giver of every good and perfect Gift, and who giveth to every Man liberally, and upbraideth not.* Indeed, he giveth to every Man *severally as he pleases, to some more, to some less, to some five Talents, to some two, and to others but one;* according to Men's Ability to improve them, and as in his infinite Wisdom he sees most conducive to his *own Glory,* and the *Edification of the Church,* but he is wholly *wanting* in this Divine Gift to no Man that is capable of improving it, but bestows upon every sensible Christian, *Grace sufficient,* where-with if he makes *good Use of it, to work out his Salvation*

And this should have this four-fold good Effect upon us. It should make us unfeignedly *thankful* to the Infinite Goodness of God, for this his unspeakable Gift; looking upon the *Grace* he hath bestow'd on us, as an Earnest of our Salvation. It should put us upon begging devoutly and earnestly and frequently at the Throne of Grace, for still *greater Degrees of this Heavenly Aid,* in order to his *greater Glory,* and our more *perfect Happiness;* remembering that this is of all the greatest Treasure; and what a *Frail Sinful Creature,* should above all things hunger and thirst after. For tho' every man at first, receives as much Grace as
he

he is able to improve; yet he that has improv'd what he at first receiv'd, is by that his Diligence grown capable of more, and able to make a suitable Improvement: As he in the Parable, that had improv'd his Five Talents to Ten, was capable of Receiving and Improving still *more*; and accordingly had *his* Talent given to him who buried it in the Ground, and brought it without any Improvement to his Lord. Five Talents was at first proportionable to his Ability, but by duely improving them, his Ability was much enlarg'd, and he became capable of, and received more. And to God should all the *Praise* be given, of all the good Things we perform by means of this his Divine Assistance; reflecting upon the Words of St. Paul, 1 Cor. 4. 7. *Who maketh thee to differ, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* And finally, because to *all of us* is given *Grace sufficient* to our Happiness; therefore to *work out* our Salvation with it in *fear and trembling*, lest by our Negligence and Sloth we *fail* of this Grace of God, and it be withdrawn and taken from us.

For in the *second* Place, God expects that every Man should *improve* the *Grace* he hath receiv'd, and that proportionably to the *measure* in which he has receiv'd it, and make use of it to the *Ends* for which it was bestow'd upon him.

For thus we see in the Parable, how *angry* the Lord was when his Servant brought him the

the Talent he committed to him, *un-improv'd*; he calls him *slothful and wicked Servant*, and deprives him of his Talent, and gives it for an Encouragement, to him that had made the the *greatest Improvement*, and sentences the Unprofitable Servant to *outer Darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of Teeth*. And agreeably says St. Paul, 1 Cor. 12. 7. *The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every one to profit withal*. Christianity is not an idle lazy Profession, does not consist in fine Words and specious Pretences, but in an active lively Piety, suitable to every Man's several Ability. He that has received *much Grace* must be eminent for *much Holiness*; his Piety must arise proportionably to the Communications of the Holy Spirit which he enjoys, and his *Diligence* be commensurate to his *Strength*. He that has received *five Talents*, must gain *other five* with them; and he that has receiv'd *two, other two*; and no Man must be without *some Increase*, tho' he has receiv'd but *One*.

The End for which God bestows his Grace upon us, is *threefold*. (1.) For the *Advancement* of his *own Glory*; (2.) For the Good and *Edification* of the *Church*; (3.) For our *own Happiness and Salvation*. And therefore, the more Grace and Assistances from Above a Man has receiv'd, the more should he endeavour to *glorify God* with it, to *edifie the Church*, and by a holy Life, to secure his *own Salvation*. And he that either makes *no use* of the

the Grace that God hath given him, like him in the Parable, who instead of *trading* with his Talent, hid it in the Earth; or else *abuses* it to *vile* and *wicked* Purposes; is a *wicked* and *unprofitable* Servant, and shall be cast into *outer Darkness*.

To know *when* a Man has receiv'd plenty of this Divine Grace, and to what *Improvement* he is consequently oblig'd; is, for him in the first place to reflect upon his *Natural* Parts and Abilities, upon his Capacity of *understanding* and considering the great *Truths of Religion*; and then, what *Instruction* he hath met with in the School of Righteousness, what plenty of Religious Discourses and Exhortations he has enjoy'd; and how frequently he has felt Motions from *within* to a still more and more holy and exemplary Life: He that hath experienc'd all this in a *great* degree, that hath had this pregnant *Natural* Capacity well cultivated by an early and excellent *Instruction*, and had the whole of Religion plainly laid before him in all the *Doctrines, Duties, Rewards* and *Punishments* of it; and been often and affectionately exhorted to live accordingly in all Holy Conversation and Godliness, and has frequently felt secret *internal* Motions and Perswasions to it; this Man has received much more than *One* Talent at the hands of God, and God will expect from him a *proportionable Improvement*; and he must *abound* in every good Word and
Work:

Work : For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required ; and to whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. But because all Men are not of equal Abilities naturally, neither have the same Opportunities of Instruction and Improvement, nor the same immediate Impulses of the Blessed Spirit ; where there is any defect in these Respects, God will abate proportionably in his Expectations ; and he that received the One Talent, had he gained but One other with it, would have been call'd a good and faithful Servant, and been received into the Joy of his Lord.

Let us all therefore, endeavour to grow in Grace according to the measure of this unspeakable Gift ; to perform our Duties, each in his Station, and according to his Ability, faithfully and industriously ; that when our Lord comes to make Enquiry into each ones Improvement of his Talent, and call for every ones particular Account, we may all, from the least to the greatest, cheerfully give it up, and receive the immense Reward of a sincere Diligence : For,

In the third place, There will most certainly be a Time when our Great Lord will come to take Account of every Man's Improvement of the Grace that was given him, and Reward every Man according to his Deserving.

That there will certainly be a Day of Judgment both of Quick and Dead, when every
Man

Man shall be rewarded according to that he hath done in the Body, whether it be good or evil, is a Truth so evident from Scripture, that those who have read, and do believe those Writings, can make no doubt of it: And the Proof of this from Reason, has been so convincingly manag'd by several Learned Pens, particularly of late by Dr. Sherlock in his Excellent Discourse upon Judgment, that I think nothing can be added to it; I shall only therefore Collect such a Description of that Great Day, and the Proceedings in it, out of the Revelations (where it is the most movingly represented) as may incline us all with the greatest Diligence, and immediately, by Self-Examination and Amendment of every evil Way, to prepare for that great Audit, that we may give up our Accounts with joy, and not with grief. In the 20th Chapter of the Revelations, ver. 12. after the divine Apostle had given a Description of the Appearing of the great Judge upon his Throne, I saw a great White Throne; says he, and him that sat on it; from whose face the Earth and the Heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them: He proceeds, I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the Books were opened. And another Book was opened, which is the Book of Life; and the dead were judged out of those Things that were written in the Books, according to their Works; and the Sea gave up the dead that were in it; and Death and the Grave deliver'd up the dead

dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their Works: And whosoever was not written in the Book of Life, was cast into the Lake of Fire.

That is, The Records shall then be laid open, wherein every Man's Receipt of Grace is enter'd, and those whose Works shall be found proportionably good according to the Assistance they have receiv'd from Above; or, in the Stile of the Parable, that have made an answerable Improvement to the Number of Talents committed to them, their Names shall be written in the Book of Life, and they received into the eternal Joy of their Lord. But those who can then give no good Account of their Talents, shew no suitable Improvement in Holiness according to the measure of Grace they have received, shall never see Life, but be cast into the Lake of Fire, which is the second Death. And because so very few will be so wise, as to make due Preparation for this great Day of Account, by improving the Grace God has given them to the great Ends for which it was design'd; therefore, as 'tis describ'd Rev. 3^v. 15. *The Kings of the Earth, and the great Men, and the rich Men, and the chief Captains, and the mighty Men, and every Bond-man, and every Free-man, many of all Qualities and Conditions, from the highest to the lowest, shall hide themselves in Dens, in Rocks, and Mountains, and say to the Rocks and Mountains, fall on us, and hide us from the face*
of

of him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Wrath of the Lamb; for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand! May these Terrors of the Lord perswade us to provide in this our day, for the Things that belong to our Peace, before they be hid from our eyes! looking for, by frequent Meditation, and hastning unto, by a diligent Improvement of our Talents, the coming of this dreadful day of God; and being above all things careful, That we be found of him in Peace, without spot and blameless; for God will bring every secret Thing into Judgment, whether it be good or evil, and exactly adapt every Man's Recompense to his Work. Which brings me to the next Thing I am to consider in this Parable; namely,

Fourthly, That, at that great Day of Account, when every Man's Work is fully known, and his Improvement compar'd with what he has receiv'd; the Diligent shall not only in general be receiv'd into the Joy of their Lord, and the unprofitable cast into outer Darknes; but the most Diligent, those that have made the greatest Improvement, shall receive the greatest share of Happiness: And those that have been most careless and Unprofitable, shall be doom'd to the greatest misery. That is, in short, there will be degrees of Happiness or Misery respectively, awarded to Men according to the degrees of their Holiness or Impiety.

I know this has been much question'd by some,

some, and wholly deny'd by other's ; and their main Reason against it I conceive to be this : That since the Happiness of the *Just* in Heaven consists in the *Vision of God*, or the Excellencies and Beauties of the Divine Nature, which will fill a holy Soul with eternal and inexpressible *Delight*, for so St. *John* expresses the Bliss of Heaven, by *seeing God as he is*, 1 Joh. 3. 2. and St. *Paul*, by *seeing him face to face, and knowing him even as we are known*, 1 Cor. 13. 12. And since the Misery of the *Wicked in Hell* consists in an eternal *Banishment* from his Divine Presence ; for so the Sentence runs that shall be pass'd upon them at the Day of Judgment, *Depart from me ye Cursed, &c.* Upon these Accounts it seems to them most probable, that *All the Just*, being admitted to the *Beatifick Vision of God*, should be *equally Happy*, and *All the Wicked* being for ever *exil'd from him*, should be *equally Miserable*.

But this Argument in my Apprehension, is so far from *destroying* the Doctrin of the Degrees of Happiness and Misery in Heaven and Hell, that I think 'tis rather a great *Supporter* of it. For, since 'tis very true, that the Happiness of Heaven consists in the *Beatifick Vision of God*, and the Misery of Hell in an eternal *Banishment* from him ; and since 'tis as true, that *some good Men in this Life*, approach nearer to him, and see more of his Excellencies, and bear a greater Resemblance to him than *others*, and so become *capable* of a more *intimate*

Vision of him in Heaven ; and *some* bad Men, on the contrary, wander to a *greater distance* from him *here*, and become *more unlike* him by their *great* Impieties than other Sinners do ; and so become more *incapable* of that *pure* and *holy* Vision, than those that are *less* wicked : Since this is so, methinks nothing is more agreeable to Reason and Justice, than those who were the Holyest Men here, should be the Happiest Saints above ; and those who were the deepest sunk in Wickedness in this World, should be plung'd into an equal Degree of Misery in the next ; and consequently feel the *most exquisite* Pangs of Horror and Despair, the *hottest* Boilings of Rage and Impatience, and *most bitter* Remorse of Soul, for bringing this *most miserable* Condition upon themselves ; when *once* they might with much Ease and Pleasure have avoided it, and been for ever *happy* in the *Vision and Enjoyment of God*.

Indeed, as to plain Proof from *Scripture* of the *Degrees of Misery in Hell*, I must confess I cannot recollect any, unless the 12th Chapter of *St. Luke's Gospel*, v. 47. 48. and the 11th of *St. Matthew*, v. 22. &c. may be thought to be so, and would by no means *strain* God's Word beyond its due Extent ; but as to *Degrees of Glory and Happiness in Heaven*, I think there are several Places that plainly enough establish that Doctrine ; of which I shall mention but one, and that because 'tis part of a

Parable

Parable exactly the same in the *concealed sense* of it, with that I am now discoursing upon, only something differently related by *St. Luke*. 'Tis in the 19th Chapter, the 15th and 4 following Verses; where we find, when the King came to take Account of his Servants Improvement of what he left in their Hands to Trade with in his Absence, he exactly proportion'd every Man's *Recompence* to the *Increase* he made of what was committed to his Charge; to him that had gain'd *Ten Pounds*, with the Pound his Lord left with him, was given Authority over as *many Cities*; and so to him that had gain'd *Five*, proportionably Authority over *Five*: Which I think can mean no less than this, that where there is different Degrees of Mens Improvement of *Grace* in *this World*, there shall be as different Degrees awarded of *Glory* and *Happiness* in *Heaven*; and there being great Difference between the Degrees of *Christians Improvement* here, there will be as great Difference in the Degrees of their *Happiness* hereafter. And though every Saint in Heaven shall have as clear and intimate Vision and Enjoyment of God as he is *capable* of, and partake in an agreeable Measure of the *Happiness* that will flow from such Vision and Enjoyment, and be as Happy as 'tis possible for him to be; yet the *Capacity* of every Saint will not be *equal*; Some Souls will be more enlarg'd than others, and able to receive more Rays of the Divine Glory; and

so, though every of those Vessels of Honour shall be *full*, yet all will not *hold alike*; and one Star *there*, will differ from another Star in Glory.

'Tis true, indeed, that the Mind of *every* good Man shall then be clarified and refined, purg'd from the Dross and Soil contracted during its Residence in the Flesh, and rendred more agile and expedite in the Exercise of its several Faculties, and its Knowledge and Love of God vastly improved: But that Souls of *less* Improvements here, shall immediately upon their Departure from the Body, receive *extraordinary new Additions*, to equalize them to those of *higher* Attainments, is hard to imagine; and would mightily discourage the generous Endeavours of *Heroick Piety* and *Exemplary Religion*. But when every Man shall in that glorious Kingdom above, be rewarded according to the Degrees of his Piety; and a *great* Love to God, and *zealous* Prosecution of the Interest of Religion, and an *eminent* Sanctity, shall be crown'd with a *more than ordinary* Glory and Felicity in *Heaven*, 'twill mightily encourage a holy Soul to *forget*, with *St. Paul*, *the things that are behind*, and *press on to what is still before*, always aiming at still greater Degrees of *Perfection*, till Mortality shall be *swallow'd up of Life*.

The Improvement of this *Speculation* to *Practice* is this: That since the Degrees of Glory and Happiness in Heaven, shall be answerable

swerable to the Degrees of Men's Holiness, and Improvement of their Talents upon Earth; we would run with *Diligence* the Race that is set before us, and gird up the Loins of our Mind, and set our selves to the Performance of every thing that it well-pleasing in the sight of God with *Cheerfulness*; and not pretend *Difficulty*, when the Reward is so exceeding great, and shall be proportion'd to the Degrees of our Vertue. For can we be *too happy*? Can we be *too like God*? Can our Crown be too glorious and resplendent? Away then with that mean spirited Religion which thus lessens and *confines* our Happiness; let us unfold our Hands, and pluck them out of our Bosoms, and encourage our selves in a vigorous Pursuit of an *excellent Piety*; forasmuch as we know, that our Labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Fifthly, In the next Place, I am to shew, that 'tis abominably *false and impious*, with the Unprofitable Servant in the Parable, to charge God with being *unreasonably rigid and severe*, in taking so strict an Account of Mens *Improvement* of his Divine Grace and Assistances, and expecting to find a good Use made of what he committed to their Trust.

That God is often charg'd with such unreasonable *Severity*, by Men that care not to perform their Duty, is too true to be question'd; and such as love to indulge their vile Affections, and cannot afford to take any pains

to be Religious, are frequently heard to say, They serve God as well as they *can*, and they can do no more; and that *such* a Religion as we urge Men to, is much too hard for Flesh and Blood: 'Tis a Law fitter for Angels than Men; and though they *wish* they could observe and do it, and can't but *consent* to the Excellency of it in the Inner-Man, yet they find a Law in their Members warring against the Law of their Minds, and bringing them into Captivity to the Law of Sin; and so, the good that they would they do not, and the evil that they would not that they do. And they take up with this as a sufficient Excuse; and because God is infinitely *merciful* and *good*, they think he will accept the Plea of the great *Hardship* of his Commands, and their *Inability* to perform them, instead of Obedience to them. But, (as the Lord in the Parable said to his slothful Unprofitable Servant) Out of their own Mouths will I judge those wretched Persons, that thus mock and abuse God, and deceive their own Souls into Ruin. For, if God be infinitely *good* and *merciful*, then certainly, he will not expect any Thing from Men beyond their *Ability*, nor command their Service and Obedience any farther than they are able to pay it: And consequently, what this *merciful* and *good* God commands by *All* Men to be done without any Exception or Dispensation, and threatens Eternal Misery to such as shall dare wilfully to *disobey* him; this, *Every* Man, no question

question, is able to perform; through the Divine Grace and Assistance; which, as I have before prov'd is in sufficient measure given to every Man. And to *deny* this, is, in effect, to charge God with the greatest *Cruelty, Oppression, and Injustice* that is possible. For what less, is the giving Men such Commands as they are not able to perform, and withal threatening, and actually *inflicting, unconceivable Torments* (for such are those of *Hell*) upon all that shall be found disobedient to the *impracticable Law*? This would be, indeed, to require *Brick without Straw*, as the *Egyptian Taskmasters* did, and then to lay on *Stripes* for a Failure in the Work; nay, 'twould be infinitely *worse*, because the Punishment for Irreligion, and not improving our Talents, is infinitely *greater*, and shall be inflicted to all *Eternity*.

Since therefore, God knows whereof we are made, and remembers that we are but *Dust*, and can tell how difficult his Commands will be to us, and how proportionable our *Ability* is to keep and do them, better than we our selves, (for 'tis *he* that hath made us, and gave us our *Natural Powers and Faculties*, and the *Superadditions of Grace and Aid* from Above;) since he is infinitely *good*, and will not *overload* his Creatures, nor exact *impossible Tasks*, or such as are *extremely difficult*, and but one degree *below* impossible; since he is likewise infinitely *just*, and will not *damn* Myriads

of poor Wretches to all Eternity, for not making an *impossible* Improvement of their Talents ; and expects only that they should give a *reasonable* Account, according to what they have receiv'd from him : From all this it will follow, Not that therefore a Man shall be excus'd for pleading *Inability*, but that every Man is *Able*, through the never deficient Grace of that good God to such as heedfully attend to it, to *keep* his holy, just, and good Commands, and make *Improvement* suitable to the Talents he hath receiv'd ; and if, for all this, he perish, his Blood will be upon his own Head.

Wherefore, let no Man, for the future, be so impious as to charge God with expecting *impossible* Services from his Creatures, or think to palliate his Irreligion by crying out of the extreme *Hardship* of living like a Christian ; but let every Man set heartily and sincerely about his Duty, and he will find, that God's Grace will be *sufficient* for him to his daily Improvement, and that the ways of Religion are *ways of pleasantness. and all her Paths are Peace.*

I come now to the *last* Thing to be consider'd in this Parable ; which is, That the Condition of the diligent *Improvers* of their Talents will be unspeakably *happy*, but the Condition of the *Unprofitable*, beyond Expression *miserable* ; and that, both in *this* World and in the *next*.

First,

First, The Condition of the diligent *Improvers* of their Talent, will be unspeakably happy, both in *this* World and *that* above. In *this* World, a quiet and serene Conscience will be to them a *continual Feast*; the Sense of having perform'd their Duty according to their *Ability*, of having been good Stewards of the Grace of God bestow'd upon them, and that they can give a *sincere* Account, tho' not a *perfect* one, to their great Master, when he shall come to look into their Behaviour in their Stewardship; this, will fill their Breasts with unspeakable Satisfaction, their Soul will be *calm*, and their Thoughts at Rest in Conscience of their *Fidelity*, their Life not imbitter'd with anxious Fear and Dread of a sad *After-Reckoning*: but, like that of a faithful Servant who is in his Master's Favour, steady and easie, and moving cheerfully in the Circle of his Duty, and in joyful Expectation of the Reward of his Diligence, when his great Lord shall advance him from the State of a *Servant* to that of a *Friend* and Bosom-*Favourite*; nay, of a Coheir with himself of the Joys and Felicities of the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

And besides this Serenity and Satisfaction of Mind, and comfortable Prospect of so glorious a Recompense of Reward, (which are Blessings of the first Magnitude, and to which, nothing in *this* World is *comparable*) the *improving* Christian shall have *more Talents* given him,

him, more Grace shower'd down upon his Soul; what the *Slothful* have forfeited, shall be conferr'd upon him, and he shall *abound still more and more* in every good Word and Work. And what Condition can approach nearer to the state of *Heavenly Glory*, than that of a holy Soul thus *plentifully stor'd* with the *Divine Grace*? And if *Grace* and *Glory* differ only in *degree*, and the One be but the *Completion* and *Perfection* of the other; a Soul so *filled* with *Grace* as the *improving* Soul will be, must needs live a *Heaven upon Earth*, and have frequent *Antepasts* of *Glory*.

And in that *other* World, when the *Glory* shall be *reveal'd*, that is prepared for them that love and serve our Lord Jesus in *Sincerity*; then will their *Happiness* be as *ineffable* as *endless*. It is express'd in this Parable, by *entering into the Joy of our Lord*; that is, partaking of *his* *Glories* and *Felicities* in the *Presence* of the *Immortal God*.

They shall be conducted (after having given a good *Account* of their *Stewardship*) by the *Blessed Angels*, into the *Presence* of the great *King of Heaven*, where they shall *see him face to face*; and with *wondring* *Eyes* and *enravisht* *Hearts*, behold his *Glory*, gaze upon his *Splendors*, and nearly view *his* *Beauty*, who is the *Fountain of Perfection*. He, who is *Light it self*, and in whom is *no Darkness at all*, will *hide* nothing of his *Glory* from the *Eyes* of their *pure* and *prepar'd* *Minds*; but communi-
cate

cate the Knowledge of his most excellent Nature, to the utmost *Capacity* of their Beatified Souls, and make 'em full of Divine Gladness, with the Joy of his *Countenance*. Their *Apprehensions* shall be clear'd and brightned, their *Faculties* act upon this best of Objects *vigorously*, and without any Hindrance or *Distraction*; and every View of the Divine Beauty shall discover *new* Graces and Perfections (for God is an Immense and Fathomless *Ocean* of Beauty, as *Plato* excellently expresses it) and their Capacities by every such View shall be enlarg'd, and made still more and more *capacious*, for the Reception of a following greater Manifestation. And so, their *Love* and *Admiration* of this Divine Being always *increasing*, and their Enjoyment of him compleat and full, to the utmost of their Capacity, their Joy and Happiness will be, like that of God himself; because springing from the same *Fountain*, *Unspeakable* and *Eternal*.

And since the Reward of a *Pious Industry*, will be such an *Exceeding and Eternal* Weight of Glory; methinks we should take off our Affections from these *lower* Goods, and doat no longer upon these vain and worthless *Trifles*, nor throw away our Love upon that which *satisfieth* not, and spend our Labour for that which is not Bread; but make it our great Endeavour to be *rich towards* God, and by improving the Talents he hath given us, lay up a *Treasure in Heaven*: Remembering, That
Eye

Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man, to conceive the things which God hath prepar'd for them that love him, 1 Cor. 2. 9. And certainly, that Diligence is well bestowed, which shall be rewarded with a Crown of Glory, Eternal in the Heavens.

But with the *Unprofitable and Slothful Servant* it is not so; neither in this World nor in the next. In *this World*, the *Lashes* of a *guilty Conscience* will be unto him a *Continual Torment*; the Sense of his having carelessly neglected his Duty, and not performing, according to his *Ability*, the Just Commands of his great Lord; but being an *Unfaithful Steward* of the Grace of God bestowed upon him, and that he is far from being able to give in a good Account, when his Lord shall come, expecting the Improvement of his Talent: *This* will fill his Breast with unspeakable Trouble and Perplexity, and imbitter all his Worldly Enjoyments with the Mixture of Anxious Fear, and Dread of a severe *After-Reckoning*; and the terrifying Expectation of his sad Fate that will ensue, will be to him, even like a *Hell upon Earth*; and cruciate his Soul with unspeakable *Pangs and Agonies*. And, which is much worse still, the *Grace* that has so long lain *unimprov'd*, shall at length be taken *from him*; and the Man, as *desperate* and irreclaimable, be given over, and as 'twere *seal'd up to Remedyless Misery*. And in the *next World*,
at

at that great Day, when he shall be actually call'd to give Account of his Works, the Dire Sentence of *Depart from me ye Cursed into Everlasting Fire, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels*, shall strike him through with Horror and Confusion; and he shall be driven into *Outer Darkneſs*, where he shall Eternally bewail his Miserable Condition, and gnash his Teeth in bitter Remorſe for bringing himself to that Place of Torment, by slothfully neglecting the Improvement of that Divine Grace; with which he might, if he would, have work'd out his Salvation: Crying out to Eternal Ages in utter Despair, and most tormenting Agonies of Soul, *O that I had consider'd in that my Day, the things that did belong unto my Peace; but now, they are for ever hid from mine Eyes!*

And now, for a Conclusion of this Discourse. Here is in this Parable we see, on the one Hand, all the *Encouragement* in the World to Diligence and *Industry*, and a Lively Improving Piety; such as more and more Abundance of Grace, with all the Blessed Attendants of it in *this* World, and a full Enjoyment of God himself in *Heaven*. And on the other side, here is, what if duly consider'd, will make any Man afraid of Spiritual *Sloth* and Idleness, and not dare to neglect the *Improvement* of his Talent; for if he does, he shall be depriv'd of God's Grace here, and doom'd to Eternal Misery at the Day of Judgment.

ment. Wherefore, let us seriously consider what has been now commented upon this Parable; and beg of God so to bless it to our Good, that we may be inclin'd by it to make a due Improvement of the Talents he has committed to our Management, to his *Honour* and *Glory*, and our own *Eternal Salvation*.

THE PRAYER.

MOST Glorious God, the Fountain of Perfection, whom I humbly acknowledge to be the giver of every good and perfect Gift; I beseech thee assist me with thy Grace, that according to thy Just Expectation, I may make a suitable Improvement of the Talents I have receiv'd from thy Bounty, to thy Glory and the Publick Good. And may my Industry be excited by this great Consideration, That thou wilt certainly call me to give an Account of my Improvement, and very speedily perhaps, and proportionably reward or punish me in the Eternal World. I thankfully own, most merciful Father, that thou hast given me sufficient Grace wherewith to arrive at the End of my Hopes, and art not at all wanting to me in this unspeakable Gift; O may I not be wanting to my self, and neglect and bury this most Precious Talent, but with Diligence and Carefulness endeavour to work out my Salvation with it in Fear and Trembling: Remembering what Confusion I shall be in, how
utterly

utterly without Plea or Excuse, when for my Wicked Slothfulness thou shalt consign me to outer Darkness, since thou didst enable me to perform all thou expectedst from me. And may the unspeakably Happy Condition of the Diligent, encourage me to an Active Persevering Piety, and always to abound in the Work of thee, my Lord; since I know my Labour shall not be in vain; but be rewarded with still larger Additions of thy Grace in this World, and with the Participation, in great Degrees, of thy Glory in the next. O God, assist me more and more with this thy Heavenly Aid, and may I always gratefully acknowledge from whom I have receiv'd it, and return thee all the Praise of what I shall do well by thy Assistance, and always fear, lest by my Negligence I forfeit it: That so, faithfully improving the Talents thou hast here committed to my Trust, I may, at the great Day of Retribution hear these Blessed Words, Well done good and faithful Servant, enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord. Which grant, O Gracious God for the Sake of Jesus, thy Beloved. Amen.

P A R A B L E IX.

Of the Covetous Rich Fool.

Luke xii. 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21.

And Jesus spake a Parable unto them, saying, The Ground of a certain Rich Man brought forth plentifully.

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do because I have no Room where to bestow my Fruits?

And he said this will I do; I will pull down my Barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my Fruits and my Goods.

And I will say to my Soul, Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years; take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?

So is he that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not Rich towards God.

THIS Parable was spoken upon Occasion of one of our Lords Followers, desiring him to Arbitrate between him and his Brother, in a difference about dividing their Patrimony; for so Verse 13. of this Chapter, *one of the Company said unto him, Master, speak unto my Brother, that he divide the Inheritance with me.* To this our Lord answered in the 14. Verse, *Man, who made me a Judge or a Divider over you?* And takes Occasion from that Request to him, rather to advise those that were with him, and all that should hereafter be his Disciples, to *take Heed and beware of Covetousness*, and that because a *Man's Life or Happiness consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth*; as 'tis in the 15. verse. And to make this his Excellent Advice sink deeper into their Minds, he spake the Parable I am now to Discourse upon.

The Design of it, as we see from the Context, is to draw Men off from *Covetousness*, or a too eager Desire of heaping up Riches; and to expose the great *Folly* of being wholly intent upon laying up Treasures in *this Life*, and taking little or no Care to be *rich towards God*. For, as that Rich Man in the Parable, whom God had blessed with an *extraordinary Increase of the Fruits of the Earth*, even to

more than his Barns could hold, did entertain Covetous Thoughts of building new ones to hoard it up in, and promis'd himself much Happiness from that Abundance, *Take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry, for thou hast Goods laid up for many Years*: As this Covetous Rich Man was surpriz'd with a sudden Summons into the other World, and snatch'd away from the midst of this Abundance, and upbraided with *Folly*, in trusting in such *uncertain* Riches; so, and for the very same Reasons, is every Covetous Rich Man an Egregious *Fool*, that *confides in Wealth*, and *neglects Religion*.

In my Discourse, therefore, upon this Parable, I shall do these Four things.

First, I shall give a short *Description* of the Vice of *Covetousness*.

Secondly, Endeavour to *expose*, both the great *Folly* and *Vileness* of this Vice; together with the Ill Consequences that attend it;

Thirdly, I will answer the Rich Fool's Question which he propos'd to himself upon the great Increase he had, *What shall I do, because I have no Room where to lay my Fruits?* And,

Fourthly, Shew the great *Wisdom* of not setting our *Hearts* upon, nor *eagerly* pursuing Wealth, and of bestowing it as Religion does direct, should it please God in an extraordinary Manner to bless us with it.

And

And after all, I will urge this upon Men's *Practice*, and so conclude this Argument.

First, I am to give a short *Description* of the Vice of *Covetousness*, that we may know what it is that this Parable would incline us to *avoid*.

The *Covetousness* this Parable warns against (for there are several Sorts of it) is an *Immoderate* Desire of *heaping up* Riches, or of having still *more and more* Wealth, after we have sufficient for the *Comfortable* Support of our selves and Relatives; that we may for the Future, live in greater *Ease* and *Luxury*.

First, This *Covetousness* is an *Immoderate* Desire of Riches; for *all* Desire of Riches is not *Criminal*, and a Man may very lawfully *desire*, and as lawfully, by all due Means, endeavour to procure *so much* Wealth as is needful for his own and his *Families* Comfortable Maintenance, and will enable him to be kind to the Poor. But, to desire even *this* with *Impatience*, and over-great *Solicitude*, is the Sin of *Covetousness*; and the Sin is very much *aggravated* when a Man greedily desires still *on*, when his *Comfortable* Subsistence, and sufficient Provision for his Family is already provided for.

Again, *immoderately* to desire to heap up Riches is *Covetousness*, though we may intend afterwards to *enjoy* them, to *eat, and drink, and be merry*, and take our *Ease* the more, as the Rich Man in the Parable purpos'd to do;

for this distinguishes *Covetousness* from extreme *Parsimony* and *Niggardliness*. They agree indeed in this, that they are both an *extreme Desire of Riches*, but they differ likewise in this, that the *Covetous* may eagerly desire to get Riches with a Design afterwards as prodigally to spend them, but the *Niggard* hoards up what he has got, and endeavours to scrape more to it with a Purpose not to make use of it *himself*, nor to let any body *else* touch it, as long as he can help it. And these, though they are *both* very great *Vices*, yet *Niggardliness* is, I think, by much the greater of the Two. But 'tis the extreme Desire of heaping up Riches, tho' with a Purpose to *enjoy* them, that is the Vice this Parable is levell'd against; for the Rich Man *there* intended to enlarge his Barns, and lay up his Increase in them, *that he might take his ease, and eat, and drink, and be merry*; which is a Kind of *Covetousness*, that though very *many* are guilty of, yet few think it deserves to be call'd by that hateful Name.

There is one thing more to be explain'd in this Description of *Covetousness*, namely, What is meant by such a Proportion of Riches as is sufficient for the *Comfortable* Subsistence of a Man and his Relatives? And the Answer to this must be in *General*; (for to *Particularize* in this Case would be endless) *that is* sufficient for the *Comfortable* Subsistence of every Man and his Family, which will secure them according to their *Station* and *Degree*,
from

from *Want* ; and provide Plenty of what is necessary to *Life*, and *Health*, and *Decency*, though it does not arise to the *Pomps* and *Vanities* of the World: For he that hath *this*, has, no question, what is sufficient for a very comfortable Subsistence to any *Reasonable Man*. And he that is not satisfied with *such* a Degree of Wealth as *this*, will never be satisfied with *any*, be it never so *great*.

He therefore that at *all* desires Riches *impatiently*, much more, he, that when he has a *Reasonable Sufficiency* of Wealth, covets still *more*, that he may *ingross* it to *himself*, and the more indulge his *Luxury*, to the Neglect of better things, and builds his Hopes of *Happiness* upon such a Multitude of Riches ; is guilty of the *Covetousness* this Parable was spoken against : And the *Folly* and *Vileness* of which Vice, I am in the *Second* Place to expose, and shew what very *Ill* Consequences do attend it.

And *first*, All *Immoderate Desire* of Riches, upon what Account soever, is a very great *Folly*. *Immoderately* to desire *any* thing is questionless a *Folly* ; for all *Immoderation* is foolish and *unreasonable*, as must be acknowledged by every Man at first sight : and *immoderate Desire* is a kind of *Rack* and *Torture* to the Mind, which for a Man in *any* Case to bring upon *himself*, is certainly a *Folly*, and therefore in *General*, it must be allow'd to be a great Piece of *Folly*, *immoderately to desire*

Riches. But more *Particularly* it is so upon the following Accounts.

First, Because 'tis so very *uncertain*, whether a Man shall *attain* his Desire, or no. There are so many *cross* Accidents incident to the *Pursuit* of Riches, let Men take what Course they will, that 'tis generally the most *precarious* thing in the World. If a Man crosses the *Seas* for Wealth, as *uncertain* as the *Winds* and *Waters* are, as *numerous* as the *Rocks* and *Quick-sands*, and *Sea Robbers*; so great is the *Uncertainty*, whether *that* way he shall *have* what he *desires*, and *heap up* Wealth, or no. If, for more *Security* he stays at *Home*, and by *Domestick* Employments endeavours to be *rich*; whatever his Employment is, he is not sure he shall have *Health* to pursue it; or if he *has*, that his Endeavours will be *successful*; Ten Thousand unforeseen Accidents may destroy a very *hopeful* Beginning, and one *Month* may set him further *back* than he has *advanc'd* in *Twenty Years*; and *one* unlucky Hit may reduce him to *Poverty*, after he has arriv'd *almost* to the *Completion* of his Desires. In *other* Cases, there are some *certain Means* that seldom *fail* of their respective Ends; as *Learning*, where there is an *Aptitude* for it in *Nature*, may certainly be acquired by *Ingenuous* Education, *Diligent Study*, and *Good Conversation*; and when there is a *Natural Genius* likewise, Men seldom fail by *Good Instruction* and

and *Industrious Practice*, of becoming Artists in their several Professions. But *Riches* do ebb and flow *unaccountably*; sometimes the greatest *Industry* fails of them, and they fall *unexpectedly* upon the *Idle* and the *Negligent*; and as often, when Men think they are within their *Reach*, they make themselves Wings and fly away they know not how. 'Tis like a Child's pursuit of a *Grass-hopper*, whose Motions are so very *irregular*, that he finds it a very difficult Matter at all to come *near* it; and when at length, after much Pains, he thinks he has gain'd his Prize, and eagerly puts forth his Hand to seize it, the nimble Insect leaps to a further Distance from him than before. Even just so (how rustick soever the Comparison may be) is it very often with Men that *immoderately* desire, and *eagerly* pursue *Riches*; there's no *regular* Way of proceeding that a Man may securely depend upon in the Case; The Ebbs and Flows of *Wealth* are as various and unaccountable as the Motions of that little *Insect*, 'tis as hard a matter to come within *reach* of them, and Men are as often baulk'd when they think they have them in their Possession. And this can't but have been the *Observation* of every Man that has liv'd any while in the World, and taken Notice of the Proceedings in it; and has been the costly *Experience* of very many. Now, for a Man *immoderately* to desire, and *impatiently* to pursue, what there is no sure and *steady* Way

of *attaining*; and when, for any thing he can tell, after all his Pains, and the Uneasiness consequent upon his eager Desire, he shall *miss* of his *End*; nay, when 'tis a Thousand to One but he *shall* miss of it (for of a *Thousand* that immoderately *desire* great Riches, there is, modestly speaking, scarce *One* that attains them) for a Man to suffer the Torment of an *immoderate Desire* of what there is so little Probability of *attaining*; is certainly a great Piece of *Weakness* and *Folly*; and almost as bad, as if a Man should endeavour eagerly all his Days to enclose the *Wind* in his *Fist*.

And this Comparison, as *extravagant* as it may seem, is countenanc'd by the *wisest* of Men; who, in the 5th Chapter of *Ecclesiastes*, 16th Verse, after he had, for Five or Six Verses before, expos'd the *folly* of an immoderate Desire of Wealth; asks this Question, *What Profit hath he that hath labour'd for the Wind? All his Days* (as 'tis verse 17.) *he eateth in Darknes*, or Uncertainty of the Event, and *hath much Sorrow, and Wrath with his Sicknes*, i. e. as 'tis express'd elsewhere by the same wise Preacher, *the deferring of his Hope maketh his Heart sick*, and much is his Trouble and Vexation in pursuing what is *Vanity of Vanities*. And therefore with great Reason does St. Paul warn Men not to trust in *uncertain Riches*, or the *Uncertainty* of Riches, which a Man is as uncertain of *getting*, as of *keeping* when he hath them. 1. *Tim.* 6. 17. And to
reassume

reassume the former Comparison, as *the Wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the Sound of it, but cannot tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth*; so *unaccountable* are the Motions of *Wealth*. For all any Endeavours of ours, *Wealth* will take its own course and change masters or *servants* rather as it listeth; and tho' there is a great deal of *Noise* made with it, and about it, yet no Man can certainly say, *whence it cometh*, by what Methods he may be sure to procure it, nor *whither it goeth*, by what means 'tis lost by one, and passeth another.

And this is the *first* Reason why an *immoderate* Desire of *Riches* is a great *Folly*, because 'tis so strangely *uncertain* whether a Man shall have that Desire of his *gratified* or no, nay, a Thousand to One that he shall *not*. A *moderate* Portion of this World's Good may be moderately desir'd by a wise Man, because there is no great Fear of his being *disappointed*, and Industry is generally rewarded with a *Comfortable* Subsistence: but impatiently to thirst after *great* Riches, is an *Egregious Folly*, because 'tis great Odds, but 'twill be to *no purpose*.

But *secondly*, should it be to *some Purpose* thus eagerly to desire and endeavour after great Riches, and the Man *gains* what he would have; yet, after all, the Purchase is not *great*, nor will it countervail the Uneasiness the whole Man endures in the *immoderate* Desire and earnest Pursuit of it. What *toil* some
Days

Days and *restless* Nights, what *Servitude* and *Drudgery* do those go through who resolve, if possible, to raise large Estates, and greater Families? How many *low* pitiful things are they fain to truckle to, nay, what is worse, how much *cheating* and *underhand* dealing, how much *Violence* and *Oppression* is there committed by those that make *haste* to be rich? What *Discontents* and *repining* at (as they think) their *slow* Progress, how does every *Rub* and *Hindrance* go to their very Heart, and their frequent *Baulks* and *Disappointments*, pierce them thorough with *more* and *more* *pungent* Sorrows, than all their Wealth, tho' they have Hearts to enjoy it, will ever make amends for?

If abundance of Gold and Silver would certainly make a Man *wiser* and *better*, if 'twould *clear* his *Apprehension*, or *strengthen* his *Memory*, or improve his *Reasoning*; if 'twould make him more prudent and *discreet* and of a *riper* *Judgment*; if 'twould increase *Piety* and *Religion*, and promote a *Godlike* Frame of Spirit; nay, if 'twould but so much as refine a Mans *Temper*, and make him of more sweet and *obliging* *Behaviour*, or *regulate* the *Passions* and *Affections* of the Soul, and help him to *Tranquility* of Mind, and cure *Anger*, and *Pride*, and *Envy*, and *Lust*, and *Revenge*, or the like; if abundance of Riches would work any of *these good Effects*, 'twould be worth while earnestly to desire them, and industriously to endeavour

deavour to procure them : But when 'tis so far from *this*, that the direct *contrary* is general observable in those that have the greatest Riches in Possession ; it must, I think, be allow'd to be a very great Piece of *Folly*, for a Man to *endure so much* for what, when he has it, will not *countervail*.

But, though greedy *Worldlings* may own, that great Riches have little or no Influence upon the Happiness and Improvement of the *Inner Man* : yet, because a Man has a *Body* as well as a *Soul* to take care of, they are thus greatly desirous of much Wealth, because 'twill help them to the Enjoyment of much of *this World's* Happiness, and acquire what will highly please and gratifie the *Body* ; as the Rich Man in the Parable said, they may take their *ease, eat, drink, and be merry*, when they have *much Goods laid up for many Years*. I shall therefore in the

Second Place shew, the *folly* of expecting even *this World's* Happiness from Abundance of Riches.

For besides, that the Appetites of the Body are generally observed to be more sickly and *deprav'd* in *rich* than *poorer* Persons ; their *Sleep*, worse rather than better than other Mens ; *the Abundance of the Rich will not suffer him to sleep* ; says Solomon, *but the Sleep of the Labouring Man is sweet, eat he little or eat he much* : Eccles. 5. 12. And that *Health* is much more a Stranger to the *Rich* than to
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the *Meaner* sort, and the Pleasures of having a Body Vigorous and Active, without the Encumbrance of Weakness and Diseases, almost engross'd by the Labouring Poor: Besides this, (which yet alone is enough to prove, that 'tis a *folly* to expect even this World's Happiness from abundance of Riches, for without *Health*, which Luxury destroys the most of any thing, there is no Taste or Relish in any other of its Enjoyments;) there is this One Reason more, among others, that will farther, and I think *evidently* prove, that 'tis a very great Folly to expect to be *happier* even in *this* World, by growing Richer; and it is this, That Riches are of all Things the most *unsatisfying*, and the most *perplexing*.

Other Good Things of this World do in some sort *satisfise*; and Men are often *cloy'd* with *Pleasures*, have enough of Mirth and Jollity, of Recreations and Diversions, and the like; and the Mind is, for a *while*, eas'd and refresh'd by them: But as for *Riches*, as they *increase*, the Desire of still *more*, *increases* proportionably, nay, rather *disproportionably* with them; and 'twas never yet known, that a *worldly-minded* Man ever thought he had *enough*, but that his Appetite grew *keener* after Wealth, the more 'twas fed with it: And 'tis not unusual, to hear the greatest Complaints, Murmurings and Repinings from the *richest* Men. And as for the *Perplexity* that attends *Abundance* of Wealth, that likewise

is as evident to common Observation. The more a Man *bath*, the more Care he must take to *preserve* it, the more Quarrels and Law-Suits will he be embroil'd in; and when there are Troubles and Commotions in the State, and Times grow dangerous and uncertain, then are the greatest *Worldlings* fullest of Fears and dreadful Apprehensions; and not only *real*, but *imaginary* Dangers, terrifie their Unman'd Souls; Things always appearing with the worst Aspect to *their* troubled Fancies, who have made *Gold* their *Deity*, and ty'd up their Happiness in their *Bags*. And nothing, certainly, can be more *perplexing* to a Man's Mind, than such great Fears of *losing That*, in the *possession* of which his *whole Happiness* is *concentred*.

And accordingly, *Solomon*, who had great Possessions, above All that were before him, and gather'd him Silver and Gold in such Abundance, that Silver was in *Jerusalem* common as the Stones in the Street, *1 Kin. 10. 27.* after all, says he, *Eccles. 5. 10, 11. He that loveth Silver shall not be satisfied with Silver, nor he that loveth Abundance with Increase. And what Good is there to the Owners thereof, saving the beholding of it with their Eyes? And even the Eye is not satisfied with seeing neither.* And *St. Paul* says very plainly, That the *Love of Money is the Root of all Evil*, and they that will be Rich, fall into *Temptation and a Snare*, and pierce themselves through with divers Sor-

rows; and that *Contentment*, with only *Food and Raiment*, is a far greater Happiness, 1 *Tim.* 6. 9, 10. And therefore, good Reason had the Wisest King to say, after all his Increase, and the Abundance he had *amass'd* together, that it was, not only *Vanity*, but *Vexation of Spirit*, Eccles. 2. 11.

Now, that which can never *satisfie*, and as it *increases*, increases a Man's Trouble and Perplexity (which is true, we see, of Riches) is, no doubt, far from conducing to a Man's *Happiness in this World*, and therefore, 'tis a very great *Folly*, for any Man to depend upon Abundance of *Wealth* for *Happiness*, for 'tis rather, the Cause of much *Trouble* and *Disquietude*. Or however, God may suddenly deprive a rich *Worldling* of all he has by *Death*, and say, as in the Parable, *Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be requir'd of thee, then whose shall those Things be which thou hast provided?* For, *As we brought nothing into the World, so 'tis certain we can carry nothing out.* And thus much for the *Folly* of Immoderate Desire of *Riches*, in Expectation of a *Happy Life* from *Abundance*. I proceed now to shew,

The *Vileness* of this sort of *Covetousness*, and of placing the Happiness of Life in great store of *Wealth*.

That 'tis a very *vile* Thing for a Man immoderately to covet *Riches*, and place the *Happiness* of his *Life* in *Abundance* of them, will be very evident, if we briefly consider
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what a Man is, and what *Abundance of Wealth* is, and what little or no *proportion* the *one* bears to the *Dignity* of the *other*. A Man is a Creature endow'd with a *Rational* and *Immortal* Soul, capable of *Knowing*, *Admiring*, *Loving*, and *Enjoying God*, who is the *Supreme Good* and the *Centre* of *Felicity*. As a *Christian*, he is an adopted Son of God, Co-heir with Christ of a *Crown of Glory* in the *Eternal Kingdom of Heaven*, and design'd to participate of those *Rivers of Divine Pleasures* that are at God's *Right-hand* for ever and ever. As for *Riches* (or *Abundance of Gold and Silver*, in which now-a-days we esteem *Riches* chiefly to consist) they are *really* no better than *Heaps of Earth* of different *Colours*, impress'd with different *Stamps*, and made of different *Sizes*, and to which Men have given a different *Value* and *Esteem*, according to their different *Colour*, *Size*, and *Impression*; and which in themselves are good for little but to be *look'd on*, and which he that would *live* must part with when he has them, in *Exchange* for other *Things* that are necessary for his *Subsistence*.

Now what can be more *vile* and *base*, than for so *Noble* and *Excellent* a Creature as Man, so far to *degrade* himself, as to employ his greatest *Love*, and *Admiration*, and *Desire*, upon a *Piece of Earth*, which was originally made for him to *reap* upon, and produce *Things* for his *Food* and *Pleasure*! To make
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that his *Master*, nay his *God*, which was made to be his *Servant* ! For a *Rational Soul* to deat upon a senseless *Clod*, to neglect the *Contemplation* of the *Excellencies* of his *infinitely perfect Maker*, and admire one of the *lowest* of his *Creatures* ; to desire a *Piece of Earth* with the greatest *Application*, and have *no Value* for the *Immortal Glories* of *Heaven* ; to place his *Happiness* in what is so very much *inferiour* to him, and upon that which is *indeed* his *Happiness* to bestow no *Thoughts* ; what can be more *vile* and *abject* than this ! what more *unbecoming* the *Dignity* of the *Rational Nature*, and of a *Creature* that has such *glorious Hopes* ! Where is the *Reason* of a *Man* that lays out all his *Endeavours* to acquire a *Trifle*, and in the mean time *disregards* that which is his *chief good* ? and where is the *Religion* of a *Christian*, that has been *redeem'd*, not by *Corruptible Things*, such as *silver and gold*, but with the *Precious Blood* of *Christ*, as of a *Lamb without Blemish and without Spot* ; where is his *Religion*, that notwithstanding this, makes *Silver and Gold* the *chief Object* of his *Affections*, and *treads under foot* the *Son of God*, and *counts the Blood* of the *Covenant*, wherewith he was *sanctified*, an *unholy*, or *common*, *Thing*, and *does despiht* to the *Spirit of Grace*, and loves and admires *Mammon* more than his *Saviour* ? What more *vile* and *brutish* than this, what more *stupidly ungrateful* ! This is, to come down to a *Level* with the *Beasts that perish* ;

perish; nay, 'tis to sink much lower; for They act according to their *Natural Instincts*, and choose as they are directed by their Great Creator, and serve him obediently in that Rank of Being in which he has plac'd them: But *that Man*, much more *that Christian*, that makes *perishing Riches* the main Object of his Desires and Endeavours, acts directly *contrary* to the Reason that God has given him, degenerates many degrees below the Dignity of his Nature, disobeys the Orders of his Creator, slights the Heavenly Counsel of his Saviour, despises the Glories and Felicities of the Kingdom of Heaven, and of a *Man* and a *Christian* makes himself a vile *Muckworm*, delighted in nothing *Noble* and *Excellent*, but groveling upon the Earth, as if that were the *Centre* of his Happiness. And what can more *vilifie* and *degrade* a *Reasonable* Soul, made after the *Image* of God, than such base Affections as these? 'Tis certainly a most vile Degeneracy, and renders a *Man* the most *contemptible* Creature in the Universe, both to *God* and *Angels*, and all *wise* and *good Men*.

And thus much may suffice to expose the *Folly* and *Vileness* of an *immoderate* Desire of *Riches*, as in them placing the *Happiness* of *Life*. I shall now shew

The ill Consequences that attend it; which (besides that great *Perplexity* of Mind they cause, mention'd before) are chiefly these *two*: (1.) It mightily hinders a *Man's* *Pro-*

gress in Religion, which is the *one Thing necessary*. (2.) It exposes a Man more than any thing, to the Danger of *Apostacy*, or *falling from the Truth*.

First, An immoderate Love of Riches does mightily hinder a Man's *Progress in Religion*, which is the *one Thing necessary*. We may remember, our Lord, in his Interpretation of a Parable (being discours'd of) *Mat. 13. 22.* says, that the *Cares of this World*, and the *Deceitfulness of Riches*, like *Tborns* that spring up with Seed, *choke the Word of God*, and render it *unfruitful*; and in another Parable of a great Supper made at the *Marriage of a King's Son*, by which (as was discours'd upon that Parable) is represented the glad Tidings and Invitations of the Gospel; he tells us, That *that which detain'd Men from it*, was likewise the *Cares of the World* and the *Love of Riches*; they had Ground to look after, and Oxen to plow, and therefore they could not come to the Wedding Supper. *Mat. 22. Luke 14. 18.* And accordingly says our Saviour, in as *express Words* as can be, *Mat. 6. 24. No man can serve two Masters, ye cannot serve God and Mammon.*

Now the *Reason* of this is two-fold: For *first*, Nothing so much *distracts* a Man's *Thoughts*, as an eager Desire and Pursuit of *Wealth*; for Riches are so difficult to be *acquir'd* (as has been said) and so very *slippery* when gain'd; that, as to get them will exer-
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cise all a Man's *Contrivance*, employ all his Thoughts and *Attention*, and consume his whole *Time*; so to *keep* them when once gotten, will, to a Man that knows the *Hardship* of getting them, and how *soon* they are *lost* again, engage him in constant Care and Solitude to *watch* his Idol, lest he be *depriv'd* of it; and so, his Mind becomes distracted with continual Apprehensions of *Danger*; and at leisure for no other Thoughts than how to *secure* his *Riches*. And this, those that are acquainted with Men much wedded to the World, may soon perceive by their careful anxious Looks, and distrustful Timorous Discourse. Now, the immoderate Love of Riches thus *engrossing* a Man's Soul; and the great Business of *Religion*, or making Provision for *Another* World, and laying up a Treasure of good Works in Heaven, being a Thing that likewise requires *Time* and *Diligence*, and a close Application of all our Faculties to the Performance of it; and it being impossible for a Man to attend closely to two Things at once; and the Love of *this* World, and of the *next*, being not only *differet*, but *contrary* the one to the other: How can it be, but that he that *eagerly* loves *Riches*, and has the Soul prepossess'd with a strong Desire of *them*, and all his Faculties before engag'd in their Pursuit; must move very *slowly* in the Way of Religion, if he moves *at all*; nay indeed, rather move *backward* than *forward*; and the *more* he loves

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the *World*, grow colder still in his Affections
to *God*.

Another Reason of this is, Because an Im-
moderate Love of Money is a kind of *Fascina-*
tion and Enchantment : it casts a *Mist* before
a Man's Understanding, and makes him less
sensible and *apprehensive* of the great Obliga-
tion to a Religious Life, and so dulls and stu-
pifies the Soul, that it becomes very little
moved with the Sermons of the Gospel. What
else should be the Reason of that strange *Un-*
concernedness in the Worldly-minded, though
prel'd never so home with the Necessity of
minding Religion more and the World less, of
endeavouring, before all Things, to be *rich*
towards God, and to give of their Abundance
to the Relief of the Poor, and not to trust in
uncertain Riches, and the like ? They give us
the Hearing perhaps, and that's All, and go
on still in their own Course as earnestly as
ever ; and if they offer any thing in their De-
fence, 'tis so strangely *weak* that a Man can't
but admire at it. Sometimes we shall hear them
say, they don't know *what Streights* they may
be reduc'd to yet before they dye, and there-
fore they think it but Prudence to provide for
the worst ; forgetting all the while, that our
Lord expressly *forbids* all such anxious Solici-
tude for the Morrow, and commands an hum-
ble Trust in the Providence of God, who never
forsakes those that are moderately industrious,
and depend upon him for a Blessing ; and ne-
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ver. reflecting upon the *miserable Streight* they will be in at the Day of Judgment, if destitute of good Works, and not able to give a sincere Account of their Stewardship.

Sometimes these Men will quote Scripture, and tells us, the Apostle says, *He that provides not for his own House, is worse than an Infidel*, forgetting in the mean time the words of the same Apostle in another place, that *the Love of Money is the Root of all Evil*; and those of our Saviour immediately before this Parable, *Take heed, beware of Covetousness, for a man's Life consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* And in *Mat. 6. 32.* *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these Things shall be added unto you, for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*; and that the *Covetous* are in the number of those that shall never see the Kingdom of Heaven. *1 Cor. 6. 10.* *Eph. 5. 5.* Of all Vices that we reprove and warn Men against, *Covetousness* and *Worldly-mindedness* we find to be most *stubborn* and *irreclaimable*; and 'tis very seldom indeed, that we can stop a Man that is in a hot pursuit of Wealth; so strangely *bewitching* is this Love of Money, and more than ordinary destructive of a true Sense of Religion in the Soul. And accordingly says our Lord, *How hard is it for a rich man* (one that makes a God of Riches, and confides and trusts in them) *to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven! 'tis easier for a Camel*

to pass through the Eye of a Needle. 'Tis next door to an Impossibility, and nothing but the Almighty Power of God changing his Heart, can make him capable of that Happiness. And St. Paul agreeably, *Not many rich, not many mighty are called, and the God of this World hath blinded the Eyes of those that believe not.* And the *Pythagoreans*, by the meer Light of Nature, were sensible of this, and taught their Scholars a Separation from the Affairs of the World, if they would Philosophize well, and find out pure Truth, and the Secrets of Wisdom. Wherefore, we see it highly concerns us, to take no *such* Thought for the Morrow, but endeavour to lay up a Treasure in Heaven; because, *Where our Treasure is, there will our Hearts be also*

Another very sad Consequence of an Immoderate Love of Riches, is, that it exposes a Man, more than any Thing besides, to Apostacy, or falling from the Truth. St. Paul, *1 Tim. 6. 9.* says, *They that will be rich, fall into Temptation and a Snare;* and more expressly in the next verse, *The Love of Money is the root of all Evil; which, while some have coveted after, they have erred from the Faith:* and the Event has often prov'd this true; and the Hopes of gaining, and the Fear of losing Riches, has prevail'd with Thousands to turn *Apostates* to the Truth. For the sake of a little Money 'twas, that *Judas* betray'd his Master and Saviour; and to tempt with Money

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ny, is a way of procedure so very successful, an Engine so almost irresistible, that 'tis made use of by all sorts that would gain Profelites to a Party; and the great Tempter, with much Confidence, after his other Stratagems fail'd him, made Offer of *Riches* to our *Lord Himself* (as his best Reserve) when he would perswade him to Fall down and Worship him. And so unreasonable a Love have Worldly-minded Men for Wealth, as to *be* and *do* any Thing at the Frowns or Promises of him who has Power to give or take away Riches. This has been the Experience of all former Ages, and too much of our *own* too, and will still be so, till Men grow so wise as to know how to be content with Food and Raiment, and believe our Lord's Words, that *a mans Life consisteth not in the Abundance of the Things which he possesseth, and that Godliness with Contentment is the greatest gain.* And therefore, as much as it concerns Men to be *constant* in the Profession of the Truth of God, that is, as much as their *Salvation* is worth, so much it concerns them to *take heed and beware of Covetousness.* For 'tis very true, in more Senses than one, that it is *Idolatry.* Colof. 3. 5.

Having thus shewn, the great *Folly* and *Vileness* of an Immoderate Desire of Riches, and of expecting the Happiness even of *this* Life from Abundance of Wealth, and mention'd two very ill *Consequences* of this Covetousness; I proceed now to the

Third Thing I intended to do; which is, to Answer the Rich Fool's Question that he propos'd to himself, upon the great Increase he had, *What shall I do because I have no room where to lay my fruits?* And shew, how many good Ways there are of Disposing of *Abundance*.

Of all the Ways of bestowing what was more than his Barns would hold (by which I suppose is express'd his having more than was needful to his own comfortable Subsistence) Covetousness would let this Rich Man think of none but of Building *New Barns* wherein to lay up his Abundance, and then to *take his ease, and eat, and drink, and be merry*: He look'd no farther than *Himself*, and the more God's Blessings increas'd upon him, the more he purpos'd to live in Luxury and Excess, and *Epicurize* away that which God gave him to a quite different, and much better Purpose.

*Quod superat non est melius quo insumere possis?
Cur eget indignus quisquam te divite? quare
Templa Ruunt Antiqua Deum, cur improbe
chara*

Non aliquid Patri tanto emetiris Acervo?

Horat. Serm. Lib II Sat. 2.

For, every Man whom God has blessed with *Abundance*, is God's *Steward* of that *Abundance*, and must bestow it according to the *Will* of his great Lord, for so St. Peter,

in his first Epistle, chap. 4. ver. 10. *As every man has received the Gift, even so minister one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God.* Now the Duty of a good Steward is thus represented in the 42d Verse of this 12th of Luke, *Who then is that faithful and wise Steward whom his Lord shall make Ruler over his Household to give them their portion of Meat in due Season?* That is, to give the Family their Portion in due Season, is the Duty of a Faithful and Good Steward. Now the Race of Mankind is God's great Family in the World, and some of the Members of this his Family he has made Choice of as his *Stewards* and *Purveyors* to provide for the rest, and has accordingly entrusted them with such a share of his Revenue, to some more, to some less, as in his infinite Wisdom he has thought most fit, and order'd them to expend it to the Advantage of his Household, that every one be provided for according to his Needs, and that no Man be suffer'd, as much as in them lies, to be miserable and perish: And this he requires should be done *faithfully*, after a moderate Provision first made for themselves and Relatives, as they shall answer it at that great Audit, when every Man must give Account of his Stewardship.

The Rich Man then in the Gospel, being (as every other Rich Man is) God's *Steward*, to provide for such as were in Necessity and *Want*, according to the *Abundance* God had given

given him, 'tis an easie Matter to answer the Question he propos'd to himself upon this great Increase, *What shall I do because I have no room where to lay my fruits?* Why, act like a good Steward for thy great Master, and let the Houses of the Poor be the Granaries for the Abundance of thine Increase. *Charity to the Necessitous* is the best Way of bestowing *Abundance*; and as many Ways as there are of expressing that Charity (which are innumerable) so many Ways are there of disposing of what is more than needful for our own comfortable Support. To Feed the Hungry, to give Drink to the Thirsty, Harbour to distressed Strangers, Cloaths to the Naked, Visits of Comfort and Relief to the Sick, and Freedom to Prisoners; to be a Father to the Fatherless, and a Husband to the Widow, and the like; this is to discharge a good Stewardship; this is what every Rich Man ought to do with his Abundance: And Blessed is that good Servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing; *Of a Truth*, saith our Lord, *his Master will make him Ruler over all that he hath*; he will commit still more of his Revenue to his Management, bless him with greater Prosperity and Increase, and at last he shall be received into the Joy of his Lord, and Reign with Christ his Great Master, in Glory for ever. Whoever therefore has *Abundance*, needs not much to perplex himself how he shall bestow it, for the *Poor are always with us*; and for

for the Relief of *their Necessities*, not the Gratifying our own *Luxurious* Desires, must God's *Extraordinary* Blessings be laid out.

Let us now, in the *Fourth* Place, consider the great *Wisdom* of not setting our Hearts upon, nor eagerly pursuing Riches, and disposing of them as Religion directs, if it shall please God in an extraordinary Manner to bless us with them.

If Riches increase, set not your Heart upon them, is excellent Advice of the Royal Psalmist, *Psal. 62. 10.* and very true is that of St. Paul to Timothy, *Ephes. 1. 6, 10.* that *while some have coveted after Money, they have err'd from the Faith, and pierc'd themselves through with divers Sorrows*; and that Godliness with Content is great gain; and therefore, wise indeed is that Man, that knows how to be content with his present Portion, and by setting his Affections upon more noble Objects, escapes the *Snare* of coveting after Wealth. He is free from the most *dangerous* Passion, the Love of Money being the *root of all Evil*; and is secure of Quiet and Satisfaction amidst all the Turns and Varieties of Fortune, the great Uncertainties of a false and fickle World: If *Poverty* should become his Lot, he is *prepar'd* for't; he knows there is no Stability in this World's Good, and therefore values it accordingly, and remembers that he has a much greater Treasure in a better Place, of which none can deprive him, and which he shall enjoy

enjoy to *Eternity*, and upon *that* fixes his Affections, and longs for the Happy Time when he shall take *Possession* of it. While he hath a plentiful Fortune, he acts like a good Steward of his great Lord, and enjoys the Comforts of it by letting those share with him that want a Supply, and thanks God that he is so blessed, as to *give* rather than *receive*; and in every respect makes the best use he can of what he has, to the Advancement of the Glory of his great Patron, and the Good of his Brethren; and then can sleep securely, though Dangers and Misfortunes threaten, if God thinks fit to *divert* them, and *continue* to him what he has, he knows he can do it; if not, he knows that all will end for the *best* at *last*, and so, chearfully resigns what God before had lent him: he is satisfied that *Happiness* does not consist in Abundance, and that a good Conscience is a continual Feast, and therefore, his main Endeavour is to preserve a good Conscience, a Soul clear and unspotted, and with *that* coarse Fare will relish well, and a homely Garment sit easie upon him; and such *Necessaries* as these, he that feeds the Ravens, and cloaths the Lillies, will surely provide for him. And he that is *thus* dispos'd, must needs be in perpetual Tranquility and Peace; and very *wise* consequently in taking that Course, which helps him to those inestimable Blessings.

As for the Wisdom of disposing of abundance (when God thinks fit to bless a Man with

with

with it) according to the Direction of Religion in the Relief of the Poor and Needy; there needs nothing more to recommend it to Christians, than for them to read the latter Part of *Mat. 25.* where we are informed that the Expresses of Men's *Charity* shall at the great Day of Judgment be particularly enquired into, and the Charitable rewarded infinitely with Glory and Happiness in Heaven; and the Uncharitable doom'd as accursed Persons to depart from God the Fountain of Bliss, into Everlasting Torments, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. And, if so to direct our Steps in this World, as to avoid the Miseries of Hell, and arrive at the unspeakably Happy Kingdom of Heaven, be the greatest *Wisdom*, then is it the greatest Wisdom by a Charitable Disposition of Men's Abundance to the Poor, to make Provision against that great Day of final Retribution, when Charity shall be so particularly enquired into, and so highly rewarded.

There remains nothing now to be done, but to urge what has been said upon Mens Practice. We have seen in this Discourse how great *Folly* 'tis eagerly to desire and pursue *Abundance* of Wealth, that 'tis very uncertain whether ever such Desire shall be *gratified* or no, and that there is no *Satisfaction* in the greatest Riches when *possessed*, and that they are often very suddenly lost again, and then the Grief for being *depriv'd* of them will fill the Soul with

with abundantly greater *Trouble* than the *Enjoyment* of them did with *Pleasure*; and we have seen, as the *Folly*, so the *Vileness* of *Covetousness*, how much a Christian is debas'd by thus groveling on the Earth, and placing his Happiness in what is so much *beneath* him, and neglecting that which is the only proper Object of his Affections, and is of infinitely greater Value than all the Riches of Ten Thousand Worlds; we have seen likewise the *ill Consequences* of *Covetousness*, what a great *Hindrance* it is to, nay, *Destroyer* of Religion, how it indisposes a Man for the Service of God, and endangers, more than anything, his steady Adherence to the Truth; we have been directed to much better Ways of disposing our Abundance when we are blessed with it, than either in hoarding it up, or wasting it in Luxury and Excess; namely, in relieving the Necessities of the Poor, which will intitle us to the Reward of a good and faithful Steward, even the Eternal Joy of our dear Lord; and we have seen the great *Wisdom* of a *contented* Mind, the Blessedness of not *over-valuing* Riches, and the great Advantage that will be made by the *Charitable* Disposal of them, when Christ shall come to take Account of Mens Works at the great Day of Recompense. Wherefore, to conclude all in the excellent Exhortation of our Lord immediately after my Text; let none of us take *Anxious and Perplexing Thought for our Life,*

Life, what we shall eat; nor for the Body, what we shall put on, for the Life is more than Meat, and the Body than Rayment, and he that gave the Greater, will, no Question, provide the Lesser. Let us consider the Ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, have neither Store-House nor Barn, and God feedeth them; how much better are we than the Fowls: And which of us by taking thought, can add one Cubit unto his Stature? If we then be not able to do what is least, why take we thought for the rest? Let us consider the Lillies, how they grow, they toil not, they spin not, and yet, Solomon in all his Glory, was not arrayed like one of these. If then, God so cloath the Grass, which to Day is, and to Morrow is cast into the Oven, how much more will he cloath us, who very much betray our little Faith in doubting it?

Wherefore, let us not immoderately seek what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithall be cloathed, neither be of doubtful, or anxious and too careful Mind, for our Father knoweth that we have need of all these things; but seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto us, in such a Proportion as Infinite Wisdom and Goodness knows to be best for us. Remembring, that as the Covetous Rich Fool in this Parable, that trusted in his Riches, and propos'd to himself much Happiness from a Luxurious Enjoyment of them, was suddenly snatch'd from them to give Account of his Steward.

Stewardship; so shall it be with every one that layeth up Treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God.

The PRAYER.

O Eternal God, the great Creator and Governour of all things, and whose Wisdom and Goodness in all the Disposals of thy Providence is infinite; grant me the Wisdom to be contented with my present Lot, and satisfied with a moderate Proportion of this World's Good, and not to be too careful and solicitous in my Pursuit, even of that. For ever preserve me, I entreat thee, from the great Folly and Sin of Covetousness, and may I be so thoroughly convinced of the Uncertainty of Riches, both in the getting and the keeping, how unsatisfying they are when possess'd, and the many Snares and Temptations that attend them; as always to preserve a great Indifferency to them, and make it my chief Endeavour to attain the real Happiness of a contented Spirit. Grant that I may be more and more sensible how vile a thing it is to place my Felicity in what is so much beneath me as these Perishing Riches are, and which instead of improving me in what is really valuable, tend to betray me into many vile and hurtful Lusts, retard my Progress in Religion which is the one thing necessary, and too often lead into Apostacy from thy Truth. O Grant that I may act like a Man, and a Christian, and
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make it my chief Aim to be rich towards thee my God, and to lay up a Treasure in Heaven; and if through thy Bountiful Goodness, Riches here increase. give me grace, I intreat thee, not to set my Heart upon them, but to dispose of them so as may most conduce to thy Glory, and the Good of the Community; that making Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness according to thy Blessed Will, when these fading Riches shall fail, and be left behind me, my Charity may procure for me a Reception into these Everlasting Habitations, where I shall have a glorious Inheritance that fadeth not away; where neither Rust nor Moth doth corrupt, and where Thieves break not through and steal, and where my Happiness shall be ineffable, fully satisfying and Eternal. Amen. Blessed God, Amen, Amen.

Z PARABLE

P A R A B L E X.

Of the Barren Fig-Tree.

Luke xiii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

A certain Man had a Fig-Tree planted in his Vineyard, and came and sought Fruit thereon, and found none.

Then said he to the Dresser of his Vineyard, Behold these Three Years, I come seeking Fruit on this Fig-Tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?

And he answering, said unto him, Lord let it alone this Year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it:

And if it bear Fruit well: And if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

THIS Parable was spoken upon the News that was brought to our Lord of the sad Fate of some Factious Galileans, whom Pilate the Roman Governour had set

set upon and destroy'd, mingling their Blood with the Sacrifices they were offering. To this, our Lord first made this Answer; *Suppose ye that those Galileans were Sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those Eighteen, upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell and slew them (another sad accident that had lately happen'd) think ye they were Sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.* And then he added this Parable, that he might further enforce the Necessity of a speedy Repentance and Amendment of Life in all Men; in order to their escaping the Just Judgment of God in this World, and the Eternal Punishments of Sin in the next.

From what our Lord said to his Disciples upon the sad Fate of the *Galileans*, and those slain by the Tower in *Siloam*, *think ye that they were Sinners above all, &c.* we may, before we proceed to consider the Parable, learn this short, but excellent Lesson; namely, That when sudden ill Accidents befall our Neighbours, we do not presently make Conclusion, as is too often done, (especially where there has been any Enmity or Difference between the Parties) that God has met with them by his Judgments for some *Extraordinary* Wickedness of theirs, and pronounce them *worse* Men than our selves, or others that *escape*, be-
Z 2 cause

cause they suffer such things ; for this is a very *rash* and uncharitable Sentence, and may be far from *Truth* : But rather, by God's *Severity* upon others, be inclined to reflect upon our *selves*, and humble our selves before him for our *own* Iniquities ; and entirely resolve to forsake every Evil Way, lest *we* likewise fall under the *like* Expresses of his Vengeance in this World, or of infinitely *worse* in that which is to come.

In the Parable it self, is represented God's Method of Proceeding with Sinners now under the Gospel from first to last ; and it is this.

First, He plants them in his *Vineyard*, the Church of Christ ; that there, by the good Cultivating of the Ministers of his Kingdom, and the refreshing Influences of his Blessed Spirit upon their Souls, they may become Fruitful of such good Works, as may fit and prepare them for the Enjoyments of his Heavenly Kingdom ; to which in due season, they are to be *transplanted*. After they are thus plac'd in his *Vineyard*, and Cultivated by the Sermons of the Gospel, he looks for a proportionable Fruitfulness from them ; and that after all his Care and Goodness to them, they would for their Part make him a due return of the Fruits of Evangelical Righteousness : As, when a Tree is remov'd from a Poorer to a Richer Soil, and much Care and Husbandry used about it, 'tis expected it should grow and flourish accordingly, and bring forth more
and

and better Fruit. After God has, with much Patience and Forbearance, yearly sought for Fruit from them, and is as often disappointed; his Wisdom and his Justice prompt him to rid his Vineyard of the Incumbrance of those Unprofitable Trees, to remove from the Society of his Faithful Disciples, those that are a Trouble and a *Scandal* to them; and as Barren Trees are laid aside to be burnt, so to consign them to those everlasting Burnings prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. But, though in Justice he purposes the Destruction of the Unfruitful, yet his infinite Mercy, through the Intercession of the Compassionate Jesus (the *Dresser* of this his Vineyard, the *Head* and *Governour* of the Christian Church) inclines him to a still farther Forbearance till they shall be cultivated and manur'd afresh, by the again repeated Instructions and Exhortations of his Servants the Ministers of the Gospel, and the reiterated Motions of the Blessed Spirit of Life and Holiness. And then, if they bear Fruit *well*, Happy will it be for them; but if not, after that he will *cut them down*, and utterly destroy them. Of each of these Particulars we shall now discourse in their Order.

The *first* is, God's wondrous Care and Tenderneſs of Sinners in Planting them in his *Vineyard*, as the Parable expreſſes it; that is, receiving them into the Church of Christ, where they are cultivated by the Ministers of his Kingdom, and their Souls water'd with
gentle

gentle Showers from Above, the blessed Influences of the Holy Spirit, that they may Flourish and become Fruitful of such good Works as may prepare them for the Felicities of Heaven, to which in due time they shall be Transplanted.

Before the Coming of our Saviour, the *Jewish* Church was God's Vineyard, his peculiar Inclosure, and the Subject of his more immediate Care and Government ; and all but the Seed of *Jacob* were excluded as wild uncultivated Trees, and left to Themselves in the Wilderness of the World : For so, in a spiritual Sense, was all but the Land of *Jewry*, the Lot of their Inheritance. Afterwards, when the Fullness of Time was come, that God would take Pity upon the whole Race of *Adam*, and receive all Mankind to his Favour ; he then *enlarg'd* that his Vineyard, and gave a Free Admittance to all that would submit to the *Culture* and Government of his *Eternal Son* ; whom he sent to break down the former Inclosure, and make it more *capacious*, even as large as the *World it self*, and committed it to his Management, made him the great *Dresser* of this Vineyard, the Head and Governour of this *Universal* Church ; that through his excellent Directions, and the Care and Industry of his Servants, and the Dews from Above of his Divine Grace and Assistance : And above all, through the wondrous Efficacy of his *Precious Blood*, with which he plentifully enrich'd

enrich'd this his new Plantation, it might thrive and flourish, and bring forth Fruit meet for him by whom it was dress'd, even the *Fruits of the Spirit*, and such as are meet for *Repentance*, such as may advance the Glory of God by the Salvation of innumerable Souls, that *none* made after his Image might *perish*, but *all* come to *Everlasting Life*.

God's Vineyard then being thus *enlarg'd*, and his Church now no longer confin'd to a *Corner* of the World, but by the Coming of Christ made *Universal*, that *all men might come to the Knowledge of Truth*; Man is again, as 'twere, seated in *Paradise*, and reconciled to God: 'Tis again put into his Power to continue in his Makers Favour, and after a Happy Life in this World, to be *transplanted* into that Heavenly Country, where is the Residence of the Divine Majesty, and Rivers of ineffable Pleasures which flow for evermore. As through the *Disobedience* of the *first Adam* Mankind was driven out of Paradise, and doom'd to Live and Labour amongst Briars and Thorns, as under the Displeasure of his Creator, and then to Dye and Return to his Dust; so through the *Obedience* of the *second Adam*, even to the Death of the Cross, through the Merits of his Blood, and the Atonement of his Sacrifice, all that sad Sentence and Condemnation is, in a *Spiritual* Sense, revers'd, and we are again planted in the Vineyard and Garden of God, recall'd from the Portion of Thorns

and Briars, and restor'd to the Favour of our Creator, and at length to change this Corruptible for Incorruptible, this Dishonour and Weakness for Glory and Power, this Natural for a Spiritual Body, this Mortal Life for Immortality; and by this means is brought to pass the Saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in Victory.* 1 Cor. 15.

O Blessed Alteration! O happy Change of *Misery and Shame* for Happiness and Glory! O the Miraculous Love and Goodness of God to Mankind, in thus commiserating our deplorable Condition, and delivering us from the Power of Darkness, and translating us into the Kingdom of his Dear Son, and making us *meet* to be Partakers of the Inheritance of the Saints in Light! Happy are they who have heard of these Glad Tidings, and are planted in this Spiritual Vineyard, and under the Care and Cultivation of the great Dresser of it, *Christ Jesus*, who have such great Helps and Assistances to *bring forth fruit unto Holiness*, and consequently such full *Assurance of Hope*, that the *End will be Everlasting Life.* Heb. 6. 11.

Let them give Thanks from the Bottom of their Hearts, whom the Lord hath thus Redeem'd, and deliver'd from the Hand of the Infernal Enemy, and be telling of his Salvation from Day to Day: And let us of these Happy Islands, in the first place, magnifie him for this his Infinite Goodness; for none have had a greater share of it than we, none better
Planted

Planted nor better Cultivated, than the Members of this Church of *England*; and (which does much advance the Blessing) none were in a more sad and *deplorable* Condition than the Inhabitants of these Islands before the Preaching of the Gospel. And indeed, what the Prophet *Isaiab* says of God's dealing with the *Jewish* Church, *Isa. 5. 4.* which was then his Vineyard; may be very truly said of his gracious Dealing with this our Church, *What could have been done more to his Vineyard that he hath not done in it? He hath planted it in a very fruitful Hill, and fenced it by his Providence from the Incurfions of its Enemies, and gather'd out the Stones thereof, purg'd it from scandalous Heresies and Superftitions, which are Stones of Stumbling and Rocks of Offence, and built a Tower in the midst of it, guarded it with the Civil Power, making Kings its Nursing Fathers, and Queens its Nursing Mothers, and made a Wine press in it, furnish'd it with all Necessaries of Holy Instruction, and the Service of an Excellent Ministry, to enforce the great Truths of Religion, and lay all the Beauties and Excellencies of it before the People. And now, what could have been done more for this Church than the Lord has already done for it? And what an inestimable Happiness is it that we enjoy, who were Born in this Church, early Consecrated to God in Baptism, and thereby planted in this Vineyard, and fed with the sincere and unmix'd*
Milk

Milk of the Word, plainly and without Reserve, or the cunning Craftiness of Men that lye in wait to deceive: We are invited to a Frequent and *Entire* Reception of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that great Conveyance of the Divine Grace and Aid, and have as many, and as moving Exhortations to live up to our Holy Profession, as are enjoy'd by any Part of the Christian World. What an inestimable Happiness is this! And what great Reason have we, as to bless God for this his unspeakable Goodness to us, so to bring forth the Fruits of Righteousness in great Abundance? 'Tis but Just and Right that we should do it, and God expects it from *All* that are planted in his Vineyard, much more from such as have had *extraordinary* Care and Cultivation bestow'd upon them, as we have had. For so, in the

Second Place, we find in this Parable, that the Owner of the Vineyard came to the *Fig Tree* he had planted in it, expecting Fruit from it.

The Fruit that God expects from Christians that have enjoy'd the Means of Grace and spiritual Improvement, is that which is call'd *Fruit meet for Repentance*, and the *Fruits of the Spirit*. Fruits meet for Repentance, are the Advances to a New and Spiritual Life, such as shall demonstrate a sincere Renovation and Change of Mind, a Turning from a Course of Rebellion against God, and Hatred of

of him, to entire Obedience to him, and hearty Love. But he that to the Profession of Christianity adds Debauchery of Manners, and instead of bringing forth the Fruits of the Spirit, such as *Love, Joy, Peace, Long-Suffering, Gentleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance, and such like*; Drudges in the *Works of the Flesh*, such as *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanneſs, Lasciviousneſs, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, Envyings, Murthers, Drunkenneſs, and such like*, such Men as these are, as St. Jude expresses it, *Trees, whose Fruit withereth, without Fruit, twice dead, Jude 12.* Or dead a second Time after they were *enliven'd* by the Grace of Christ, and planted in his Vineyard, where they might have liv'd and flourish'd and brought forth much Fruit, well-pleasing unto God; and by this their Barrenness, are as 'twere *pluck'd up by the Roots, and to whom is reserv'd the Blackness of Darkness for ever, and whose End is to be burn'd.*

When our Lord, as he was returning from *Bethany to Jerusalem*, saw a Fig-Tree at a Distance, very promising and full of Leaves, and went to it, expecting to find Fruit upon it; but finding nothing thereon but Leaves only, curs'd it, and said unto it, let no Fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever; he plainly enough told the World, that the *Profession of Christianity* must always be attended with the Fruits of Piety, that he expects to find it
so,

so, and will severely punish where he finds it otherwise. The Leaves of a Fig-Tree are broad and strong, and hang thick, and are of a lovely Colour, and therefore very apt to represent the Profession of Christianity, which makes the fairest Appearance of any Religion that was ever taught the World, and the Title of a *Christian* does include all that can be suppos'd excellent and good in a Man. But, as the Fig-Tree, besides flourishing Leaves, bears a *Delicious Fruit*, and has always upon it Fruit coming to Maturity; so Christianity must not be all *Shew* and Profession, but the Fruits of Holiness must appear as well as the Leaves of Fair Speeches, and the outward Performance of some of the more Customary and Publick Duties of it; and, as is observ'd in the Fig-Tree, there must *always* be some Fruit growing to Ripeness and Perfection: God expects to find it so, and where he is disappointed, the Fate of the Barren Fig-Tree will be their Portion.

We are all of us too apt with our first Parents, to cover our Spiritual Nakedness with Fig-leaves, and by tacking together a few External Observances of Religion, think to hide our Shame, and pass for good Servants and Disciples of the Lord Jesus: But this is too thin a covering to conceal our Vileness from his Eye, to whom all things lie Naked and open, and who knows the very Secrets of the Heart. He that is *indeed* a Follower of
Christ,

Christ, and loves him in *Sincerity*, must walk as *he* walk'd, imitating his Example, and treading in his Blessed Steps, departing from all Iniquity, denying himself and all his vile Lusts and Affections, obeying chearfully the Holy Commands of his great Lord, and giving all diligence to add to his *Faith, Vertue, and to Vertue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godliness, and to Godliness Brotherly Kindness, and to Brotherly Kindness Charity; for if these things be in us and abound, they make us that we shall be neither Barren nor Unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ,* 2 Pet. 1. 5. 6, 7, 8. And he only that has thus his *Fruit* unto *Holiness*, shall in the *End* attain Everlasting Life.

'Tis *Fruit* then, God expects from Christians, not *Leaves*; not the *Form* of Godliness, but the *Power* of it; not to be call'd *Lord, Lord*, but to have his Commands *Obedyed*. But since God is infinitely *full* already, and can receive no Addition to his inexhaustible Store; since our Goodness extendeth not to *him*, neither is it any Profit to him that we make our Way perfect: It will not be amiss to enquire upon what Accounts God so strictly and indispensibly requires that we should be Fruitful? And 'tis upon our *own* Account that we might be happy in *this* World, and made *capable* of enjoying the Glories and Felicities of the *Kingdom of Heaven*.

First,

First, God expects the Fruits of Righteousness from all that name the Name of Jesus, and are planted in his Vineyard, that they may be happy in *this* World.

'Tis the great Design of our good God to make his Creatures *happy*; and because we are plac'd in *this* World to fit and *prepare* our selves for *Heaven*, and are to spend a Life here *below*; he has given us a *Rule*, which, if we walk by, we shall be happy *here* as well as in the world above; and which, if we disregard and deviate from, a *double* Misery will be our Portion. And in this God deals with us as a wise and good Parent with his Children; he keeps them close to what will conduce to their Happiness, though he *himself* receives no other Benefit by it, than the Hope of seeing his *Off-spring* happy.

'Tis for this Reason that our Saviour, the great Dresser of God's Vineyard, and his Servants, the Apostles, so often press the Observance of such Rules as have chiefly Relation to the Comfortable Living in *this* World; as with Relation to others, *Mercifulness, Charity, Meekness, Forbearance, and Forgiveness of Injuries, Peaceableness, Compassion and Pity*, together with exact *Justice and Honesty*; without which there would be no Comfort of *Society*; and Men would be like so many Wild Beasts, preying upon and devouring one another. And with Relation to our *selves*, we are taught *Temperance, and Sobriety, and Cha-*
stity,

stity, and Moderation in all things, Contentment of Mind, Patience, and the like; without which, neither a Man's Mind or Body would be at Ease, nor taste any Comfort and Happiness in Life. Indeed, God has been pleas'd to annex the Rewards of Heaven to the sincere and constant Practice of these Vertues, as a further Encouragement to Men chearfully and diligently to set about them; but 'tis the Happiness of this World that they have a direct Influence upon, and are therefore commanded, and therefore encourag'd, that much Sin and Misery might be prevented, and Men might be happy in this lower World.

For, as for the contrary *Vices, as Cruelty and Unmercifulness, Rage and Intemperate Anger, Uncharitableness and Revenge, Strife and Envy, Injustice and Oppression, and the like; these would make a Hell upon Earth, and quite destroy Society and all the Comforts of it, and make the World like a Desert, and force Men to the Shelter of Rocks and Mountains, and Dens and Caves of the Earth: And where-ever they should go, if Intemperance and ungovern'd Lust, and Inordinate Desire and Use of the Gratifications of Sense, Discontent and Anxiety of Mind, Impatience, and the like, should follow them; their Misery would be endless, and Happiness an utter Stranger to them.*

And therefore, as much as the Happiness of Life is to be valu'd, so much are we bound
to

to praise and adore the Infinite and *Disinterested* Goodness of God; who hath given us such Rules of Living as if *observ'd*, will *procure* that Happiness; and who besides, that we may not *fail* to observe them; has over and above propos'd to us ineffably Glorious Rewards in Heaven if we *do*, and threatned as great a Misery in Hell if we *do not*. That is, he has done all that is *possible* to be done to make a *free Agent* happy in the World that *now* is, as well as that which is to come; and therefore 'tis highly reasonable that we give all possible Praise and Thanksgiving to that his Infinite Goodness, and use all possible Diligence to *co-operate* with his Gracious Intentions for our Good; for 'tis *our* Happiness that will be promoted by it, not *his*. And this is the first Reason why God so *indispensibly* requires of us the *Fruits of Righteousness*, because 'tis impossible we should be happy even in *this* World without them.

A *second* Reason of this is, because otherwise 'tis impossible we should be happy in the *next* Life.

The Happiness of the next Life, we are well assur'd, consists in an intimate Vision and Enjoyment of God; who is the Fountain of Excellency and *Perfection*, and consequently of *Bliss*; and God being an infinitely Pure and *Holy* Being; and it being necessary to *Enjoyment*, that there should be a Correspondence and *Agreeableness* between the Object and the Faculty;

Faculty; no Soul but what is Pure and *Holy*, is *capable* of enjoying a Pure and *Holy* God.

The Soul therefore of every Man, being, since the Fall of *Adam*, stain'd and *polluted*, full of vile Affections and Lusts, such as render it *uncapable* of so *pure* and *Divine* a Happiness; 'tis necessary that it should be refined and *purified*, and have Heavenly Affections and Desires planted in the Room of those Vile and Brutish ones, and recover the Divine Likeness which has been so shamefully *defac'd*, that so at length, by the Actual Exercise of the Divine Life *here*, we may become, in some Measure, *capable* of enjoying the Celestial Happiness that flows from the Contemplation and Love of the *Supreme Good*. Or, in the Words of *St. John*, that being *like* him in this State of *Probation*, we may be *prepar'd* to *see* him *as he is*, in the Regions of *Glory*.

And this, an Observance of the Precepts of our Holy Religion will effect; and they were *therefore* given that they might effect it. We are exhorted to be *poor* in *Spirit*, *humble* and *resign'd* to the Will of God, that so we may be conducted safely to the Kingdom of Heaven; *to hunger and thirst* after *Righteousness*, that we may be *fill'd* with *Grace* here, and *Glory* hereafter; *to mourn* for our former *Vileness*, and *Degeneracy*, and *Estrangement* from God, and flee from all *Wickedness*, and sincerely endeavour a *Reformation*, that so we may be *comforted* in the Day of *Retribu-*

tion, and, as good and faithful Servants, be receiv'd into the *Joy of our Lord*. We are urg'd to *Parity of Heart* that we may see God, to be holy as he is holy, perfect as he is perfect, pure as he is pure, because he *hates* Iniquity, and into *his* Presence no *unclean* thing can enter, and without Holiness no Man can see the Lord. So that the Reason why God requires that we should *bring forth Fruit unto Holiness*, is, that the *end may be everlasting Life*. These are the Reasons why God so *strictly* and *indispensibly* requires that we should be fruitful of good Works, after he has planted us in his Vineyard, and cultivated us by his Blessed Son, and his Servants the Apostles, and their Successors, the Bishops, and other Inferiour Ministers of his Kingdom. *O that Men would therefore praise the Lord for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders that he doth for the Children of Men!* Psal. 107. 8.

The *third* thing this Parable informs us of, is God's *Long-Suffering* towards Sinners, and that, though he does indeed *expect* the Fruits of Righteousness from those that are planted in his Spiritual Vineyard, the Christian Church, yet he expects it with much Patience and *Forbearance*; and is not so extremely rigid as to punish for the *first* Disappointment he meets with, but waits still *further* to see if Time will work Amendment: And this is express'd in the Parable, by the Lord of the Vineyard, his coming *three Years* seeking Fruit on his Fig-Tree, and still finding none. Of

Of this *Long-Suffering* and Forbearance of God; every *Sinner* that is yet *alive* is an Argument. Which of the *best* of us have not been *less* fruitful than we *ought* to have been, and then God may with the greatest Reason expect from us, considering the Means of Improvement that we have enjoy'd; and this not only for *three* Years, but for three many times *repeated*? How *many* have been *wholly unfruitful*, and that for Scores of Years, notwithstanding all the Care and Cultivation of God's Ministers; and have been all the while in the Service of the great Adversary of God and Man, doing Despight to the Holy Spirit, Slaves to their vile Passions and Lusts, without Thought of Religion, and without God in the World: And yet, through God's Infinite Mercy and *Long Suffering*, are repriev'd from Destruction, and still in Possibility of Salvation, upon their intire *Repentance*, and bringing forth Fruits *meet* for it for the Future! As many Years as a Sinner has liv'd since he could discern between Good and Evil, so long has God expected Fruit from him, and so often been disappointed, and so long patiently *forborn* him; and considering how *hateful* Sin is to God, how highly provoking it is for his Creatures that have receiv'd their *Being* from him, and all the Blessings they have since enjoy'd; nay, for whom his only Son in wondrous Love shed his most Precious Blood, that he might purchase to himself a peculiar People,

zealous of good Works; and who have been so long planted in his Vineyard, and dress'd with the greatest Care and Tenderness, so that nothing on God's Side is wanting to their Happiness; considering how provoking 'tis for Creatures, under such *strong* Obligations, to serve and obey him to the utmost of their Powers, obstinately and continually for so many Years to rebel against him; 'Tis indeed a Miracle of Divine *Forbearance* that any wilful Sinner is on this Side *Hell*. But, to our unspeakable Comfort, and our unspeakable *Shame* too, so it is; and still this is the Voice of the Father of Compassions, *Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil Ways, for why will ye die O House of Israel!*

'Tis indeed of the Lord's Mercies only that we are not consum'd, and because his Compassions fail not, but are new every Morning; but tho' to him belong Mercies and Forgive-nesses, yet to us nothing but *Shame and Confusion of Face*; who have turn'd our Backs so long upon such Infinite Long-Suffering and Forbearance, and have refus'd to be intreated to our Happiness. But let us not be deceiv'd, God's Spirit will not always in this Manner strive with us; and he that still despises the Riches of this his Goodness, and is not by it led to Repentance, but after his Hardness and Impenitent Heart, treasureth up to himself Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God, who will render to every Man according

according to his Deeds. Rom. 2. 4, 5, 8. *Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish,* shall at length (as slowly as it moves) certainly overtake him, and crush him into Ruin.

For so, in the next Place we are told in this Parable, That when the Lord of the Vineyard had long expected Fruit from his Fig-Tree, and still found none; he said, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?*

And indeed, God's *Forbearance* and Long-Suffering of Sinners, is so far from being an Encouragement to them to go on still in their Wickedness; that, if they rightly consider it, 'tis a prevailing Motive to a speedy and sincere *Repentance*. For *Forbearance* does imply a preceding *Guilt* and *Obnoxiousness* to *Punishment*, which, though *respited* for a Time, is not wholly *remitted*; but if it be ineffectual to the *Reformation* of the Sinner, will be at length pour'd down in full Measure upon his Head. And therefore, when a wicked Man reflects upon his evil Course of Life, and withall sees himself as yet *forborn* by the Offended Majesty of Heaven, and that he lives as securely as better Men; if his Lusts have not quite blinded his Reason, he must needs conclude that this *Forbearance* of so *Just* and *Holy* a God, who infinitely *hates* Iniquity, and is resolv'd to punish it, and has declar'd that he will not *finally* spare the guilty; is only in order to his *Amendment*, that so he may have Time to *review* the Actions of his past Life, and attend

to the Miserable Consequences of them, and so be inclin'd to *return* to that Obedience to God which hitherto he has so shamefully neglected; because, if he still persists in his Rebellion against his Maker, and is Incurable, *Mercy* shall be turn'd into *Judgment*, Destruction shall overtake him like an armed Man, and he shall not escape.

The Divine Justice in this Case may be compar'd to the Course of a *River*; it may be damm'd up and its Progress hindred for a Time; but unless its Stream be *diverted* some other Way, 'twill swell till at last it bear down the Obstacle, and rush on with greater Violence for being interrupted in its Way: So here, the great Benignity and Compassion of God's Nature may sometimes interpose between the Stroke of Justice, and the wretched Offender, to see if he will repent and do no more wickedly, that so the Divine *Nemesis* may steer another Course; but if all this prove at length to no Purpose, if the Man *refuse to return and seek after God*, he will whet his *Sword and make ready his Arrows against the Face of him*, Vengeance shall then have its *free Course*, and Torrents of God's inflam'd Anger shall overwhelm his Soul for ever. There are many Places in Scripture to this Purpose, and which are so obvious to every Attentive Reader, that they need not be here recited: And truly, *irreclaimable* Sinners are so great a Dishonour to God, and Disparagement to Religion,

gion, and like a Contagious *Pest* to Society, that they deserve to be remov'd to a Place more proper for them, the Habitations of the Devil and his Angels.

But still the Compassionate Jesus is our Intercessor; and when, after God's long *abus'd* Forbearance Justice is ready to strike, he pleads in Virtue of his Blood for a still *longer Reprieve*. Hoping that at length the Sinner may be awaken'd by the Sermons of the Gospel, and the inward Motions and Excitations of the Spirit of Life and Holiness, and *see and fear* his Danger and return by Repentance, and do no more wickedly. For so in the next place 'tis said in the *Parable*, that when the Lord of the Vineyard gave Order that the Barren Fig-Tree should be *cut down*, the *Dresser* of the Vineyard, by whom our *Saviour* is represented, *answering, said unto him, let it alone this Year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it.*

Christ is our *merciful and faithful High-Priest* in things pertaining to God, to make *Reconciliation* for the Sins of the People, for he knows our *Infirmities*, and in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able also to succour those that are tempted, and ever liveth to make *Intercession* for us. Heb. 2. 17, 18. Heb. 7. 25. He moves for a still *longer Respite*, and promises to use new Methods that we may become fruitful of such good Works, as will be well-pleasing in his Father's Sight, and accordingly cultivates and manures our Souls

with *repeated* Exhortations to Repentance, presses the Discourses of his Ministers still more *home* upon Men's Consciences, and gives new Aids and Assurances of his Blessed Spirit; provides new Happy Circumstances by his Providence for our Good, such as a Faithful *Instructor*, Good *Conversation* and *Example*, Pious *Books* and Discourses which may warm and enliven a Sense of Religion in the Soul, and awaken Attention, and soften the Heart of Stone, and render it penetrable by the Arguments of the Gospel, and receptive of the Blessed Impressions of the Spirit of God: That, as loosening the Mould about the Roots of a Tree, and cherishing it with the kindly warmth of Dung, is very conducive to the spreading of its Fibres, and making it flourish and grow fruitful; so, these gracious Methods of the great Dresser of God's spiritual Vineyard, Christ Jesus, may so influence the Souls of Christians, as to make them bear much Fruit, to the Glory of God, and their own everlasting Salvation.

This is the *last* Course that can be taken for a Sinner's Safety; and if this will not prevail with him to take care of his Happiness, there is no longer Hope. 'Tis like the Intercession of a Favourite for a Condemn'd Criminal, upon Condition of his better Conversation for the future; but if he again returns to his old vile Courses, his Friends then abandon him, as one that *deserves* to perish. And so here in the Parable,

Parable, Christ the Beloved Son of God intercedes for a miserable Sinner ready for Destruction, and begs a *Reprieve* for him, to see if Time and farther Care, will cure his Wickedness; but, if *this* proves ineffectual, there remains nothing but a *fearful Expectation of Judgment and fiery Indignation*. His *Intercessor* will then give him over for *Desperate*, and suffer Justice to take its Course; for so said the Dresser of the Vineyard to his Lord, *If after I have digg'd about it, and dung'd it, it bear fruit well; but if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

And *this*, in the *last* Place, represents to us the *deplorable* Condition of such, as after all the Methods of Grace for their Reformation, are still *hardned* in their Wickedness; Christ will no more appear in their Behalf, no more Thought shall be taken for their Safety; but their *Compassionate Intercessor* shall then become their *stern* and *inexorable Judge*.

And, when the dreadful Day of Doom shall come, and the miserable Wretches appear before his Throne, to receive the just Recompence of their obstinate Impieties; then shall *That Jesus* who once so earnestly pleaded with God in their Behalf, pronounce the Dreadful Sentence, *Depart from me ye Cursed into Everlasting Fire*. Depart from me your Saviour, and *once* compassionate Mediator between God and You; Be from henceforth and for ever depriv'd of all *Hope of Redemption* and Rein-
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statement into the Favour of my Father ; Be banish'd for ever from all Intercourse with *Heaven*, without any *Intercessor*, any *Propitiatory Sacrifice*, any *Advocate* to plead your Cause, and without any Place for *Repentance* to Eternal Ages : Depart to the Regions of Endless *Horror* and *Despair*, in the Society of the *Devil* and *his Angels*. And this is but the just Demerit of your *Obstinate Wickedness*, who *despis'd the Goodness of God that should have led you to Repentance*.

This is the sad End of *Irreclaimable Sinners* ; this is the Punishment of an *unfruitful Profession of Christianity* : Wherefore, let those consider this that forget God, before it be too *late*, lest he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them ; Let them no longer turn the *Grace* and *Forbearance* of God into *Lasciviousness*, but work out their Salvation with *Fear* and *Trembling*. For God is just as well as *merciful* ; and though *slow to Wrath*, and of great *Goodness*, repenting him of the *Evil*, yet he will by no means clear the obstinately *guilty*, but to such is a *Consuming Fire*.

The P R A Y E R.

I.

O *Merciful God, who hast planted me in the Vineyard of thy dear Son, the Christian Church ; and by the Culture of thy Ministers,*
and

and the enlivening Influences of thy Blessed Spirit, hast taken tender Care of my Growth, and that I thrive and flourish in all spiritual Excellencies till I be fit to be transplanted to thy Heavenly Paradise; I bless thy infinite Goodness for the Enlargement of this thy Vineyard, so as to extend even to us, though so remote from thy first Plantation; and for those extraordinary Helps we of this Church have, in order to our Increase in all the Fruits of the Spirit: And earnestly beg, that we may not produce Leaves only, the mock Appearances of Christian Vertue, but the Fruit of a sincere Religion, in all the Instances of Holy Conversation.

II.

I acknowledge, with Admiration at thy infinite Love to Mankind, that 'tis Our Happiness thou respectest, in thus indispensibly requiring Fruit of us, not any Acquisition to thy self, who art infinitely full already, and the overflowing Fountain of all possible Good: Thou commandest that our Fruit should be unto Holiness, because we shall otherwise be incapable of the blessed End of our Hopes of Eternal Life, and spend our Days too in Misery in this Lower World. O Lord, as is thy Majesty, so is thy Mercy! O make me duely sensible of thy tender Care of my Happiness, and may it never, through my wretched Obstinacy, be in vain! And in vain would it be, were not thy long-suffering wonderful. With what amazing Patience dost thou wait to see if at length I shall be fruitful! How often have I disappointed thy
just

just Expectations, and yet thou hast still forbore me through thine own Compassions and the Intercession of my dear Redeemer, the Dresser of thy Vineyard, who hath ply'd me with new Methods of Conversion, fresh Applications to invigorate my Piety, that at the last I may return thee acceptable Fruits, and escape the sad Punishment that is due to Barrenness. Thou hast done all, O blessed God, that can be done to secure the Happiness of Rational and Free Agents: I therefore beg, with all the Earnestness of an awaken'd Soul, that thy Goodness, Long-suffering, and Forbearance, may soften my Spirit, and lead me to Repentance, and melt me into Shame, and Tears of Penitential Sorrow, for having so long abus'd the tender Kindness of so good a God. O let not thy Lenity ever extinguish the Dread of thy Vengeance, which though slow is sure; and may I seriously consider, that if this thy Mercy is not effectual to my Reformation, 'twill but add weight to the Eternal Ruin I deserve. May these Considerations, most gracious God, never depart from my Mind till Fruit be added to my Leaves, and I experience the Power of True Godliness; which if thou wilt grant me, then will I praise thee without ceasing, and magnifie thy Goodness for ever and ever. Amen. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE XI.

Of the Prodigal Son.

Luke xv. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19,
20, 21, 22, 23, 24.

And Jesus said, a certain Man had two Sons :

And the younger of them said to his Father, Father, give me the portion of Goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his Living.

And not many days after, the younger Son gather'd all together, and took his Journey into a far Country, and there wasted his Substance in riotous Living.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty Famine in that Land; and he began to be in want.

And he went and joyned himself to a Citizen of that Country, and he sent him into his Fields to feed Swine.

And he would fain have filled his Belly with the Husks that the Swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. *And*

And when he came to himself, he said, How many Hired Servants of my Fathers have Bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with Hunger! I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee,

And am no more worthy to be called thy Son, make me as one of thy Hired Servants.

And he arose and came to his Father. But when he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him.

And the Son said unto him, Father. I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son.

But the Father said to his Servants, bring forth the best Robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring on his Hand, and Shoes on his Feet.

And bring hither the fatted Calf and kill it, and and let us eat and be merry.

For this my Son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.

THIS whole Chapter, from the Third Verse to the End, is intended to represent the great Tenderness and Compassion of God towards Sinners; his great Desire that they should Repent, and turn from their wicked Courses; and how highly pleasing to him it is, when they sincerely do so. And this is express'd in Three Parables; The

The first, of a Man's seeking diligently a Sheep that he had lost, and leaving the rest of his Flock till he had found it; and then rejoicing greatly, and telling his Neighbours the good News, and inviting them to partake of his Joy. The Second is, of a Woman's having lost a Piece of Silver, and seeking very carefully till she had found it; and then, in like manner, rejoicing with her Friends for her good Success. And the Third Parable is, that of the *Prodigal Son*: And because they are All to the same purpose, 'twill be sufficient to discourse of *One* of them only; and the *Last* being the most full and comprehensive, I shall consider *That*.

The Occasion of Our Lord's speaking these Parables, was, The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* finding fault with him for Instructing and Conversing with *Publicans* and *Sinners*; for they look'd upon it as very scandalous, and a kind of *Pollution*, to have any Familiarity with those *worst* of Men, as they thought them, and murmur'd against our Saviour, saying, *This Man receiveth Sinners, and eateth with them*, verse 2. To this Objection of theirs against him, he answers in the Parables before mention'd, and shews, how unreasonably uncharitable they were, to think much of his Teaching and Conversing with those, who *because* the vilest of Men, had therefore the most *Need* of his Holy Instructions and excellent Example,

ample, that they might be reform'd and Reclaim'd from their Wicked Practices. For, as he said elsewhere, the *Whole* have no need of a Physician, but those that are *Sick*; and therefore he came to Seek and to Save those that were *lost*, and *Not* to call the *Righteous* but *Sinners* to Repentance. Nay more, he tells them in the 7th and 10th Verses of this Chapter, that *There shall be more Joy in Heaven, in the Presence of the Angels of God, over One Sinner that Repenteth, than over Ninety and Nine Just Persons that need no Repentance*; or such a Total Change of Mind as is in a Sinner that *breaks off* his vile Courses by Repentance. And farther to explain and enforce this great and most comfortable Truth, and represent it more lively to their Apprehensions, he spake the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*; and therein, very naturally and movingly, expresses these *four Things*.

First, The great *Extravagancy* of Wicked Men, when they give themselves up to the Conduct of their *own* Wills and Affections, and are weary of the Government of God their Heavenly Father.

Secondly, The *sad* Condition such Men quickly reduce themselves to by that their Extravagancy and loose self-will'd Course of Life, or in other Words, the miserable Consequences of Debauchery and Riot.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, The sharp Remorse of Conscience that attends such Courses, the Shame and Sorrow for them, and the Resolutions of an awaken'd Sinner to return again to his Obedience to God. And

Fourthly, The great *Tenderness* and *Compassion* of the Father of Spirits to such as Repent in earnest, and keep their Resolutions; His Readiness to receive them again to his Favour, and great Joy for their Return, *Because they were dead but are alive again, were lost but are found* Which last Particular is the Reason of the greater Joy that is in Heaven over one Sinner that Repenteth, than over Ninety and Nine Just Persons that need no Repentance; and is a very satisfactory Account of our Lord's so often *Conversing* with and *Instructing* *Publicans* and *Sinners*: For they had the most need of that great Physician of Souls, and consequently their Salvation would cause the greatest Joy in Heaven; and therefore our Compassionate Saviour so industriously endeavour'd their *Conversion*. And, had the *Pharisees* had any of that Goodness in them they so much pretended to, they would have rejoiced at our Lord's Charity, and admir'd and lov'd him for it, rather than have murmur'd at it as they did, and used it as an *Objection* against him.

The first Thing express'd in this Parable is the great *Extravagancy* of wicked Men when they give themselves up to the Guidance of

their own Wills and Affections, and are weary of the Government of God their Heavenly Father. 'Tis represented here, by a Prodigal Young-Man's leaving his Father and rambling into a far Country, and there wasting his Substance with *Riotous Living*.

Impatience of Government and *Restraint*, and a Desire of being *Free*, and at Liberty to follow their own Inclinations and Propensions; is that which first prompts Men, with the young Prodigal in the Parable, to leave their Heavenly Father, and get as far from his Government as they can; and when they have laid aside the Thoughts of *Religion*, then to take their Swing, and do what seems good in their own Eyes. And with this *fancied Liberty* they are at *first* mightily *pleas'd*, and wish it could be *always* so; that is, that there were no *God*, or no *Religion* to awe and *confin*e their Desires; but that they might be a Law unto themselves, and their own Will the sole Measure of their Actions: For so the Foolish Young-Man in the Parable, we read could not be satisfied till he had his Fortune in his own Hands, to dispose of as he list'd; *Father, give me the portion of Goods that belongeth to me*; and as soon as he had it, he got as far from his Father as he could, and then, denied not his Soul whatever it desired, or as the Parable hath it, *Not many days after, the younger Son gather'd all together, and took his journey into a far Country, and there wasted his Substance with Riotous Living.* And

And just so it is with a Sinner. He finds Religion will oblige him to a *serious* and circumspect Conversation, and that if he continues in the Family of the Faithful, he must live *soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World*, and deny his Bodily Appetites and Desires, and keep them under Subjection to the Spirit; and imitate the Excellencies of his Heavenly Father, *be holy, pure, and perfect, as he is*, because he abominates Iniquity, and into his Presence no unclean Thing can enter. But these are *hard* Sayings; this is a Servitude that he looks upon as *unsufferable*; and he has (as he thinks) a much easier and pleasanter way of Living in his Eye, and which he *longs* to experience; and therefore resolves, once for all, to shake off the galling Yoke of Religion, and get as far from the Government of his Divine Parent as he can, and become his own Master; and then he thinks he shall be happy. So blinded are Sinners by the Deceitfulness of Sin, as to shun Happiness and embrace Ruin; to look upon the *Glorious Liberty of the Sons of God* as the greatest *Slavery*, and exchange it for the vile Drudgery of Vice; to run from that Blessed Being who is the Fountain of Perfection and Happiness, and insist in the Track that leads to Eternal Ruin! An unfortunate End is always the consequence of lawless Liberty; and as a Ship without a Helm or Governour, instead of arriving at the Haven, is soon split upon Rocks, or

over-whelm'd with Quickfands; such is the Case of a Sinner, that impatient of the gentle Restraints of Religion, is resolv'd to quit it, and take his own Course.

But why should Men be so weary of the Government of God, and desire so earnestly to be at their own Disposal? Is not Religion the most *Reasonable* Service? And should it not be the greatest Pleasure to a Rational Creature to act according to the best Reason? Is not God the *wisest*, the most *powerful*, and the most kind and *indulgent* Being too? And is it not more eligible to be govern'd by infinite *Wisdom*, and *directed* in the right Track to *Happiness* by infinite *Goodness*, and *shielded* from Dangers by infinite *Power*; than to be hurried on by the blind Force of brutish and unruly Passions to our Unhappiness and Destruction, and expose our selves to all the Malice of Hell, by yielding to the Temptations of the Devil, and forfeiting the Protection of the Almighty? Certainly, if Men would but *consider*, instead of desiring with the Prodigal Son, to be free from the Government of this our Heavenly Father, and to take their *own* Course at a *Distance* from him; they would say with Holy *David*, *One Day in thy Courts is better than a Thousand, I had rather be a Door-keeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Ungodliness*; and confess in the Words of our Church, that his Service is perfect Freedom. And the silly young Prodigal

digal in the Parable soon found by a costly Experience, the Difference between living under the mild and prudent Government of his Father, and being left to the Conduct of his own ill instructed and *green* Head. But before I proceed to this Consideration, I shall briefly shew how fitly *Vice* is represented by *Prodigality*.

Prodigality, in the Words of this Parable, is *wasting a Man's Substance* or Estate, in *riotous* or profuse and extravagant *Living*; or without any Regard to the *future*, squandering away what he has in excessive *Luxury*: And therefore a wicked Man is certainly the *greatest Prodigal* in the World, because he *wastes* and destroys what is of the greatest *Value* and Esteem, and that in the most *profligate* Manner, without any thought of what shall be *hereafter*, only that he may gratifie his present Appetites and Desires. For,

First, Nothing is a more *substantial* Good, and more to be priz'd and carefully *preserv'd* than the *Grace of God*, or those Blessed *Motions* and *Inspirations* of the Holy Spirit, whereby Men are inwardly inclin'd to *pursue* what will make for their *Eternal Happiness*, and *disswaded* from, and warned to *avoid* what will bring them to endless Ruine. Now this *Grace of God* a Sinner turns into *Lasciviousness*; despises and neglects, nay *resists* the *Motions* of the Spirit of Life and Holiness, and closes with the *Temptations* and *Suggestions* of the

Spirit of Vileness and Impurity ; and does this so *continually* and with so much *Obstinacy*, that he daily wastes that inestimable Treasure, and more and more grieves that Blessed Spirit, and forces him to withdraw his Influences, till at length they are quite *extinguish'd* in his Soul, and a desperate spiritual *Poverty* succeed, an utter *Want* of that Divine Grace, which he so profligately wasted when he had it. And no Poverty certainly so miserable as that which will starve and famish the *Soul*, and bring it to *Eternal Death* ; and therefore no Prodigality like that which squanders away that which is the only Nourishment of the Spiritual Life : Especially if we consider for *what* it is that a Sinner is thus prodigal of so great a Treasure, namely, the gratifying a few Brutish Lusts, and the acting such Vices as bring no true *Satisfaction* along with them, but are full of *Vexation* and *Disappointment* in *this World*, and will at last sink the Soul into the lowest Hell.

Secondly, *Time* is likewise a very substantial Good, and highly to be valu'd, and carefully improv'd, because 'tis the only Opportunity we have of securing our main Interest, the Happiness of *Eternity* ; and when *Time* shall be at an *End*, that is, to every *particular* Person when Death shall put a Period to this Life, then comes that Night in which no Man can work, then the Opportunity shall be for ever at an End, and according as Men have

have improv'd or wasted their *Time* in *this* World, so shall their *Eternity* be *happy* or *miserable* in the *next*. And therefore, he is indeed very foolishly prodigal, who without any Thought of hereafter, wastes this precious Treasure, this only Opportunity of making himself for ever happy, in *Vanity* and *Folly*, in pleasing and humouring his Body, and neglects the Improvement of his Soul; and instead of *working out his Salvation with fear and trembling*, secures to himself *Eternal Misery*. And this does every wilful Sinner, when, with the Prodigal in the Parable, he wastes this his Substance in *Luxurious and Riotous Living*, and studies nothing but how to gratifie the *lower Life*, looking no further than this present World for Happiness, 'till his Opportunity be quite lost, and he is surpriz'd into an unchangeably Miserable Condition, because when 'twas put into his hand to make himself *happy* if he *would*, he neglected it, and chose the Track to *Ruin*.

Thirdly, The Glorious Reversion of our *Heavenly Inheritance*, is a Treasure likewise that can never be sufficiently valu'd; for *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither can it enter into the Heart of Man to conceive*, the Felicities and Glories of it. Now this, we are assur'd by him that cannot *lie*, and whose it is to *bestow*, shall be the Reward of *Vertue* and sincere Religion; all this is laid up for them that love God and keep his *Commandments*.

And therefore, for a Man that knows all this to be so, prodigally to throw away all Expectation of, and Title to such a Reversion as this, upon such low and profligate Accounts as the wallowing in the filthy Pleasures of a Goat or a Swine, or the heaping up Treasures of Gold and Silver which are as *unsatisfying* as they are *uncertain* and *perishing*, or for the Sake of a little empty Honour, or the like: This is the very Highth of profligate Extravagancy, and such, as one would think, no sensible Man should ever be guilty of.

Upon these and many other, nay, indeed *all* Accounts, 'tis very true that a wicked Man is the greatest Prodigal in the World; for he wastes and throws away what is of highest Value to a Man; and that, for what is no better than *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*.

And thus much for the *first thing* express'd in this Parable, *viz.* the great *Extravagancy* of ungodly Men, when they give themselves up to the Guidance of their *own* Wills and Affections, and grow weary of the Government of *God* their Heavenly Father: Like the Prodigal Son, they *waste* their most precious *Substance*, in *riotous and profligate living*.

The *second thing* express'd in this Parable, is the *sad Condition* such Men soon reduce themselves to by that their Extravagancy and loose self-will'd Course of Life; or in other Words, the *Miserable Consequences* of Debauchery and Riot, and of following so *Blind a Guide*

Guide as Mens unruly Passions and Lusts. For so in the Parable, when the Prodigal Young Man had spent all, there arose a mighty Famine in that Land, and he began to be in Want, and went and joyn'd himself to a Citizen of that Country, who sent him into his Fields to feed Swine: And he would fain have fill'd his Belly with the Husks that the Swine did eat, but no Man gave unto him.

The first ill Consequence then of this Prodigality or Lawless Extravagant Living, is Spiritual Want, or a Scarcity and Famine of the Divine Grace in the Soul; which is by so much more to be dreaded than a Famine of Provisions for the Body, as Eternal Misery and Death is more terrible than Temporal. The Grace of God, is questionless the Nourishment of the Divine Life; and which, if once withdrawn, will leave the Soul dead in Trespasses and Sins: Now an obstinate Course of Disobedience to the Divine Will, drives out that Life-giving Power, and makes the Soul incapable of Vital Union with so pure a Spirit; and, as a Humane Soul is forc'd to leave a Body rotten and wasted, and unapt any longer to entertain it, so this Divine Spirit is thrust out from a corrupted sinful Soul. And consequently, there must be a famine in that Soul of that Heavenly Bread which is absolutely necessary to eternal Life; and the Consequence of that is Eternal Death.

And

And certainly, no Man that considers what a Dismal Condition that Soul is in, which is reduced to such *Extremity* of Spiritual Want as this; how full of Horrour and Despair as doom'd to endless Misery, and *seal'd* up to Destruction, which she sees dayly nearer and nearer approaching, and *no* way to *escape*, but (like a Wretch immur'd between two Walls, there to be starv'd to Death) in continual Expectation of her sad End: No Man that considers this, with that Seriousness he ought, but will be very careful not to *waste* what is so *necessary* to his Spiritual *Subsistence*; *i. e.* by no means grieve, or resist, or quench that Life-giving Spirit, by whom all true Religion *lives, and moves and hath its Being*, and which if neglected and oppos'd will be *withdrawn*, and that perhaps for *ever*. If like *Esau*, we sell this inestimable *Blessing* for a Mess of *Pottage*, forfeit the Food of our Souls that we may indulge our Sensual Appetites, that we may fear that a Spiritual *Famine* will be our Punishment, and no place left for Repentance, no Blessing remaining for us, though we seek it *earnestly with Tears*. As the Prodigal in the Parable, when, after he had wasted his Substance in riotous Living, and then *wanted*, and was ready to perish with Hunger, so that he would have been glad of the meanest and coarsest Fare, would fain have fill'd his Belly with the *Husks that the Swine did eat*; even that he could not obtain, for *no Man*, says the Parable *gave unto him*.

Another

Another ill Consequence of this Spiritual Prodigality, and loose wicked Course of Life (and to name no more amongst a numerous Train of them) is, that it extremely degrades and debases a Man, and engages him in the vilest Drudgery imaginable, the serving *Bestial Lusts*, and *Devilish Passions*. This is express'd in the Parable by the *Prodigal's* being sent into the Fields to feed Swine; a thing the most *abject* in it self, and the most detestable to the *Jews* (to whom our Lord spake the Parable) who were taught by their Law to esteem that Creature among the most *unclean*. And as low or lower than this does he debase his Nature, who, neglecting the *Noble Precepts of Religion*, makes his *Sensual Appetite* the Rule and Measure of his *Actions*. For what more *Beastly* and Detestable than *ungovern'd Lust*? The wretch himself that is guilty of it is ashamed *publickly* to commit it, and takes Advantage of Holes and Corners, and the Night to hide his abominable Wickedness, and his own *Blushes* that attend the Commission of it.

What puts a Man upon more pitiful and *unmanly* Shifts to attain his Desire? What sneaking and cringing to a base Strumpet, and her baser Servants, before Access can be had to a Neighbours Bed, or a Virgin Innocence defil'd?

And as much may be said of the Shame of *Drunkenness*, that *Swinish Vice*, which makes a Man more vile and despicable than the foulest

est of Brutes. 'Tis a Vice every Way odious and unmanly, and full of the most detestable Consequences, and branded with the *basest* Character, even by *Infidels*: And so of all other Sensual Vices, the Shame and Baseness is notorious.

Those *Devilish Passions* likewise, to which Men become subject that throw off the Government of Religion, such as *Pride, Vain-Glory and Hypocrisy, Envy, Hatred and Malice*, and such like; do greatly defile our excellent Nature, and are the greatest Disparagement to those that suffer their Minds to be infested with them; as would be soon apparent, could we but persuade them to so much Seriousness as to recollect with themselves how odious these Vices have appear'd when they have met with them in *other* Men. And if they look so ill in *others*, certainly no Man can be so besotted as to think them *amiable* Qualifications in *himself*; but must confess, that whoever is so foolishly prodigal as to waste and squander away what is of *real* Excellency, as *Vertue* is in the Eyes of all Men, and gives himself up to such Devilish Passions as those before mention'd, and the Service of such vile Lusts; Debases himself much lower than that vile Office of serving the vilest of Brutes. Great Reason therefore have such Men seriously to bethink themselves, and attend to the Remorse of their Consciences, which goes along with such Courses, and being once awaken'd

waken'd resolve to return again to their Obedience to God. Which is the

Third thing express'd in this Parable, by the Prodigal Son's coming to himself, and thus reasoning. How many hired Servants of my Father's have Bread enough and to spare, and I perish with Hunger! I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be call'd thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.

Misery, and Shame, and Repentance always tread close at the Heels of *Wickedness*; and indeed, so much Misery and Shame, as Sin is the Occasion of, must needs make any Man that *considers* and is not *hardned* in his Iniquity, to repent and be *sorry* that ever he committed it. *When ye were the Servants of Sin*, says the Apostle to the Romans, *ye were free from Righteousness*; Rom. 6. 20, 21. ye had what ye desir'd, and liv'd without God and Religion in the World, and were a Law unto your selves (as the Prodigal, weary of his Father's Inspection over him, desir'd his Portion and went into a far Country, and there liv'd riotously and without Controul) *But what Fruit had ye of those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the End of these things is Death.* And this the young Prodigal found too true likewise by a sad Experience, and wasted what he had and was ready to perish with Hunger, and glad to submit to the basest Servitude for Sustenance,

nance, and at last was fain, with much *Shame* and *Repentance*, to return to his Father, and humbly confess his Folly and Unworthiness to be call'd any more his *Son*, and desir'd only the Favour of being made as one of his hired Servants. The Works of Darknes, as *St. Paul* says, are always *unfruitful* of any thing that is really *satisfying* and good; but bring forth *Briars and Thorns* in Abundance, many Troubles and Vexations, wherewith to tear and torment the miserable sinful Soul.

Let us consider a little more *particularly* this *Resolution* of the Prodigal to return to his Father, and *when* it was that he took it up.

The Parable says, he made this *Resolution*, *when he came to himself*, and considered how many of his Father's *hired Servants* had Bread enough and to spare, while he that was his *Son* was ready to *perish with Hunger*.

Indeed, every *wicked Man* is *beside himself*, out of his *Reason* and his *Wits*;

*Quem mala stultitia & quæcunque inscitia veri
Cæcum agit, insanum.*

Horat. Serm. Lib. II. Sat 3.

————— *ubi prava*
Stultitia, hic summa est insania: Qui sceleratas
Et furiosus erit, ——— Horat. *ibid.*

For what Man of a *Sound Mind* would act so strangely and make such disadvantageous
Choices,

Choices, as a *Sinner* does? Who with his Wits about him would take all Ways possible to make himself *miserable* to all Eternity, and when at the same time too, he might with less Trouble make himself eternally *happy*? Who, that could make use of his Reason, would chuse to enjoy the Happiness of a *Brute*, a *Goat* or a *Swine* for Instance, rather than that of a *Man* or an *Angel*, nay, of God himself? Who but a *Fool* or a *Mad-man* would part with the *certain Reversion* of a *Crown* and *Scepter*, for the *present Possession* of a Bag of *Counters*? And yet, this does every obstinate *Sinner* do, and therefore may well be said to be void of Reason, and beside himself; but, because he is *willfully* so, and *will not* make use of his Reason to the Purposes for which it was given him, his *Madness* is his *Fault* rather than his *Misfortune*, and the *Extravagancies* of it will be without *Excuse*.

In this *moral Frenzie* was the *Prodigal* in the Parable, when he left his *Father* and wasted his Substance afar off in Excess of Riot; till at length the sad *Consequences* of his Extravagancy brought him again to his Reason; and when he came to himself, he resolv'd to *arise and return to his Father*, &c.

A *Man's coming to himself*, in a Religious Sense, is the making use of his Reason in reflecting upon the past Errors and Miscarriages of his Life; in considering the many sad *Consequences* of Vice, and the great *Obligation*

we have upon all Accounts to live *Religiously*, and fully purposing upon such Consideration, to break off all evil Courses, and live for the Future as becomes *Men* and *Christians*. For a Man is never more himself, than when he exercises his Reason upon the best of Objects, *Religion*; and considers how he may best conform himself to the Holy Rules of Christianity, and purposes to do accordingly: And he that suffers himself to be hurried on by impetuous Passions and unruly Lusts, to commit vile Actions, and neglects to make use of his Reason to govern and keep in *order* his Affections, acts more like a *Brute* than a *Man*, and is not yet *come to himself*.

Consideration is indeed the *Life* of both *speculative* and *practical* Religion; and then 'tis that Men *believe* and *live amiss*, when they cease to *consider* as they ought. For, there is so much of *Truth* and *Evidence* in the things a Christian is to *believe*; and the things he is to *do*, are so *excellent* in themselves, and so conducive to *intire* Happiness both here and hereafter; that no Man, that *duly* considers and *attends* to either, but will be powerfully inclin'd to *assent* to the one, and *practise* the other, and be no longer an Infidel or Heretick, or live a vicious irreligious Life.

'Twas *Consideration* made the Prodigal Son resolve to return to his Father, and humble himself before him; and could the Sinners of this Age be perswaded seriously to *consider* and

weigh

weigh things together, they would soon see Reason enough to convince them that 'tis their wisest Course to live at another Rate than formerly, and put an End to their Extravagances by Repentance.

But *what* did this Prodigal consider when he came to himself, that so powerfully inclin'd him to return to his Father with such an humble and shameful Confession of his Extravagancy? 'Twas *this*; *How many of my Father's hired Servants have Bread enough and to spare, and I perish with Hunger?* He found by a woful Experience, that however uneasie 'twas to him formerly to be under his Father's Eye, and in Subjection to his Commands; 'twas by a far happier Condition than that, which by his Prodigality he was then reduc'd to: The meanest of his Father's *Servants* was in Circumstances than *he*, and therefore he thought it his wisest Course to arise and return to his Father. And so would it be with a Sinner, would he but *compare* a Virtuous and Vicious Course of Life together. He would find by his own sad Experience if he would but attend to it, that all his Extravagances, from which at first he expected to reap so much Happiness, are not only *Vanity*, empty and unsatisfying, but likewise *Vexation of Spirit*; full of Troubles and Misfortunes, attended with Shame and Disgrace, inward *Remorse* and Gripings of Conscience, and dire Forbodings of the Wrath to come. And this

would soon convince him of the much greater Happiness of Obedience and Submission to the Will of God; for that has none of all this Misery, but *Peace of Conscience, inward Contentment and Satisfaction of Mind, and the comfortable Expectation of Eternal Happiness in the Presence of God.* And the *Conclusion* of such Considerations, would be, his Resolution to arise and go to his Heavenly Father, and with much Humility and sincere Contrition say unto him, *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be call'd thy Son, make me as one of thy hired Servants.* And indeed, the poorest good Man that is a diligent and faithful Servant of God, is in an infinitely happier Condition than the greatest wicked Prince; he experiences more true Happiness even in this World, and when he shall hear the joyful Sound at the Day of Judgment, *Well done good and faithful Servant, enter into the Joy of thy Lord,* and wicked Emperors be thrust away, with *I know you not, depart from me ye Workers of Iniquity;* then shall all the World discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not: The former shall have Bread enough, and to spare, their Happiness shall be compleat and full; while the latter shall perish with a keen Hunger after what they shall never enjoy, and for ever be sent empty away.

After

Parables of our Blessed Saviour. 387

After the Prodigal had *consider'd* himself into a Resolution of *returning* to his Father, he put his Resolution into *practice*, and arose and *came* to his Father, and said, *Father, I have sinned, &c.*

And truly, 'tis not bare *resolving* that is sufficient to Amendment of Life; we must *act* agreeably, and that *immediately* too, or else our Resolutions, though never so earnestly made, will vanish into *nothing*, and the Breach of them still more increase our *Guilt*. For, when a Man has proceeded so far towards a new Life, as to *resolve* to forsake every Evil Way, and no longer to insist in his former vile Courses; 'tis a sign that his Soul is rous'd and *awaken'd* from its spiritual Sleep, that his Eyes are *open'd*, and that he *discerns* his Error, and if after all this, he *still* persists in it, he then sins against clear *Light* and *Knowledge*, which is the highest Aggravation of a Fault.

As a Sinner therefore should, as soon as he is become sensible of his Sin, immediately *resolve* to *forsake* it, and return to his Obedience to God; so must he immediately put his Resolution into Practice: for otherwise, he does but mock God, and deceive his own Soul, and will only increase his Damnation. A well-grounded Resolution is a good *Preparative* to Amendment, but 'tis but a *Preparative*; and to *resolve* to do a Thing, and *actually* to do it, are two very different Things. We all of us, I hope, that pretend to be Christians, so far

consider, as to grieve and be asham'd for having offended our Good God; and are at *that* instant resolv'd never willingly to transgress his Holy Will again: Let us but *keep* our Resolutions, and we shall be Happy; for, such as with the Prodigal, *actually* return to their Heavenly Father, and humble themselves before him, he is ready, with the greatest Expressions of Kindness, to receive to his Favour. Which brings me to the

Last Thing express'd in this Parable; (*viz.*) The great Tenderness and Compassion of the Father of Spirits to such as repent in earnest, and perform their Resolves of Amendment; his Readiness to be reconciled to them, and extraordinary Joy for their Return, *because they were dead but are alive again, were lost but are found.* For so 'tis said in the Parable, That when the Returning Prodigal was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had Compassion, and ran, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him, and said to his Servants, Bring forth the best Robe, and put it on him, and put a Ring on his Hand, and Shoes on his Feet, and bring hither the fatted Calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.

While he was yet a great way off, his Father had Compassion, and ran to meet him. By this is express'd God's great Desire that a Sinner's Repentance should be compleated; he will meet him, and that with more than ordinary Assurances of his Spirit, lest any Temptation should

Should so far prevail as to *divert* his Return, and make him *change* or *defer* to put in *practice*, that good Resolution he had taken up. He *prevents* a *real* Penitent with the Riches of his Grace, and while he is yet a *great way off*, labouring with the Difficulties that attend a thorough Change of Life; he, with infinite Charity and Compassion, comes forth to *meet* him, that by his Divine Aid he may secure his Retreat from the Endeavours of the Devil and his own vile Affections, to bring him back to his former vain and wicked Courses, which by God's Grace he has resolved to break off by Repentance.

And when a Sinner's Repentance is *completed*, and he is actually return'd with Shame and Sorrow to his Heavenly Father; what *rejoycing* is there! With what endearing Kindness does the Divine Goodness entertain a miserable self-condemn'd Wretch, that sees his Error, is *asham'd* and *griev'd* for it, and returns with hearty Purpose to obey him better! 'Tis represented in the Parable, by the highest Expressions of Joy that were in those Eastern Countries; the Prodigal's Father *ran to meet him, fell on his Neck, and kissed him, commanded the best Robe to be put on him, and a Ring on his Hand, and Shoes on his Feet, and made merry with Feasting, and Musick, and Dancing.*

One would have thought, his wild Extravagancy should have met with rougher Entertainment, at least at *first* Interview; and

Reproof have been given to his *Folly*, which brought him to so much *Misery*. But his *Fathers Compassion* was above his *Anger*; and because he whom he thought was *dead and lost*, was *alive again and found*, he forgot all *Resentment*, and embraced him with *Tenderness and Endearment*. And thus it is with *God* when he sees a *Returning Sinner*: Though the *Sinner* has indeed deserved nothing but the *Expresses of his Wrath and Indignation*, and to be for ever *rejected* by him; yet he who gives freely to every *Man*, and upbraideth not, and whose *Mercy* is over all his *Works*, will not break the *bruised Reed*, nor quench the *smoking Flax*; but in infinite *Goodness*, not only give *Admittance* to, but receive with *joy* his *Returning Prodigals*.

And how can we enough praise and admire these *Wonders of the Divine Compassion and Love*, to poor miserable and polluted *Creatures*! 'Tis an *Abyss* that can never be fathom'd; our *Thoughts* are lost and swallow'd up in the *Contemplation* of it, and *silent Admiration* does best express that which *no words* can reach.

And now, for a *Conclusion* of the whole; Since *Vice* and a *Lawless Course of Living*, is the *Parent* of so much *Misery*, and has so many ill *Consequences* closely attending it even in *this World*, and is, as the most *extravagant*, so the most *unhappy Prodigality*; and since the *Miseries of a wicked Life here*, are but

but the Beginnings of unconceivable and *eternal* Sorrows *hereafter* ; and since there is but *one* Cure for this great Evil, and nothing but sincere *Repentance* will save us from Destruction ; and since God is so infinitely good, as greatly to *desire* we would Repent, and return to our Obedience to him, and affords us all possible Helps in order to it, and greatly *rejoices* to see a Sinner *penitent*, and receives him with the highest Expressions of *Tenderness* and *Love* ; since all this is so, let us put off no longer, what, if we would be happy, must be done at last ; but, with the greatest Thankfulness, embrace the inestimable Favour of being again receiv'd into the Arms of our merciful God and Saviour. Let us immediately turn from every Evil Way, and that we may do so *effectually*, let us lay to heart how *vexatious*, and full of *Shame*, and utterly *unprofitable* a wicked Course of Life is, and how full of *Pleasure* and unspeakable *Delight* it is to advance from Grace to Grace, and to *perfect Holiness in the fear of God*. And having *resolv'd* well, and fully purposed our Return to the wise and good Government of our Heavenly Father, without Delay *do* as we have *resolv'd*, and arise and go to our Father, and say, with all Humility and Confusion of Face, and sincere Contrition, *Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son* ; and he whose Compassions never fail, will embrace us with the Arms of

his Mercy, and forget our former Provocations, and take us to his Favour and Protection in this World, and at length make us Partakers of the Joys of his *Heavenly Kingdom*; where there shall be Rejoycing in his Presence for our Happiness and Salvation, *Because we were dead but are alive again, were lost but are found.*

The P R A Y E R.

I.

A Almighty and most merciful Father, whose Government is directed by infinite Wisdom, and proceeds in infinite Goodness, so that happy are they in whose Hearts are thy Ways, and that turn not aside from thy Commandments; I confess, with Shame and Confusion of Face, and I hope with a truly humble, penitent, and obedient Heart, that my vile Extravagancy and Impatience of thy blessed Restraint, and foolish Desire of Liberty, and following the Byass of my own brutish Inclinations, has hitherto been too notorious, and sad have been the Consequences of my Departure from thee. I have prodigally wasted thy Divine Grace, and turn'd it into Wantonness, I have squander'd away my Time in Vanity and Folly, which is the only Opportunity of securing my Salvation; and, without Infinite Mercy, have forfeited the Reversion of my Heavenly Inheritance; and all this, for what is below the Affecti-

ons of a Rational Creature, and indeed, as I have found by a costly Experience, no other than Vanity and Vexation of Spirit. And just it is, thou should'st withdraw thy Grace, which I have so often slighted and abused, and leave my Soul to starve and famish, and dayly draw nearer and nearer to Eternal Death. But thou, O Father of Mercies, whose Compassions fail not, and who desirest not the Death of a Sinner, but rather that he should repent and live; look graciously upon thy Returning Prodigal.

II.

I now am sadly sensible of my deplorable Condition, and beg importunately, that I may so effectually hearken to the inward Shame and Remorse that now I feel, for my past inexcusable Madness and Folly, as that I may immediately return to my Obedience, to thee my infinitely wise and indulgent Parent, who art ready, I know, to stretch out thy Arms to receive me, and to whose preventing Grace I owe these Pious Resolutions of humbling my self before thee. Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy Son: make me but as one of thy meanest Servants: I am now fully sensible, that one Day in thy Courts is better than a Thousand, and had rather be a Door-keeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Ungodliness. O continue to strengthen these good Affections in me, and send out thy Light and thy Truth, even thy blessed Spirit, that he may conduct me to thy Dwelling

ling-Place, and secure my Retreat from the Kingdom of Darkness. O may I never defer what, if I would be happy, must be done at last, but instantly return to thee, O Father of Compassions. Then shall I experience the happy Exchange of Misery and Shame, for Joy unspeakable and full of Glory; and instead of being the Triumph of Malicious Fiends in Hell, occasion extraordinary Joy in the Presence of thee my God, and thy Holy Angels, because I was dead and am alive again, was lost but am found. O Blessed God, verifie this Bliss upon me, for thy Mercies sake in Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.

PARABLE

PARABLE XII.

Of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

Luke xvj. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26,
27, 28, 29, 30, 31.

There was a certain Rich Man, which was clothed in Purple and fine Linnen, and fared sumptuously every day;

And there was a certain Beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of Sores,

And desiring to be fed with the Crumbs which fell from the Rich Man's Table: moreover, the Dogs came and licked his Sores.

And it came to pass that the Beggar died, and was carried by the Angels into Abraham's Bosom: the Rich Man also died, and was buried.

And in Hell he lift up his Eyes, being in Torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his Bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip

dip the tip of his finger in Water, and cool my Tongue, for I am tormented in this Flame.

But Abraham said, Son remember, that thou in thy life-time received'st thy good Things, and likewise Lazarus evil Things: but now, He is comforted, and Thou art tormented.

And besides all this, between Us and You, there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore Father, that thou wouldest send him to my Father's House; For I have five Brethren: that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this Place of Torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.

And he said, nay Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the Dead they will Repent.

And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though One rose from the Dead.

THIS Parable seems to be designed to inform us of *Three Things*:

First, That from a Man's Prosperous or Adverse Condition in *this World*, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his Condition in the *next*; and that 'tis not seldom that the *Happiness* Men meet with in *this Life*, is changed for *Misery* in the *other*,
and

and that *Affliction* here ends in Happiness hereafter.

Secondly, That whatever Alteration is made in the State and Condition of the Soul, after its *Departure* from this World, shall be from thenceforth for ever *unalterable*. And

Thirdly, That every Man may be sufficiently *assur'd* of this that reads the Scriptures, and powerfully enough inclin'd to *avoid* that Future *Misery*, and secure his Eternal *Happiness*; without any more *extraordinary* Ways of Conviction of the *Truth* of this, and *Perswasion* to act accordingly: And that those who are not *satisfied* with what has been *hitherto* reveal'd in this Matter, will *never* be satisfied, though One should come from the Dead to assure them of it. Of each of these Particulars I shall discourse in their Order.

The *first* thing this Parable informs us of is, that from a Man's prosperous or adverse Condition in *this* World, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his Condition in the *next*; and that 'tis not seldom, that the Happiness Men meet with in this Life, is chang'd for Misery in the other; and on the contrary, that Affliction Here ends in Happiness Hereafter. And this is express'd in the Parable by a Poor *Beggar*, that was full of Sores, and begg'd but the Crums that fell from a Rich Man's Table, his being carried by *Angels* into *Abraham's Bosom* when he died, or received into that Place of Happiness which

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is prepar'd for them that live and dye in the Faith and Fear of God; as *Abraham* did; while the Rich Man that was cloath'd in Purple and fine Linnen, and fared sumptuously every day, after he dy'd was *Tormented in the flames of Hell.*

'Twas the *Observation* and *Complaint* of *Solomon*, and might have been made (if it was not) long before, even from the Infancy of the World, that no Man knoweth either the Love or Hatred of God, by All that is here in *this* World before him; nay, that there are *Just* Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the *Wicked*, Eccl. 9. 1. and *Wicked* Men to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the *Righteous*; i. e. That *Wicked* Men are often observ'd to be *prosperous* here, as if they were the *Favourites* of Heaven, and rewarded for their Vertue, and *good* Men *calamitous* and afflicted, as if they were *hated* of God, and punish'd for their great *Impieties*.

Job makes a very pathetic *Complaint* to this purpose, *Job* 21. 5. and was indeed, *himself* a deplorable *Instance* of what he then complained of; and he introduces what he would say with the greatest Solemnity, *Mark me, and be astonish'd*, says he, and lay your *Hand upon your Mouth*; *Even when I remember I am afraid, and Trembling seiseth my Flesh. Wherefore do the Wicked live to become Old, yea are mighty in Power, and their Seed is establis'd*

bliss'd in their sight with them, and their Offspring before their Eyes? Whereas I, might he have said, (and questionless he alluded to it) I that have the Testimony of God himself, that there is none like me upon Earth, a Perfect and an Upright Man, one that feareth God, and escheweth Evil, Job 19. 9. am on a sudden strip'd of all my Glory, and my Children All together snatch'd from me, by a dreadful Accident, and my self smitten with sore Boils, from the Sole of my Foot unto my Crown, so that I am weary of my Life, and think I have reason to curse the Day of my Birth. They spend their Days in Wealth and Mirth, and in a Moment, with a quick and easie Passage, go down to the Grave; whereas I, miserable though innocent, am cloathed with Worms, and Scabs, and Clods of Dust; my sighing comes before my Meat, and my Roarings are poured out like the Waters, and I long for Death, but it cometh not.

Holy David likewise, P^{sal.} 73. 21. very feelingly complain'd of this, and the Prophet Jeremy, Jer. 12. 1. and indeed, this so seemingly strange Method of Providence is the Observation of every Man, and the Wonder of most. And what Conclusions Men will be apt to draw from such Observations, is easie to imagine. The Best of Men will be apt to be discouraged, and tempted to say with David, Verily, I have cleansed my Heart in vain, and wash'd my Hands in Innocency: And as for
Sinners

Sinners, no doubt but they will be embolden'd by it to *strengthen themselves in their Wickedness*; and either perswade themselves that their Actions are *not* so odious in the sight of God as has been represented to them; or that, because they *Thrive and Prosper* more than *Better Men*, the Threats of Religion are but *Scare-Crows*, and because not *speedily*, shall never be inflicted; or, if there be another World, that they shall fare as well in *that* as they have done in *this*. And the more *indifferent* sort of Men, that are neither very Bad nor very Good, if they *prosper* here, will be apt to think it is an Argument of God's *Favour* to them, that they perform an acceptable Service to him *now*, and that it shall therefore be well with them hereafter; and if they do *not* Thrive, they will be inclined to follow the Course of those that *do*, as looking upon *Prosperity* to be an Argument of the *Favour and Blessing of God*.

But *All this is throughout a great and dangerous Mistake*; and *Worldly Prosperity* is neither a certain Argument of God's *Favour* to Men in *this* World, or of their *Happiness* in the *next*: Neither is *Affliction* a certain Sign of God's *casting Men off* here, or a sure Fore-runner of *Eternal Misery* hereafter; but frequently on the *contrary*, the *Good* are *calamitous* in *this* World, but receiv'd into *Abraham's Bosom* in the other, and those that are *Prosperous*

perous and *Happy* here, too often have their Portion in the *Flames of Hell* hereafter.

Prosperity is in it self indeed a *Blessing*, and promis'd as a Part of the Reward of Godliness; and accordingly, many good Men are *Happy* even here; and were *All* truly good, *All* would be Prosperous and *Happy*; for 'tis *Sin* only that makes the World *miserable*: And on the other side, Affliction is *in it self* a great Evil, and by *no means joyous but grievous*, and is always the Punishment of some *Offence*. But, oftentimes *Worldly Prosperity* is sent as a *Curse* rather than a *Blessing*, and is the Effect of God's Displeasure, and the *only* Happiness that some shall e'er enjoy. And *Adversity* proves a great *Blessing*, and is an Expression of God's Favour and Paternal Regard, the only Misery some shall ever feel, and an Introduction to *Eternal Happiness*; some, in mercy, being corrected *here* for their Faults, that they may escape the *everlasting* Punishments of the other World, and others *fatted up* here, as to a *Day of Slaughter*, and suffered (since they choose it) to have their Portion in *this* Life. As *Abraham* in the Parable, said to the Rich Man, (who through the Excess of his Torment, begg'd that he would send *him* who was once a *poor Lazarus*, but then in a Place of *Happiness*, to dip his Finger in Water, and come and cool his Tongue) *Son, remember that thou in thy Lifetime receivest thy good Things, and likewise*

Lazarus his evil Things, but now, he is comforted and thou art tormented.

And indeed, it is no wonder that it should be so, and that *Prosperity* in *this* World should so often end in *Misery* in the *next*, and the *Afflictions* Men meet with *here*, be turn'd into *Happiness* *hereafter*. For *Worldly Prosperity*, however *charming* it may appear to us, is a State so full of *Dangers*, so beset with *Temptations to Vice*, so apt to divert Men from attending to Things of infinitely greater moment, and laying up a *Treasure* in *Heaven*; and *Adversity* on the contrary, though very *uneasie* to *Flesh* and *Blood*, yet is so apt therefore to *wean* Men from the *World*, and the fading *Vanities* of it, and make them out of *Love* with what is so *fickle* and uncertain, and full of *Trouble*; and is a State that *humbles* Men much, and increases *Devotion* and *Trust in God*, and puts 'em upon *Repentance*, and a *Desire* of enjoying that *Heavenly Treasure* which shall never be taken from them: That for a *Rich Man* to enter into the *Kingdom of Heaven*, seems by far the greater *Difficulty*, and more likelihood is there of the *Calamities* of this *World* bringing a *Man* to that happy *Place*, than the prosperous *Enjoyment* of its *Pleasures*. And accordingly says the *Apostle*, *Not many Rich, not many Mighty are called, and that Riches are a Temptation and a Snare, and drown Men in divers hurtful Lusts, and bring them to Destruction and Perdition; and therefore*

therefore exhorts Men to count it all Joy when they fall into divers Temptations or Afflictions.

The Use then, that we may make of this first Part of the Parable, is this; not to be dejected under Adversity, as if cast off by God, and utterly depriv'd of his Favour, nor puff'd up by Prosperity, as if peculiarly dear to Heaven; but in every State to make it our greatest Care and Endeavour to secure our main Interest, and with Fear and Trembling, in the one Condition as well as the other, to work out our Salvation, by the Practice of that Holiness, without which, no Man, whether Rich or Poor, Calamitous or Prosperous, shall see the Lord; and with which any Man, in whatsoever Circumstances he is in this Life, shall be sure of a glorious Eternity in the Presence and Enjoyment of his Maker. If Riches increase by honest Industry, and conscientious Dealing, and prudent Management, we ought to esteem it as a Blessing, and humbly thank God for it; but by no means should we set our Hearts upon them, nor grow high-minded, and conceited of our selves, as if greatly in the Favour and Esteem of God, and our Prosperity the Reward of our extraordinary Virtue; nor despise the Poverty of others, looking upon them as less Holy because not so prosperous as we. Neither should we grow vain and luxurious; or covetous and sordid, but make Friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness, and act like good Stewards of the

manifest Grace of God, being given to Hospitality, and ready to relieve the Necessities of such as are in want ; remembering always, that many have all their Share of Happiness in this Life, and while they dote immoderately upon the World, and place their chief Good in being prosperous here, forfeit their Glorious Reversion hereafter : And always fearing lest our Prosperity become a Snare to us in this Matter, and we turn it into a Curse by our ill Use of it, and become such Fools, as for the Gain of a little of the World, to lose our Immortal Souls. What Comfort had the Rich Man in the Parable of all his former Prosperity, when he lay weltring in the Flames of Hell ? All his Purple and Fine Linnen, and Sumptuous Fare, because he abus'd 'em to Luxury and Excess, and grew negligent of laying up a Treasure of good Works in Heaven ; ended at length in the Want of a Drop of Water to cool his inflam'd Tongue.

If Affliction and Poverty should be our Lot, 'tis then our Duty to endeavour to be contented, and not despond as if utterly rejected of God, but to remember that there is a better World, in which those shall be unspeakably and for ever happy, that are patient and resign'd in this Vally of the Shadow of Death ; that the Lord loveth whom he chasteneth, and that if we comply with the Ends of his Correction, and amend under his Paternal Rod, our light Affliction, which is
but

but for a Moment, shall work for us a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory. Lazarus in the Parable, we read, was miserably poor, desirous, though but of the *Fragments* that fell from the Rich Man's Table, and full of noisom painful Sores, a sad Spectacle both to himself and others; and yet, when he died, was carried up by *Angels* into *Abraham's Bosom*. 'Tis not a Man's *outward* Circumstances that God respects, but the inward *Temper* of his *Mind*, and often makes his *outward* Condition calamitous, that his *Mind* may grow better; 1 Sam. 16. 7. and if a Man be as poor and despicable in the Eye of the World as *Lazarus*, yet if he is of a contented *resign'd* Soul, and makes it his Endeavour to be *rich towards God*, he at length shall be fill'd with *Joy unspeakable and full of Glory*, while many *rich* that have their Portion in *this* Life shall be *sent empty away*.

And thus much for the *first* thing this Parable informs us of, namely, that from a Man's prosperous or adverse Condition in *this* world, there is no Judgment to be made concerning his final Condition in the *next*.

The *second* thing it informs us of is, that whatever Change is made in the Condition of the Soul, after its *Departure* from this World, its State shall be from thenceforth for ever *unalterable*. For so in the Parable, when the Rich Man being in Torments, lifted up his Eyes, and saw *Abraham* afar off, and *Lazarus* in

his Bosom, and cry'd and said, Father Abraham have Mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the Tip of his Finger in Water and cool my Tongue, for I am tormented in this Flame; Abraham, after he had told him that *he* had in his *Life-Time* received his good things, and *Lazarus* his evil things, and that then there was a great and unexpected Change, and *Lazarus* was comforted and he tormented; he adds, moreover, that between him and them there was a *great Gulf fixed*, so that those which would pass from thence to him could not, neither could any pass from him to them.

What is meant by this *Gulf fixed* between Heaven and Hell, which hinders any *Comfort or Relief* coming from thence to that miserable Place, or any *Trouble or Annoyance* from that Place to Heaven, so that the Condition both of the *Wicked* and the *Righteous*, remains unchangeably *happy* or *miserable* respectively, has been much controverted, especially amongst the *School-men*. But it tending to very little *Edification* to relate their *Opinions*, most of which are very *frivillous*; I shall only say what is the most receiv'd *Opinion* in our *Church*. By the *Gulf fixed*, we suppose is only meant *God's irreversible Decree* that those whose *Wickednesses* made them incapable of the *Vision and Enjoyment* of *God*, and sunk them down to *Hell*, shall for ever remain there without any *Hopes of Comfort or Relief*, and that the *Righteous*
like-

likewise shall be receiv'd into *Life* and Happiness *everlasting*, and such as all the Powers of Hell shall never be able to lessen or disturb. And this methinks to any sensible Man, should appear to be an Opinion the most reasonable and most agreeable to the Holy Writings. Now here 'twill be worth our while, since the rich Man's Punishment is express'd by his being tormented in Flame, and doom'd to be for *ever* so, to satisfie two Queries usually put in this Case; as *first*, Why the Torments of Hell are express'd by Flames and Burning? And *secondly*, How it can be consistent with the Divine Justice to punish the *transient* Acts of Sin, with such an *endless* Misery?

To the *first* I return this Answer as to me the most satisfactory. Though I believe that at the general Conflagration, when the Heavens shall be shrunk up as a scorch'd Parchment, and the Elements melt with fervent Heat, and the World and all that's in it be burn'd up; though I believe that God will then take Vengeance of his Enemies in *real* Flames of Fire, which shall for ever encircle and prey upon their Bodies: yet I think, *that* will be the *least* Part of their Torment, and that the *Extremity* of it will consist in the *inward* Trouble of their *Minds*; arising from an *impatient* Appetite, and continual *Thirst* after that *Felicity*, which they know, through their *own* Default, they shall *never* come to enjoy. And that such *vehement* Desires, and the Passi-

ons consequent upon the *disappointment* of them, should be call'd *Flames* and *Burning*, is no more than what is usual in our common Manner of speaking; and the Expression of *fervent* and *ardent* Desires, is often met with in the holy writings too, particularly, where *David* says, *My Soul breaketh out with the very fervent desire it hath always to thy Commandments.* And *Rage*, and *Fury*, and *Impatience*, and the like, which attend *unsatisfied* Desires, are likewise frequently attended with the Epithet of *Fire*; as every one must needs have observ'd.

Now, *Man* having an *innate uncontrollable Thirst* after *Happiness*, and which is always equally intense, and that to the highest Degree; when, (as the Punishment of his Rebellion against God, his foolish and wicked Choices here, his Pursuit after *lower Good*, and Neglect of the *supreme*) he shall be for ever banish'd to an infinite Distance, not only from the *Fountain* of Happiness, but from every *Stream* and *Participation* of it (which here below cool'd his Heat a little, and for the present gratified that his Desire) and yet the Appetite and *Thirst* after it continuing as great as ever, and the Wretch withal sensible of the *utter Impossibility* of attaining it; and that, not so much as *one Drop* from that Fountain of Bliss shall ever be given to allay his Thirst, and cool his parch'd and inflam'd Tongue: His Desire must for ever be to the highest Degree
 craving

craving and *importunate* in *vain*; and being continually thus *disappointed*, his *Impatience* will still grow hotter and hotter, and his Remorse for bringing this upon *himself*, turning to eternal *Rage* and *Fury*, and boiling up like Rivers of enflam'd Brimstone, the *Fire* will be *everlasting*. And what a Calenture, think we, will the whole Man be in; when *without* the fiercest *material* Flames shall prey upon the *Body*, and hotter Fires *within* torment the *Soul*! And this Notion of the *Flames* of Hell, seems to me not obscurely hinted, in the Rich Man's lifting up his Eyes in his Torment, and when he saw the happy State of *Lazarus* in *Abraham's* Bosom, begging him to impart, though but *one Drop* of that Bliss he enjoy'd, to cool *his* parched Tongue. His Desire of that Happiness was in the greatest Degree of *Ardency*, and when he saw *Lazarus* in *Abraham's* Bosom, then he cry'd out, *Abraham* have Mercy on me, for I am tormented in this *Flame*. Thus much for the *first* Query. To the *second* I return this in Brief; That since *Sin* is the *greatest possible Evil*, (it being a Violation of the *strongest* Tyes and *Obligations*, an Opposition and *Contrariety* to the *Supreme Good*, and in *no* Case *eligible*, as every considering Man must needs confess) it can't be too rigorously dealt with, even by the Infliction of the *greatest possible Punishment*; for there is the same Proportion between the *greatest Evil* and the *greatest Punishment*,

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nishment, as between a *lesser Evil* and a *lesser*
Punishment: And therefore, unless we'll say,
there can never be any Proportion between a
Fault and its Punishment, I think we must
own, there is Proportion *here*.

Now the Use we may make of this second
Part of the Parable is this. That, since the
Consequence of a Life of Wickedness, is so
dreadful and *remediless* a Ruin, and the Wages
of Sin this *eternal* Torment and Death; we
would be above all things careful to *avoid* this
Place of everlasting Torments, and make use
of our Time and Opportunity while we have
it, in providing for a *happy* Eternity. The End
of every Man's *Life* is the Beginning of Eter-
nity to *him*; then *Time* shall be no more, no
more Space for Repentance and working out
our Salvation, and after the great Change that
Death will make in our Condition, no more
Changes from thence forward for ever, no
intermediate Purgatory to cleanse our remain-
ing Filthiness; but as Death leaves a Soul, so
shall Judgment find it, and an *irreversible*
Sentence be pass'd upon it. And this great
Truth can never be too often call'd to Re-
membrance; and there is so much of *Terror*
in it to a wicked Liver, that whoever *thinks*
at all, must needs be inclin'd by it to husband
well this his *only* Opportunity of making him-
self for ever Happy, and immediately endea-
vour to clear himself from that Guilt, which,
if he *dies* in, will make him for ever miserable,
and that without the least *Alleviation*. The

The *last* thing this Parable informs us of is, That every Man may be sufficiently assur'd of this great Truth, that reads the Scriptures; and powerfully enough inclin'd to avoid that future Misery, and secure his eternal Happiness, without any more *extraordinary* Ways of Conviction in this Matter, or Perswasives to act accordingly: And that those who are not satisfied with what has already been reveal'd of future Rewards and Punishments, in all Probability will *never* be satisfied, tho' one should *come from the Dead* to assure them of it.

This is express'd in the Parable by the Rich Man's desiring (after he was sadly assur'd by *Abraham*, that there was no Remedy for himself) that he would *send Lazarus to his Father's House* (for I have five Brethren, says he) that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this Place of Torment. To this *Abraham* answers, *They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hear them.* But this would not satisfy the miserable Rich Man, and he said, *nay, Father Abraham, but if one went from the Dead they will repent.* To this *Abraham* gives this final answer: *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded though one arose from the Dead.* As if he had said, There is all the Assurance given to Men by the Holy Writings of the Truth of these things, that any reasonable Man can desire; and the same Obstinate and Atheistick Infidelity

lity and Debauchery of Manners that makes Men disbelieve what the *Scriptures* affirm of *another Life*, would make them *still* disbelieve it, though one arose from the Dead to assure them of it.

And if this was true *before* the Gospel, when these things were but *darkly* reveal'd in comparison of what they are *now*, and the *Jews* might *then* be sufficiently assur'd of them by attending to the Writings of *Moses and the Prophets*; it is a much more *confirm'd* Truth to us Christians, the *Scriptures* of the *New Testament* assuring us of it in the most *plain* and *express* Terms that can be: According to what the Apostle says, *2 Tim. 1. 8.* that our Lord *has brought Life and Immortality to Light by the Gospel.*

And yet, some are so unreasonable, as when we discourse about Judgment to come, and the Rewards and Punishments of another Life, not to *tremble* at it as *Felix* did, but with perverse Infidelity question the *Truth* of the thing, and ask us how we can be *sure* it is and shall be so, and whether we have been told it by one that *came* from the other World, and has *experienc'd* what we say to be true: And that nothing less than such a Proof shall ever make them believe it. And when they are urg'd with the Testimony of *Moses and the Prophets*, and of the *Son of God* himself; they have the Confidence to laugh at this as an Invention of *Church-Men*, and no better than

than a *Religious Cheat*. They are not ignorant, they say, that the Writings which we affirm were divinely inspir'd, do very plainly and expressly assert, That there shall be a Judgment to come, and that every Man shall be rais'd from the Dead, and plac'd before the Almighty Judge, and consign'd to eternal Happiness or Misery, according to what they have done in *this* Life, whether it be good or evil: But they deny the *Truth* of those Writings, and consequently the Reality of what they assert of this Nature. Our Business therefore must be to prove the Truth and Divine Authority of those Holy Scriptures, and then 'twill follow, that he that still disbelieves the Doctrine of future Rewards and Punishments, and is not inclin'd to live accordingly, will neither be convinc'd nor perswaded in this Instance, though one *rose from the Dead*.

The Opposition Anti-scripturists make against the Holy Writings is in short this. Either they will deny that those Books were written by the Men whose Names they bear; or, if they are forc'd to grant *that*, they will deny the Truth of the *Matters of fact* which they set down, and endeavour to pick out Inconsistencies and Contradictions in their Relation; and if beaten from that Post, they'll deny that the Writers were Men *divinely inspired*, and affirm that the Doctrine they wrote was merely the Product of their own Brains, and what strange Occurrences they record of
their

their Master Jesus (as of *his* Resurrection from the Dead, as an Argument that there shall be another Life after this is ended, and all Men *then* arise likewise, and be call'd to give account of their Works) that this and the like strange Passages they record of Jesus, supposing them to be *true*, were not done by a *Divine* Power, but by Art Magick and the Power of the Devil. And this, could it be made good, would be a shrew'd Blow indeed, and all reveal'd Religion soon sink into Ruin: But in short (for to enlarge here, would far exceed the Bounds of a single Sermon) a Christians Defence of the *Truth* and *divine* Authority of the Holy Writings may be this.

First, Though some have *deny'd* that the Books of the Old and New Testament were written by the Men whose Names they bear, yet no Man ever yet could prove it; nay, on the contrary, they have been receiv'd as Genuine for many Hundreds of Years, and by Men of very different Religions and Perswasions, and that were bitter Enemies to the Religion there taught, and the Professors of it, and would have been extreamly glad to have prov'd the *Whole a Forgery* if they could. But since they *did* not, when 'twas so much for their Interest to have don't, 'tis plain they *could* not; and since they are, to this Day, approv'd by all Sorts of Religions as Genuine, 'tis as much as can be said in the Case, and as much as can be said for any other Book in the World;
And

And we must either throw aside *all* Books as *spurious*, or believe *this* which we call the *Bible*, to be *genuine*. Well, but though *this* may be true, yet they object further, that there is no Truth in the Matters of *fact* which these Men set down; and particularly that the whole Story of our Saviour's Life, and Death, and Resurrection, is a Falshood, and that their Relations are *contradictious*. But to this we may return, That though this has been by some Men said, yet it has never been *prov'd*; nay, on the contrary, several Heathen Writers, as *Pliny*, *Tacitus*, *Lucian*, *Suetonius*, and others of great Antiquity, quoted by * *Grotius* and † *Huetius*, have given in their Evidence as to the Matters of *fact* on the Christian Side; and tho' they have made it their Business to *vilifie* the whole Story of our Lord's Life and Death, yet they could not *say*, much less *prove*, that there were *no* such Occurrences as are recorded by the Evangelists. And truly, the Evangelists are so *punctual* in all Circumstances of Time and Place, so *particular* in naming of Persons concern'd, and that were Eye Witnesses of those Transactions, and those too, Enemies as well as Friends, Jews and Heathens as well as Christians; and those Transactions were so *publick*, and in the Face of the *World*, and the Account of them was written so *soon* after they were *done*; that it would *then* have been

* *De verit. Christ. Rel. Lib. 2.*

† *Demonstrat. Evangel. Propos. 3. prope Initium.*

been a very easie Matter to have detected the Falshood of the *Whole*, or of any *Part* of the Story, if there had been any, and both Jews and Heathens were very much *concern'd* to do it if they could, and no doubt, they endeavour'd it to the utmost of their Power. But yet, after all, we find that neither then nor since, any thing of this Nature has been fastned upon these Writings, but rather the Truth of them has been approv'd by the Confession of the *Enemies* of Christianity, than which no better Argument can be produc'd for the Truth of any Ancient History in the World.

And as for the *Contradictions* and *Inconsistencies*, which, they say, are in the New Testament; though to Men *unlearn'd*, or else deeply *prejudic'd*, some Things may at first sight seem to clash a little, yet upon a *closer* View of any *competent* and *unprejudic'd* Person, they will be found to be far from being irreconcilable: And these seeming Differences are likewise in things not *material*; in the *main* there is an unquestionable Harmony: Which, considering that *four* several Men were the Writers, and that they writ in different and *distant* Places, is no mean Argument, that what they so *punctually* and *agreeably* relate, is *true*. And indeed, those *little Differences* that are taken Notice of, are rather an Argument for the *Truth* of their Relation, than any thing to the contrary; for had it been a *pack'd* Business, they would have been careful

careful not to have differ'd in a *Title*. As for their *last* Reserve, that supposing the Matter of *fact* to be *true* which they relate, yet those strange things that are recorded of *Jesus*, might be performed by *Art*, *Magick*, and the Power of the *Devil*: And that, what he or his Apostles have deliver'd by Way of Precept and Doctrine, was meerly the Product of their own *Brains*, and no Inspiration of God: To this we may return in this Manner.

'Tis certain that the coming of *Jesus Christ* into the World, was to *destroy* the Works and Kingdom of the Devil, as is evident from his casting so many evil Spirits out of possess'd Persons, and from their trembling at his Presence, and crying out for Dread; and from his teaching so *Holy* and Heavenly a Religion, than which, nothing can more weaken his Infernal Kingdom: And to attest the *Truth* of this his Doctrine, and that he was sent by *God* to teach it to the World, he wrought diverse and very amazing *Miracles*, and those highly *beneficial* ones too; such as giving *Sight* to Men that were *born blind*, and curing long and desperate Diseases, and raising to Life those that had been *dead*, and one of them four Days *buried*, and this only with a *Word* or with his *Touch*, John 11. 17. which is Part of those Matters of *fact*, set down by the Evangelists, which we before prov'd to be *true*.

Now, can any Man in his Senses think, that the Devil, were he *able*, would so far assist

one that come on purpose into the World to *destroy his Kingdom?* 'Tis our Lord's own Answer to the foolishly malicious Pharisees, who, when they saw him work a stupendious Miracle upon one possessed with a Devil, both Blind and Dumb, infomuch that the Blind and Dumb both spake and saw; objected presently, *This Fellow casteth out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils. And Jesus knew their Thoughts and said unto them, every Kingdom divided against it self is brought to Desolation; and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself, How then shall his Kingdom stand? A Demonstration* this, that 'twas not by the Power of the Devil that he wrought his Miracles, but by the Power of God. For though deluded Men may be so foolish as to frame such an *Objection*, the Devil is too wise to put the thing in *Practice*.

As for the other Part of what is objected, That what our Lord, and the Writers of the New Testament, the Evangelists and Apostles, have deliver'd by Way of *Precept and Doctrine*, was meerly the Product of their own Brains, and not the Inspiration of God; I might only appeal to the Precepts and Doctrines *themselves*, which are of so Exalted and Heavenly a Nature, and far above any thing, that either before or since was ever written by *Man*, that they *themselves* will prove their Original to be Divine. But there is a *farther Proof* of this, the many and great
Miracles

Miracles that were wrought, both by Christ and his Apostles, in Confirmation of the Doctrine they taught, and of their being commission'd by God in an *extraordinary* Manner, to declare it as the Rule of their Obedience to *him*, and of their Conversation in the *World*. For, no reasonable Man can think, that God would have so *wondrously* assisted *those* above all *other* Men, had they not been his peculiar Messengers, to make known his Will to Mankind.

And this, in short, may be sufficient to prove, to any reasonable and unprejudic'd Man, the *Truth* and *Divine* Authority of the *Holy Scriptures*; and, consequently, we have sufficient Assurance, that there shall be another Life, when this is ended, wherein Men shall be for ever recompenc'd according to their Works: For this is very plainly and expressly asserted in those Writings, as every Man knows that has read them. And therefore 'tis as plain, that 'tis an unreasonable *Obstinacy*, and too great Love of the sinful Enjoyments of *this* World, that makes Men deny their *Assent* to so great a Truth, and hinders them from being inclin'd by it, to lead a more *Innocent* and Holy Life. And the same *Obstinacy* and Infidel Hardness of Heart, and Vileness of Manners, would make them *still* disbelieve that there is a future State of Eternal Rewards and Punishments, according as Men live well or ill here below, and *still* keep

them from being perswaded by it to Amendment, tho' one came to them *from the Dead*, to assure them of it. For, what an easie Matter would it be for them to say, that the Apparition was but a *melancholly Fancy*, or a *Dream*, and regard it as if no *more*, and laugh at all things of that Nature, as too many now a-days are apt to do?

And he that will shut his Eyes against so much Reason, and Evidence, as there is, for the Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures, is Proof against any other Sort of Conviction whatever, even that of a Messenger sent on purpose to him from the other World. For so our Lord in the Parable, *If they believe not Moses and the Prophets* (we may add, and our Saviour, his Evangelists and Apostles) *neither will they be perswaded, though one arose from the Dead.*

Wherefore it becomes us all to be very careful, lest the Spirit of *Unbelief* enter into us, and we grow so *blinded* by the Deceitfulness of Sin, as either not to *believe*, or not duly to *attend* to this great and strongly *confirm'd* Truth, of the Certainty of *another* Life after *this*; and of the eternal Rewards and Punishments then to be awarded to every Man according to his religious or impious Behaviour here.

'Tis in vain to expect any further *extraordinary* Proof of what is *already* plainly declar'd by him that cannot *lye*, in those Writings
which

which we have all the Reason in the World to believe, were written by his Divine Inspiration. Let us rather so seriously consider and *attend* to what is there reveal'd to us, as by those Terrors of the Lord relating to a future Judgment, to be perswaded to a sincere Revival of our Ways, and deep Repentance of what we shall find to have been amiss, and immediate Endeavours to do no more wickedly. Let us have a care how we are charm'd with the Poms and Vanities of this World, as if here were our Happiness and our Heaven, and we look'd for no other Life when this is done; and let us be chiefly employ'd in making Provision for that other *endless* Life which will succeed this, that *then* we may be *happy*, when, if we are *miserable*, we shall be *always* so. Remembring that the Rich Man in the Parable, who in *this* Life receiv'd his *good things*, and was wholly intent upon the Enjoyment of them, and look'd no further, made no Provision for what was to be hereafter in that other State; after he died was tormented in the Flames of Hell, and *wanted a Drop of Water to cool his Tongue*: While the poor, despis'd, and seemingly miserable *Lazarus*, that begg'd for the Crumbs which fell from his Table, and was taken little Notice of by any but the Rich Man's Dogs; because his Poverty made him Religious, and think of and provide for better things in an everlasting World, was, when he died, conducted

by *Angels into Abraham's Bosom*, that Place of Eternal Happiness, Rest and Peace, which is prepar'd for the Righteous.

These things, if we consider thoroughly and seriously, there will be no need of one from the Dead, either to *convince* us of the *Truth* of them, or to *perswade* us to an immediate *Repentance*, that we may escape that Place of *Eternal Torment*, reserv'd for the *obstinately wicked*, and be receiv'd into that happy State which shall for ever crown the pious Endeavours of the Good. Wherefore, for the future, *may we all so meditate upon these things, and give our selves so intirely to them, that, through God's gracious Assistance, our profiting may appear in all things?*

The P R A Y E R.

O God, *infinitely Wise, Just and Good, the Disposals of whose Providence here below, though always for the best, are yet often the Cause of Wonder to us Mortals; especially in the Prosperity of the Wicked, and the Afflictions of the Righteous: Teach me the Wisdom, I beseech thee, to look beyond this World for Happiness, and never to make vain Conclusions of thy Favour or Displeasure to my self or others, or concerning mine or their Condition in the other World, from the Circumstances of this our present Life: But rather in all things to acknowledge*

ledge thy Providence to be good and just, and be careful to secure my Duty in whatsoever Station thou shalt please to place me. Grant that in Prosperity I may be Humble, Thankful and Charitable; in Adversity Contented, and resign'd under thy Paternal Rod; and may make that good Use of every Condition which thou designest I should, and carefully avoid the Snares of each; and make it my great Endeavour, whilst I continue here below, to secure a happy Eternity in the World of Spirits, where my Condition, whatever it then shall be, will be unchangeable. And may my Belief of future Eternal Rewards and Punishments, be daily more and more strengthened and confirmed, by a serious and unprejudic'd Attention to the plain Assurance thou hast given me of it in the Holy Scriptures; so as not to be vainly desirous of any more extraordinary Evidence in this matter: But believing these great Truths without wavering, grant that I may immediately endeavour to reform my Life before it be too late. That so, when I go hence, I may be receiv'd into Abraham's Bosom, the happy Portion of the Faithful, and escape the Place of endless Torment, prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels. Grant this, O Gracious God, for Jesus Christ his Sake.

PARABLE XIII.

Of the Importunate Widow.

Luke xvij. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

And Jesus spake a Parable to this End, that Men ought always to pray and not to faint; Saying, there was in a City a Judge which feared not God, neither regarded Man.

And there was a Widow in that City, and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine Adversary.

And he would not for a while; but afterwards he said within himself, Though I fear not God, neither regard Man;

Yet because this Widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

THE Force of this Parable in order to the perswading to a constant and importunate Devotion, lies in this, That if *Importunity* will prevail with a sinful Man, that

that neither fears God, nor has any Compassion for the Miseries of his Fellow-Creature, to grant Petitions offer'd to him: How much *more* prevalent will it be, with the infinitely good God, to relieve the Necessities of such as devoutly and earnestly implore his Help? And to the same Sense is another Parable, Luke 11. 16. *Which of you shall have a Friend, and shall go to him at Midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three Loaves, for a Friend of mine in his Journey is come unto me, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not, the Door is now shut, and my Children are with me in Bed, I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him because he is his Friend, yet, because of his Importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And the Application of this Parable is, Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be open'd unto you. And the Reason why our Lord applies the first Parable to God's certainly avenging his Elect, which cry Day and Night to him, though he bear long with them, I suppose to be (with Dr. Hammond) the great Discouragements his Disciples were then under, by reason of the Malice of the Jews, which made it necessary for him to keep up their Spirits by assuring them, that God's not immediately hearkening to their Prayers by manifestly appearing in their Cause to protect them and punish their Enemies, was*

no

no Argument that he *wholly disregarded* them, but that if they persisted in their grateful Importunity, he would at length answer their Desires. For, if Importunity be so prevalent even with *Wicked Men*, how much more will it be so with the God of Mercy and Compassion?

'Tis plain then, the chief Design of these Parables, though differently worded and apply'd, is to enforce the Necessity of *frequent and earnest Prayer*; and therefore, without any farther minute Explication of them, (they being so plain, that they neither *need* nor will *bear* it) I shall address my self to discourse upon what is couch'd under them, and endeavour to evince the Necessity of Praying *frequently*, and with Earnestness and *Importunity*.

That *Prayer*, or a Liberty of making our Requests known unto God, is a Privilege and Happiness inestimable, no one that considers the Nature of *God* and the Nature of *Man* can question. The *latter*, a poor *dependent* Creature, helpless and weak, short-sighted and ignorant, full of Wants and Necessities, obnoxious to innumerable evil Accidents of unruly Passions and Affections, the Hate and Envy of the Spirits of Darknes, strongly prone to what is Evil, and *averse* to what is Good; the *former*, a Being of infinite *fullness* and Perfection, infinitely *wise*, and *powerful*, and *good*, the Maker of the Universe, whose is the whole Creation, and to whom, every Thing that *is*
obeys.

obeys. Now, that this indigent helpless Creature should have *such* a Patron to make his Wants known to, a Patron so inexhaustibly *full*, so *wise*, so *able*, and so *willing*, to *direct* and *guide* him, to *support* and *comfort* him, to *protect* and *defend*, to *relieve* and *succour* him; to have Freedom of Address to *such* a Patron as this, is without all doubt, a Privilege and Favour that no Man can sufficiently esteem.

And yet, (so unaccountably stupid and thoughtless are Men for the Generality) What is more neglected, nay *despis'd*, than this invaluable Privilege! As if they were *full*, and had need of Nothing, or were *self-sufficient*, and could be their own Helpers; when indeed, they are *wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*

In pity to this our *doubly* Forlorn Condition, our Blessed Saviour, the God of Compassions, that if possible we might receive the full Benefit of so great a Favour and Divine Condescension; has made this *Privilege* become our *Duty*, and bound it upon us by the *Commands* of his Holy Institution; *encourag'd* our Practice of it by his own *Example*, and by Himself and his Apostles left such Directions for the more *effectual* Performance of it, that every Man for the Future might be without Excuse, if he either Pray'd *not at all*, or to no *purpose*.

Among which Directions, the *Importunity* recommended in this Parable, and in that other before mention'd so near of Kin to it, is
greatly

greatly to be regarded; as that which will certainly, if other Requisites are not wanting, (for there are others) bring down a Blessing. But because there are other Things requir'd both by our Lord and his Apostles, in order to our Praying successfully, besides Importunity; I think it will not be amiss, if I discourse more *largely* of this great and *concerning* Duty of Prayer, than I could do if I strictly confin'd my self to the Bounds of this Parable; and endeavour these three Things.

First, To prove that Prayer is not only an inestimable *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Christian.

Secondly, To shew how *far* the Obligation to this Duty does *extend*. And,

Thirdly, What are the necessary *Requisites*, that this Duty may be perform'd *successfully*.

First, Prayer is not only the *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Christian.

Watch and Pray, that ye enter not into Temptation, Mat 26. 41. was our Lord's Charge to *Peter*, and the two Sons of *Zebedee*, in the Garden of his Agony; and not to them only, but to all others that are in their Circumstances, (*i. e.*) in great Danger of being tempted, and weak and unable of Themselves to make Resistance; and that, God knows, we all of us are, and therefore to all of us is this Command directed. *Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be open'd unto you*, says the same Blessed Jesus immediately
after

after one of the Parables before mention'd; as if he had said, God will be gracious and relieve your Necessities, but 'tis upon Condition you will lay your Wants before him, and implore his Help; according to that of St. James, chap. 4. ver. 2. *Ye have not, because ye ask not.* In the Sixth of Matthew our Lord has set us a *Pattern of Prayer*, and commanded us to use it, *When we Pray, say Our Father, &c.* And he spake the Parable we are now discoursing on, to this very purpose, *That men ought always to Pray, and not to faint*; and he himself was our *Example* too in this Matter, and *continued whole Nights in Prayer unto God*, and his Example in Things within our reach, as assiduous Prayer is, we are upon innumerable Accounts obliged to follow.

And as our Lord, so his Apostles bind this upon us as our *Duty*. Thus St. Paul bids us *in every thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving, to let our Requests be made known unto God*; and to *continue in Prayer, and watch in the same with all Perseverance, and to Pray every where, and without ceasing.* Phil. 4. 6. Col. 4. 2. Eph. 6. 18. 1 Tim. 2. 8. 1 Thes. 5. 17.

The Duty, we see, is sufficiently bound upon us by our Holy Religion: 'Tis plain and express, and must as carefully be observ'd as any other Command; so *sollicitous* is our good God for our Happiness, as by all means to bring us to the Practice of what will be so
highly

highly *beneficial* to us; And where the *Love* of a Thing, upon Account of its *own Excellency* and Serviceableness to our *Selves*, will not attract our numb'd senseless Souls, there to goad and prick us on, and even *force* us to it, by Threats of Punishment if we refuse. Good God! That Men should need *baling* to Felicity! And that *God* should be so desirous of it, as thus to take all Measures to bring us to it! O the unaccountable *Stupidity* of Man, and the unsearchable Riches of the Goodness of God!

And what a miserable Wretch is he, unnatural to himself, and Ungrateful to his God, who by his Obstinacy shall frustrate so great Tenderness of God as this, and break through so many Obligations to his own Ruin! and with Devilish Pride and Sullenness starve and famish his Soul, rather than Pray to God to Relieve and Help him! How many of those that call Themselves Christians are thus wretchedly miserable, God and their own Consciences know best; but let not any Man be deceiv'd; 'tis not only a *Privilege* now, but is become a *necessary Duty*, and by the Neglect of it we shall not only lose the Benefit consequent upon the Performance of it, but receive the Punishment due to the Breach of the Laws of God; which in all probability, will be so much the more *severe*, as the *Benefit* would have been *great*. For nothing is more provoking, than to have great Favours and Condescensions

descensions (such as is this) slighted and despis'd. And thus much may suffice to prove, that Prayer is not only the *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of every Christian. I proceed in the

Second Place, to shew, How far the Obligation to this Duty does extend. Our Lord in the Proeme to this Parable, says, That Men ought *always* to pray; and St. Paul, *1 Tim. 2. 8.* says, *I will that Men pray every where*, ἐν παντι παντω, in every Place; and *Ephes. 6. 18.*, ἐν παντι κλιση, upon every Occasion, with every Opportunity; and *1 Thess. 5. 17.* he joyns both together, and commands that we pray *Ἀεὶ καὶ ἀεὶ πῶς*, without Intermiſſion. So that 'tis a Duty that extends to all *Times* and *Places*, to all *Seasons*, and *States* and *Conditions* of Life; and as at all Times we stand in *need* of the Favour and Blessing, the Protection and Support, the Mercy and Forgiveness of God; so 'tis at all Times our Duty to beseech it of him. But this will need a farther Explication.

For this Praying without *ceasing* or Intermiſſion, cannot be understood in the strictest Sense, as if there were to be no Cessation of the *Act*, for that would be impossible; and there are many other Things that we are as much oblig'd to, which will take up great Portions of our Time. Many Necessities of Nature there are that must be adverted to and supplied, many honest Employments that must be followed, many other Christian Graces that

that must be exercised, and sometimes even innocent *Recreations* must take place; there being, as *Solomon* says, *a Time for all Things, a Time to Weep, and a Time to Laugh, a Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance.* This, as well as other *Affirmative* Commands, does, *Obligare semper*, as the Schools distinguish, but not *pro semper*; that is, There is no Time, or Season, or Place so exempt, but that in due Circumstances we are oblig'd to this Duty, but it does not oblige as *Negative* Commands do, to every Moment, without any Exception There is no Minute of our Life, but the Commands, *Thou shalt do no Murder, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou shalt not Steal,* and the like, do oblige us to observe them; but there are very many Portions of our Time wherein such Precepts as these, *Be Afflicted, and Mourn, and Weep,* and the contrary to it, *Rejoyce evermore,* and *Pray without ceasing,* and the like, neither do nor can oblige. To keep our Minds in an habitual Frame and apt Disposition for the Performance of these Duties in proper Circumstances, is all that is expected from us. But more particularly, to Pray *always,* or every where, and without ceasing, is to do these Three Things:

First, 'Tis to be very frequent in offering up pious *Ejaculations,* or short *mental* Prayers, as Occasion shall offer, which will be very often; and the most usual and common Occurrences of Life may be improv'd to this sort

of

of Devotion, without the least Hindrance or Encroachment upon any other Employments. In the Field, in the Shop, in the Bed when Sleep departs, in a Journey, every where, and at all Times, this may be done, without Expence of Time, without *Shew* or Observation; and is a Service highly acceptable to God, and keeps the Mind in an excellent Frame and Temper, and is out of Danger of being polluted by *Hypocrisie* and other base and little Ends; which too often mingle with our more *set* and *publick* Prayers. And the Soul may more *vigorously* dart forth these short Accidental Breathings, and storm Heaven more successfully by these quick lively Efforts, than by whole Armies of Words and Legions of long-breath'd Petitions, which are rather apt to *tire* the Soul, and rebate the Edge of her Devotion.

Of this Nature is the Prayer which our Lord has taught the *Church*; the *whole* far from *long*, and the *particular* Petitions very *short*, but withal *full* and *comprehensive* to Admiration: In Imitation whereof, have the wise Compilers of our Liturgy divided the Service into short *Collects*, and comprised their Sense in as few Words as is possible; that the Mind may be more *intent* and recollect, and have time to *breathe* as 'twere between each of them, and return with *fresh* Vigour and Spirit to the succeeding parts; according to our Lord's express Advice, *Use not vain*
F f *Repetitions;*

Repetitions when ye pray ; and that of the Wife Preacher, Eccl. 5. 2. Be not rash with thy Mouth, and let not thine Heart be hasty to utter any Thing before God, for God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth, therefore let thy Words be few. And this way of Ejaculatory Devotion comes very near to Praying without ceasing in the strictest Sense, and much resembles that Heavenly Employment of those, Rev. 4. 8. Who rest not Night and Day, saying Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. But,

Secondly, To Pray always, is never willingly to omit the Morning, and Evening, and Noon-day Returns, of our more set and solemn private Addresses to the Throne of Grace ; the Morning and Evening especially, which is the least Homage we can pay to the Almighty, and which are Seasons the most of all in our power, to employ as we think fit.

The Morning and Evening Sacrifice was constant among the *Jews* ; the Fire was ever Burning upon the Altar, and never was suffer'd to go out. *David* pray'd Morning and Evening, and at Noon, and God heard his Voice ; yea, seven Times a Day did he praise him because of his Righteous Judgments : and *Daniel* made his Petition three Times a Day towards *Jerusalem*, as the *Jews* Custom was.

The Morning and Evening are the two *Extremes* of the Day, and the Noon is like an *intermediate*

intermediate Link between them, that is join'd to both, and so makes one continued Day; so that, he that prays *Morning* and *Evening*, and at *Noon*, may not improperly be said to spend the *Day* in Prayer, and to continue *instant* in it. And how very fitting it is, that these Returns should without any wilful Intermission be observ'd, will soon appear to any one that *considers*.

For First, As for our private *Morning* Devotions, our Preservation from the Dangers of the Night past, God's careful watching over us while we slept, and lengthning out our Opportunity for Repentance, and making Provision for a Better Life, ought certainly to bring us upon our Knees, in humble *Adoration* of that Good God *in whom we live, and move, and have our Beings*; in humble *Submission* to his *Providence* for the Future, and devout *Oblation* of our whole *Selves*, and our whole *Time*, to *His* Service, who has continu'd to us *Life, and Health, and all Things*. And, since all our Sufficiency is of God, and we can do no good Thing, nor so much as think a good Thought, *without* him; to beg his Blessed presence with us, That he would work in us to will and to do according to his Good pleasure; That he would guide and protect us, and bless and prosper our honest Undertakings, and still continue to watch over us for Good; That we may be undefil'd by the Temptations of the Day, and look back

with Comfort upon our Actions, when we cast up our Accounts at Night.

2. As for our *Mid-day* Devotions, because we are then in the midst of the Dangers and Temptations of the Day, beset on every side with Allurements to do Evil; 'twill highly concern us *afresh* to beg the Divine Aid and Support, that we may stand upright. If we have pass'd securely the former part of the Day, it becomes us to pay our humble Acknowledgments to our Divine Guardian and Guide; and if we have *fallen*, it becomes us with Shame and Sorrow to confess our Vileness, and deprecate God's Anger, and beg his Grace, that we may be more circumspect the *Remainder* of it. And besides, the Works of the Creation, the wonderful Order of the Universe, the Variety, Beauty, and Usefulness of the Creatures, and the plentiful Provision God hath made for all our Necessities; will then be very proper to engage our Thoughts, and will minister abundant Matter for Devotion, and be very apt to fill our Breasts with Holy Breathings and Aspirations towards that inexhaustible Fountain of Beauty and Perfection, and Power infinite, who by his Word spake all this into Being.

3. And for Prayer at *Evening*, our *Protection* from the many evil Accidents, and the many great *Blessings* of the Day past; the *Miscarriages* likewise and *Failures* of it, if no *worse*, and the Dangers of the approaching Night, are sufficient

cient Motives and Engagements to renew our devout Addresses to the Almighty.

And as *private* Prayer ought to be thus constant, and without wilful Intermiſſion; ſo, and more eſpecially, no Opportunity of praying to God in the publick Congregation ſhould be omitted: For, this Attendance upon the *publick* Worſhip of God, is that which is chiefly and primarily intended by the Apoſtles in what they wrote about this Duty of Prayer. Moſt part of the firſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians*, is ſpent in giving Directions for the more decent Management of the *publick* Service of God; and *1 Tim.* 2. 8. the Command of Praying *in every place*, and that *Eph.* 6. 18. *upon every opportunity*, muſt primarily relate to the *publick*, as any capable Perſon may perceive, by conſidering the Context.

And accordingly, thoſe Converts made by *S. Peter*, *Acts* 2. 42. *Continu'd ſtedfaſtly in the Apoſtles Doctrine and Fellowſhip and in breaking Bread and in Prayers*; and v. 46. *They continu'd daily in the Temple with one Accord*; and on the Day of *Pentecoſt* we find them *all with one accord in one place*, *Acts* 2. 1. And thus it was in all Ages of the Church, till Iniquity abounded, and the Love of many began to wax cold. But methinks, the Conſideration of the great *Advantages* of theſe *Publick* Levotions above the *Private*, ſhould have ſome Influence upon us, in order to our more conſtant

Attendance at the places of Divine Worship; for our Lord has expressly promis'd his Presence there, and that the Prayers there offer'd shall be successful. Thus *Mat. 18. 19.* I say unto you, says he, that if two of you shall agree on Earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven; for where two or three are gather'd together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them. The Church is an Emblem of Heaven, and the Congregation of the General Assembly of the First-born which are written there; whose happy Employment is, to Admire, Adore, and Extol the Infinite Mercy and Majesty of God, for ever and ever; and as there, so here, the Devotion of others will raise our Affections, and their Zeal and Fervor quicken our Devotion. To which purpose is that of the Apostle *Heb. 10. 24, 25.* Not forsaking the Assembling of your selves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and provoking to Love and Good Works, by pious Example and devout Behaviour in the Church. And the Blessing pronounc'd by the Minister at the Close of those publick Offices, was in the Primitive Times thought a Thing of no mean Regard, whatever low Thoughts Men now-a-days may have of it.

To this Head of *Publick Prayer*, may be reduc'd the Assembling of a *Family* together to offer up their joint Petitions to God; whether by the chief of the Family, or by some Minister

ster of Religion, if present : And this has been a Practice of very long standing, and is of excellent Use.

It keeps a Family in a serious Sense of Religion ; it accustoms Youth to it betimes, and is an excellent Example to Children and Servants, who are apt to mark and imitate their Parents and Masters Steps more than they are aware of ; and Young People will be inclin'd to think, there is something more than ordinary in Religion, when they see those, of whose Prudence and Experience they have an Opinion, so seriously set about it.

The Returns of these Family-Devotions at the *Beginning* and *Close* of the Day, ought not without good Reason to be omitted ; for they naturally tend to make People more *Industrious* and *Just* in their Dealings in the World, as keeping us in their Minds a sense of their Being in the Sight and Presence of a Just and Holy God, and to prevent Abundance of Folly and Levity, and Looseness of Manners, and make the Days Sober and Honest, and the Nights Innocent and Chaste. And this appears evidently to be true, in the great Difference any Man may discern between Families where this Holy Custom *is*, and is *not* observ'd ; Idleness and Laziness, Pilfering and Cheating, Swearing and Lying, Lewdness and Intemperance, and Debauchery of all sorts, generally where 'tis neglected ; and good Order, Modesty, and Sobriety,

Diligence and Faithfulness where 'tis observ'd, For, it tending so much as it evidently does, to the making Men *Good Christians*; it consequently, must needs tend to the making them good in every Relation.

These solemn Family Devotions, are likewise a very good preparation for the better performance of the more publick Offices in the great Congregation. For they tend to create that habitual Seriousness and Recollection of Thought, which our *publick Prayers* command, and without which, we shall offer but the Sacrifice of Fools. The more Men are affected with the Prayers of a Family at home, the more sacred and awful will the *publick Service* in the House of God appear to them; if attentive and devout *there*, much more so *here*; and the more they feel the Comfort of joint Devotions in their own Houses, the more desirous will they be of, and the more benefited and refreshed by, the Harmony of a full Choir of Saints in the Holy Temple.

I'm afraid this pious Custom is now-a-days too much neglected; some grudging to take so much *Time* from their *other Employments* as this Duty requires; and others, on Evenings especially, making themselves *unfit* for the Performance of it by *tarrying long at the Wine, and enflaming themselves with Strong Drink*; and some truly, thinking it too *pretise* and *Pe-ritanical* a Thing, to be practis'd now-a-days.

But these *last* should have a Care how they throw ill Names upon what our Religion has made our *Duty*, and what has all along been observ'd by the best Men in the World; and they would do well to consider those Words of our Lord, *Mark 8. 38. Whosoever shall be asham'd of me and my Words in this adulterous and sinful Generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be asham'd when he cometh in the Glory of his Father and of the Holy Angels.*

Is it a fitting Reason, that a thing so excellent as this should be despis'd and refus'd, because those that in other Matters dissent from us, are so careful to observe it? Let their Piety in this Instance, rather shame us into Amendment that we may be behind them in no Good Work, and leave them no Occasion of Caviling and making Objections against our Church, by reason of the careless *indifferent* Religion of some that are of our Communion. In particular, this Neglect of *Family-Devotions* is often thrown in our Teeth; and the best way to take off the Aspersions, is heartily to set about the Practice of the Duty.

'Tis our great Happiness, were we duly sensible of it that we are Members of the most Primitive Church in the World, and the greatest Encourager of True Piety and Religion; and methinks we should be very careful, had we any love for this Church, any desire it should flourish and prosper, not to disparage it by our so *disagreeable* Conversation.

tion. Other Sects and Parties we see extraordinary diligent to gain Honour and Reputation, by all means, to their Profession, that their Antagonists may discover no Flaw or Indecency, no Breach of the Orders and Customs they have embrac'd; while we, that have the best *Cause*, are generally the worst *Managers* of it. For Shame, let us at length grow *wise*, and *live up* to what we *profess* in this and every other Particular; and transcribe the excellent Rules of our Church, in our Conversation; let us *act* like true Sons of the *Church of England*, as well as *talk* as such; and then no doubt but God and his Truth will prevail. *We* are as a City built upon a Hill, a Light set in an eminent Place, many envious Eyes are upon us, and rejoyce to see our Taper burn dim, and our City defil'd by Wickedness and Impurity; wherefore we should be the more careful to *trim* our Lamps, and purge out our Stains, and shine brightly, in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation: That these Men seeing our good Works, may at length glorifie our Heavenly Father, by a Hearty Union and Communion with us, and return to the Fold which they have so groundlessly deserted.

As for such as grudge *Time* for this Duty of praying in their Families, let them consider, whether they can indeed improve it more to their *Advantage*; whether the Gain of a little Money is to be compar'd to having
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the Blessing of God, and the Guidance and Protection of his good Providence : And whether their Time was not chiefly given them to worship God in, and to make provision for another World.

And as for such that make themselves unfit for this Holy Duty, by *Night Revels* and *Intemperance*, they can't but be sensible that that's a very ill Excuse, such as they should blush and be asham'd of, and a Fault which highly concerns them speedily to amend; remembering that Drunkards are in that black List, of such as *shall not enter into the Kingdom of Christ and of God*, 1 Cor. 6. 10.

Having thus shewn that Prayer is not only the *Privilege*, but the *Duty* of a Christian, and how far the Obligation to this Duty does extend, I Proceed to the

Third and last thing to be done, which is, to shew what is requir'd in order to the *effectual* Performance of this Duty; and what St. Paul says, 1 Tim. 2. 8. added to the *Importunity* recommended in the Parable we are now discoursing upon, will doubtless make our Prayers to be *availing*. The Apostles words are these, *I will that Men pray every where, lifting up Holy Hands without Wrath and doubting*; and of these Requisites I shall first discourse, and then of *Importunity*.

First If we would be accepted at the Throne of Grace, we must lift up *Holy Hands*. The

Word

Word in the Original signifies pure and undefil'd, and 'tis an Allusion to the Custom of the Jews, who constantly us'd the Ceremony of *washing* before they pray'd; which was intended to signify the Necessity of a *clean Heart*, in order to Acceptance with God, For God is a Being Infinitely *Pure* and *Holy*, and that cannot behold Iniquity; and into whose Presence no *unclean* thing can enter; and therefore, *the Sacrifice of the Wicked*, as *Solomon* observes, must needs be *an Abomination to him*, and bring down a Curse rather than a Blessing; and the *Prayer of the upright* only *his Delight*. Prov. 15. 8. More particularly, by this Expression of *lifting up Holy Hands* is meant these three Qualifications

First, That the Suppliant be one of a *good Life*; or if he has not formerly been so, *repents* and is sincerely resolv'd to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ, for the future. For how can he that is a Rebel to God, a Traytor and *Judas* to his Saviour, and that will obey none but the Devil and his own vile Lusts; how can such a one think that God should hearken to his Requests, who *consumes* God's Blessings upon his Lusts, as *St. James* expresses it Jam. 4. 3. and as *St. Paul*, Turns the *Grace of God into Lasciviousness*, and sins still more that *Grace may still abound*; and is encourag'd by Gods Goodness to persist in his Wickedness? He only can with Reason expect

expect to be heard by a *Holy God* who is either actually pious and good, or heartily desires and intends to be so.

Secondly, By lifting up *Holy Hands*, is meant *Purity of Intention*, unmix'd Desires of advancing the *Glory of God*, and of the Supply of our real Needs, and of promoting our *Eternal Salvation*.

That is, no man must dare to play the *Hypocrite* in his Devotion, and have other little sinister *By-Ends*, such as the *Praise of Men*, that his *Vanity* may be tickled by being esteem'd more *Righteous* and *Heavenly-minded* than his *Neighbours*; and that under the *Cover* of more Religion than ordinary, he may the more securely bring to pass some wicked under-hand Design. That there have been such sort of Devotionists as these, is evident from what we find recorded of the *Pharisees*, Men to all appearance extraordinary Religious, Fasting and Praying frequently and long, and very Exemplary in other Instances of Piety; when after all, our Lord who knew their *Hearts*, has told us, they did it to be *seen*, and to have *Praise of Men*; and under Pretence of long Prayers to insinuate into Wealthy Widows Esteem, that at length they might have Opportunity to devour their Houses. How many of this sort there is now-a-days, God and their own Consciences know best; but this is certain that where-ever the Guilt lies, 'tis a great Abomination

Abomination to him, who is *Truth* it self, and infinitely hates a *Lye*; especially in matters of *Religion*, where his *Honour* is so nearly concern'd.

Wherefore, let those who find themselves prick'd by what is now said, take care that their *Religion* be more pure and *sincere* for the Future; lest our *Lords Woes* to the *Pharisees* fall upon their Heads, and they be doom'd to the Portion of *Hypocrites*, *where is Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth.*

Thirdly, The Word *On*, sometimes signifies *Just* and *Upright*, without *Fraud* and *Cheating Arts* and *Oppression*; and he that would be heard when he prays, must cleanse his Hands from these, must do as he would be done to, and *provide things honest in the Sight of all Men*; and despise the *Gain* of *Oppression*, *Isaiah* phrases it, *Chap. 33. Vers. 15. For God is Just as well as Holy, and hates the sly Windings of Deceit and Fraud; He is about our Path, and spiech out all our Ways, and will be a swift Witness against those that oppress* instead of turning a *gracious Ear* to their *Petitions*. *Wherefore, let no Man go beyond or defraud his Brother in any Matter, for God is the Avenger of all such; 1 Thess. 4. 6.* but take care that his Hands be not defil'd with *unjust Gain*, lest it make them incapable of receiving a *Blessing*. Thus much for the first *Requisite* to our praying *effectually*, the *lifting up Holy Hands.*

A second is, That this be done *without Wrath*, that there be a Freedom from *Strife* and *Revenge*, and a Readiness to *Reconciliation* and *Forgiveness*.

For as for a hot *angry* Disposition, nothing more unfits a Man for Devotion than that; it makes the Mind continually in a *Storm*, breaks the Order and Connexion of Thoughts, puts the whole Soul into a Hurry, and makes it like a *Troubled Sea that cannot rest*. And therefore, no wonder if it cast up *Mire and Dirt*, Desires impure and displeasing to God, rather than the sweet smelling Savour of an acceptable Sacrifice.

As our Religion in general, so Prayer in particular, is a *reasonable* Service, and requires as great *Freedom* of Thought, and recollected Presence of Mind, as any thing whatever. The *Object* of Prayer, is a Being of infinite *Sanctity*, and transcendent *Majesty*, and this should move us to approach him with the most awful and sedate Temper of Mind; and that which is *pray'd for*, is, or ought to be of the greatest Value, and which it most of all concerns us, to have bestow'd upon us; and therefore it concerns us to have our Reason and Thoughts at *Command*, lest our Petition should be *rejected* for our ill *Management* of it.

Now, nothing more *discomposes* the Mind, and deprives it of the Use of Reason, than the Passion of *Anger*: It puts the Spirits into such

a violent and unnatural Motion, as makes all the Powers of the Soul for a Time *unserviceable*. Things are apprehended in strange Confusion and Disorder, and remembered with much Imperfection, and foolish and ridiculous Choices are made by the Will; and all the Affections, consequently, out of Course: Just as is the Condition of Mad Men, only the Fit is sooner over. And is this a fitting Temper of Mind to approach the Throne of the great God in, and prefer Petitions for the greatest Blessings? Let a Man after he has been brawling with his Neighbours, consider if he were to go immediately to beg a Boon of his Prince, whether he should not then do it with great disadvantage; how apt he should then be to commit Indecencies, and to omit Matters of chief Concern in his Request, and the like; and then let him say what he thinks of addressing to the great King of Heaven in such an ill Disguise of Soul? And whether he does not believe that he might speed much better, if his Mind were calmer and more it self? Now, the Returns of Prayer being so frequent, and angry Mens Brawlings and Quarrellings so frequent, it must needs often be, that such Men, unless they omit praying, which is still worse, must pray to God with Minds greatly discompos'd, and unfit for the Performance of so Holy a Duty, at least with any Success.

AS for a *Revengeful* Temper of Mind, that is a thing so contrary to him, whose Definition

is Love, and who has so freely forgiven us so infinite a Debt, that no Desires breath'd from such a Soul, but must needs stink in his Nostrils, and be utterly rejected by him. His Divine Son, the only *Mediator* between him, and us, who presents the Prayers of the Faithful, and intercedes for their Acceptance; will be so far from appearing in an implacable revengeful Man's Behalf, that he has declar'd (in a Parable before discours'd of, *Mat. 18. 23.*) he will deal with such with the utmost Severity. God will accept nothing at our Hands without *Charity*, and a Gift, though brought to the Altar, must not be offer'd there, till he that is at Variance with his Brother be reconcil'd to him; he must leave his Gift before the Altar, and go his Way, and first be reconcil'd to his Brother, and then come and offer his Gift, *Mat. 5. 23, 24.*

A third Requisite to our praying *successfully*, is, that our Prayers be without doubting, or as'tis express'd, *Heb. 22. In full assurance of Faith.* According to what our Lord said upon Occasion of the Barren Fig-Tree's being dry'd up from the Roots at his Word, which, when *St. Peter* and the rest of the Disciples wondred at; *Jesus* answer'd and said unto them, have Faith in God, for verily I say unto you, whosoever shall say unto this Mountain, be thou remov'd and cast into the Sea, and shall not doubt in his Heart, but believe that those things he saith, shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. There-

fore, I say unto you, what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. Mark 11. 20. And elsewhere, All things are possible to him that believeth. Mark 9. 23. To which agrees that of St. James, If any Man lack Wisdom, let him ask of God; but let him ask in Faith, nothing wavering, for such a Man shall not receive any thing of the Lord, James 1. 5, 6. The meaning of all which I suppose to be this, That, as the Apostles, upon their firm Belief of the Truth of our Lords Promise of enabling them to work Miracles for the Advancement of the Christian Religion, and of his Power to do accordingly, should, when they pray'd for his Help, be enabl'd to do as they desired; so all other Believers, if their Prayers are accompanied with a strong Belief of his Veracity in promising to hear the Prayers of the Faithful, of his Ability to relieve and help them, and of his infinite Goodness and Willingness to grant them their Desires, if it be expedient for them, they shall certainly speed well and receive a Blessing at the Hand of God.

The very Petitions they offer up, if for their Good, shall be granted them; and if not for their Good, God in his infinite Wisdom will bestow something else upon them, that shall be more for their Advantage: And, they may depend upon it, they shall not be sent away empty.

But, he that wavereth, and is of doubtful Mind in these particulars, and prays with great

that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. A truly humble Temper of Mind is better than all the outward performances of Religion; and a penitent Publican, that is indeed *poor in Spirit*, is far more esteemed of God, than he that makes Long Prayers, and Fasts often, and Tithes all his Substance, and is *proud* of this when he has done, and *despises* those that make not so much *Ostentation* of Religion as he does. Without *Humility*, all is *Vain-glory* and *Hypocrisie*; and the seemingly most *sanctified* Person that has it not, is like a *painted Sepulchre*, beautiful without, but full of Rottenness *within*.

By what has been hitherto said by Way of *Comment* upon this Parable, and from the *Introduction* and *Conclusion* of it (as was said) 'tis very plain that 'tis design'd to recommend the great, nay, fundamental Grace of *Spiritual Humility*, or Poverty of Spirit with relation to *Vertue*: And to shew, that let a Man have never so much of Vertue or Religion, if he is *proud* of it, it renders all abominable in the sight of God; and that none but the *humble Soul* is *his Delight*. In my Discourse therefore upon this Parable, I shall endeavour *three* things;

First, To shew what the Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is;

Secondly, How *excellent* and *beneficial* a Grace it is, and how *vile* and *mischievous* the contrary *Vice* is; and

Thirdly, How highly this Vertue shall be *rewarded*.

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As for the first, What the Grace of Spiritual Humility is; I in the first place think in the *Negative*, that it can't be a thinking worse of a Man's self than he really deserves; for no Man certainly can be oblig'd by Religion to be *mistaken* in himself, it being one of the chief things that we learn in *Christianity* as well as *Ethicks*, rightly to *know ones self*: And when there is any thing in a Man that is indeed *Praise-worthy*, I can't see why the Man *himself* may not be sensible of it as well as *others*; and innocently *please* himself with reflecting upon it, and *love* what bears so much Resemblance to, and is an Emanation from the Eternal Fountain of Goodness and Perfection. Nay, he that *dwells* much with himself, and heedfully reflects upon his Actions, and the Bent and Inclination of his Mind, as every Man *ought* to do; can't be conceived to be ignorant of what is *good* in him, any more than what is *evil*; and the same Attention which is requisite that a Man may know his *Errors* and *Miscarriages*, will likewise inform him of what is *vertuous* in him, and of *good Report*. And further, How can a Man be *thankful* to him who is the Giver of every good and perfect Gift, for the *intellectual* Favours he bestows upon him (of which *Grace to live vertuously* is the chief) who is not first conscious that he has *receiv'd* the Blessing? The Elders in the Revelations that took their Crowns from their Heads, and cast them before the Throne as
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an Acknowledgment from whom they had receiv'd them, first must be suppos'd to know that they had them *on* ; And if there be such a thing as St. Peter calls the *Answer of a good Conscience towards God*, a Man must first be *sensible* of his good Actions, before he can feel that inward *Approbation* of them.

I thought fit to say thus much in the *Negative* about Spiritual Humility, because it has been taught by some that pretend to the most *extraordinary* Religion, that we ought to entertain none but *vile* and *abject* Thoughts of our selves, to be conscious of nothing that is *good* in us, but to call our selves the *vilest* of *Sinners*, and the *worst* of *Men* ; according to St. Paul's Example, who calls himself *the chief of Sinners*, 1 Tim. 1. 15. But since it cannot be true, for a sincerely *pious*, *sober*, and *chaste* Man for Instance, to call himself the most *prophane*, the most *intemperate* and *debauch'd* Wretch living, for he must needs be sensible that is *not* so ; therefore a more *discreet* Way of Humiliation and Confession of our Faults should be introduc'd in its Room, for nothing that is *untrue* can be pleasing and acceptable unto God : And, as no Man ought to think of himself more *highly* than he ought to think, so neither should he *untruly vilifie* and *miscall* himself, but think and speak *soberly*, according as God has given to him the *Measure of Faith*. 'Tis the same St. Paul's Advice, Rom. 12. 3. whose Example is urg'd for so *extremely* de-

basing a Man's self in his own Esteem; and therefore, when *he* said of himself, That he was the *chief of Sinners*, it must look back to his former Wickedness in *persecuting the Church of Christ*, and could not be true as to his *present* Condition when he spoke it; for he was then a *chosen Vessel*, and *not inferiour to any of the Apostles*. And whatever good Man will use that Expression after him, its Signification must be *restrain'd*, either with Reference to *past* Wickednesses, or some particular Vice which too easily besets him; and cannot be true in its *largest* Sense, of any *sincerely good Man*. And 'tis a strange kind of Humiliation, that is made up of the Confession of Faults which a Man never knew himself to be guilty of; which yet is much in Vogue with some sort of People, but does indeed look too *Stage-like* to be thought real by any discerning Man.

Poverty of Spirit therefore does not consist in a Man's making himself *worse* than he is, (and truly there is no need he should do so, every Man living having enough of *real* Vileness to humble him before God) and in *over-looking* every thing that is *commendable* in him; and the *Pharisee* in the Parable might very *innocently* have *thank'd* God that he was not as *other Men*, Fornicators, Unjust, Adulterers, or even as a *Publican*; had there not been something much worse than this, mix'd with his Thanksgiving: And it was *this*. He was *proud* of his living more *circumspectly* than other

other Men, he arrogated much of the Praise to *himself*, and *despis'd* one, who, by reason of his *Profession*, he thought was a more loose and careless Liver; and never reflected upon his *Failures* and *Imperfections*, but was wholly taken up with *admiring* himself, and vaunting of his *Vertue*, and did not return, as he ought to have done, *all the Glory* to God. So that 'tis not *all* thinking *well* of ones Conversation and Virtuous Living that is *Spiritual Pride*, but only when we think *better* of it than we *should* do, and forget our *Sins* and *Imperfections*, or arrogantly ascribe the *Praise* to our *selves*, not remembering who made us to differ, and neglecting to return the *Glory* to *him*, and are so exalted in our own *Conceits*, as to despise and contemn others, because their Religion is not with *Shew* and *Ostentation*.

Spiritual Humility then, as 'tis oppos'd to this *Spiritual Pride* consists in two things.

First, In not *overvaluing* our *Spiritual Excellencies*, nor our *selves* by reason of them, but returning all the *Praise* and *Glory* to God, who is the Author of every good and perfect gift.

'Tis to remember that *he* made us to *differ*, and that we have *nothing*, not so much as a good *Thought*, but what we receive from *him*, in whose *Divine Aid* is all our *Sufficiency*.

'Tis to reflect upon the *Imperfections* and *Defects* of even our *best* Actions, and how much *Need* there is of God's *Mercy* and *favour*.

able Judgment, after we have done all that we can in his Service. 'Tis to remember likewise, that with such great Assistances from above as we have receiv'd, we might have been much *better* than we are, and have practis'd *more Graces* of Christianity, and that in *higher Degrees* of Perfection.

And when there arises any inward Complacency in our Breasts from a Vertuous Action, or we meet with any commendation from others; 'tis then immediately to give God the *Glcry*, and transfer all the *Praise* to him, and suffer no vain Tumours to remain upon our Minds, nor look down with Scorn upon others that have less Esteem and Reputation in the World: But rather to humble our selves before God at the Thoughts of the Pollutions that are still upon our Souls, and reflect how great a Debt of Gratitude lies upon us to our great Benefactor, who has given us (unworthy as we are) such great Measures of his Grace; and resolve to make him a due *return*, of a daily increasing *Praise*, and *Obedience*, and *Love*.

Secondly, Spiritual Humility consists in a due Apprehension of the *Vileness* of our *Sins*, and the great *Aggravations* of them; and as we must not *overvalue* our *Vertues*, nor our selves by Reason of them, so neither should we *undervalue* our *Vices*, *i. e.* endeavour to *palliate* and *excuse* them, and give them more *favourable* Names than they deserve, such as un-

unavoidable *Frailties*, pitiable *Infirmities*, the Effects of *Surprize*, and the like: Nor think our selves to be *less* abominable in the Sight of God for our *Commission* of them, than indeed we are.

There is no Man living, how good soever, but is still a *Sinner*; and not only Imperfections and *Frailties* may be laid to his Charge, but God knows, too often, Sins of a *deeper Dye*; as *David* and *Peter*, we know, fell into the very worst of *Wickednesses*, though the one, otherwise a *Man after God's own heart*; and the other an *Apostle* of our Lord and Holy *Martyr* for his Truth. Now *Spiritual Humility* will give a Man a due Sense of his *Spiritual Vileness*, and represent his *Sin* (whatever it be) as indeed the greatest Evil, a Violation of the highest Authority, and of a most Holy, and Just, and Good Law, and the very height of *Ingratitude* too, as being a Resisting the Will of our greatest *Friend* and *Benefactor*: And 'twill shew him the *Aggravations* of his Guilt, as being contracted against sufficient Light and *Knowledge*, and when he had sufficient Aid likewise from Above to enable him to *resist* the Temptations to it if he would. These, and the like Considerations, which a Man truly *humble in Spirit* will call to mind, will humble him still more, and render him as vile in his *own* Eyes as he thinks he is in *God's*; and make him prostrate himself before the Throne of the Divine Majesty with Shame and Sorrow, and Confusion of Face,

confessing his Guilt, condemning himself for it, and humbly imploring Forgiveness of his offended God, and that he would turn away that fierce Anger from him, which he is very sensible he has but too much deserv'd.

Thus *David* fram'd a Psalm on purpose to confess and bewail his great Transgressions in the Matter of *Uriah*: He then forgot all that was good in him, and did not expect that his former excellent Piety should cover and make Amends for those foul Sins: He did not search for *Excuses*, and endeavour to extenuate his Guilt; but, like a truly humble Penitent, chang'd his usual Strain of Praise and *Thanksgiving*, for the Accents of *Grief* and *Shame*, and bitter *Remorse*, acknowledging his Transgressions, having his Sins ever before him, and with the most pathetick Earnestness of a *broken and contrite Heart*, begging God's Forgiveness, and that he would again *Create in him a clean Heart and renew a right Spirit within him*: As if those his great Wickednesses had not only polluted all that before was good in him, but quite *destroy'd* the Rectitude and Integrity of his Soul.

And as *David*, so *St. Peter*, when he reflected upon the great Baseness of Denying his divine Master and Saviour, his Spirit was so truly humbled, that without endeavouring in the least to conceal or palliate his Fault, he *went out and wept bitterly*.

And so the *Publican* in the Parable, would
not

not so much as *lift up his Eyes to Heaven*, but stood *afar off*, in the Court of the Gentiles which was the lowest of all, and with great Compunction of Spirit *smote upon his Breast*, and said, *God be merciful to me a Sinner!*

And thus much for the *First Thing* to be done upon this Parable, which was, to shew what the Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is; (*viz.*) a not *Over-valuing our spiritual Excellencies*, nor *our Selves* by reason of them, nor *despising others* as *less Holy*, but returning all the *Glory to God*, who made us to *differ*; nor *undervaluing*, or endeavouring to excuse and *extenuate our Wick-ednesses*; but an impartial considering the *Vileness* and great *Aggravations* of them, and sincere *humbling our Selves* for them at the Throne of God.

The *Second Thing* to be done is, to shew how *excellent and beneficial* this *Vertue* is in our Christian Course, and how *vile and mischievous* the contrary *Vice* is.

'Tis a sufficient Argument that this *Vertue* is very excellent, and of great Benefit to Christians, that our Lord has plac'd it in the *Front* of his *Beatitudes*, which he begins thus, *Blessed are the poor in spirit*. Like a wise Master-builder, he lays the *Foundation low* of a Building that was to reach so very *high*; and *Humbleness of Mind* must be the *Ground-work* of that Religion which will advance a Man to *Heaven*.

Piety without *Humility* is very apt to make Men top-heavy, and over-set like a Ship without her *Ballast*; 'tis this that preserves

the Soul unshaken amidst the *Temptations* of the World, as that makes a Ship sail *sure* and *steady* amidst the *mighty Billows*. The House in the Gospel that was founded upon a *sandy Surface* of the Earth, soon yielded to the Fury of the Tempest, and great was the Fall of it; our Lord therefore begins with *poverty of Spirit*, as the *Basis* and great *security* of all his other Building; which he foresaw and foretold was to undergo the Shock of many a furious *Storm*, and contend with all the Powers of the Prince of Darkness. But more *particularly*, this Grace of *Spiritual Humility* is so excellent and highly beneficial, that nothing more conduces to a Mans *Spiritual growth*, and Encrease in Vertue, nor renders him more *dear* both to God and Man.

First, Nothing more conduces to a Man's *spiritual growth*, and Encrease in Vertue. For, 'tis very true in *Religion* as well as in *Worldly Affairs*, That nothing makes Men more *industrious* than a due sense of their *Wants*, and the *poorness* of their *Stock*; whereas, when a Man thinks he has *Abundance*, he is generally Sloathful and Careless, and *Impoverishment* becomes his Lot rather than a farther *Improvement*: An humble Sense of a Man's *Imperfections* and *Sins*, will make him *doubly diligent*, and consequently to *improve* greatly in the School of Righteousness; but haughty *Conceitedness* will certainly make him grow *worse and worse*. Nay, there will be no *End* of the *humble minded* Man's

Man's Improvement ; for 'tis always found in the pursuit of *Vertue* as well as of *Knowledge*, that the more *real Vertue increases* in the Soul of a Good Man, the more and greater the *Defects* of his *Vertue* appear to be, and consequently, the more will his *Diligence* be quickned and spurr'd on ; as *St. Paul*, the farther he advanced in the *Christian Race*, the more conscious he grew that he had not yet apprehended what he endeavoured after, and was not yet perfect; and that made him forget what was *behind*, his *former Attainments*, and reach out to what was still *before*, what he had not yet attain'd to, and *eagerly press forward* to the Mark, the Prize of the High Calling of God in *Christ Jesus*. Now the Consequence of this extraordinary *Diligence* must needs be an extraordinary *growth and increase*, and so still *onward* in a quick and vigorous Motion, till he finishes his *Vertuous Race*, and is *perfect as his Father which is in Heaven is perfect*.

And as this *spiritual Humility* makes a Man move *swiftly* in the *Christian Course*, so it makes him tread *surely* too, it ballances him, and keeps him upon his Centre, and secures him from those dangerous *Falls* which too often are the Fate of the *high-minded and proud* ; for 'twas *Pride and Haughtiness of Spirit*, we know, that ruin'd the Prince of the *Fallen Angels*, and his *Accomplices*. But *poverty of Spirit* is the great *Security* of a *Christian* against the *subtle Arts of the Tempter* ; 'tis the proper
Mark

Mark and Character of a Disciple of the meek, lowly Jesus; and is a disposition of Mind the most of all apt for *Repentance*, which is a Grace of infinite Value, as being absolutely *necessary to Salvation*; and entitles a Man, in a peculiar manner, to the Divine Aid and Assistance; for *God giveth Grace to the Humble*.

Secondly, As this *spiritual Humility* is of the greatest *Benefit* to a Christian, so does it render him highly *dear* both to *God* and *Man*.

All men love an *humble Man*, and look upon him as a *Wise* and *Extraordinary Person*; and he that is pious and circumspect in his *Conversation*, and yet is not *proud* of it, nor despises or haughtily reflects upon others that live more at *large* than he does, but advises them better, *seasonably*, and with *Meekness* and *Humility*; such a Man is esteem'd as a Person sent from *God* to do Good to Mankind, that seeing his Good Works mix'd with *poverty of Spirit*, they may be inclined to imitate so lovely an Example, and glorifie their Father which is in Heaven, by treading in *his Steps*. And as for *God*, *S. Peter* and *S. James*, and the *Wiseest* of Men all agree, that *he resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble*. And our *Lord* himself, at the end of the Parable we are now considering, says expressly, *He that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*; and the *humble Publican* went down to his House justified, rather than the
haughty

haughty Pharisee ; so beneficial and highly valuable both with God and Man, is Humility of Spirit.

But on the contrary, to be *opinionated* and proud of ones Vertue, is a great Misfortune as well as Fault, and brings a great deal of a peculiar sort of Trouble and uneasiness along with it : 'Tis a Thing hated both by God and Men, and is despis'd and disgrac'd by every Body. To what would otherwise be really *praiseworthy*, it brings the greatest *Disparagement* in the World ; and if a Man's Conversation be but *indifferent*, and like other Mens, then, nothing makes him more ridiculous, than much to *value* himself, upon what is of so little or no *Excellency*. And what a Pain 'tis for Men that look upon *themselves* as extraordinary Persons, to see others so far from that Opinion, as rather to *sight* and *depreciate* them ; may easily be imagin'd. And indeed, 'tis the Mishap of this sort of People, always to meet with such kind of Entertainment as this ; Men setting themselves on purpose to *tease* and *worry* 'em, that if possible, they may make them *ashamed*, and *wearry* of a thing so generally hated.

But besides this *peculiar* sort of *Vexation* and *Uneasiness* that attends *Spiritual Pride*, there is something much worie to be said of it, *viz.* that 'tis almost impossible for Men infected with this Vice ever to *improve* in Religion and grow better. For in the *Nature* of the Thing,
nothing

nothing *slackens* Diligence and *Industry* more than this, without which no *progress* can be made in any thing, or at best a very slow one, especially where there are such Difficulties to be struggled with as in Religion; and what signifies Instruction or Reproof (unless it be to gall and enrage him) to a Man that thinks his Vertue very *extraordinary* if not *compleat* already? And besides, *God*, from whom we derive all our Sufficiency, *resists the proud*; and therefore, as *Solomon* says, no wonder if *when pride cometh then cometh Destruction, and a haughty Spirit be the forerunner of a fall.*

Besides, as the Condition of Mankind is now, to be proud of *Vertue* is to be proud of *Imperfection*; for such is the Vertue even of the *best* Men upon Earth: nay, 'tis to be proud of that which is *not*; for no Man that is proud of his Vertue is *indeed* Vertuous, that *poverty of Spirit* being wanting which gives the Value to all Religious Actions, and renders them acceptable in the Sight of God. And it not only pollutes and unhallows what might otherwise deserve the Name of Vertue, but (as was hinted before) it keeps a Man from growing better; it *blinds* him, that he cannot discern his Faults; and he is so taken up with admiring his *Excellencies*, and (with the *Pharisee*) *thanking God that he is not as other men are, Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or the like, that his great Defects pass unobserv'd by him*: And with the Man in the Fable, he

is so busie in gazing upon things *above* himself, that he perceives not the Dangers *under his feet* till he falls *into them*.

Having thus endeavour'd to shew what is the Grace of *Spiritual Humility*, and how *excellent* and highly *beneficial* a Grace it is, and how *vile* and *mischievous* the contrary *Vice* is, destructive of all Religion, and hateful both to God and Man; I proceed now in the *Last* Place to shew, how highly this Vertue shall be *rewarded*; which is exprest thus in the Close of this Parable, *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted*.

That is, in short, Mens *Humbleness of Mind* in point of *Vertue*, their *Self-Annihilation*, and returning all the Glory of their Good Actions to God, as the *Author* of whatever is commendable in them; and without *priding* themselves in their *present* Attainments, pressing on still to *greater Degrees* of Perfection and Heavenly Life: This shall, in the World of Eternal Felicity and Glory, be rewarded with the Impression of a near Resemblance to that Divine Fountain of Holiness and Perfection, whom here they acknowledg'd to be the Giver of every *good and perfect gift*. They shall then *see him as he is*, and they shall *be like him*; No Failures, no Slips or Imperfections, no Avocations from the happy Employment of Admiring and Loving God, shall be *There*, which in *this* Life are the perpetual Clogs and Vexations of a Holy Soul; but with their Faculties

culties *free and vigorous*, they shall *fully* enjoy this *supreme Good*, without *Interruption*, ^{to} all *Eternity*. This is that which makes a Heaven; this is to enjoy the Happiness of God *himself*; and this Heaven and this Happiness shall be the Portion of the *poor in Spirit*, who here ascribe to God the Praise and Glory of their *vertuous* Actions.

And their Humbling themselves before his Majesty, in a deep Sense of the Vileness and Ingratitude of their *Sins* (which the best Man living is not wholly without) shall be rewarded with the *Pardon* of them; they shall be lifted up from their Prostration at the *Feet* of their God and Saviour, and be received into his *Bosom*; and Joy, *extraordinary Joy*, shall be in Heaven in the Presence of the Holy Angels for their Repentance. They shall be exalted from the State of *Penitents* to that of *Friends*, nay *Sons of God*, and all Tears for the Future shall be forever wip'd from their Eyes, and they shall participate of the Joy of their Lord from *Everlasting to Everlasting*. And such an exaltation as this, is, no doubt, an abundant *Recompense* for all the Pains of spiritual Mortification; and a Repentance *so* rewarded, will never be repented of.

To conclude therefore; If we hope to have a share in that ineffable Felicity which shall be the Reward of this Humility of Spirit we have been discoursing of, we must make it our Endeavour to tread the Path that leads to it:

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We must *humble* our selves before God according to the Measures above described, that he may *exalt us in due time*. And (as without whom we can do no good Thing) we must with all Earnestness and Importunity beg his gracious Assistance, who was *meek and lowly in Heart*; that we may follow his Steps, and return him all the Glory of our *pious* Advances, who worketh in us to will and to do of his good Pleasure; and be so duly affected with Shame and Sorrow for our *Wickednesses*, as with the *Publican*, in bitter Remorse, and with sincere Purposes of Amendment, to smite upon our Breasts, and say, *God be merciful to us miserable Sinners*.

The P R A Y E R.

O *Meek and Lowly Jesus, who resistest the Proud, and givest Grace to Humble, and hast plac'd Poverty of Spirit in the Front of thy Beatitudes, as the Foundation and Ground-work of thy Holy Religion; Teach me this excellent Grace, I humbly beseech thee, and grant that I may hate and shun Pride above all Things, as the most dangerous and destructive Vice, which defiles every thing however otherwise commendable and excellent, and naturally tends to the Pit of Destruction. And to allay all vain Tumors that may arise, give me, O Blessed Saviour, a true Sense of the Corruption of my sinful Nature,*

Nature, my many heinous Violations of my Duty, my vile Ungratitude to thee, my greatest Benefactor, the great Imperfections of ev'n my best Services, and that whatever I have done that is praise-worthy, is owing to thy gracious Assistance, and that of my self I can do nothing that is good. O may I therefore never arrogate to my self what should be wholly thine, nor despise any Man, like the haughty Pharisee; who have nothing my self but what I have receiv'd from thee; but in sincere Humility of Spirit return thee all the Glory, saying, after I have done all that I can, I am still an Unprofitable Servant, and have done but what was my Duty to do. And grant, that in an humble Sense of my still great Defects, considering what vast Assistances I have had, I may smite upon my Breast and say with the Publican, God be merciful to me a miserable Sinner. Grant this, thou meek and humble Lamb of God, for the sake of thine own Tender Mercies. Amen and Amen.

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