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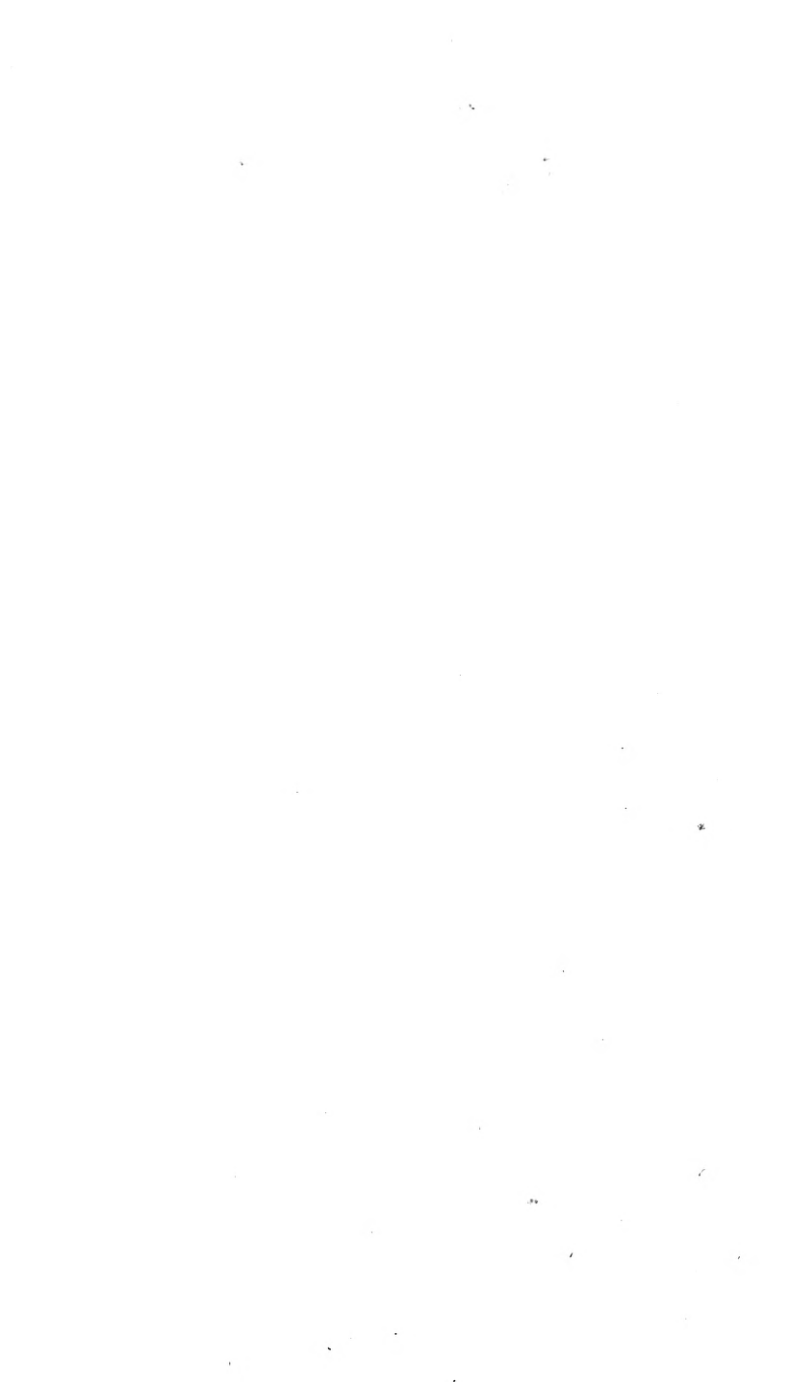
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The [✓]PROTESTANT SYSTEM:
CONTAINING
DISCOURSES
ON THE
PRINCIPAL DOCTRINES
OF
NATURAL and REVEALED RELIGION.

Compiled from the

WORKS of the following PROTESTANT
DISSENTERS, viz.

ABERNETHY,	FORDYCE,
AMORY,	FOSTER,
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To which are added,

FOUR DISCOURSES never before printed.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

V O L. II.

L O N D O N :

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MDCCLVIII.



DISCOURSE I.

On the Mediation of Christ.

[F O S T E R.]

I TIM. ii. 5.

— *And one mediator between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus.*

Intend, in this discourse, to explain the *mediatorial* character and office of Christ; which gives such *scope* and *enlargement* to our ideas of the *economy* and *order* of God's moral government, as unassisted nature could not attain to. The several branches of this mediatory constitution are, indeed, the principal points, by which the gospel is *distinguished* from mere natural religion; the primitive and invariable religion of all mankind. And yet it will be obvious to every cool and considerate inquirer, that though these are, as it were, the peculiar *complexion* and great *characteristic* of the Christian doctrine, they were not intended to form a scheme entirely *new*; but are all closely *connected*, and *interwoven*, with the essential branches of *the religion of nature*, which they were originally designed to explain and enforce.

Thus, for example, that God governs the world with perfect wisdom and rectitude, is the clear and undepraved sense of *nature*; “ which must be content
“ with this *general* knowledge, and cannot pretend to

“fix, *precisely*, in what *particular manner* this government is conducted.”—Here then the gospel comes in properly to the *aid of reason*; and informs us that it is administered by *Jesus Christ*, invested with the authority of God. The government is undeniably *one* and the *same*, whether exercised *immediately*, or by a *substituted* power: So that, in the general truth, the voice of *reason* and *Christianity* both concur. And though reason could never have *discovered*, by its own strength and penetration, that the administration of this government was committed to a *delegate*, sufficiently authorized, and compleatly qualified, for the execution of so *vast* a design; yet it is equally certain, that it can produce no *decisive* objection against this notion of a *mediatorial* King and Lord of all; unless it be able clearly to demonstrate, “that the *supreme* and *original* ruler of the world is under an *immutable* obligation to govern always by himself *alone*; and that great and *wise* purposes may not be served, by appointing a *subordinate* power.” But to assert this in cases, where we have no *competent* ideas, and scarce *any* comprehension at all of the subject; and in a *particular case*, in which we must be absolutely *unqualified* to judge with certainty, unless we have, actually before us, *all the possible* reasons that may render a particular oecconomy, *expedient* and *fit*, in the *infinite* government of the Almighty;” is a strain of arrogance and presumption, as extravagantly *absurd*, as it is *impious*.

So, again, that God is in his nature absolutely *good*, and strongly disposed to shew *mercy*, is one of the *first* principles that *unperverted reason* teaches. But, then, though reason, unless it be terrified and quite enslaved by superstition, must look upon this as an *essential* perfection of the Deity, and as the most *illustrious* and *amiable* part of his moral character; it must also suppose, that the *exertions* and *displays* of his *mercy*, as well as those of his *power*, are, in all cases, directed and proportioned by *wisdom*. “And what is the
“*fittest*

“*fitteft* and *propereft* way, either of difpenfing his
 “mercy upon *the whole*, or with refpect to any *par-*
 “*ticular fystem* of creatures, requires faculties of much
 “*larger* extent, than thofe that are allotted to the *hu-*
 “*man* mind, to adjust and fettle.” In the *general*
 principle, that *God is merciful*, natural religion and
 revelation entirely *correfpond*: But with refpect to the
ftated way of diftributing his *favours*, fo as moft ef-
 feftually to fubferve the ultimate end of his *moral* go-
 vernment, an extraordinary revelation, *alone*, is ca-
 pable of yielding us clear and full *fatisfaction*.——
 “Here therefore, (as it was not unreaſonable to
 “fuppofe it *might*) the goſpel *has aétually* opened to
 “us a *new conftitution*, in the doctrine of *Chrift the*
 “*Mediator*.”

The *general action* of a *Mediator* is what thofe, who,
 inſtead of modeſtly exerciſing and improving, make
 an idol of human reaſon, are apt upon the firſt pro-
 poſal of it, and without *knowing* or *inquiring* what it
really means, to traduce and villify. And indeed the
reaſons of it have been fo groſſly *miſrepreſented*, as has
 given too much occaſion, to ſuperficial thinkers, to
 load it with reproach and cenſure. For God, confi-
 dered in himſelf, has been deſcribed as an object of
horror, and abſolutely *inacceſſible* by his frail offend-
 ing creatures.——An *unnatural* imputation, and moſt
abſurdly blaſphemous!——“For where can *acceſs* be
 “found, if not to *infinite mercy*?” To whom can the
 miſerable, to whom can penitent finners, fo *freely* ap-
 ply for *relief* and *pardon*, as to the *only* being in the
 univerſe, whoſe goodneſs is *unlimited* and ſtrictly *im-*
mutable? Can *communicated* mercy be more generous,
 condeſcending, and compaſſionate, than *original* and
eternal mercy? or if the ſupreme being be, in par-
 ticular caſes, *averse* to all commiſeration; dare any
 inferior being *preſume* to intercede as a *Mediator*?
 To *dictate* mercy to him that is all-perfect, to attempt
 to make him more *compliant*, to ſooth and mollify
 him into greater *benignity* and *indulgence*? If God be,

in himself, an unchangeable and unerring pattern of every thing that is *right* and *fit*; would not such a Mediator act an *indecent*, nay, an *immoral*, part? Would he not behave in a manner unbecoming an *intelligent* being, “if he should *sue* for mercy, *any farther* than God is “by *nature* merciful?” On the contrary, if any circumstances could be supposed, in which the supreme model of every thing truly worthy and noble might be imagined to be, *essentially* considered, unpropitious and inaccessible; is it not undeniably certain, “that “*the Mediator* also ought to be inaccessible?” Or can the Deity be *degraded* by the *exercise* of compassion, in the very same case in which the Mediator is *exalted* and *dignified* by *pleading* for compassion? And, to add no more, must not our humble supplications, even when they are offered through a *Mediator*, be *ultimately* presented to the *divine* mercy? If so, it then necessarily follows, that the *true* ground, on which the mediatorial scheme was established, could not be, “that God was in himself either too *terrible*, “or too *resentful*, or too *inexorable*, to be *directly* addressed and invocated;” but this, and this *alone*, that some great and beneficial purposes might be served by it, with respect to the *moral world* considered more at large, but especially with respect to *mankind*, to whom the scheme itself appears to have a *peculiar* reference. And the true *Christian* doctrine of a Mediator, the substance of which is, “that our blessed “Saviour was *appointed* by the *supreme* authority of “heaven and earth, to *reconcile* apostate and rebellious “men to their offended Maker and Sovereign, and “to be the *distributor* of God’s favour to mankind;” I say this primitive and unadulterated doctrine of the gospel, concerning the *One Mediator*, carries not with it, in its general notion, the least shadow of a *contradiction* to *any* of the *truths* that *nature* inculcates; and will appear, I am persuaded, to *unite* and *harmonize* with *all* of them, in the distinct explication of its several parts.

Whether the mediatorial character of Christ may be properly said to have *commenced* till after his *resurrection*, when he had *all power* committed to him, and was constituted the *One Lord* through *whom* are *all things*; I shall not at present minutely enquire. Thus much however may, I think, be safely affirmed, that there are several probabilities to incline us to believe, that *this* is the scheme laid down in the New Testament; and more particularly that the *title* of *Mediator* is what Christ never *expressly* assumed to himself, during the time of his own public ministry upon earth, nor was it ever ascribed to him till *after* his *exaltation* to *regal* dignity and power. But if we take his mediatorial office in the common construction of it, as *beginning* with his prophetic mission, and *including* the substance of what he either *did* or *suffered*, as the faithful messenger and servant of the most high; it will still approve itself, in every branch, to the candid and unprejudiced reason of mankind.—For that God should *commission* a particular person, and furnish him with *authentic credentials*, to *revive* true religion, when it was buried, and almost quite extinguished, under a heap of *barbarous* and *hurtful* superstitions——and that he should *even appoint* for this purpose, and to promote the eternal salvation of mankind, a being of the *first rank* and *dignity* in the moral creation——neither of these, I say, can appear at all strange to us, when we consider that his mercies are infinite, and not to be measured by the narrow extent of human sensations and affections; and that the *original worth* and *former transcendent glory* of the *instrument*, employed in this generous design, had a natural tendency to conciliate greater *attention* to, and a more sublime *veneration* of, his doctrine: Which last is directly pointed out to us (*Matt. xxi. 37.*) as the *immediate view* of providence, in this surprising instance of grace and condescension. And when the same excellent person, for *opposing* the *prejudices*, *superstitions*, and *vices* of the world, was, after a long

of preparatory indignities, tortured and put to death with the utmost ignominy, contrary to all the principles of justice and gratitude; that his *resolution* and *undaunted integrity* in submitting to such undeserved cruelties, without so much as once *prevaricating* in the sacred cause of truth, should be highly *honoured* and *rewarded* by the supreme Governour and judge of mankind——is a *sentiment* perfectly agreeable to our *natural apprehensions* of his wisdom, equity, and goodness.

But the *death* of Christ is represented in the gospel in a different light: For we are not only told, that *God was in, or through, Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, but that we are *reconciled to him by the death of his Son*; that *we have redemption thro' his blood, the forgiveness of sins*; and that he hath *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*.—And it will without doubt be asked, what is the *true sense* of this doctrine; and how it may be reconciled with the eternal principles of *reason*, and the notions which we are led by *nature* to entertain of God?

To which I answer, that it is the *undeniable* doctrine of the New Testament, that the *death* of Christ was not *intended* “to render the Deity *propitious*, i. e. “willing to be reconciled to his creatures upon *fit* “and *honourable* terms;” because it was proposed by *himself*, and the whole *use* and *efficacy* of it springs from his *appointing* and *declaring* it to be an *accepted sacrifice*: So that it must of necessity suppose him “to have been *antecedently propitious*.” The truth of the case therefore is, that it was “an *expedient* “originally *proceeding from the mercy* of God, and “not the *argument*, or *notice*, inducing him *to be* “*merciful*.”---What then could it *possibly* be, “but “the *properest* and *wisest* way, in which he thought “he could *dispense* his mercy?”---“But how the “*wisest*?” Not surely with respect to *any influence* upon himself, whose mercy was *complete* and *immutable*; it could therefore *only* be on account of the *moral uses*

uses of it, or to promote the *important ends* of God's moral government. And the *great purposes* which are evidently *served*, by the express command of God to consider the *death* of Christ under the notion and character of a *sacrifice*, are those which follow.

First, that it might be a *standing memorial* of God's being *propitious*, and *inclined to pardon* the sins of men; and an enforcement of that fundamental principle of *all religion*, that *he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*: "A memorial co-inciding with the "almost *universal sentiment* and *practice* of the world " (among whom *sacrifices* were esteemed as an essential part of religion) and likely, upon that account, "to have a more *certain* and *powerful* influence."---
 SECONDLY, that it might be a *standing memorial*, likewise, of the *evil* and *demerit* of sin; and, consequently, a perpetual *incentive* to *humility* and *repentance*.-----
 And, THIRDLY, it seems to have been wisely appointed with this view likewise, viz. to supersede the *use* of all *future sacrifices*; which, extending even to *human sacrifices*, had been the most *depraved* and *unnatural* branch of *Heathen* superstition. And, therefore, that it might the better produce *this effect*, which was *worthy* the *care* of infinite wisdom and goodness, we are expressly informed, that Jesus Christ *hath* by one offering, *perfected* for ever *them that are sanctified*.

And, in the *LAST* place, "there is formed, by "this *constitution*, a beautiful *analogy* in a very considerable and important point, between the *settled* "methods of God's *natural providence*, and the *extra-* "ordinary *operations* of his *grace*;" which, perhaps, may justly be esteemed as one of the *principal reasons* of it.—By the *offence* of *Adam* in eating the forbidden fruit, the *Christian* revelation informs us, *death* was introduced into the world, and descended from *him* to *all his posterity*. Thus the Almighty maker of the world was pleased to *establish* the *order* and *course* of nature, with respect to mankind. And in this

view of the case, death to all the *race* of *Adam* must be regarded as a *misfortune* only, brought upon them by the *fault* of *another* (which frequently happens in innumerable other instances) and not as a *proper punishment* of a *crime* committed by *themselves*. But *this evil*, so far as it was *entailed* upon all men by a fix'd and unalterable law of *nature*, and was not the *consequence* of their own *voluntary* transgression, is (it may not perhaps be so proper to say, *entirely remedied*, as) *counterbalanc'd*, by *restoring* mankind, through Jesus Christ, to a possibility of obtaining *eternal life* --- An appointment, no more the *reward* of their own *personal* virtue and righteousness, than the original and universal law of death was, according to the scripture account of it, a *punishment* of their *personal* crimes. Here, then, there evidently appears a *correspondence* of design, and an admirable *harmony* in the divine conduct --- The *whole* most *wisely* and *equitably* proportion'd. ----- Here we see the *mercy* of God providing a *remedy* equally extensive with the *misfortune*, that, by his *just determination*, sin had occasion'd. And as the *first* constitution, with respect to the power of *death*, ought not to be esteemed as merely *capricious* and *arbitrary*, but was probably intended as an *awful testimony* of God's *displeasure* against sin; and as, with a view to this end, human nature was so *framed*, that the propagation of the *species* should also be the propagation of *mortality*, after it had *once* taken place: So the introduction of *life* by the *death* of Christ, considered as an *illustrious* instance of *goodness* and *compassion*, of *inflexible integrity* and *dutiful submission* to the Supreme Being, is a *bright* and *encouraging demonstration* of God's *delight* in eminent virtue, and of the *extraordinary honours* which he is disposed to confer upon it; and, consequently, a strong incentive to the *sublimest* acts of *piety* and *beneficence*. "So
 " that the same *general reason* runs through *both* the
 " parts; and the *whole* is admirably *adapted* to the
 " *ends* of moral government."

What I have now offer'd, I take to be the *proper explanation* of the following passages, in St. Paul's epistle to the *Romans*.---That *if, through the offence of one, many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace (which is by one man Jesus Christ) hath abounded unto many*-----That *as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life*.-----That *as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord*. And if the *possibility* of obtaining eternal life by *all*, and the *actual* attainment of it by the *faithful servants* of God, be the *appointed consequence* of Christ's *offering himself up to death*-----every one must easily see, that *his death* might be much more properly described as a *sacrifice*, than any *offerings of brute creatures*, which had *no such efficacy*; and the phrases (though after all in a great measure *figurative*) of our being *redeemed by his blood*, and *reconciled to God by the death of his son* (with others of a like import) must appear to have a *clear and very emphatical* meaning.

But to dismiss this topic, on which I have not time to enlarge-----The gospel has farther declared to us, that because our blessed Saviour *humbled himself, and [in pursuance of the command of the supreme God and Father of all] became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; therefore God also hath highly exalted him, hath committed to him all authority in heaven and in earth, and constituted him, under himself, the head over all things for the good of his church*; So that the *government* of God is now *mediatorially administered*, and his *goodness* *mediatorially dispensed*. And in the conclusion of the whole scene, Christ will still appear in his *regal* character to *judge* the world; according to the general tenor of that *wise constitution*, whereby *the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son*.---This is a
short

short summary of the *mediatorial scheme*, from its *first commencement* to its *final completion*; when the *fates* of all mankind being *judicially decided* and consequently the *ends* of the *mediation* entirely *accomplished*, the *kingdom* shall be *delivered up to God*, even the *Father*; that the *Son* also himself may be *subject unto him who put all things under him*-----And *God may be all in all*.

By this great and extensive scheme, the *wisest* and *best* beings in the universe are employed in offices becoming their dignity, and their exalted rank and character. God *himself* is represented as the original *contriver* and *author* of it, pursuing the dictates of his infallible wisdom, and prompted by his boundless goodness. The chief being *after him* (whose perfections of nature will admit of no *comparison*) is the person appointed to be the *mediator*. The holy spirit, as the *next* in rank and honour, acts as the *first minister* of this mediatorial government; having for his *assistants* the angels; who all unite in the glorious design of reducing mankind to the primitive paths of virtue, truth and *happiness*, and in strengthening, raising, and comforting the *heirs of salvation*. So that, by this means, there is formed as it were a *scale* of benevolence *from* the first source and fountain of goodness, *through* the various intermediate orders of superior spirits, quite *down* to mankind; who are taught, and strongly *incited*, by these examples, to practice condescension, disinterested kindness, and tender sympathy one towards another, and lenity and mercy even to inferior animals: That one actuating vigorous spirit of goodness and compassion may be *diffused* throughout the whole reasonable creation of God.---Nor is there any thing, in the scheme of *mediation* in general, but what is plainly *analogous* to the established system both of *nature* and *providence*. The world, according to the *first* plan fixed by its Almighty Sovereign, is in a great measure, and ever will be,

media-

mediatorially governed ; and *parents, guardians, civil rulers, friends, men in common to men*, in the necessary *interchanging* offices of human life, are, in most instances, the *intermediate instruments* of that good, which *originally* springs from the Divine bounty. The scheme of nature therefore being apparently a scheme of *mediation*, the idea of a mediator cannot be *in itself* absurd, unless the constitution of nature be wrong---And, in consequence, unless direct Atheism must take the place of *Christianity*.

I beg leave to conclude with giving a short account of what is, in my opinion, *the true gospel of Christ* ; of which the doctrine of his *mediation* is an essential and most important part. And the general substance of this divine institution is----*natural religion and virtue revived*, when the knowledge of them was in a manner erased from the minds of men, by vice and wild enthusiasm ; with the addition of two or three plain *positive institutions*, guarded in the strongest manner against *superstitious abuses*, and adapted to enforce the eternal laws of morality, and a most exact and scrupulous regard to every branch of substantial and useful goodness.----But, more particularly, the principles recommended by it are these : “ That there is *one God, the Father* and supreme Lord of all, who *created and governs* all things by *Jesus Christ*---That mankind are *accepted* with this infinite Being upon whom their happiness absolutely depends, through *the righteousness of faith*, co-inciding, in the final scope of it, with the general law of *sincerity* ; which, at the same time, that it condemns every instance of *wilful vice*, is condescending to the *involuntary infirmities* of human nature.---That the favour of God is extended to *all* mankind ; his forgiving mercy to *all* true penitents ; but dispensed in such a way, that reason could neither *discover*, nor can justly *arraign* ; an expedient wisely pitched upon to encourage *repentance* by the hope of *mercy*, to inspire sinful men, undeserving
of

of the divine favour, with constant sentiments of *humility*, and to extirpate *superstition*.---That the father of mankind is ever ready to *assist* them, in the pursuit of moral rectitude and happiness; that he will hereafter *judge the world in righteousness* (whom he has made necessarily *subject* to his government, and *accountable* for their behaviour) by *Jesus Christ*: And that when he allots to all impenitent offenders impartial retribution, in proportion to the various degrees of their guilt, he will munificently reward his faithful and obedient servants (from the immutable pleasure he takes in virtue, and to render it finally *triumphant* and *victorious* over “iniquity and vice) with immortal felicity and honour.” ---A scheme this, upon the whole that one would think every *considerate*, every *religious*, every truly *moral*, man must highly esteem and venerate: And all who heartily *believe* it, and allow it to have its natural and just *influence*, will *probably* be *happy* in peace and sublime joy of mind here, and, *infallibly*, in the everlasting favour of God hereafter.

DISCOURSE II.

Faith a reasonable condition of salvation.

[M O R R I S.]

JOHN iii. 36.

*He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life :
and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see
life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*

IN discoursing of unbelief I observed, that the goodness of God in creating mankind, and sending Jesus Christ to save them from their sins, may give us just reason to conclude, that he will shut none out of heaven for any thing, but what does in itself render them incapable of it ; or is the cause of their living in those vices, which must inevitably have this sad effect. And for the same reasons we may rest assured, that he will not make any thing the condition of our salvation by his Son, but what is necessary to prepare us for it, as all moral virtues are ; or at some times, and in some circumstances, is necessary to ingage us to the practice of that holiness, without which we cannot see the Lord. And with this view at least we may suppose, this faith is required, to which all the blessings of the world to come are promised in the text. He, who believeth, is said to have everlasting life, because he shall certainly possess it, if he perseveres. The sacred writers frequently speak
in

in this manner to denote the certainty of the event predicted, or the promise made. *Isaiah ix. 6. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.* But perhaps when the Baptist here uses the present tense, he may only intend, that he who believeth hath a right to eternal life; for sometimes the right to a possession is expressed by the word, which signifies the possession itself. And this may seem to be the meaning of Christ himself, *John v. 24. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.* But however this be, whether they speak of the right every true believer hath to eternal life, or of the certainty of his possessing it in case of perseverance, faith in Christ is plainly made a condition of our enjoying this inestimable blessing. The same condition of salvation was proposed to the Gentiles by his order. *Mark xvi. 15, 16. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.* Accordingly when they preached Jesus to them, they promised salvation by him to those only, who believed. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, said Paul and Silas to the jailer, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house, Acts xvi. 31.* But, that faith is made one condition of enjoying eternal blessedness to them, who have heard the gospel of Christ, is acknowledged on all hands. And if it should be asked, Why is so much stress laid on faith in the business of salvation? the reasonableness of this will, I hope, sufficiently appear, when I have explained from these words,

- I. The nature of that faith, to which eternal life is promised in the gospel.
 - II. The reasons for which this faith is required, and made one of the terms of salvation by Jesus Christ.
- Before

Before I enter upon these heads, I cannot but observe, that the state of those times, in which the blessed Jesus appeared, may direct us in forming a just notion of these things. The gospel was first preached to Jews and Gentiles, who had not only been trained up in other religions, but were then also very much corrupted in their judgment and manners. They had extremely degenerated from those laws of God, under which they lived. The Jews, tho' exact in observing their traditionary rites, omitted the weightier matters of the law, and freely gave themselves up to the worst of immoralities. The Gentiles did not only worship a multitude of idols, but were sunk into the lowest degree of ignorance and vice. They both therefore were called upon by the gospel to reform their sentiments and practice, which could not be done, unless they believed in Jesus Christ. And from hence we may understand,

I. The nature of that faith, to which eternal life is promised in the gospel. For,

1. It is supposed that those, to whom the gospel is preached, do not inconsiderately reject, but honestly inquire into the truth of the christian institution. Though it is ever so clearly proposed to them, and supported by the most rational evidences, they may either be so far influenced by their preconceived opinions, and their indulged customs, as to refuse to examine it; or may set themselves to examine it from a sincere desire to be informed of the will of God. Our blessed Lord did not require the Jews to believe in him implicitly, or to take things upon his word without inquiry; but exhorted them to search the scriptures, and to compare his doctrine and miracles with the predictions of the prophets, in order to judge, whether they were accomplished in him. John v. 39. *Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they, which testify of me.* And they

they who believed in him, were convinced by reflecting upon his doctrine and miracles. The Samaritans, who were inclined to have a good opinion of him, by what their neighbour said, when they heard him themselves, were fully persuaded, by the excellency of his doctrine, that he was the Messias. John iv. 41. *And many more believed because of his own word: And said unto the woman, Now we believe not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.* The goodness of his doctrine it was, which induced his disciples to believe in him. John vi. 68. *Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.* The officers themselves, who were sent to apprehend him, were so taken with his discourses, that they were inclined to believe in him, and returned without executing their orders against him. John vii. 45. 46. *Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man.* Nor were believers only convinced, that his doctrine was worthy of God in itself; but, by regarding his miracles with due attention, were also satisfied, that his commission was from God. John ii. 23. *Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed on his name, when they saw the miracles, which he did.* Nicodemus likewise came to Jesus by night, and said unto him Rabbi, *we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles, which thou doest, except God be with him,* ch. iii. 2. We read also that another time, *Many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these, which this man hath done?* ch. vii. 31. The faith therefore of them, who believed in him, was not an inconsiderate and rash credulity: but they examined his doctrine, and reflected maturely upon his miracles, before they believed. The faith likewise of them, whom he commended, was founded on a rational

nal conviction, as appears from every instance ; but I shall only at present allege that of the centurion. He reasoned with himself, that if he bid his servants go, and they went ; Jesus, who had so much power over diseases, could command the distemper to leave his servant, and it would depart from him, tho' he was at a great distance. The faith of the Bereans, recorded with honor in the scriptures, was the result of a diligent and impartial search after truth. *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so,* Acts xvii. 11. And among the Gentiles, they who believed were such, as were disposed to inquire into the reasonableness of the doctrine concerning eternal life, preached by the apostles ; and did not instantly reject it, because it was contrary to their former conceptions. For this is the sense of those words of St. Luke in the Acts : *And as many as were ordained to eternal life, believed,* ch. xiii. 48.

2. Moreover it is supposed, that when they are convinced of the truth of Christianity by attending to the evidences of it, they assent to it with all their hearts and affections. Nothing is more certain than this, that men do not always follow the light of their understanding, and act according to the conviction of their consciences. As in matters of practice, they may act inconsiderately, or make use of that power, which they have to forbear acting, till they are satisfied of the lawfulness of a thing ; and when they plainly see their duty, may be overpowered by custom, or led by interest to act contrary to their knowledge : so likewise in matters of faith, when truth is proposed to them, they may either judge rashly through prejudice, inadvertency, and other causes, or may suspend their judgment till they have well considered ; and even when they perceive on which side the truth lies, they may resist and stifle their convictions. As they may fairly inquire, or obstinately refuse to ex-

mine; so may they either heartily imbrace the truth, when they perceive it, or act contrary to their inward persuasion from a base regard to their present interest, and conveniency. There were some in the apostolical times, who resisted their convictions, till they wore off, as well as others, who wilfully neglected and opposed the means of information. They did not openly assent to the truth, when they were inwardly convinced, but for the love of ease, riches, and honor, turned their thoughts from it, till their convictions were lost, and their understanding darkened. The christian religion does not only contain a body of divine truths; as, that there is but one God, and one Lord Jesus Christ; that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a future state of rewards and punishments: but also prescribes a body of divine laws for the government of our actions towards ourselves, our neighbour, and our Creator. And therefore some men, though they plainly perceived the truth, yet would not profess it, because they would not resolve to leave their sinful customs, and live according to the precepts of Christ. When eternal life therefore is promised to believing, it is supposed that they, who perceive the truth of Christianity, do not resist and stifle their convictions from bad motives, but are pleased when they discern it, and receive it with all their affections. When the Eunuch desired to be baptized, *Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayst*, Acts viii. 37. And St. Paul says that, *With the heart man believeth unto righteousness*. True faith therefore implies a sincere assent and love to the truth, as well as the illumination of the understanding, and conviction of the judgment.

3. True faith does not only include an hearty assent to the truth of the christian institution upon reasonable grounds, but also an open profession of it before men. That Jesus Christ requires all, who believe in him, to make a public profession of his religion, as a proper evidence of their faith, and a necessary

necessary means to spread and preserve it in the world for the good of mankind, is certain from his appointing two solemn rites, by which it is manifested, baptism and the Lord's supper. By baptism we solemnly declare our belief in Jesus Christ, and oblige ourselves to live according to his laws. *For as many of you, says St. Paul to the Galatians, as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ,* ch. iii. 27. By being baptized in his name they professed, that he was their only lawgiver; and publickly declared, that they formed their judgment, and governed their actions by his doctrines and laws, and not by the institution of Moses. That profession of faith in Jesus Christ, which is made at baptism, is statedly renewed at the Lord's supper. And therefore the same apostle tells the Corinthians, *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come,* 1 Epist. xi. 26. And that a sincere assent of the mind cannot be sufficiently demonstrated without an open profession, is plain from his words in another place: *For with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation,* Rom. x. 10. Now an open profession of Christ could not be made in that, and the next succeeding times, without a sincere love to truth, and a deliberate resolution to suffer for a good conscience. For all, who would then live godly in Jesus Christ, must suffer persecution; being exposed to divers reproaches and calumnies, to various losses and disappointments, to many cruel and painful sufferings, and even to several violent and ignominious deaths. Thus to renounce the advantages and honors of this life, to surmount the fear of all present evils, what could it be, but the effect of a firm and unshaken trust in God, as well as of a brave contempt of the present world? Believers, who could so contentedly deny themselves all the pleasures, emoluments, and honors, which they might have enjoyed here, and so courageously bear the greatest hardships, must stedfastly rely on the truth of all the promises of God in the Gospel; that if they acted according

to their light, and obeyed the truth from their hearts, his grace would never be wanting to them, but they should be firmly supported here with inward consolations, and hereafter gloriously rewarded with eternal rest. By their faith therefore they gained a complete victory over this world, being influenced by it to despise all the fading glories of it in comparison of their duty, and to suffer cheerfully in hope of a blessed resurrection. They could even rejoice in those tribulations they suffered for their holy profession. *And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the holy Ghost,* 1 Thess. i. 6. And if we impartially consider the state of the first believers in Christ, we shall be convinced, that they far surpassed the most renowned heroes in the firmness of their resolution, their fearless courage in facing the most terrifying evils, and their invincible patience in bearing the greatest cruelties.

4. Furthermore that faith, which has the promise of eternal life, is not only supposed to proceed from a rational conviction, and to be manifested by an open profession; but also to have a proper and suitable effect upon the lives of men. In them, who first believed, it produced a godly sorrow for their past iniquities, and led them to forsake their evil ways. Nothing indeed could be more effectual to awaken men to consideration, and engage them to repentance, than the denunciation in the gospel against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, together with the gracious promise of pardon made to all true penitents, whatsoever their past transgressions had been. When they believed the threats of God, and saw the tendency of sin to make them miserable hereafter, they reformed their sinful courses in hope of that forgiveness and salvation, which was offered to them in Jesus Christ. Men were not therefore only exhorted to believe, but to repent also in consequence of their believing. Mark i. 14. 15. *Now after that John was*

was put in prison Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.* And at another time he said, *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me, should not abide in darkness,* John xii. 46. The Gentiles, by believing in Jesus, were turned from their foolish Idolatries, and purified from their vitious customs; as St. Peter said, *God put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith,* Acts xv. 9. Another effect of this faith was a sincere obedience to all the commandments of Christ, to which they solemnly obliged themselves, who were baptized in his name. True faith in Christ is always described by its effects, and supposed to be the principle of a holy life. Gal. v. 6. *For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.* And St. Paul says to Timothy, 1 Epist. i. 5. *Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.* That the faith, to which eternal life is promised, includes obedience, is plain, because this is the very end, for which it is required. Rom. i. 5. *By whom we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for his name.* To the same purpose are these words in the close of this epistle, ch. xvi. 26. *But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.* The sense of both which places plainly is, that the gracious purpose of God to save the Gentiles, as well as the Jews by Jesus Christ, was declared by the preaching of the gospel to all nations, that they might believe in him, and be engaged by their faith to obey his holy institution. The remission of sins therefore, and eternal life are not promised to such a feeble assent to the truth of Christianity, as produces no good effects, and answers not the end of believing. And this is very plain also from

the terms of salvation by Jesus Christ, which are not to be collected from some places only, but from the whole tenor of the new Testament. Those places, in which a good life in general, or the several virtues thereof are required, shew us what effect our faith must have, in order to give us a right to the pardon of sin, and the joys of the world to come. Our Lord pronounces, *Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God*, Matt. v. 8. And the author of the epistle to the Hebrews directs us to *Follow peace with all men and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*, ch. xii. 14. When remission of sins is promised to them, who believe, Acts x. 43 ; it is to be explained by those places, in which they are also commanded to repent and be converted, Acts v. 19. When St. Paul says, Acts 13. 39. *And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses* ; his words are to be expounded by those of St. James, ch. ii. 21—24. *Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar ? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect ? And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness : and he was called the friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only : not by believing in Christ only, but by such a faith, as produces a sincere conformity to his precepts. They, who come not up to these terms, will be rejected, notwithstanding their belief and profession of christianity. For Christ says, Matt. vii. 21. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven.* These, who shall not enter into heaven, did not want faith, for they called Jesus Lord ; but they were unfruitful in the christian profession, and on this account were rejected, as persons unfit for heaven. And it is really wonderful, that any Christians can so far forget these and many other places*

places in their Bible, as to lay so much stress on faith, as even to speak meanly of those good works, which God has ordained, that we should walk in them, and without which, faith is dead and unprofitable. James ii. 19. *Thou believest that there is one God; thou dost well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?* Wheresoever therefore justification and eternal life are promised to them, who believe; in such places faith includes the genuine effects of it, as the fear and love of God are considered as principles of obedience, when his favor is promised to them. We may say of faith, what Christ and St. John speak of love. *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that believeth in me,* John xiv. 21. *For this is faith in Jesus Christ, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous,* 1 John v. 3. For this reason faith sometimes stands for the whole christian religion; as in those places, where St. Paul disputes against the Jews concerning the way of salvation in his epistles to the Romans, and Galatians. To give one instance only from the former of these epistles he says, ch. iii. 28. *Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.* In which words he maintains against the Judaizers, that the Christian religion is a sufficient means of salvation without the ceremonial law. He, who so effectually believes in Jesus Christ, as to live according to his institution, shall be accepted with God, tho' he observe not the law of Moses. From the whole it is clear, that faith in Jesus Christ is such a firm persuasion concerning the truth of his religion, as is founded on a reasonable evidence, and is manifested by an open profession, and a holy life. As that unbelief, for which men will be condemned, includes a wilful disobedience to the gospel: so that faith, which gives men a right to pardon and salvation, comprehends a sincere obedience to the precepts of Christ, as a natural effect of a sincere assent to the truth of his doctrine. Having

thus explained the nature of that faith, to which eternal life is promised, I come to shew,

II. The reasons, for which this faith is required, and made one condition of salvation by Christ. And,

I. Faith considered in this view is a moral virtue, commendable in itself, and fit to be rewarded. For as almighty God, who has brought us into being, and placed us here in a state of probation for another world, has indowed us with reason, that we may be capable of discerning between notions true and false, and between actions good and evil; so it must be his will, that we should make a good use of our rational faculties, and take proper care to furnish our minds with useful knowledge; that we should be sincere lovers of truth, and endeavour to form a right judgment in those things, which concern our true and everlasting happiness. It cannot be in itself an indifferent thing, what notions we entertain in matters of religion; for as they are true or false, they must have a very different effect upon our conduct and happiness. Those, which are true, can only, in their own tendency, lead us to actions, which are good, and necessary to our happiness; whereas those, which are false, may lead us to actions, which are evil, and inconsistent with our good. This might be illustrated and confirmed by divers instances; but as time will not permit, I shall only observe, that as God is a lover of truth and righteousness, and really desires, that all men should be virtuous and happy; so he will undoubtedly be displeased with them, who have no regard to truth, nor just concern for their own real happiness; but will approve them, who take care to form a true judgment of things, and are mindful of their chiefest good. To have no love to truth, to be unconcerned about our notions and happiness is morally evil, because we make not that use of our intellectual powers, which we ought to make, and which God requires. On the other hand, it must be one part of virtue to preserve in ourselves a sincere love to truth, and to form a right
judgment

judgment in matters of faith and practice. And in judging what we should believe, we ought to regard the proper evidences of truth, and should not be swayed by such things, as are so far from being certain marks of it, that they may lead us into the worst of mistakes. And when persons have more regard to truth, than to prevailing customs, and present interest; when they are not governed by prejudice, but by evidence; and setting themselves to inquire after true religion, imbrace that, which appears so to them, upon the best inquiry they can make, they act as becomes reasonable beings, and do what is really virtuous. When Christ therefore, and his apostles, in the name of God, required the Jews to leave their traditions, the Gentiles their idolatry, both of them to amend their lives, to worship the one living and true God, and to govern themselves in all things according to his institution; and declared, that as they obeyed, or disobeyed this call, they should be punished with everlasting destruction, or blessed with eternal happiness in the world to come; and did such miracles before their faces, as were evident acts of divine power, not only to awaken their attention to those excellent reasonings they used, but also with a professed design to prove their mission from God, who could think himself unconcerned in this affair? What man could neglect to consider their doctrine, and persist in his former opinions and vices, without a criminal disregard to truth, and manifest neglect of his own welfare? And if the love of vice, and a mean regard to present things made him neglect those evidences, which were laid before him; his fault was so much the greater and more aggravated. On the other hand, they acted the part of reasonable beings, of wise and good men, who did not reject the christian doctrine without examination; but having impartially considered it, notwithstanding all former prejudices, and being convinced of its truth, honestly followed the light of their consciences, and undauntedly professed the name of Jesus Christ

Christ at all hazards. Tho' an implicit faith is of no worth, yet theirs, which proceeded from a right use of the understanding, and influenced their wills to choose what appeared right to them, was truly virtuous. However education might bias them against the christian religion, or interest might tempt them to neglect it; yet they wisely determined to consider, and resolved to profess it upon due conviction, which was certainly an argument of a noble spirit, an action in itself good and praiseworthy. This faith therefore, which the gospel requires, is not a mere act of the understanding; but proceeds from a good use of the rational faculties, and a right determination of the will, and is therefore a moral virtue, good in itself, and fit to be rewarded. And I appeal to every man, whether it is not meet, that rational beings should make a good use of their understanding, in order to obtain the favor of the supreme intelligent Mind; and to live for ever with him in that blessed place, in which there is perfect knowledge to reward their love and search of truth, as well as perfect rectitude and felicity to reward their righteous actions and patient sufferings. Besides,

2. As this faith is good and rewardable in itself, considered as resulting from a moral use of the understanding and judgment; so it is necessary to that obedience, without which we cannot be saved. Tho' it is an excellent virtue in a reasonable creature, yet it is not of itself sufficient for our salvation; as indeed no particular virtue is, unless it be attended with the practice of other virtues. Faith is not required for its own sake alone, but for the good effects it is necessary to produce. The design of Jesus Christ was to reform the world from that idolatry and wickedness, which universally prevailed; to teach men the knowledge and worship of the true God, and to engage them to the practice of all virtue upon the noblest principles of action. But how could this end be obtained without faith? If men believed not in the name of Christ, they would not obey his institution; but faith in him would

would lead them to keep his commandments. It was necessary therefore to answer the end of his coming, and was the first step to that reformation, which he intended to make. And since it is not required as an assent to the truth only, but as an inward principle of obedience, without which, no regard to the authority of Jesus could be expected; is it not fit to make this one condition of our salvation, as well as that pure and spiritual worship of the living God, that universal benevolence and righteousness towards men, in a word, that conformity to the example and precepts of Christ, which the gospel requires, and which are its genuine effects? And if we consider the state both of Jews and Gentiles, when the blessed Jesus appeared, such a faith, as was founded upon reasonable evidence, and produced obedience to his laws, was absolutely necessary to their salvation. While they lived in those sins, which they were commanded to forsake, they were not capable of salvation; for which reason, they who believed not, are called children of disobedience, on whom the wrath of God cometh, Eph. v. 6. The ambition, covetousness, oppression, hypocrisy, and other vices of the unbelieving Jews tended to put them out of the favor of God; nor less unhappy was the effect of those abominable idolatries, and vitious customs, in which the Gentiles lived. I say not, that those Jews, who sincerely served God according to the law of Moses, or that those Gentiles, who obeyed the law of God written in their hearts, could not be acceptable to him here, and happy in the future state; but that the generality of them lived in such sins, as would exclude them from heaven; and therefore such a belief in Jesus Christ, as would purify them from these sins, was necessary to their salvation. On the other hand, those virtues, which they were called to practise by the gospel; that fear and love and worship of God; that charity and justice towards men; that purity, temperance, and contentment, which our holy religion enjoins, were necessary to their present and fu-

ture happiness, to prepare them for heaven, as well as to give them inward peace, and to make them respected and useful here. If it be necessary for men to forsake their sins, and to live well, that belief in Jesus, which produces these effects, must be necessary likewise. True faith, as it is the principle of a holy life, is, in the nature of things, necessary to our salvation; and for this reason is so much insisted on, and so indispensably required. All sinners must from some principle or other reform their manners, and live righteously, in order to obtain the favor of God. Before the coming of Christ how could men be acceptable to God, if from a sincere belief in him, as the great Creator and supreme Judge of the world, they did not abstain from sin and walk in righteousness of life? Justly therefore has the author of the epistle to the Hebrews observed the necessity of faith, when he says, *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*, Heb. xi. 6. When therefore the greatest part of the world had departed from this first principle of true religion, and were enslaved to all manner of wickedness; and God was graciously pleased to send his Son Jesus Christ to reveal his will to men, and to die for their sins; to use the most proper methods to recover them from that miserable state to the knowledge, belief and worship of himself, and to the practice of virtue; how was it possible to please him without faith in Jesus Christ? Faith in Christ therefore is required, because it is a necessary principle of obedience to the will of God revealed in the gospel, and consequently fit to be made the condition of our admittance into his favor, and advancement to eternal life and glory. And if this be the nature of that faith, which the gospel requires, and these the reasons, why it is made a condition of our salvation by Jesus Christ, which I have explained; we may perceive,

1. That no objection can be reasonably offered against

against the christian religion on this account. Some unbelievers have vainly attempted to decry it for requiring faith, and promising forgiveness to the worst of sinners, if they would believe in Jesus Christ. If we were to judge by the discourses of these men, we might think that faith and believing were words never used by any persons, except Christians; and that faith in Jesus was a groundless credulity, such an empty assent to the truth of his doctrine, as produced no valuable effects. But what is faith, properly speaking, but an assent to the truth of a proposition upon such evidence, as the nature of it admits? Do not our Deists themselves believe the existence of God, and the certainty of a future state on proper evidence? Do they not believe a great many other things upon such evidence, as they are capable of? When therefore Jesus came, and revealed to the world the true God, and did not only teach the most important truths, but likewise gave forth the most excellent precepts for holy living, was it not reasonable to require belief in his doctrine, that men might be from thence induced to repent of their sins, and to live in subjection to his laws? The practice of holiness is the end of believing. And it is a gross and dishonest misrepresentation of our blessed Lord, to suppose, that he promises forgiveness of sins, and life eternal to faith alone. He promises these blessings to them only, who reform their lives, and keep his commandments. If he had promised them to such, as would profess his religion, however they lived, there would have been room to find fault; but it is certain, that belief in him is required as the means of reformation, and that a good life is no less strictly required than faith. This objection therefore made by some unbelievers betrays great ignorance, or great malice; and an impartial man needs only open the new Testament, in order to be convinced, that it is false and groundless.

2. The christian religion gives no countenance to that implicit faith, which the Church of Rome demands.

mands. She sets up for infallibility, and expects that men should receive all her dictates as true, without examination. Her members must not understand the reason of their faith, but blindly believe as the church believes. But let her be as infallible, as she can desire to be thought; why should men shut their eyes in order to follow her guidance? Surely, if she is infallible indeed, she can give them such reasons, as will convince their judgment, and lead them after her with their eyes open. But what authority has she from scripture to require this blind, implicit faith and obedience? She cannot certainly have the face to pretend to greater infallibility, than Christ and his apostles; and yet they were so far from commanding men implicitly to believe in their words, that they exhorted them to search the scriptures, and to examine whether their doctrines were true. *Search the scriptures*, says Christ himself to the Jews, *For in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me*, John v. 39. St Paul exhorts the Thessalonians, *Prove all things: hold fast that which is good*, 1 Epist. v. 21. And all Christians are directed by St. Peter; *And be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear*. The faith therefore, which the church of Rome demands, is mere credulity, without any reasonable conviction, and consequently has no virtue in it. Nor does she oblige men to believe her doctrines implicitly, because she can give them sufficient proofs of her infallibility; but because she is conscious to herself, that she has shamefully departed from the scriptures, and dreads a fair inquiry.

3. If the end of faith be the practice of virtue, how unreasonable and absurd is it for Christians to persecute one another for their different opinions? We are to demonstrate the sincerity of our faith by the exercise of charity. But all the methods of persecution, whether they consist in depriving men of their just rights and privileges, or inflicting such evils upon them, as their

their persecutors have it in their power to inflict, are directly contrary to that love and goodness, by which Christ would have us shew ourselves to be his disciples; and therefore cannot be the fruits of true faith, but spring from pride, envy, covetousness, or some other worldly and unchristian principle. And what is that faith, which men would promote by the sly arts of defamation, or the more open methods of oppression and cruelty? It is only an assent to those particular doctrines, which they hold, and some of which perhaps have no foundation in the word of God. But that faith, which is the condition of our salvation by Jesus Christ, is such a firm persuasion concerning the truth of his religion in general, as inclines us to the practice of all christian virtues, particularly those of mutual forbearance and love. He therefore, who persecutes his brother, is void of true faith, and will be treated by Christ at the day of judgment, as an hypocrite and unbeliever, Matt. xxiv. 51.

4. If faith in Jesus Christ be such an effectual persuasion of mind concerning the truth of his religion, as produces a holy life; we should take care, that we are not imposed upon by any wrong definitions of faith, and imagine we savingly believe, when we do not. Many Christians seem not well to consider, why faith is so much insisted upon in the discourses of Christ and his apostles; and by mistaking this have been led to think, that faith alone is sufficient to their justification; which has been the cause of very dangerous opinions, and very hot disputes. They should remember, that the gospel was first preached both to Jews and Gentiles, when they had strangely departed from true religion, and lived in all manner of wickedness; and therefore faith in Jesus Christ was required, not because it is alone sufficient, but that it might engage believers to forsake their sins and to regulate their lives according to his example and precepts. And indeed in preaching to them, who already believe in Jesus Christ, our great work is to persuade them to

manifest the sincerity of their faith by a suitable life, and to convince them, that they cannot be saved by believing only, but must lead holy lives. In this we have the practice of the apostles for our imitation, who in those epistles, which they sent to believers, exhort them to walk worthy of their high vocation; and shew them the impossibility of being saved by Jesus Christ, unless they keep his commandments. It might be proved by a great variety of passages in the holy scriptures, that one principal end of the coming of Christ, and even of that sacrifice, which he offered for us upon the cross, was to deliver us from our iniquities, and to make us a peculiar people zealous of good works; that, forsaking our sins, we may obtain the forgiveness of them, and through obedience to his commands may be prepared for a state of perfect purity and happiness above. And it has been the endeavour of the great enemy of mankind to defeat this glorious design, by corrupting the notions of Christians, and weakening those motives to obedience, which are set before them in the gospel; and those false definitions of faith, which have prevailed in the world, have not a little contributed to favor his malicious views. It has been defined, A rolling ourselves on Christ, A recumbency on his merits, A looking to him for salvation. But certainly as these are not true definitions of faith, so they may be attended with very unhappy consequences. For may not even wicked men think they roll themselves on Jesus Christ, and look to him for salvation, and from thence imagine they are in a good state; tho' they really are in a bad state, because they do not obey his commandments? Whereas, if faith was defined to be such an assent to the truth of the christian religion, such a belief in Jesus, as the true Messiah and only Saviour of the world, as produces a sincere obedience to all his commands, no man, who does not lead a christian life, could presume, that he was in a state of salvation; but would see the necessity of forsaking his sins, and living a better life,

in order to obtain pardon of God, and eternal salvation, through Jesus Christ the only mediator between God and man. But those false and imperfect definitions, it may be justly feared, have led some men to rely on what Christ has done for them; without shewing due regard to his commands; and even caused them to speak contemptuously of those good works, which he requires us to practise, and without which, it is declared, our faith will be ineffectual. For if we consult the scriptures, and attentively consider the descriptions of true faith, which are there given us, we shall find; that it is not a reliance on the merits of Christ only; but such a firm persuasion of the truth of his religion, as purifies us from all wilful sin, and effectually engages us to thankfulness, love and obedience. And if we have this faith indeed, we shall not deceive ourselves with vain hopes of being saved by his death, while we live in contradiction to his will. Be persuaded therefore to *add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, 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 you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. — For so an entrance shall be ministred unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Which God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

DISCOURSE III.

Holiness the design of the gospel.

[MORRIS.]

TITUS ii. 11, 12.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

IN the first verse of this chapter, St. Paul directs Titus to *speake the things, which become sound doctrine*; which things are, *That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience*: and that other Christians perform those duties, which belong to their age, relations, and circumstances, as appears from the following verses. The reason he gives, why Titus should so diligently preach these things, is rendered in the text. The grace of God, which teaches us to renounce our sins, obliges us likewise to the practice of these duties. Grace properly signifies favour, and in the writings of the apostles expresses the free, unmerited goodness of God in sending his only begotten Son Jesus Christ to declare his will, and to redeem us from our iniquities by his own death. Sometimes the effects of this wonderful kindness of God, as the extraordinary gifts of the holy Ghost, and those special assistances, which were given

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to pious men in uncommon trials, are called grace. Rom. xii. 6. *Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophesy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.* 2 Cor. xii. 9. *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.* Moreover the gospel itself, in which the great mercy of God in sending Jesus Christ is manifested to us, is sometimes expressed by the word grace. Col. i. 6. *Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.* And in this sense, I conceive, it may be understood in our text. When he says, the gospel, or, if you please, the grace of God manifested in the gospel, hath appeared to all men, he alludes to the appearance of heavenly bodies, which shine with great brightness and glory. Our blessed Lord is compared to a light shining in darkness, John i. 5; and the apostles are said by Christ to be *the light of the world*, Matt. v. 14. These words, *The grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men*, seemed to our translators ambiguous in the original. For tho' they say in the text, *The grace of God hath appeared to all men*; according to which sense, they may be understood of the gospel's being preached not only to Jews, and profelytes, but to all the nations of the world known at that time, Rom. x. 18. *But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*: yet they have given a different turn to the words in their marginal reading, which is; *The grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared.* And as the original will admit of this sense *, so it is certainly agreeable to other scriptures, and to the gracious purpose of God, which is well expressed by St. Paul,

* In Xenophon we meet with *σωτηριώτερον αὐτοῖς*, more beneficial to them. Memorabil. Lib. iii. p. 765. Ed. Paris. MDCXXXV. The same author speaking of an horse, which he has described, says, he is *σωτηριώτατος τῷ ἀμβάτην*, most safe to the rider, or most for the safety of the rider. De re equest. p. 937. Ed. ejusd.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour : who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth, 1 Tim. ii. 3. This grace of God, which offers salvation to all men, does not disengage Christians from any obligations they are under to live well ; but teaches us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. These last words are a brief summary of the whole christian practice. For sobriety consists in the right government of our natural appetites and passions ; and includes therefore humility, temperance, contentment, chastity, self-denial, and all those virtues, which more immediately concern ourselves. Righteousness comprehends all the duties, which we owe to our neighbours, as benevolence, mercy, charity, affability, forbearance, forgiveness, candor, justice, veracity ; and directs us in all things to give them the same treatment, which we reasonably expect from their hands, and to act according to the relation there is between us and them. Godliness consists in that high veneration, and those just conceptions we should entertain of the supreme Being, in prayer and thanksgiving, in loving and fearing him above all, in putting our trust in him, and humbly submitting to his will in all events. My design is not to explain distinctly, and at large, the several duties comprehended in these few words, but to consider the main point contained in them : which is, that the great end of the christian religion, or of the grace of God manifested to us in the gospel, is to make us holy. To explain this fully would require several discourses, but at present I shall only prove in a general way,

I. That it is the design of the christian religion, or the grace of God manifested to us in the gospel, to make us holy.

II. That

- II. That it is admirably fitted to answer this great and good end.
- III. I shall conclude with some inferences, which will arise from this subject.

I. The design of the christian religion, or the grace of God manifested to us in the gospel, is to make us holy.

This is declared to be one end, for which the blessed Jesus came into the world. When sin was once introduced by the transgression of our first parents, it increased so fast, that the knowledge of the true God, and of that rational service, which he required, was soon lost. And when men had departed from the true God, all manner of vice more and more abounded. The heathen were sunk so low in ignorance and vice, before the blessed Jesus came, that they could not recover the knowledge of the truth in the most important concerns of religion, nor reform their corruptions in worship and practice by any means. The philosophers, who had better notions in some things than the vulgar, amused themselves with fine speculations; but made few attempts to reform their country, and those of little or no efficacy. They were born down by the torrent of evil customs, and supported the idolatry of the times by their own example. Their notions of God and another world, were neither clear nor certain; so that they could not sufficiently support them under that ill usage, which they might bring upon themselves by attempting a reformation. And tho' the Jews had the law of God, yet the Scribes and Pharisees, who should have been teachers and examples to others, were the great corrupters of the law; they were very nice in the observation of the ceremonial part, but omitted the weightier matters, judgment, mercy, and truth: insomuch that true piety was almost banished from this people, and wickedness generally

rally prevailed and triumphed. At this time, when the whole world lay in wickedness, and there was no apparent hopes of any reformation, God was graciously pleased to send his own Son; and for what end can we suppose he sent him, but to teach men the knowledge and practice of true religion? 1 John iii. 8. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* Acts iii. 26. *Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

This end he always prosecuted in the whole course of his ministry by his private and public discourses. He faithfully reprov'd men of every rank for their sins, and exhorted them all to repentance. In his excellent Sermon upon the mount, he has taught us the most pure and sublime morality, void of all ostentation, and influenced by the noblest principles of action. He took every occasion to teach men the practice of virtue, and to inculcate the necessity of obedience to the will of God in all respects. When it was told him, that his mother and brethren sought for him, he said, *Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother,* Mark iii. 35. When a certain woman said, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast suck'd:* he answered, *Yea rather blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it,* Luke xi. 28. When some told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, he said, *Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,* Luke xiii. 3. When Martha entertained him at her house, and complained of her sister Mary for leaving all the care of providing to her, that she might attend his discourses; he took this occasion to shew, that religion was the most important affair of life, and commended her for choosing this good part, Luke x. 42. At another time, when his disciples asked him, *Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?* he shew'd them the necessity of mortifying their pride and ambition,

ambition, and becoming humble, as little children, Matt. xviii. 1. In many other discourses, he shews us the necessity of mortifying covetousness and all inordinate lusts ; of improving all our abilities in doing good, and living according to our holy profession, which is the design of those beautiful parables of the talents and the virgins. He did not therefore teach men, that they were under no obligations to keep the law of God, because he would make satisfaction for them : but inculcated the necessity of repentance, and a holy life, in order to obtain the pardon of their sins, and to become heirs of eternal life.

His own conversation was answerable to his discourses, and tended to promote a sincere regard to the will of God. He set a most perfect example of all those virtues, which are summarily comprehended in the words of the text. By that perfect command, he exercised over his natural appetites, by his great humility, notwithstanding all his divine abilities, by his contentment in the lowest circumstances of life, by that self-denial, courage and patience, which he manifested in the greatest dangers and the most afflicted condition, he has taught us the practice of sobriety. By his benevolence towards all men, and his compassion towards the miserable ; by his affability to those, who came to him, and his going about doing good ; by his justice to the persons, characters and estates of men, several instances of which occur in his life ; by his speaking the truth, when he knew it must cost him his life ; by his candour in putting the most favourable construction on the actions of his disciples, and kindly reproving them when they had done amiss ; by his praying for his most inveterate enemies, when they were doing him the greatest mischief, he has shewn us the complete practice of righteousness. And as to godliness, his profound adoration of the Father, his many acts of prayer and thanksgiving, his love to him and zeal for his glory, his firm hope and trust in him in the most trying circumstances, his intire re-

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signation and submission to his will in all events; clearly teach us, wherein the exercise of it consists. He was the most perfect pattern of all private, social, and divine virtues, which ever appeared in the world; and has therefore by his spotless life shewn us the practice and necessity of holiness; that we ought to walk even as he walked, and not vainly hope to enter into his glory without imitating his pure and heavenly conversation, according to our several abilities. He says therefore, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.* And, *If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love: even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love,* John xv. 10.

All the doctrines and precepts of our blessed Lord have a tendency to promote holiness, and were undoubtedly given forth by him with a design to make men truly virtuous. What can more directly tend to promote a holy life than those notions of God, which we have learned from his religion? We believe in one God, who is a most pure and immense spirit; who is perfectly holy, as well as infinitely good; who views all our thoughts and actions, and is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity with delight. As God therefore, who hath called us, is holy, so ought we to be holy in all manner of conversation. The notions, which the Gentiles entertained of their deities, might embolden them in vice; but our belief in God tends to restrain us from sin, and engage us to the sincere practice of all virtue. No doctrine of our holy religion is merely speculative, but is designed to beget in us a holy disposition, and to lead us to a regular practice. In particular the doctrine of the resurrection and the future judgment teach us to keep our bodies undefiled, and to be upright in our whole conduct. For which reason St. Paul says, that because he had hope towards God; *That there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just, and unjust,* he therefore exercised himself *to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men,* Acts xxiv.

15, 16. And as for the precepts of Christ, there is not one of them, but what forbids some sin, or commands either the practice of some particular virtue, or substantial piety in general. This is so obvious to every one, that I need not insist on particular instances. And what can be the design of such holy doctrines and laws, but to make all those, who believe in him sincerely holy? Such excellent precepts surely were not given us to improve our knowledge only, but likewise to direct our practice. He gives no encouragement to any man to hope for salvation by him, unless he observes his laws in the general course of his life. For he declares, *Not every one, that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven,* Matt. vii. 21.

But from the incarnation, the discourses, the example, the doctrines and laws of Christ, let us proceed to consider what was the end of his dying for us; whether he offered himself as a sacrifice for us upon the cross, that he might make atonement for our sins only; or whether it was not his view also to deliver us from the power of sin, and to make us holy. He must certainly design to purify us from sin, because this is absolutely necessary to remission. The guilt of sin, or obnoxiousness to punishment, is contracted by the violation of the divine law; and we cannot therefore be acquitted from it, but must increase our guilt, while we continue in sin. He must therefore deliver us from sin, before we can possibly be forgiven; and make us holy in order to our acceptance with God. And as this appears to be necessary from the nature of things, so if we will be determined by the scriptures, it is there declared to be one end of his dying in our stead. Titus ii. 14. *Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* His redeeming us from all iniquity is to be understood of his

his setting us at liberty from the dominion of sin, as plainly appears from the parallel words of St. Peter, 1 Epist. i. 18 : *Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers ; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.* This end of Christ's death is declared by the same apostle, ch. ii. 24. *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness.* To the same purpose are the words of St. Paul, Gal. i. 4. *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.* His intention therefore in dying for us was to recover us from the power of sin, and to ingage us to walk in newness of life. And his death indeed, considered as a sacrifice for sin, is most wisely adapted to answer this end ; because it gives us the greatest encouragement to hope for mercy, if we truly repent : and at the same time shews us the utter impossibility of obtaining forgiveness, while we continue in a state of disobedience. For if we could be accepted with God in a state of sin, why did his blessed Son suffer the ignominious death of the cross, that he might save us from our sins ? I cannot now more largely shew what an excellent means of turning us from sin to God the death of Christ is, how many ingaging motives to reformation and obedience it contains ; but it is material to observe, that he did not only suffer death to deliver us from our sins ; but also to complete that example of suffering virtues, which he had set us in the whole course of his humiliation. St. Peter therefore says, *For even hereunto were ye called : because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.* And if these were his ends in offering his life for us, is it not a great, a dangerous mistake for any persons to imagine, that they are not in duty bound to keep the law of God, because Christ made satisfaction

satisfaction for them? Is this reasonable? Is it not highly absurd? Is it not impossible? For if our creation, if every other instance of divine goodness lays us under an obligation to gratitude, love, and obedience, the amazing love of God to mankind displayed in the death of Christ, the many great and most desirable blessings, which are conferred upon us in him, cannot possibly diminish and cancel the obligations we are under to obey the law of God, but must confirm and increase them. Thus St. Paul argues, *That he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him, which died for them, and rose again*, 2 Cor. v. 15. *For ye are bought with a price*, says the apostle in another place: *therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*, 1 Epist. vi. 20. In whatsoever view therefore we consider the death of Christ, his design was to make us personally holy, as the only means of our recovering the favour of God, and being prepared for a state of eternal blessedness hereafter. And for this end he arose again and ascended into heaven, that by sending down the gifts of the holy Ghost, he might make the ministry of the apostles successful in turning men from idols to God, and from sin to the practice of holiness. He said therefore, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*, John xii. 32. Tho' the Jews crucified him, yet when he was risen again, he would by the mighty works done in his name propagate his doctrine through the whole world, and ingage men to obey his institution. His resurrection from the grave, and ascension into heaven, should induce us to moderate our affections towards present things, and to set them chiefly upon things above. Col. iii. 1. *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

If we farther proceed to consider the sanctions of his religion, the rewards which are annexed to the observation of his laws, and the punishments, which

are denounced against the violation of them, we shall perceive, that their end likewise is to restrain us from sin, and to make us truly righteous. The promises of the gospel are designed to engage us to renounce the pomps and vanities of this world, which cannot give us that intire satisfaction, we naturally desire; to lead holy lives, and go through all the trials of our virtue with resolution and stedfastness. This end of them is declared by St. Peter, 2 Epist. i. 4. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* What their tendency is, what influence they should have upon all Christians is plain from St. Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians, 2 Cor. vii. 1. *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* The promises therefore of the gospel are to move and excite us to the stedfast practice of piety; and the end of those threats, which are denounced against the disobedient, is to preserve us from sin by overbalancing all the allurements and terrors of this world, when they are set before us. Matt. x. 28. *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* All the grace of God therefore manifested to us in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is designed to recover us from a state of sin to a state of holiness; and this is not only the natural tendency, but the declared end of all his doctrines and precepts, of all the promises and threats of his holy institution.

II. I proceed to shew that the christian religion is admirably fitted to promote this great and good end. And,

1. It gives us the most easy, perfect, and efficacious rules for the practice of virtue.

2. It proposes to us the most proper and prevailing motives to holiness of life.

1. It gives us the most easy, perfect, and efficacious rules for the practice of virtue.

We are not left to trace out the knowledge of God, nor to collect our duty from the relation of things by our own reason. For tho' this may in some measure be done, it requires more capacity and leisure, than most men are masters of. Besides, when persons have been long addicted to evil customs, they have little or no inclination to such inquiries; and are so prepossessed with false notions, that they cannot certainly discern the truth. This was the case of the politest heathen, before the advent of our blessed Lord. They were so bewildered with a multitude of opinions, so overborn by the prejudice of education and the power of evil customs, that they could not attain any certain knowledge of the true God, and of a future state, nor indeed of moral virtue in some respects: all which is abundantly plain from their own writings. And they, who are not able to consult them, may be satisfied by reading the first chapter of St. Paul's epistle to the Romans, and other places of the New Testament. But the knowledge of these things is plainly delivered to us in the christian institution. What we should believe concerning God, how we should worship him, the fear and love, and other duties we owe to him; how we should behave towards all men, relations or neighbours, friends or enemies, superiors or inferiors; the government of our natural passions, and every duty, which concerns ourselves; what the future state of good and bad men will certainly be, are all laid down so plainly in the dis-

discourses of Christ and his disciples, that men of the meanest capacity, the unlearned as well as the learned, may understand them without any difficulty. It sets all these things in so strong a light, that we evidently perceive the truth and reasonableness of that, which we should not have known, or been very uncertain about it, if we had been without the advantage of divine revelation.

Moreover his religion does not only give us more plain, but also more perfect rules for a holy life. For as to the extent of our duty, there is no moral evil, but what it forbids. There were several sins allowed of by some of the philosophers, but our blessed Lord requires us to *abstain from all appearance of evil*. His followers were forbid to do many things, which the heathen allowed. Eph. iv. 17. *This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind*. His religion indeed strikes at the root of all sin, because it forbids evil thoughts and desires, from whence evil actions proceed. The Christian must mortify the lusts of the flesh, which is the most effectual way to preserve himself from evil actions. Gal. v. 24. *And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections, and lusts*. On the other hand there is no virtue, but what it commands. There are some virtues which the philosophers did not prescribe, but our religion teaches us the practice of every thing, which is commendable and good. It does not only teach us to love our friends, but likewise our enemies; and to do good to them, who have used us ill. It directs us to lay no more stress on things than the nature of them requires; to observe positive institutions as means of religion, and moral virtue, as that, wherein it principally consists. Christ therefore tells his disciples, *That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*. He has none of those loose maxims, which prevailed among the Jews, who hoped

hoped to commute for the neglect of other duties by observing some great precept of the law; but them, who were misled by such vain opinions, he directs to the love of God and our neighbour, because they who are influenced by these principles, will observe all the duties, which they owe to them. The religion of our blessed Lord sanctifies the mind, and does not only direct to good actions, but infuses the best and most generous principles. It shews us, that no religious actions will be acceptable to God, if done from vain ostentation and sinister views; and that to please him, we must be moved by sincere and good intentions. Nothing therefore can be more perfect than the rules, which he gives us, for the command of our thoughts, and the government of our actions; and consequently no institution can be better fitted to make men truly righteous.

The precepts of Christ are likewise most efficacious, because the divine authority is stamped upon them. The lectures of the philosophers were read to few, and had no authority to enforce them; and therefore their finest sentences had no weight upon the consciences of their auditors, because they were not received as the commands of God. But Christ and his apostles preached to all men, and delivered their doctrines and precepts as the will of God; and proved that they were really so, by the miracles which they did in his name. The wonderful works done by the apostles raised the attention of all considerate persons, and overcame their prejudices. They were hereby convinced, that their idols were no Gods; and that there was but one living and true God, by whose power these miracles were done; and that it was his will, they should renounce their sins, and obey his laws. Hence proceeded that surprising change, which was effected by the preaching of the apostles. They, who seriously considered their miracles, could not resist the evidence of them; but were prevailed upon to change their manners, as well as their notions,
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in obedience to the gospel. The apostles reasoned justly from the scriptures with the Jews, and from the nature of things with the Gentiles; but their reasonings could not have had so quick and so great success, if they had not been supported by their miracles. By the means of these it was, that so many converts were made in Jerusalem at the feast of Pentecost, and in other places, where the apostles preached in the name of Jesus. To these St. Paul attributes his success among the Thessalonians, 1 Thess. i. 5, 9. *For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. — For they themselves shew of us, what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*

2. The christian religion proposes to us the most proper and prevailing motives to holiness of life. To persuade men to repentance, what can be better suited than the gracious promise of pardon made us by Jesus Christ, and confirmed by his own blood? We are not left to conjecture from the attributes of God, that he will forgive us after great, wilful, and long repeated transgressions; but we know it more certainly, and more comfortably from the gospel of Christ. Acts xiii. 38. *Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that thro' this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.* When men, who were conscious to themselves of many heinous sins, both Jews and Gentiles, were so well and so firmly assured, that God would freely forgive all their past offences, how great soever, upon a sincere amendment; how effectually must this move them to forsake their sins, and to lead better lives? Besides, this promise is not only suited in its own nature to win sinners to repentance, and to reconcile them to God; but the condition also, upon which this most desirable blessing of forgiveness is suspended, must have a great effect. For remission through the blood of Je-

fus Christ is promised to them only, who heartily repent of their sins. Acts ii. 38. *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the holy Ghost.* The christian institution gives no encouragement to such, as delight in their sins; tho' it gives the greatest to them, who are truly penitent.

Another motive to holiness, which may not only animate our indeavours, but also keep under and overcome those doubts and fears, which arise either from the sense of our own weakness, or the temptations of this world, is the promise of the spirit. Much indeed may be done by those natural powers, which God has given us, if we seriously resolve to live well, and add suitable indeavours to our good resolutions. But when persons have been long enslaved to their sinful passions, they too often experience, that when they would do good, evil is present with them. In this case he, who sincerely indeavours to resist temptation, and to reform his life, may hope for the assistance of God; but to have such clear and express promises, as are made to us in the gospel, is a mighty motive to resolution and perseverance. We may cheerfully set ourselves to work out our salvation, because we know, that God will prosper our sincere indeavours by his blessing. By his grace, if we devoutly ask it, and honestly concur with it, we shall be effectually supported against all temptations, and difficulties. For what can be too difficult for Christians to perform, too hard for them to suffer, when God is with them, and assists them by his spirit? And this promise of divine assistance is also made us upon such conditions, as cannot but render it a great incentive to care and diligence. If God wrought upon men irresistibly, this might tempt them to sit still, waiting for his operations, and neglecting the use of those capacities and means he has given them; but since he has promised his aid to them only, who faithfully exert their own best indeavours, it no less powerfully incites men to

do their own part, than it encourages them to hope for all needful assistance. And that the gracious assistances of the holy Spirit are thus conditionally promised, is evident from the whole tenor of the Bible; for where these are promised, there, or in other places, our own consideration, resolution, and action are required. Phil. ii. 12. *Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, For it is God which worketh in you, both to will, and to do, of his good pleasure.* James iv. 7. *Resist the devil, and he will flie from you.*

To these motives may be added the threats and promises of the gospel, which have likewise a great tendency to promote this good end. The future misery, which it denounces as the just consequence of a wicked life, will far exceed all the trouble of mortifying our lusts, and all the evils, which can be inflicted upon us for a good conscience. How powerfully then should the belief of this restrain us from sin, and excite us to steadfastness in religion, that we may not, for fear of temporary evils, run upon everlasting destruction? On the other hand, the promise of eternal blessedness made to the obedient is no less proper to allure us to our duty, as might be shewn in divers respects, if we could at present distinctly consider them. The very nature of the future reward, as it is a state of perfect rectitude, calls us to purity; since we cannot be prepared for it, unless we are previously sanctified in this life. Besides, the transcendent excellency of the future glory makes it a most powerful incitement to virtue, because it will be inconceivably better, and more solid than any thing, which this changing world can bid for our affections. Nothing in this life, no present pleasures, advantages, or honors can make us amends for the loss of eternal blessings; and therefore whatsoever we lose on that account, we should take care to secure to ourselves a right to them through Jesus Christ. The promise of this complete and inconceivable felicity is likewise made to us upon such conditions, as cannot but

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strongly influence our practice : for eternal life is promised to them who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, Rom ii. 7. Such are the motives, which our holy religion proposes, in order to prevail with us to renounce our sins, and to live godly ; and besides these, the grace of God in sending Jesus Christ to reveal his will to us, and to die for our sins ; in assisting our indeavours to reform by his spirit, and forgiving our sins upon repentance, cannot but constrain us to love and gratitude, which are principles of obedience no less powerful than pure. St. John says, *We love him ; because he first loved us,* 1 Epist. iv. 9 : and *this is the love of God that we keep his commandments,* chap. v. 3. His inexpressible love manifested to us in Jesus Christ is not only a proper means to gain our affections to himself, but engages us likewise to love one another, as St. Paul observes, 1 Theff. iv. 9 : and wherever these principles prevail, there every divine and social virtue will be observed. But,

III. I shall conclude with some inferences which arise from this subject.

1. From hence we may infer the truth of the christian religion. God is perfectly holy, and therefore no religion can be justly supposed to come from him, unless it tend to promote a holy life. But now supposing he was pleased to give mankind a revelation of his will, what other worship would he require, what other laws would he give forth, than those which our holy religion enjoins ? We have therefore good reason to conclude, that Jesus came from God, because his religion teaches the most perfect practice of holiness. To his doctrine he justly appealed for the truth of his mission. John vii. 16. *Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.* The purity of his doctrine is not indeed the only proof we have for the truth of his religion. The miracles

which he did in the name of the Father, and which his disciples performed in his name after his ascension, most fully attest the truth of his religion; and shew that it is not only good in itself, but that he was truly sent from God to deliver it to men. And this external evidence was necessary, whether we consider the prejudices of some, or the weak capacities of others. They, who would not have attended to the internal evidences of his doctrine, were awakened by these stupendous works, and convinced of the truth of his mission.

2. We are hence furnished with a good rule to try the doctrines of men, whether they are true or false. For if the grand design of the dispensation of the gospel is to make us holy, no doctrine can be Christ's, which has a contrary tendency. By their fruit we may know them, for if they tend to encourage men in sin, and tempt them to neglect their duty, they are certainly false; and yet such are many doctrines, which have prevailed among professed Christians. The popish doctrine of absolution, that the priest has power judicially to absolve from all past sins them, who shew some contrition at the point of death, is not a doctrine of Christ, because it tends to make men defer their repentance, and to live licentiously, hoping for the benefit of this absolution at last. And as to their doctrine of indulgences, what wickedness are they not capable of committing, who have received an indulgence for sins to come, as well as an absolution from sins past? These indulgences indeed do not only tend to harden men in sin, but have been often given on purpose to draw them into wicked undertakings. Their doctrine of purgatory is no less contrary to holiness; for if men can hope to be refined from their sinful corruptions by the flames thereof, and to be translated from thence to heaven by the prayers of the living, which are to be purchased with money, will not this tempt them to neglect the mortification of their lusts, and sleep on securely in their
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beloved vices, while they live? But not to mention other popish doctrines, it must be confessed, that some things have prevailed among Protestants, which are not favorable to the great design of the gospel. To suppose, as some have done, that men can do nothing acceptable to God, till they are wrought upon by irresistible grace, notwithstanding all the natural powers God has given them, and all the directions of his word, does not tend to ingage them to set about their duty; but rather to discourage them from it, if not to tempt them to go on in their sins, expecting this irresistible operation. In fact many, who have imbibed this notion, are not ashamed to make it an excuse for delaying their repentance; which must be attended with the worst of consequences, as it cannot but offend almighty God, and confirm their vicious habits; as it prevents those indeavours, and deprives them of that assistance, by which they might subdue their sinful passions, and reform their lives. And as it has not a good tendency, so it is manifestly contrary to those passages of scripture, which exhort sinners to repent and be converted; and consequently prove, that there is something for them to do in obedience to the word of God, as the condition of their being assisted by his spirit. The gracious assistance of God is not promised to supersede, but to prosper our indeavours, as plainly appears from the words of St. Paul already quoted. But I will add no more instances. By this rule you may try other doctrines, whether they are of God or not.

3. From hence we may safely judge whether we are in a state of salvation. The ultimate end of the gospel is to make us eternally happy, and as a necessary means of effecting this, it designs to make us holy. If therefore we would have good reason to hope for eternal blessedness through Christ, we must not oppose, but concur with the gracious design of his religion. We must not place our affections chiefly on lower objects, nor gratify the lusts of the flesh; but *follow peace with*

all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord, Heb. xii. 14. He, who lives in obedience to God, may be assured that he is in his favour; but he, who liveth in wilful sin, is neither a child of God, nor an heir of eternal glory. For St. John says, 1 Epist. iii. 10. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness, is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. If we live in love and in the practice of all holiness, we shall be fit for heaven and the communion of the saints above. Since the religion therefore, which we profess, is so holy, let us not dishonour it by a wicked life; but adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour by a truly christian temper and conduct. And if in this world, we live soberly, righteously, and godly, we may look with comfort for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; and when he comes, we shall behold him with joy, and enter into his everlasting kingdom.

DISCOURSE IV.

The influences of the Spirit entirely persuasive and moral; and its fruits of the same kind with the dictates of natural Conscience.

[F O S T E R .]

E P H E S . V . 9 .

For the fruit of the Spirit is, in all, goodness, and righteousness, and truth.

BY the Spirit, which St. Paul opposes to the *Flesh* considered as the spring and source of *moral evil*, we must understand the Intelligent principle in man, enlightened and assisted by the Spirit of God. And when it is said, that *goodness, and righteousness, and truth*, are *the fruit of the Spirit*, each of the terms, having an extensive meaning, may denote the *whole* of virtue and religion; which, in *different* views, exactly suits with *all* these characters.---It is justly stiled *Goodness*, as it is lovely and amiable, and productive of peace and happiness---*Righteousness*, as it is fit in itself, and agreeable to the dictates of right reason---and *Truth*, because it is founded on the real existence, the settled order, the natural relations and dependencies of things. And it may not be improper to remark on this occasion, that let the immuta-

ble ground of moral obligation be called the *Truth* of things, the *Fitness* of things, moral *Rectitude*, or moral *Beauty*, the general foundation in all must be, in a great measure, the same: Because as, on the one hand, whatever is *agreeable* to the *real nature* and *constitution* of things must, of necessity, be a specimen of *right* behaviour; and whatever is an instance of *right* behaviour must, by as plain a necessity, be so far, a *justly proportioned* and *beautiful* character; so, on the other, nothing can possibly be considered as *amiable*, or raise in us an idea of moral *Beauty*, but what is, likewise, an unquestionable specimen of moral *Rectitude*, and exactly corresponds with *Truth*, and *Reason*.

But it is most probable, that the Apostle only intended, by the expressions in the text, the *particular virtues* of *equity*, *beneficence* and *mercy*, *truth* and *fidelity*; comprehending in his design (as the reason of the thing must imply in it) *every other* particular virtue of the *like* moral and unchangeable obligation. This, I say, is highly probable, because in the parallel passage several *particular virtues* are distinctly enumerated---*The fruit of the Spirit is love---peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*---I shall only add farther, by way of introduction, that some of the best *Greek* copies, and most ancient versions, read---for what is, in the text we follow, *the fruit of the Spirit---the fruit of Light*. And, indeed, as *St. Paul*, in the verse immediately preceding, tells the *Ephesians*, that they were *sometimes* darkness, *but now* were light in the *Lord*; and exhorts them just after, continuing the use of the same metaphor, *to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness*; the word *light*, for these reasons, is most agreeable to the context, and seems to have been the *original* reading. But, on which side soever this be determined, the case upon the whole is still the same. For *the fruit of Light* can be nothing different from *the fruit of the Spirit*, mentioned

tioned in the parallel text above-cited. And on the other hand, those who are *born of the Spirit* are, in the scripture phrase, the *children of light*: and those who *walk in the Spirit* are said, also, to *walk in the light*. From whence we may justly observe,

In the first place, that the *assistances* which we receive from the *Spirit*, either in the attempting, or perfecting, the reformation of evil habits and practices, and throughout the whole course of a religious and virtuous life, are entirely *rational*, and can have only a *persuasive* and *moral* influence. They co-operate with our own *deliberating* and *reflecting* powers, illuminate, improve, and convince the *understanding*; and, by representing in a *clear* view important *principles*, and *motives* adapted to our constitution as Intelligent Beings endued with freedom of choice, they inspire good resolutions, and carry them on to such a degree of strength and constancy, as at length surmounts all difficulties, and renders the ways of piety and universal righteousness easy and delightful. This is undeniably the case with respect to the *aids* and encouragements, that are graciously afforded to Mankind, by the *external revelation* of the Gospel. And if, at *any time*, the merciful Father of our Spirits is pleased to have a *direct* and *immediate* communication with the mind, or appoints *the same* to be maintained by any particular Being as his *Angel* and *Minister*; no other account can be given of it, consistent with his perfect *wisdom*, and the *regular* and *harmonious* operation of his Providence, than this---that it is in a way agreeable to the *frame* of Human nature, *gentle*, *soft*, and *persuasive*, not *controuling* or *obstructing* the free use of reason, but, by the help of the *understanding* alone, influencing the *will*, and moderating all the *affections*.

We may talk of this point as a *Mystery*, in a *sublime* strain and without *ideas*, as long as we please. However, if we reflect impartially, we shall, I believe, find it *impossible*, that *rational* creatures should be

be moved to any branch of virtue and right behaviour, but according to the scheme which I have now proposed; unless we suppose, that some *præternatural* strong instinct is excited within them, and that they are acted by a *blind impulsive* principle, *without*, or *above*, reason: The consequence of which must be, that their conduct is neither *intelligent*, nor *moral*; can neither be denominated *religion*, nor entitle to a *reward*. It appears then to be a truth founded in *Nature*, and concurring both with the doctrine of *St. Paul*, and with the wisest conceptions we can frame of God's moral character and government---That whatever is, really, a *fruit of the Spirit* must, also, be the *fruit of Light*.

And from hence it follows, that, in all those instances, in which we are determined to the exercise of particular virtues, or animated to zeal and devotion, by *false* principles, our virtue, zeal, and devotion, *thus* excited, or *so far* as they are owing to the force of *such* principles, cannot, upon any *just* ground, be ascribed to the *Divine Spirit*. The influence we feel may be *strong*, *efficacious*, and *transporting*, and terminate in producing some of the *genuine* fruits of *righteousness*; but it can, with no colour of reason, be stiled a *Divine* influence, when it springs from *error* and *delusion*. For let us talk clearly and intelligibly upon the subject.—How is it that *wrong* principles can operate upon the mind in such a manner, as to produce so *good* an effect? why only thus;---by being considered as *just* and *right* principles---as *important* principles of *Natural* or *Revealed Truth*---as principles that *ought* to determine our resolution and conduct---and are in *themselves*, and in their *direct tendency*, a *fit* and *proper* means to promote Religion, and the practice of the Moral virtues. But the whole of this (upon the supposition now made, that they are *erroneous* principles) is, in terms, a contradiction to *reason*, and *nature*, and an *equal* estimate of things, and, especially, to the *infallible*

fallible certainty of the *Divine* knowledge: and, consequently, an *influence*, that involves in it so much of deceit and imposture, must (*so far*, at least, as it is grounded on such *deceit* and *imposture*) proceed entirely from the weakness and prejudice of Human nature, and can, by no means, aspire to a *heavenly* original.

I might instance in sentiments that are generally known to prevail, and to be zealously espoused, among *ourselves*. But my design at present being only to illustrate the point before us, which the giving offence to any, and thereby infusing needless prejudices, may rather perplex and darken; I shall content myself with putting a *remote* case.---A *Roman-Catholick* believes, that, in what we call the sacrament of the *Lord's-Supper*, instead of the elements of *bread* and *wine*, he receives the very *substantial body* and *blood* of Christ. *This belief* may be a means of exciting in him an ardent and humble devotion; the strong and lively devotion, which is occasioned merely by an *absurd* and *irrational* faith, may make him more strict and assiduous in discharging *unquestionable* duties of religion, and prompt him to acts of *real* goodness; and when he finds his affections *vigorously* moved, and that they serve to fix, to enliven, to support, *pious* resolutions, it is not at all unlikely, that he will be inclined to impute what he *feels*, and what works so *efficaciously* within him, to a *Divine* impulse. And, indeed, the *devotional* writers of that Party have been apt to make pretences that are equally extravagant, and to indulge themselves in a most transcendent and sublime *Enthusiasm*.---But what must a *Protestant* think of this? Can he hold *Transubstantiation* to be a monstrous corruption of the true doctrine of Christianity, to be fruitful of all absurdities, and flatly repugnant to reason, sense, and experience; and can he represent the *adoration of the Host* as superstition at least, if not idolatry; and yet justly admit, at the same time, that the *impressions*,

pressions, which are caused by this *wrong* belief and *superstitious* adoration, come *directly* and *immediately* from *above*? It is *impossible*.--- The same reasoning holds good with respect to all other *errors*. For it is a maxim of eternal and invariable certainty, and if there be any first principles in arguing this must be one, that all inward *ardors*, *transports*, and *excitements*, which are *purely* the effect and energy of *falsehood*, by what name soever they deserve to be distinguish'd, can, at least, have no claim to this honour, of being consider'd as the *immediate* dictates and operations of the *Spirit of Light and Truth*.

I may proceed one step farther in the way of *general reflection*, and add to what has been already said, that *false* principles of religion, in one shape or other, are too commonly entertain'd. This the *multiplicity*, the wide *difference*, the direct *contrariety* of religious sentiments, that obtain in the Christian world, incontestably demonstrate. And farther, the *right* and *genuine* principles are often *disguis'd* by artful glosses and refinements, or *deprav'd* by spurious additions; which blend, and mingle together, a confusion of *Truth* and *Falsehood*. Or, at least, if they happen to be retain'd, in their strict original *purity*, and *justly* interpreted, such *consequences* are frequently extorted from them, as, in a great measure, prevent their natural use and efficacy. For it is not an unusual thing, to see groundless *inferences*, that are weakly deduc'd from good principles, usurp the weight and influence of the *principles themselves*, as the *spring* and *rule* of action: Which amounts to the same, in effect, as a man's having nothing else but *misguided* and *erroneous* sentiments, to determine and regulate his course of life. As, therefore, it has been plainly proved, That when virtue and piety proceed either from *corrupt* principles, or from *false consequences* substituted in the place of true principles, the *motive*, or *determination* to virtue (which *so far* is *error* only) cannot be ascribed to the holy and infallible *Spirit* of God: As this, I say, has

has been plainly proved; the many and various cases that occur of this kind, wherein it is absurd to suppose a *Divine* influence, should, one would think, be allow'd by all Christians to be a standing and unquestionable evidence of the *natural strength* of the Human mind, and the *force* of its resolutions; and that, as it agrees best with reason, with the very idea of religion, with the universal strain of the Gospel (which is address'd to us as reasonable creatures, furnished with proper *capacities for action*) it is likewise a truth confirm'd by fact and observation, that Man, by the *internal powers* of his mind, and the aid of his *natural faculties*, can raise, and cultivate, and improve to a considerable degree at least, religious and amiable dispositions.—So far is he from being (as some have thought it their duty, to the disparagement and reproach of his Nature, to represent him) *free* only to do evil, but with respect to piety and true goodness, in a state of *Moral impotency*.

I desire I may not be understood as intending to insinuate any thing, in what has been offer'd, against the doctrine of *Divine assistances*, graciously afforded to Rational Agents in the discharge of their duty; to enlighten the understanding, excite good affections, support and encourage under difficulties, strengthen the resolution of the sincere and well-disposed; and, by all, to advance their *moral rectitude*, which is both their supreme felicity, and the ultimate design of their creation. On the contrary, I firmly believe, that this doctrine, which, in general, is clearly and strongly intimated in the Christian Revelation, is also, in itself, highly *reasonable*. For as it is probable from the best lights of Philosophy, that the *continual operation* of that Infinite Being, who made the universe, is absolutely necessary for maintaining the established laws and order of Nature, and holding together the frame of the material World; it is natural to conclude, that on *particular occasions*, when his goodness directed by consummate wisdom may fitly
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incline him to it, and preserving the intire use and exercise of their inherent faculties, he *aets* likewise upon the moral. And, besides, no opinion can more exactly correspond to the idea we have of him as the *Father* of Intelligent Beings, concern'd for their happiness, and desirous of their true perfection. Nothing suits so well with his peculiar complacency and delight in persons of virtuous characters, as this thought; that he sometimes, by an immediate access to the mind, communicates such *strength* and *aid*, as renders their virtues as *easy* and *pleasant* to themselves, as they are beneficial to others. The wisest of the Heathens, therefore, have expressed their sense of this truth, guided merely by *Nature's* light. But notwithstanding the certainty of the doctrine in *general*, what I have asserted may still hold good—that all pretences to a *Divine* assistance are insupportable, *so far as erroneous* principles determine our choice, and are the *sole* motives to action. And my insisting so largely on this subject will need no apology, when it is consider'd that it may help to determine (as I have before observed) some important controversies, subsisting amongst Christians, about so *essential* a point as the *Moral agency* of Man; which is the necessary foundation of all *law* and *government*, whether *Divine*, or *Human*. We may observe,

In the second place, that those things which are described, in the text, as *the fruit of the Spirit*, are no other than *Moral* virtues, *Goodness*, *Righteousness*, and *Truth*; things of *real substantial* excellence, *Godlike* in their nature, and *unchangeable* in their obligation. It was to awaken Mankind out of their lethargy, occasion'd by manifold superstitions and vices, and to inculcate a strict regard to the above-mentioned *primitive* and *essential duties*, that the *Son* of God came down from heaven: and it was worthy the *Spirit* of God, and the *ultimate end* of his commission, to inspire the principles and habits of the same most excellent and amiable virtues.—It will perhaps

perhaps be objected, that, in the parallel text in the epistle to the *Galatians*, St. Paul speak of *Faith*, likewise, as a *fruit of the Spirit*. But to shew that this does not in the least interfere with what I have advanced, it will be only needful for me to suggest these two remarks; 1st, That *Faith* frequently signifies in the Scriptures, not an assent to the truth of propositions, but the virtue of *fidelity*. And thus it is natural to understand it here, since it stands connected and ranked with other *moral* and *social* virtues, such as *love*, *peace*, *long suffering*, *gentleness*, *goodness*, *meekness*, and *temperance*. However, let us consider it, 2^{dly}, in the sense of the objection, as denoting a *belief* of the Gospel; and it will still amount to just the same. For the Faith, recommended in the New Testament, is neither believing by *chance*, nor from *presumption* and a high-strain'd fancy, nor from *constraint* and *force*; but such a persuasion, as is built on *reasons* sufficient to convince a *fair* inquirer, and which proceeds from a *disinterested* and *ingenuous* temper: In which view of it, it is undoubtedly of a *Moral* nature.

But though it appears from hence that *morality* is a *spiritual* attainment; and that to represent it as a trivial thing, of inferior and diminutive excellency, is really reproaching the *Spirit of grace*; yet the language of *modern* Christianity happens, in this respect, to be vastly different from that of *Apostolical* Christianity. The account, which the Gospel itself gives, is plain, and easily comprehended. But if a man was to enumerate *the fruits of the Spirit*, according to the *catalogue* given of them, in these *remote* times, by some Expositors of the Christian scheme; it might look to an indifferent person, who was not acquainted with his *design*, as if he *directly* intended to describe the several kinds and degrees of *religious Enthusiasm*. For what are they---but *sudden suggestions*, *strong sensible impressions* upon the mind, *extasies*, *irresistible impulses*, and the like; which dis-

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turb the understanding, and sometimes *agitate* so vehemently, that they throw all things into a confusion; and, by their *violence*, are supposed to *controul* the *will*, and lay a *necessitating* bias on all our faculties and affections.

But allow me to ask, in the first place, where we find the least hint, in the authentic doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, of these pretended *irresistible impulses*, which are so contrary to *Nature*, and impossible to be reconciled with *sedateness* of thought, or the *calm* and *deliberate* exercise of virtue? Is our being exhorted not to *grieve*, and *quench*, the *Spirit*---an argument that his influences are *inextinguishable*, and operate with a *necessitating* force? Or is our being commanded to *work out our salvation*—a proof that it is intirely wrought out for us, without the concurrence of our own *agency*? If, in any case, recorded in the New Testament, we might expect to find intimations of this nature, it must, surely, be in the *miraculous* conversion of *St. Paul*: But *here* the evidence not only fails us, but appears to be clear on the *opposite* side. For the Apostle himself says, in his apology before king *Agrippa*, that he *was not* disobedient unto the *heavenly vision*; plainly intimating, that his *freedom of choice* still remain'd with him, and, of consequence, that his conversion was, properly, an act of *virtue*, and not effected by the *uncontroulable* energy of an Almighty power.

Again, where do we read, that *the fruits of the Spirit* are *sensible* and *distinguishable impressions* made upon the mind---*strength of passion*, *transports*, and inward *servours*? The *Scriptures* encourage no such pretensions; and *Reason* directly opposes them. *Reason* plainly teaches, that these are *uncertain* and *fallacious* marks, by which no just judgment can be formed. For inward *heat* and *raptures*, *sudden emotions*, and *unexpected suggestions*, may be purely *mechanical*; and accounted for, like other vicissitudes and changes in the Human frame, from the general laws of

of Nature; and, particularly, from the vast influence which fancy has upon our *sensations* and *passions*. And, surely, it must be a very surprising and preposterous height of confidence, to rest on any thing as the *criterion* and *test* of our being *regenerated*, and *divinely* directed, if we are not certain (as here it is impossible we should be) that it cannot spring from *mechanical* causes, but necessarily requires a *supernatural* interposition.

Add to this, that the marks, which we are now speaking of, are no less *dangerous*, than they are fallacious and deceitful. They give a handle to every wretched *Enthusiast* to impute his ravings, and follies, and wild starts of imagination, to *the Spirit of the living God*. And thus they *consecrate* delusion and imposture, and, if it be of a licentious and impure tendency, enable it, with the more ease, to extirpate the natural seeds of virtue, and corrupt the morals. They are dangerous likewise in this respect---as they divert us from attending to the substance of religion, by employing all our concern about inward *feelings*, *warm frames*, and *fermented spirits*, which have no relation to it. Finally, they are of very bad consequence as to the peace and comfort of our minds. For when the inward heat is cooled, and the passion, that is ascribed to a *Divine* quickening, subsides, (as it must unavoidably do, because Nature cannot long continue in a *violent* state) then *darkness* covers us, and complaints are made, that God hath *withdrawn the light of his countenance*---And there is a transition *alternately*, and owing altogether to the fixing a *false* rule of judgment, from a state of sanguine and lively *hope*, to a state of languid and gloomy *despair*: Upon these accounts, our blessed Saviour wisely instructed his disciples to determine this *critical* question---Whether they were *born of the Spirit*---only by the *moral change* that was effected in their tempers, and habits, and outward behaviour. *Marvel not*, says he to *Nicodemus*, *that I said unto thee, Ye must be born*

again. [For the thing has nothing so profoundly mysterious in it as you seem to imagine, but may be explain'd by a familiar instance.] *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* Which is as if he had said, The operations of the Spirit are indeed imperceptible to sense, and not to be distinguish'd from a man's own exercise of his natural faculties; but they are visible and certain in the effects, or *fruits*, which they produce; in the *fruits* of morality, and a universal conformity to the dictates of reason, and the laws of God---or, as the text expresses it, in *the fruit of goodness, and righteousness, and truth.*

But this leads me to another observation, with which I shall conclude: And that is,---That the way I have taken of considering this subject is the only one that can give *strength* and *credit* to *Religion*; which can never be supported with honour, nor effectually recommended to wise and unprejudic'd judges, but by advancing *Morality*. On the contrary, the representing *religion* as having a certain incomprehensible and *mystical* sublimity---as more *spiritual* and *refined* than mere moral virtue,---and distinct from it---must, of course, destroy the *respect* and *confidence*, which are otherwise due to *religious* characters. And this melancholy and reproachful consequence of so strange and injudicious a conduct is, already, too visible, and plain from experience. For it is the remark of a very great and admired writer, that---*If we are told a man is religious; we still ask, "What are his Morals *?"* ---But there could be no possible foundation for such a bitter *sarcasm*, by which the most venerable name, and the best cause in all the world, are treated with *scorn* and *ridicule*---If religion was always described as a reasonable service; in which moral obligations maintain'd their proper rank, and were acknowledg'd to be an *essential*, nay, the *superior*, part.

* Characteristicks, Vol. II. p. 6.

Men of thought and ingenuity ought to be *above* being misled by mere *show* and outward *appearance*; which is the just character of the *ignorant* and the *superficial*. And if they argued impartially, upon the *truth of things*, and not upon *Popular prejudices*, they would quickly discern, that Religion, consider'd as it is in itself, must aid and strengthen every *Moral Tie*. For it retains every *motive* that *Morality*, in the *separate* notion of it, includes, arising from either ---its *beauty* or *use*; its agreement with the natural *order* and *relations* of things, its advancement of *personal* perfection and happiness, its tendency to promote the *Publick* good.---And to give the greater force to all these, it adds another highly *rational motive*, and that is, the authority of God, the wise and merciful *Governour*, the righteous and impartial *judge*, of Mankind. And if religion, fairly represented, had only its *direct* and *genuine* influence, and was practis'd in its full *extent*, the state of the question would deserve to be *alter'd*: And when we heard, that a man had *honest* Moral *principles*, and was a person of *natural justice* and *good temper*; instead of acquiescing in this, for our more complete satisfaction, as to the solid ground of reposing *confidence* in him, we might, *reasonably*, be solicitous to know farther; “*Whether* “*he was religious and devout?*” Indeed, the *noble* author abovemention'd was pleas'd to say, that this is a *question we seldom think of* *. And, as we are apt to think but seldom of other questions, that are not only *pertinent*, but of the utmost *importance*, the fact, perhaps, may be, in a great measure, as he has stated it. But from what does it proceed?---From the *true nature* of religion? This cannot be pretended, without betraying extreme weakness, and want of reflection. It must therefore spring entirely---either from *our own* ignorance of religion; or *other mens* corruptions of it by superstition and vice. But notwithstanding both of these, it may, when it is rightly

* Characteristicks, *ibid*.

explain'd, be the most *natural ground*, and the strongest *guard*, of mutual faith and confidence. And I will venture to assert, upon the reasons already produc'd, that the *Mere Moral Man* (if such a one there *is*, or *can be*) without *religion*, is not able to give the *same security* to the *World* in general, of his honesty; to his *Country*, of his steady and uncorrupted duty; or to his *Friends*, of his inviolable honour and fidelity; as he can do, who is both *Moral* and *Religious*. And the *Christian* character, in particular, can be consider'd in no other light, without doing it an unpardonable *wrong*, than as most friendly to *Human commerce*, and calculated for the most complete preservation of all our *natural* and *social* rights; since *the fruit of the Spirit*, which essentially belongs to it, is expressly said to be the Moral virtues that support the order and happiness of Societies.---viz. *Goodness, and Righteousness, and Truth.*

DISCOURSE V.

The Nature, Reasonableness, and Advantages of Prayer.

[LEECHMAN.]

MATTH. XXVI. 41.

— *Pray, that ye enter not into Temptation.*

WHEN we consider that our blessed Saviour has commanded us to pray, directed us in what manner we ought to pray, and set us an example of frequent prayer in his own practice; it must appear surprising, that any who pretend to be his followers, should indulge themselves in a determined contempt, or careless neglect, of this important duty. But, surprising as it is, a little acquaintance with what passes in the world, puts it beyond all doubt, that the express precepts, and conspicuous example, of the great instructor of mankind, with regard to prayer, are treated slightly, nay even contemptuously, by some of those who call themselves his disciples. To what causes can such strange inconsistency betwixt the profession and practice of christians be ascribed? There may be many and various causes of it, according to the different turns of men's tempers, and pursuits in life. But as it would detain us too long, to enumerate them all; let it suffice at present, to take notice of that, which every

one who has reflected on what passes in the world in his own time, or has looked into the history of former ages, must have observed; namely, That the best things may fall into disrepute, and consequently into disuse, for no other reason, but because they have been abused by the weak or the artful and designing part of mankind. Thus, prayer, an excellent thing in itself, and a noble means of improving our souls in every thing virtuous and praise-worthy, is sunk into contempt among one part of the world, from this accidental circumstance, that weak and well-meaning people have sometimes sullied its native beauty, by a mixture of low superstition; or, because worldly and designing men have perverted it to serve their wicked purposes.

In discoursing therefore on this subject, 'tis hoped it may not be unuseful to endeavour, in the first place, to explain the nature of prayer; and to set it in its true light, by stripping it of all foreign and superfluous circumstances.

In the second place, to vindicate it from the objections commonly urged against it, And,

Thirdly, to point out the advantages which arise from the sincere and stedfast practice of it.

Before we enter upon the consideration of these heads, it is proper to observe, that prayer is to be understood in a restrained sense in this discourse; as signifying chiefly that part of devotion commonly called Petition; as distinguished from adoration and thanksgiving, which are frequently comprehended in the meaning of the word Prayer.

In order to understand the nature of prayer, let us take notice that the inward acts of mind and heart exerted in it, from which the outward expressions should

should flow, and by which they should be animated, are principally these three following.

First, A lively and intimate persuasion that we are utterly insufficient for our own happiness; and that we depend entirely upon our Maker for all we possess here, or hope to enjoy hereafter. That we are in a dependent and indigent, a dark and uncertain state of being, is obvious on the first reflection: we discern, we feel in ourselves many marks of our dependence, our indigence, and ignorance. We find ourselves possessed of an existence which, if we only regard this present life, is confined within very narrow bounds, and extends only to a very short period. We see all creatures about us continually disappearing, after having acted their part but a few years on this stage: and we cannot avoid expecting the same fate ourselves; that we must soon withdraw into darkness, and make room for others: as we came into being without our own choice or consent, at the pleasure of another, so we must depart out of this state of being at the command of him who sent us into it: and even while we are allowed to continue here, we can neither procure for ourselves all the good things we want and desire, nor secure the possession of what we already enjoy: we feel manifold wants which we cannot supply: we groan under manifold imperfections and infirmities which we cannot remove: we are liable to innumerable dangers, many of which we do not foresee; and from others, even when we do see them approaching us, we cannot defend ourselves. We are conscious that we are not only in some instances weak and helpless; but very ignorant, and uncertain of many things which nearly concern us. We know not what shall befall us in our passage through this life; nor at what time, in what manner, or circumstances, we shall make our exit from it into another: neither know we what our state, or employment shall be in those other regions, into which we must enter

when we depart from this world. But the most lamentable and mortifying ignorance is still behind, namely, ignorance of our duty, or the great rule of life; ignorance of our true happiness, and the way that leads unto it. Though we have some general knowledge of our duty from the light of reason and revelation; yet we find that we are not only in danger of erring, but frequently do err in applying general rules to particular instances of our conduct: daily experience convinces us, that a regard to worldly interests, and the strength of irregular appetites and passions, greatly darken our understandings, and occasion such false judgments concerning our behaviour, as necessarily leads us astray from the path of life: and surely, we have great reason to dread the consequences of a departure from the law of righteousness, under the government of the righteous judge of all the earth. In like manner, tho' we have some general and speculative knowledge concerning our true happiness, or chief good; yet our own experience, as well as observation of the world, may convince us, that our views of it are not so clear and striking as at all times, to prevent our pursuing false appearances of it: for alas! how frequently, how fatally are we disappointed; finding those things vain and unsatisfactory, in which our fond imagination had promised us happiness? We have no security in ourselves, that we shall not be guilty of the same transgressions of the law of virtue, and the same departures from the path of happiness, in the succeeding stages of our lives, that we have been in the former ones. Now, every man who has seriously considered how wretched and helpless he is in himself, will find the necessity of flying out of himself, and of taking refuge in Him who made him, and upholds him in being. Which leads us to the

Second act of the soul exerted in prayer, namely, the lifting it up with the utmost ardor, to that greatest
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and best of beings, who brought us into life, and assigned us our station in it; entreating him to teach us what part we should act; to dispel all that darkness of understanding, which is so apt to mislead us from the right path; to forgive our sins and follies; to deliver us from the fatal consequences of all our errors; to preserve us from relapsing into them; and to guide us safely to some proper mansions of rest, of light, and joy, beyond the grave. Every one who has imprinted on his mind a just sense of his ignorance, weakness, guilt, and danger, will find an inward necessity constraining him to have recourse in fervent prayer, to the great Author of his being, to conduct him safely through this stage of his existence; to continue his providential care, in guiding him through the valley and shadow of death; and to settle him at last in some happier place of abode.

The third act of mind exerted in prayer, is a firm belief, and assured trust, in that God to whom we pray, and on whom we depend, that he will not only always do what is best, what tends to the greatest good of the whole system of intelligent beings; but that he will, sooner or later, bring every one who sincerely seeks wisdom from him, to the possession of perfect virtue and everlasting happiness. Without this confidence in the infinite mercy of the great Father of all, there would be no foundation for prayer, nor encouragement to the practice of it. When we enquire into the doctrine of divine revelation on this head, we find lively and unshaken acts of trust in God are by it represented as equally necessary and essential parts of prayer, with either of those already mentioned. ‘He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him,’ Heb. xi. 6. ‘If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the

‘ the sea, driven with the wind and tossed.’ James i. 5, 6. There are numberless joyful declarations to the same purpose, in the books of the Old Testament: such as, ‘ The Lord is nigh to all them that call upon him in truth: he will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will save them.’ Psalm cxlv. 18, 19. Our blessed Saviour hath expressly renewed and confirmed all those delightful promises, which were published by the inspired writers under former dispensations. ‘ Ask (says he) and it shall be given; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened: or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone; or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? if ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them who ask him?’ Matth. vii. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. That these particular and positive declarations of the will of God are more fully satisfactory to the human mind, and more directly calculated to encourage the study and practice of true religion, than the general persuasion that God will always do what is fittest and best, is so evident, that it is needless to spend time in illustrating it. What great numbers of mankind are capable of understanding a plain and express promise, and of drawing the highest consolation and encouragement from it, in the course of a virtuous life, who could never have reasoned out to themselves a clear and just character of the Deity: nor inferred from it, that he would constantly and universally connect felicity with virtue? This plainly shews us, that it is an unspeakable advantage, to enjoy such a clear revelation of the will of God; as banishes all doubt and uncertainty, concerning the method in which he treats his apostate and guilty creatures. But at the same time, it may be

be observed, that there is good ground to hope it always has been, is at present, and will for ever be, the great, the standing, the invariable law of the divine government, to bestow wisdom, virtue, and happiness, upon all those who ask them with unfeigned sincerity of heart; even tho' they never heard of these comfortable promises on which our souls rest securely; for it is very observable, that these joyful assurances from the great Father of all, that he will be found of those who seek him, are expressed in such general terms, as to exclude no one, of whatever nation or country. Besides, nothing can be more agreeable to the all-perfect character of him, who is no 'respector of persons,' and accepteth those in every nation who fear him, and work righteousness; than to befriend and assist all those who sincerely seek his aid. May we not then indulge ourselves in the charitable hope, where-ever there was any one found, even in the heathen world, groaning under a sense of his deep ignorance and depravity, and earnestly panting after light and purity; that God never did deny his grace to such a person, but enlightened him with as much knowledge as was necessary for purifying his heart, and guiding him forward in the paths of goodness? As it must be acknowledged, that that sincerity, and honesty of heart, which prompts any one to seek direction and assistance from above, is itself a gift, a special gift of God; so it should likewise be owned, that there is no reason to suspect, that God will deny what further light and assistance may be necessary for him, whom he has already distinguished so far with his favour, as to bestow upon him sincerity and uprightness of heart; provided he maintains and cherishes that lovely disposition, and earnestly asks the direction of heaven in true humility.

Before we conclude this head of the discourse, let it be remarked, in order to prevent mistakes, that, when it is said, 'God will accomplish the desires of those who seek him;' this must always be under-

stood of those who seek him with real sincerity and humility of soul, (virtues indispensably required in the Gospel of Jesus Christ;) and who, in a constant dependence on the divine assistance, exert their utmost endeavours to do whatever they can discern to be the will of God. Further, this doctrine of the certainty of obtaining our requests, must only be understood of what is necessary for enlightening and assisting us in the paths of virtue; and should by no means be extended to a thousand other things, which we may desire to know or possess, tho' they have no inseparable connection with our virtue or happiness. We may be apt to wish, with the greatest fondness, for uninterrupted health, ease, and pleasure, through our whole lives; but, in these things, we must not hope to be gratified. We must learn to leave the all-wise disposer of every event, to lead us to happiness, in whatever path he pleases; whether it be the hard and rugged one of adversity and affliction, or the more soft and smooth one of prosperity and joy. And lastly, let us carefully remember, that there is no ground to expect that even our best and most pious desires are to be accomplished all at once, and in an instant: we must wait with patience, till God shall finish his own work, by the various methods of his providence and grace: 'tis with the works of God within us, as with the works of nature without us: they are not completed all at once, and in an instant: they require time, and are brought to perfection by slow and insensible degrees. A child must have time to become a man. The tree which is but just now planted, must have time to grow up to its full maturity, and bring forth fruit. In like manner, the progress of the soul towards perfection in virtue, is by slow advances: bad habits must be gradually weakened and overcome; and good dispositions must be raised to their proper height, by an almost imperceptible increase. In a word, though we may be assured that our heavenly Father will bring us to perfection in glory and happiness,

ness, at last ; yet it is only by the slow and almost indiscernable steps of his providence and grace, that we must be ripened for it. •

Now, from this view of prayer, it appears, in the first place, that there is a foundation laid for it, in the nature and circumstances of mankind, as dependent, ignorant, weak, and guilty creatures ; and in those manifestations their Creator hath given them of his glorious perfections, as employed for their safety and welfare. And, in the second place, from what has been said of the inward acts of mind and heart exerted in prayer, we may infer, that every well-disposed person (who will be at the pains to consider things impartially, and to distinguish betwixt pure prayer itself, and those odd and foolish things which may sometimes mingle with it) must see, that is a thing highly reasonable ; that it is unavoidable to those who allow themselves to think seriously ; that it is fit, and becoming, in the present state and circumstances of mankind ; and that it has a natural tendency to beget and promote all those amiable and important dispositions of mind, which render men happy in themselves, useful in this world, or fit for another. And, in the third place, this explication of the nature of prayer may furnish us with proper answers to the objections against it, commonly insisted on by those whose minds are under the power of prejudices. Which leads us to the

II. Head proposed above, namely, to vindicate prayer from the objections commonly urged against it.

First, then, it is objected by some, ‘ That an omniscient God knows already what we want, before we ask it ; and to what purpose do we ask those things which he already knows we stand in need of ? ’ The answer to this objection is evident : That the design of prayer is not to inform God of things which he did not know before. This is so far from being
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the design of it, that every one, even of the meanest capacity, understands, that, when he addresses himself to his Maker, he ought to have it expressly in his consideration, that he to whom he prays, knows all his wants already, every circumstance of his condition, and every thought of his heart. The real design of prayer is, in the first place, to express under a lively impression of the presence of God, the sense we have of our dependence upon him, of our manifold wants, and that he alone is able to supply them; and to make this sense more deep and affecting. Now, since it is a certain truth that we depend upon God; and have numberless wants, the supplying of which we can expect from God alone; is it not highly reasonable and natural that we should acknowledge this in his presence, and express to him our desires, and our dependence upon him? Does not such acknowledgments frequently made to him, naturally tend to strengthen our sense of this truth, and to make it more deeply affecting? Will any one venture to assert that this truth is not to be thus owned? Where is the man who dares pretend to have credit and authority sufficient to controul this truth? Is not this a truth owned by angels in heaven, as well as men upon earth? Is not this a truth which shall be for ever owned by a dependent world? Besides, is not this a truth in which we are deeply interested? Is it not of the highest importance toward cultivating all other good dispositions, that we have most lively impressions of this truth, and use the most natural means of making them lively? As our dependence upon God is the primary, the most important of all relations, and the foundation of all others; the deepest sense and acknowledgment of it must be our first, our supreme, and our most natural and most indispensable duty: our obligation to it can never be extinguished any other way than either by annihilating us, depriving us of our reason, or rendering us independent.

Is it not manifest that an intimate and habitual sense of our dependent state, has a mighty influence on all the duties which we owe to our Creator, and to one another? The strength of our love, the warmth of our gratitude to our Maker, and the stability of our confidence in him, must rise or fall in proportion as the persuasion of our dependence upon him is fainter or stronger. And as nothing has a more powerful tendency to inspire us with love, benignity, and compassion to our fellow-creatures, than considering them as the children of the same great Parent of all, equally depending upon him with ourselves, for all they enjoy here, or hope for hereafter; so, nothing can more effectually check that pride, selfishness, and vanity, which leads us to contemn and injure our brethren of mankind, than an habitual sense, that we are as really dependent creatures as they are; that we are as insufficient for our own happiness as they are; and that he on whom we depend can soon raise them to our state, or thrust us down into theirs: Why, then, may not this truth, most certain in itself, and most important in its consequences, be owned in the most public and religious manner; in that manner which naturally tends to make the deepest impression of it upon our hearts? and that, certainly, is the owning it in direct addresses to God himself. Why should we not embrace every proper opportunity of acknowledging it, with all those affecting and solemn circumstances, which may contribute to imprint a deep and abiding conviction of it on our own minds, and those of all around us? But to speak more directly to the head of petitioning; it is,

Secondly, A further design of prayer, to express, under an actual sense of the presence of God, our earnest desires of having all those sentiments and pious dispositions, which it is proper for us to entertain and cultivate, considered as dependent, reasonable, social, and guilty creatures. If we feel earnest breathings after happiness, after the means that lead to it, and
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all those pure and worthy affections which are the principal ingredients of it, we certainly ought to encourage and favour them. If then we find ardent desires arising within us after the knowledge, the favour, the resemblance, and enjoyment of God, why may we not express them in that manner and in those circumstances, which will contribute most to cultivate and increase such honourable and worthy motions of the rational soul? and, surely, the addressing such desires to God is the most effectual method of strengthening them. If we believe that God can accomplish these worthy desires, why may we not ask it of him? If we hope and trust in him that he will sooner or later accomplish them, why may we not declare our joyful expectations of being at last possessed of them? If we feel our souls ascending to God in love, joy, and praise, is it not reasonable, that we should indulge those delightful sentiments, and, by repeated acts, confirm and improve them?

If these inward emotions of heart are just and natural, if we cannot but approve them, if we judge them worthy of being cherished and strengthened; why may we not give full vent to them, in all proper methods of outward expression? and, if our own experience, and the testimony of the best of mankind inform us, that the yielding up our souls to the full influences of devout affections, and giving them full scope in voice and language, especially in addresses to God, are the most effectual methods of increasing that strength and fervour, and of spreading their happy effects through the whole of human life; it surely must be our truest wisdom to employ all these means of establishing and perfecting them.

Secondly, It is further objected, ‘ That, since God
 ‘ is infinite in goodness, he is always disposed to be-
 ‘ stow on his creatures whatever is proper for them;
 ‘ and, since he is infinite in wisdom, he will always
 ‘ choose the fittest time, and best manner of bestowing
 ‘ it. To what purpose, then, do we entreat him to
 ‘ do,

‘do, what he certainly will do, without any solicitation or importunity?’ To this it may be answered; That, as it is not the design of prayer to give information to our Creator of things he was not acquainted with before; so, neither is it the design of it to move his affections, as good speakers move the hearts of their hearers by the pathetic arts of oratory; nor to raise his pity, as beggars, by their importunities and tears, work upon the compassion of by-standers. God is not subject to those sudden passions and emotions of mind which we feel; nor to any change of his measures and conduct by their influence: He is not wrought upon and changed by our prayers; for, ‘with him there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.’ Prayer only works its effect upon us; as it contributes to change the temper of our minds; to beget or improve right dispositions in them; to lay them open to the impressions of spiritual objects, and thus qualify us for receiving the favour and approbation of our Maker, and all those assistances which he has promised to those who call upon him in sincerity and in truth: the efficacy of prayer does not lie in the mere asking; but in its being the means of producing that frame of mind which qualifies us to receive. If it is still urged, ‘Why do we ask, if God does not grant merely for the asking?’ To this I reply, that, if by asking be understood the uttering of words, and using a voice and language, in which all the symptoms of earnestness and importunity appear; this external part of asking, I own, serves no purpose, with respect to God; and the only use of it is to engage the attention, and raise the devotion of our own minds, or those of others. But, if by asking, be understood the inward desires and breathings of the soul after those heavenly dispositions, in which the perfection and happiness of our natures chiefly consist: in this sense of it, I assert, that these are the beginnings of virtue: these are the means of improving it, both in the nature of things, and by the positive appointment of God: these are inseparable

able from real virtue, as long as it is capable of improvement; which may be for ever, for any thing we know to the contrary: these desires, I say, are altogether unavoidable, and must arise in the breasts of all who have any degree of real goodness. Whoever has had the least glimpse of the beauty and excellence of real virtue, is not satisfied with such views of it as he has already attained; but pants after a clearer and stronger view of its everlasting worth and importance. Whoever has felt that pleasing serenity, that lively joy, and delightful liberty, which arises from any considerable degree of superiority to worldly passions, longs with ardor, nay, almost, with impatience, to obtain an intire conquest over them; and whoever has tasted the sublime, the divine pleasures of true devotion, breathes with the greatest fervor after the full and uninterrupted enjoyment of them. To those, then, who ask why we cherish the inward desires after the heavenly graces, and study to cultivate them by prayer, the answer is plain; That the doing so is the necessary consequence of real virtue, both in its first and feeblest, and in its highest and most perfect state, at least while in this world.

But, if it should be still urged, ‘that, tho’ we must have the desires, tho’ we ought to entertain and cultivate them, yet this is no sufficient reason for our offering them up to God, and entreating him to accomplish them: why may we not desire all the divine virtues, and frequently repeat the desire in our minds with pleasure and with ardor, without directly addressing it to God, whose infinite goodness inclines him to fulfil it as soon as his unerring wisdom sees fit?’ To this I answer, that it is impossible for the human mind to stop at the desire: it feels a powerful impulse, urging it forward to beg God to bestow what it wishes for with vehemence: and this very argument, which is urged against the lifting up holy desires to God, (viz. that he is infinite in goodness, and willing to gratify them,) is a principal

principal motive for offering them up; and makes it impossible for a well-disposed mind to abstain from it. Since, then, there is a determination in our nature, leading us to pray; since there is a law of external revelation commanding us to pray; since our own minds, on the calmest reflection, approve of praying, as being an explicate and natural acknowledgment of our dependence on our Maker, and a declaration, that we will gratefully receive the blessings we pray for, as the free gifts of his bounty: and since prayer is a means of enlivening and strengthening the best dispositions in our souls; we may conclude, that it is not only an innocent and harmless exercise, but that it is our indispensable duty to be frequently employed in it.

Further, we may add to the preceding reasonings, that it is highly probable it would be neither a wise, nor kind conduct in Providence, to bestow heavenly wisdom, worthy dispositions, and the happiness that accompanies them, on those who neglect to own it, and who will not acknowledge their dependence upon it. Is it not highly credible, that the infinite wisdom and goodness of the great Creator of all things, has established a standing law in the government of his rational subjects, that those dispositions which qualify them for his approbation and favour, shall be bestowed on none, but those who sincerely humble themselves to ask them? Nay, is it not solemnly declared in the revelation God hath given us, that this is, in fact, the great law and rule of his conduct, that for these blessings, 'he must be sought after by the house of Israel. Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me, Psal. l. 15. The Lord is nigh unto them that call upon him, and he will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he will hear their cry, and save them. Psal. cxlv. 18. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. James iv. 6. The meek God will guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his

‘ way.’ Pſal. xxv. 9. Do not our own minds approve of it as a juſt and reaſonable conſtitution, that the ſincere, the humble, and pious petitioner ſhould obtain his requeſts, while the neglecter of God, the unthinking, the proud, and unſubmitting ſinner ſhould be neglected, and continue to want what he will not humble himſelf to aſk from the divine bounty? Nay, muſt it not be owned, that we can diſcern wiſe and juſt reaſons, why this ſhould be an eſtabliſhed law of the divine government? Is it not manifeſt, that ſincerity, humility, and earneſt deſires after wiſdom and virtue, are diſpoſitions pre-viously neceſſary, in the nature of things, to prepare our minds for receiving heavenly wiſdom, and all the virtues which accompany it? Is not a deep ſenſe of our own ignorance, and earneſt panting after the wiſdom that comes from above, a fitter diſpoſition for attaining it, than a fond conceit of our own wiſdom? Is not a conſciouſneſs of the manifold diſorders of our hearts, a more proper ſituation of mind, for receiving that grace which muſt rectify them, than a vain and fooliſh imagination, that all is right within already? Is not a ſorrowful ſenſe of our great loſs, while we are void of thoſe divine virtues, which form the image of God in us, the moſt natural preparation for being beautified with them? If then this ſincerity and humility, theſe ardent deſires of ſpiritual bleſſings, and this deep ſenſe of our imperfections, are naturally pre-requiſite to our receiving theſe divine favours; is it ſuppoſeable, (where theſe previous qualifications are found in a juſt degree, and withal a lively perſuaſion that it is from God alone we can obtain theſe ſolid bleſſings,) that the human heart can avoid flying to him for them, by the moſt ardent invocations and prayers?

To ſum up the whole argument; ſince there is an inward impuſe, prompting us to pray; ſince there are frequent precepts of external revelation commanding us to pray; and, ſince it is the eſtabliſhed law of the righteous government of God, over the intelligent world,

world, that spiritual blessings shall be bestowed on those only who humble themselves to pray for them; we may infer, that prayer is so far from implying any just reflection upon the perfect wisdom and goodness of the great Governor of all things, that it is a just compliance with that constitution of things which he hath appointed; and an harmonizing (so to speak) with the wise order of his providence. Since prayer is appointed by God to be the means of producing, preserving, and increasing in us the best and worthiest dispositions; to practise it is nothing else but a concurring with him, in his great design of establishing the happiness of his creation.

3dly, It is further urged, ' That there is no just ground of expecting any immediate light or aid from heaven, in consequence of the most sincere and fervent prayer: for, after the most accurate inquiry that can be made into the workings of the human mind, there is nothing to be perceived, but what may be the natural effect of proper motives and arguments.' In answer to this; let it be observed, that, even supposing there is no good disposition awakened in the human soul, where the proper considerations and motives have not been laid before it; yet, there may be good reasons for believing, that there is some secret and undiscernable aid of Heaven concurring with those considerations and motives; displaying their whole importance and force to the mind; fixing the attention of it to consider them; and laying it open to feel their whole power and influence. This at least must be allowed, that the same motives, laid before the minds of different persons, do not produce the same effects: in two persons, who seem equally capable of discerning the strength and force of motives; who seem to have bestowed equal attention in weighing them; and whose passions seem to be equally capable of resisting; the effects they produce are widely different. Besides, it deserves our most attentive consideration, that there is no inseparable connection betwixt the

clearest and justest views of the excellence and importance of moral and spiritual objects, and those feelings and affections of heart which correspond to them: a man may have the justest and sublimest ideas of all the human, social, and divine virtues, while he remains in a great measure, or altogether, without any feeling of them in his heart. There are many instances in the world, of men, who have formed the purest and most exalted conceptions of the divine perfections, who can speak of them with dignity, and are highly delighted with the theory and contemplation of them; and yet feel almost nothing of that true devotion of heart, which should be awakened by them. In like manner, a man may have his mind stored with the most exact and delightful speculations concerning the beauty and worth of temperance, integrity, sincerity, benevolence, friendship, humility, and all the human and social virtues; may be capable of speaking and writing about them, to admiration; while he still continues under the power of the lowest sensuality, and a selfish malignant disposition. On the other hand, it may be observed, that those who are less acquainted with the delightful theories of virtue and religion, who have not such exact and perfect notions of them, and who, from a necessary attention to other things, are seldom employed in thinking on them; yet are more uniformly governed in life, by the natural influence of the pious and virtuous dispositions themselves, than the greatest philosopher or divine, who spends his days in contemplating the ideas of them, and those views of things which should excite them. Now, as it is the good dispositions themselves, that constitute the soul and essence of virtue: as they only give the true dignity to our minds, and beauty to our lives; as they only can form the character which is worthy and acceptable in the sight of God; so, they are always represented in scripture, as the fruits and effects of the Holy Spirit. Gal. v. 22, 23. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, good-

ness,

‘ness, faith, meekness, temperance.’ From these observations, it plainly appears, that after we have got the purest and clearest ideas of religion, and the fullest views of those motives which should engage us to the practice of it; there is still ground to pray, that God may bless us with those divine affections of heart, which are the only real ornaments to our souls, the only lasting foundations of their peace and happiness. Our ideas are but pictures and images of the things themselves: and, as the picture of a feast cannot satisfy our hunger, nor the picture of a fire warm and enlighten us; so, the finest ideas of virtue and religion cannot make us good and happy, without those dispositions of heart, which should be raised and kept alive by them.

It may be also observed, as a thing of very considerable importance in the present argument, that the power of a man over his own inward dispositions, or those of others, is not so great, as some seem to imagine. No man will venture to boast that he can by any one effort, how vigorous soever, or even by repeated efforts, resolutions, and endeavours, raise the virtuous dispositions in his own soul, to such a degree of strength, that they shall uniformly and constantly prevail over all the passions which may oppose them; far less can any one pretend, that it is in his power to form anew the hearts of others, and change their dispositions, from the worst to the best, at his pleasure. Excepting our Saviour, an infallible teacher of virtue, a perfect master of the divine art of forming the noblest and worthiest dispositions in the human mind, never appeared in the world. The wisest, the best, and tenderest parent, cannot by all his art, and most assiduous endeavours, bestow true virtue on his dearest child: the most learned, most virtuous, and affectionate tutor, cannot form it in his beloved pupil. If an infallibly successful teacher of virtue could be found any where, what an invaluable treasure would he be; and how worthy to be sought after in the remotest corners of the world? No doubt, when one

reads pious books, hears virtuous discourse, sees worthy examples, and has enjoyed the benefit of the finest instructions, he may, or rather, he must be furnished with the justest and most amiable ideas of the whole glorious train of virtues : but, it will not follow hence, that he must have such a relish for the virtues themselves, as shall constantly render him superior to the temptations of the world ; or even, on the whole, make him a man of a virtuous character. This doctrine of the inability of mankind to make themselves virtuous and happy, and of the need of assistance from above, in this divine work, has been so deeply felt by the more thinking and considerate part of them, that it extorted a confession of it, even from those whose speculative principles seemed to lead them to a denial of it. For we find that sect of the heathen philosophers, who laid the foundation of their system in the distinction betwixt things in our power, and out of our power ; (meaning by the former, our good dispositions, resolutions, and actions ; and, by the latter, the external enjoyments of the world, which depend on a thousand accidents, over which we have no command ;) even they, I say, in opposition to their favourite distinction, inculcated the usefulness and importance of prayer *.

To all these observations we may add, that there has always been a very general and strong propensity in mankind to believe, that God makes impressions on the minds of men, in an immediate manner. And of this it were easy to bring numberless proofs, from the Poets, Philosophers, Orators, and Historians of former ages. I am very sensible that it will be objected, that few pretend that they themselves have felt any foreign and divine influence, which they could certainly distinguish from the natural and ordinary operations of their own minds : but, to this one may reply, that it may be the peculiar excellence of the

* Marcus Antoninus, Book IX. and Simplicius' Commentary on Epiſtetus, at the end.

Deity's method of operation, that it is imperceptible in itself, and only discernible by its effects. Thus, tho' we do not feel the power of God, upholding us in life, yet we do not know but it may be as really exerted every moment, in supporting our being, as it was at first, in bringing us into it. Besides, it may be said, that many good men, quite free of superstition, and remarkable for strength of mind, have declared that they have felt secret and sudden influences, determining them to particular steps of conduct, which had very remarkable effects, as to the happiness and usefulness of their after-life: and, does not almost every one feel thoughts, resolutions, and designs, springing up within him, which he is not conscious he has been led to, by any former course of his reading, conversation, or reasoning? Nay, if there is any credit to be given to human testimony, must we not believe that intimations have been made to good men, of future events, which greatly concerned themselves, or the society to which they belonged.

To conclude; those who will not allow any immediate influence of the Deity upon the human mind, but ascribe every thing there to the natural force of arguments and motives, ought to consider, that it is only going one step farther, and they come to God, and must own him as the original author of all. It is God who has made the mind of man capable of perceiving motives, and of being wrought upon by them: it is God, who, in the course of his providence, has presented such a train of motives to any one's mind, as has engaged him to practise all the virtues of a holy life: to God, therefore, the praise of it is to be given. And there still remains abundant reason to pray to him, that he may, in the unsearchable wisdom and goodness of his providence, continue to present such views of things to the mind, as may determine it always to chuse the virtuous and worthy part.

Fourthly,

4thly, But should any one object in this manner, (which I believe will scarce be done by any considerate man) waving the debate about the aids which may be obtained by prayer, yet alledging that he has no need of it : ‘ What should I pray for ? Shall I pray that
 ‘ God may enlighten my mind with the knowledge of
 ‘ my duty, and make me perceive the excellence and
 ‘ importance of piety, sincerity, truth, integrity, cha-
 ‘ rity, and all those virtues which dignify the souls of
 ‘ men, and beautify their lives and manners ? I know
 ‘ all these things already, and conduct my life by
 ‘ them.’

How much is it to be wished, that every one who thinks or speaks in this manner, would seriously ask himself;---Have I already attained as clear and distinct views of the worth and importance of all the heavenly virtues, as are attainable by mankind ? Have they as sovereign and commanding an influence over my heart and life, as ever they had over any of the sons of men ? Am I sure there is nothing farther to be seen, nothing higher to be felt ? What if human nature is capable of stronger and brighter views of the worth and majesty of the great virtues of the spiritual life, than I have yet obtained ? Nay, may I not suppose that many of the children of men have actually attained them, and conducted their lives more unerringly under the power and influence of them ? Have I any ambition remaining ? any thing of that divine ambition of aiming at a transcendency in what is great and good, in what is the sole glory of a reasonable being ? Shall I not then aspire after the highest sense, and the strongest impresson of them, that my nature is capable of ? Is there a great Father of lights, the enlightener of all minds, the everlasting lover and friend of truth and righteousness ? Has he declared that he is ready and willing to enlighten those who ask wisdom from him ? Has he assured us, that there is a dispensation of grace and light carrying on in the world, by his Son and Holy Spirit ;
 by

by which those blessings are perpetually imparted to all who sincerely ask them? Has he already enlightened, in a superior manner, those souls which lay themselves open to his influence? And, shall I refuse to ask his heavenly wisdom, and live contented with a smaller portion of it, when a greater may be obtained? Surely no true lover of virtue, no one who has any real greatness of mind, can bear the thought. But, perhaps, the objector will reply: 'What tho' I have not the highest and most striking sense of the everlasting worth and beauty of these things; yet I have as just and strong a sense of them, as is sufficient for all the purposes of human life; as much as will enable me to withstand the temptations of the world, and render me superior to them. I am so thoroughly persuaded of the excellence and value of all the moral and divine virtues, that I am in no danger of being seduced into a forgetfulness of the duties which I owe to God, to mankind, or to myself. I have such a perfect abhorrence of every thing base and unworthy, of every thing that approaches to a departure from what is just, becoming, and honest in human life, that it will be an everlasting security to my virtue: or, if at any time, thro' the force of some great and sudden temptations, I should be guilty of some small failure, I have nothing more to do, but call up the strength and resolution of my mind, and all things shall be right again.' In answer to all this, in the first place, it may be observed, that, supposing all that true, which vain men represent to their own conceited minds; tho' there should be no need for prayer; yet, surely, there is the justest ground for another part of devotion, thankfulness, and praise. Is it not reasonable, that those persons should lift up their hearts and hands in gratitude to that God, who has hitherto preserved them from the temptations of the world, and enabled them to lead a blameless life? Is it not God, who made them capable of discerning the honest, the just, and worthy

part,

part, and enabled them to follow it? Is it not God, who planted the good dispositions in their hearts, and has not suffered them to be overcome by the contrary passions? Can any blessing be greater, or afford juster ground for the most sincere praise and thankfulness? Nay, can any thing be more reasonable, than that they should pray to heaven with the greatest sincerity, for the continuance of such an inestimable blessing? Are we not always depending on the providence of God for it? To how many diseases and accidents are we exposed, which no human wisdom can foresee or prevent; by which the strength of our minds may be exceedingly impaired, our tempers fretted and soured, nay, our rational powers entirely destroyed? But, farther,

Allow me, in the second place, to exhort and beseech those, if there are any such, who imagine they have maintained their integrity invariably, through the whole course of their lives, (without the assistance of prayer, or any acts of trust and confidence in God,) to take an attentive review of their whole past conduct, and compare it impartially with the purity and perfection of the divine law; and then let them honestly declare if they have discerned nothing otherwise than it ought to have been: will any one venture to assert, that, upon the strictest examination, he finds he has not departed from the great rule of what is worthy and good, scarce in any instances; or, that he is not conscious to himself, of having neglected many things he ought to have done, might have done, to render either himself or others, wiser, better or happier? Do not many things occur to him, in the survey of his whole life, which he disapproves, which he would not choose to be guilty of a second time, and which he would endeavour to amend, if he were to pass life over again? I am inclined to believe there is no man, who, upon looking back, will not be sensible he has thought, said, and done many things, which he would not choose to do over again, were he placed in the same circumstances: that he has omitted,

ted, foolishly and criminally omitted, to do many things, which he would now joyfully embrace an opportunity of performing, if the like circumstances should present themselves. May it not be further asked, How do you know, but that, if you had been fervent in prayer, and with true devotion had lifted up your desires to God, for conduct and direction, you might have been preserved from those crimes, and those omissions of duty, which you cannot now review, without regret and self-condemnation; and been led to the practice of many virtues, and performance of many good offices, the opportunities of which can never be recalled?

May we not further inquire of those who have such complacency, and satisfaction in their own characters and conduct; Do you find nothing in the present temper and disposition of your mind, which you have reason to complain of, and which you desire to have rectify'd? Are there no imperfections to be corrected, no virtuous affections to be refined, confirmed, strengthened, and perfected? Are you already possessed of that degree of love to God, and true virtue, which pervades the whole soul, controuls the power of all the inferior passions, establishes a perpetual serenity within, and animates you with the utmost joy and alacrity, in practising all the virtues of a worthy life? If ye imagine ye are already raised to the utmost summit of perfection; we may safely venture to assert, that ye are mistaken; and, that self-love has blinded your eyes, and made you pass too favourable a sentence upon yourselves. This fond imagination, that ye are already perfect, is almost a demonstration, that ye are yet at a very great distance from it: ye have certainly fixed too low a standard of religion; your intellectual eye is not quick and piercing enough, to discern the idea of perfection set before you in the law of God, which ye ought perpetually to have in your view, and to be aspiring after, with the utmost ardor. There are but few to be found,
who

who have attained to the justest and highest taste of the true sublime in heart and life : whoever has had a clear and distinct view of it, will not flatter himself that he has reached it ; nay, he will be fully sensible, that he has not yet approached near it : and, whoever fondly imagines that he is come up to it, has not distinctly perceived it. That man must have a low understanding, and a vain heart, who is thus satisfied with himself ; who fancies he has attained to the truly great and perfect in temper and conduct : and, whoever is thus easily satisfied with himself, is commonly the only person who is so ; or, at least, the number of those will be few, who pass the same judgment on him, that he does on himself. The higher any one advances in religion, his views are proportionably opened and enlarged. That moment the virtuous man has gained the victory over some bad passion he has been long struggling with, he sees some other one not quite subdued within him ; and, that moment he reaches to some certain pitch of virtue he had in his view, he discerns some higher pitch of it, at a great distance from him : in this, he resembles a traveller in a large champaign country ; who, this hour, sees nothing beyond a small eminence, which terminates his view at a distance ; the top of which he no sooner gains, than a new extent of country fills his eye, equal to that he has already pass'd. Since, then, there is still something yet unattain'd in the spiritual life, can we restrain ourselves from praying that the God of grace, the author of every good and perfect gift, would enlighten our eyes to discern it, and inspire us with the divine ambition of aiming and endeavouring to obtain it ? Is it not a joyful, nay, a triumphant consideration, that, by the light and assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, we may travel on, from perfection to perfection, and approach nearer and nearer to our Maker, by higher degrees of resemblance.

Further,

Further, may we not desire those who imagine they have no need of prayer, to look forward to that part of life they may yet have to pass through? Are they certain they shall never meet with any temptation, that may be an overmatch for that virtue of theirs, which they flatter themselves is so firmly established? May there not be ten thousand circumstances in life, which may endanger their integrity? Every occurrence, every state, every employment, has its peculiar temptations, and may occasion a departure from the right path. What security have we in ourselves? Are we not conscious that our reason is weak, in many things clouded by ignorance, blinded by prejudices, seduced by appetites, and over-ruled by passions, and unreasonable affections? When we look abroad into the world, how many melancholy instances may we mark out, of the seemingly firmest virtue, soon shaken, and overcome? Must we not own that wiser, greater, and better men than we can pretend to be, have yielded to the force of temptation; and, in some degree, and for some time, apostatised from the cause of righteousness? Have not they themselves mournfully acknowledged this afterwards? Can any then be so insufferably vain and arrogant, as to imagine that nothing can ever lead them astray, or in any degree darken their understandings, or corrupt their hearts? Is it not most natural for every one who loves the good and virtuous part, and delights in the practice of it, to wish that he may have the assistance of a superior guide, to conduct him safely thro' all the snares which may be spread for him in a degenerate world? In a word, every one who is thoroughly sensible of his own weakness, and of the innumerable dangers to which virtue is exposed in the present disordered state of things, will see sufficient reason for lifting up his soul to God in these emphatical prayers of the devout Psalmist, Psal. cxix. 33---37. 'Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I shall keep it unto the end. Give me

‘ understanding, and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall
 ‘ observe it with my whole heart. Make me to go
 ‘ in the path of thy commandments ; for therein do I
 ‘ delight. Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and
 ‘ not unto covetousness. Turn away mine eyes from
 ‘ beholding vanity, and quicken thou me in thy
 ‘ way.’

To all which, it may be added, that, if ever any person appeared in the world, who could plead that he had no need of prayer, Jesus might have done it ; He felt a perpetual good-will to all mankind, and was animated by it to go about in an uniform and unwearied course of beneficence ; he was quite unmoved with the temptations of the world, and walked on in the execution of his great undertaking, with an undaunted and victorious pace, in spite of all opposition ; and yet we learn from the history of his life, that he was frequently employed in prayer, as well as recommended it to his followers : surely then, no one else can pretend that he is above the need of prayer, and other acts of devotion.

Again, ‘ It is objected, that, whatever use prayer
 ‘ may be of, for direction and assistance in the paths
 ‘ of virtue ; it surely can be of none, for the obtain-
 ‘ ing the pardon of sin, and deliverance from those
 ‘ punishments, which are threatened to be inflicted
 ‘ on sinners, in this, and an eternal world : for if sin
 ‘ deserves punishment, and if punishment is necessary
 ‘ to frighten us from continuing in it ; how can pray-
 ‘ ers for forgiveness secure us from those sufferings,
 ‘ which are intended by our kind Creator for our re-
 ‘ formation and amendment !’ To this it may be an-
 swered, that a sense of our faults, humble confession
 of them, and earnest entreating the divine mercy to
 forgive them, are very proper means of promoting a
 penitent disposition in us ; they naturally preclude
 the necessity of punishments destin’d for our refor-
 mation ; as by them we in a gentler manner attain to
 the end of such punishments, without having suffered
 them :

them : and thus prayers, for the pardon of sin, may be of unspeakable advantage, as they contribute to produce that temper of mind in us, which leads to an alteration in our conduct, and consequently secures us from those punishments which must have ensued either on our past transgressions, or on our persisting in the like course of iniquity.

Before we finish this head, it may be proper to observe, that others argue against praying for the pardon of sin, in another manner : ‘ What occasion can there possibly be, (say they) for praying to God to forgive our sins? our sins are owing to the invincible force of temptations ; and so are only the unavoidable frailties of our nature ; and surely an infinitely good God can never call us to a severe account for them.’ As this is an important matter, on which our highest and eternal interest depends, it greatly concerns us to take care that we do not deceive ourselves : let us attend to the voice of revelation, and of reason ; and we shall find that they jointly proclaim, with the highest solemnity, that sin shall not pass unpunished. Hearken to that awful declaration of holy writ, Gal. vi. 7. ‘ Be not deceived, God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ; for he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption : but, he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting :’ that is, our everlasting state hereafter, depends upon our behaviour here. As surely as he who sows wheat or barley in the seed-time, shall reap the same kind of grain in the harvest, and no other ; so certainly shall those who live a wicked life here, be miserable hereafter. Is it not amazing, that mankind are not struck with this tremendous declaration ? The reason of this must be, that they do not in earnest believe it. Every man believes, that if he sows the seeds of thistles and thorns, he cannot reap wheat or barley ; but, every one does not believe, that if he lives a vicious and impious life here, he cannot enjoy

happinefs hereafter : what is the reason why we believe the former, and doubt of the latter, ſince they are equally true ? One reaſon is plainly this : that we have obſerved the courſe of nature in the frequent returns of ſeed-time and harveſt ; and find by undoubted experience, that it is an invariable law of the natural world, that whatever kind of grain is ſown, the ſame kind, and no other, is reaped in the harveſt. But we have not yet ſeen one whole year, one full period of the government of the rational world : we have only ſeen the ſeed-time of human life ; the harveſt is yet to come ; the great year is not completed, at leaſt, within our view : but, as ſoon as we enter into the inviſible world, we ſhall be convinced, that it is an unalterable law of the moral as well as of the natural world, that, whatever a man ſows, that he alſo reaps : there we ſhall ſee what dreadful miſery ſprings out of vice, and what further puniſhments are inflicted on it ; what unſpeakable happinefs grows out of virtue, and with what additional joy it is crown'd. But, further, let us conſider, that, tho' we had not thoſe ſolemn declarations of divine revelation, we ſhould have juſt reaſon to dread the conſequences of criminal indulgence, both in this, and in an after-ſtate. For, when we attend to the conduct of divine Providence, we ſee that vice is actually puniſhed at preſent, in a certain degree ; which gives natural ground to fear that it may be puniſhed in an higher degree hereafter. The natural deformity of vice, the pangs of remorse which accompany it, the havock which it makes of the beauty, the order and peace of our minds, the direful effects of it, in the bodies, fortunes, families, and characters of thoſe who indulge themſelves in it without controul ; plainly intimate, or, rather, loudly proclaim, that the Governor of the world is engaged againſt it, and will not ſuffer it to paſs unpuniſhed : now, has the great author of nature begun to chaſtiſe, and puniſh ſin here ; and what ground is there then to hope that he will favour it hereafter ? What ſhadow of

of reason is there for flattering ourselves, that the measures and laws of divine conduct shall be altered? The other world is only a succeeding period of the same government, under the same Governor, in which we have all possible reason to believe the same fundamental laws of rewarding virtue, and punishing vice, shall continue in full force. It certainly then greatly concerns us, not to cherish an indifference and fearfulness, with regard to what may be hereafter, under the righteous government of God. To think or speak in a slight and unconcerned manner, as to what may happen in any period of the divine government, is unspeakable irreverence, and manifest impiety: but, to live at random, without regarding the divine law, and the tremendous sanctions of it, is madness, and impiety to such a pitch, as must astonish, and strike every thinking person with terror. Let us beware then of trusting to mistaken notions of the boundless benignity and mercy of the great Parent of all. Do we allow that it is consistent with the most perfect goodness to inflict just punishments on wickedness here? (and allow it we must; for, we see that, in fact, it is done :) by what train of reasoning, then, shall we be able to show, that it is inconsistent with the same perfect goodness, to punish it with greater severity hereafter?

Fifthly, It is objected, ‘that those who seem to delight in prayer, do not appear to be better, happier, or more successful than those who neglect or contemn it. Where do we find God interposing for the prosperity of the pious, or where are these happy effects of devotion we are taught to expect?’ In answer to this, it may be observed, that there are different sorts of persons, who pray from very different views and intentions: some pray with no other nor higher view, than that they may gain a character as religious; which may be of use to them in the prosecution of some worldly design. Others use prayer as a kind of charm, to render them acceptable to God,

or as an atonement and compensation to him, for those lusts of their hearts, which they are unwilling to mortify, and those iniquities of their lives, which they still continue to commit. Now, both these sorts of praying people are to be thrown out of the question: and it is to be confined to those who pray, with simplicity and sincerity of heart; who have no other aim in praying, but that they may become better men, that they may know the will of God more clearly, and may obey it with more constancy and alacrity, and who trust in God, that he 'will be to them a sun and shield, and will give them grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from them, *because* they walk uprightly.' If it be ask'd, What the better are these persons for their habitual course of prayer, and other acts of devotion? The answer is plain, that, tho' they are not, perhaps, distinguished with outward prosperity, yet they are rewarded with inward enjoyments of a higher and nobler mind. What tho' God has not bestowed houses, lands, riches, pleasures, honour, strength or beauty, upon the pious man? These are only outward good things, incapable of giving true happiness to the possessors of them. But, if he has given him greater blessings, wisdom, virtue, truth, integrity, temperance, humility, meekness, contentment, and contempt of the world, with all that inward peace, joy, confidence in himself, and hope of immortality which accompanies them; these are the true riches, the real treasures of the immortal soul: these are such treasures, as calamity, danger, death, can never rob it of.' 'Tis true, these inward pleasures, these mental possessions, are not discerned by spectators: but those who feel and enjoy them, cannot doubt of their superior worth and excellence. As 'tis well known, that many of those who put on an air of happiness, and whose outward splendor and flourishing circumstances create admiration and envy in ignorant beholders, carry about with them secret pains, and inward stings, which greatly diminish, if not intirely destroy

destroy, their apparent happiness and contentment; so, it is as certain, that the sincere worshippers of God, even when in the lowest state, and most struggling circumstances, enjoy many silent pleasures, and secret consolations, which give them greater happiness, than worldly men ever taste amidst their greatest gaiety and abundance. He who is conscious that he possesses, in the main, that temper and disposition of mind which is acceptable to God, and who maintains an assured trust and confidence in the mercy and goodness of his Creator, enjoys an inward rest and composure of mind, which cannot be described. It is called, in Holy Scripture, ‘the peace of God that passeth all understanding.’ It is an inward calmness and tranquillity, like to that of the highest heavens. He that enjoys it, is easy within himself, and pleasing to those around him. He is free from those inward disturbances and anxieties which disquiet the souls of other men. His conversation is pleasant, and his tranquillity appears in the cheerful air of his countenance, tho’ silent: his mind is open to taste, with full relish, all those good things which Providence has provided for sweetening the journey of human life. But, why do I call this happy state of mind, tranquillity only!—it is far beyond mere calmness or tranquillity.—There may be a perfect tranquillity and calmness in the air, tho’ the day be overcast with thick mists and clouds. The state of the pious man’s mind is like a calm and serene day, enlightened and enlivened with the brightest sun-shine. The truly devout man is not barely content with his lot, acting the part assigned him, however low it may be, to the best of his power: his soul rises up above contentment, to joyful thankfulness and praise. He rejoices in that existence, into which he has lately entered, and in that rank of creatures to which he is advanced. When he considers that he is admitted to be a spectator of all the glorious works of nature around him, and that he is not only made capable of con-

templating the beauty and order, the grandeur and magnificence of them ; but of adoring, praising, resembling, and enjoying the great Creator and sustainer of them, he is transported with wonder, gratitude, and praise. If these are my enjoyments (says he to himself,) in this first stage of my existence, when my faculties are only beginning to open and unfold themselves ; what new scenes, what nobler and more magnificent entertainments may I expect shall be presented to my view, while my faculties are improving and enlarging thro' millions of ages ? What divine, what inconceivable joys, must break in upon me, if I should be admitted to survey all the bright and illustrious scenes of Providence, in many other parts of God's great dominions, and through all the successive periods of his righteous government ? But, what must my state be, when I shall see my Maker himself, ' not darkly, as through a glass, but face to face ?' — Here, language, imagination fail me. — Sure I am, it must be something that will be a fountain of unpeakable delight and everlasting rapture. ' Eye
' hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it
' entered into the heart of man to conceive those great
' things God hath laid up in store for those that love
' him.'

The last objection I shall take notice of, is this, ' that prayer can be of no importance ; for, since all
' things are already fixed by an unalterable decree of
' God, all those whom he has determined to be good
' and happy, shall certainly be so, whether they pray
' or not.' In answer to this, let it be observed, that none ever maintained that God hath determined events to happen without any means. Now we have shewn that prayers are the proper means of obtaining spiritual blessings ; and therefore, if we desire these spiritual blessings absolutely necessary to our happiness, (and which are not ordinarily appointed but to such as are thus properly prepared to receive and improve them) we should certainly incline to the use of all the necessary means

means to prepare ourselves for receiving them. Does any one ever pretend to reason thus ; If it be decreed that I shall be wise and learned, I shall undoubtedly become so, tho' I should never converse, read, think, or exercise my understanding in any way ? Did ever any one seriously expect he would arrive at knowledge and wisdom by the mere force of an eternal decree, while he rejected all the means of attaining it ? Did ever the husbandman sit down and reason thus with himself ; If it be determined in the eternal decree of God, that I shall have a plentiful crop, I shall certainly reap it in the harvest, tho' I neither manure nor sow my field in the seed-time ? Now, so far as prayer is the means of rendering us virtuous and happy, it is as absurd to expect we shall arrive at virtue and happiness without it, as it would be for the husbandman to hope he shall have his usual crop, tho' he bestow none of his usual labour and industry.

To conclude this head of the discourse, it may be proper to remark, that, after all that mankind can do, to reason themselves into a persuasion of the uselessness and absurdity of devotion, there is still something within them, too strong, too mighty, for all their pretended demonstrations to conquer. The foundation for devotion is laid so deep in the human mind, that the utmost art and laboured endeavours of a whole life cannot erase it. There are certain circumstances and situations of affairs, in which nature will break forth, and shew its force to be superior to all artificial reasonings : there are, I say, such circumstances in the course of almost every one's life, as will oblige the most hardned, obdurate neglecter or contemner of prayer, to lift up his soul to God with the utmost fervor. There are many such circumstances ; but, as it would take up too much time to describe them all, we shall only mention a few of them. When one is reduced to the utmost extremity of distress, under the pressure of some great affliction, when relations, friends, and others, stand around,

but cannot give any relief, or administer any consolation; where is the man to be found, whose speculative opinions can then maintain their power over him; and restrain him from looking up unto God, and imploring aid and relief from him? In all cases too, of sudden and extreme danger, do not we see how naturally men fly to God, and invoke him with the utmost fervency, to help and deliver them? In like manner, when the poor, the weak, the friendless man, is sorely wronged, and grievously oppressed by the great and powerful ones of the earth, and sees no possible way of redress from men; does he not call upon the great Judge of all, to protect the injured, and plead his righteous cause? Again, when grievous crimes are laid to an honest man's charge, of which he is intirely innocent, especially when accompanied with such circumstances of probability, as that his friends, and those who are inclined to judge most favourably of him, cannot help suspecting that he is guilty; does he not then naturally appeal to the all-seeing and un-erring Judge, and entreat him to vindicate his innocence, and clear his good name? These things are felt in mankind, by a sudden impulse of nature, without any deliberate reflection. Beside these instances, we may take notice of the two following: First, When any one is about to leave the world, and bid an everlasting farewell to all the enjoyments of it; when all hope of restoration to health, or even of prolonging life in a lingering disease, is taken away; is there any one who can then abstain from praying, that the great and good Being, who brought him into the world, and led him through all the different stages of life, may continue his providential care, conduct him safely into the untry'd world of spirits, and be his guide through all the periods of his existence? And, Secondly, When any one stands by, and sees the expiring agonies of his dearest friend, for whom he felt the warmest love, and the highest esteem; in whom he reposed an unreserved confidence; when he sees that

that all those talents, virtues, and excellencies, which delighted his soul, are soon to cease, as to this world; can he help wishing and praying, with the utmost ardor, that such a soul, with all virtues and accomplishments, may survive the dissolution of his mortal body, and that he may enjoy his delightful society in another and better situation of things, where there shall be no danger of death and separation any more?

But, why do I insist on these particular alarming circumstances, as the only proofs that mankind are determined, by the very frame of their nature, to have recourse to Almighty God? For, as soon as the faculties of the reasonable soul begin to open and unfold, it appears to be in a posture (I had almost said, in an act,) of devotion. Do not we see all mankind breathing after knowledge and happiness? Do not they all pursue truth and happiness, however far mistaken they may be, as to the kind of it? This ardent desire in the human soul, is so natural, so essential to it, that, perhaps, there cannot be a juster, or better definition given of it, than that it is, a rational being panting for knowledge and happiness. It must be owned, that these breathings of the soul (after truth and felicity,) are not directed immediately to God, nor explicitly expressed in words · and yet as there is no notion or conclusion of reason more natural, or obvious to the soul, than its dependence on God, and that he is the sovereign dispenser of its lot, the source from which all its excellency or happiness must flow; prayers are its most natural exercise, and even these instinctive desires may justly be called natural prayers. They discover a plain tendency of the soul towards God, the eternal fountain of light and happiness: they are sure indications, that there is some idea of truth and happiness inseparable from the human mind; and that there is a natural instinct in it, which leads all men to seek after and pursue some species or another of good, and even to implore it from God.

From

From all these observations and reasonings, it is hoped we may conclude, that the neglecting or contemning of prayer, must be owing to prejudices, cherished and fortified with art and care; and not to any dictate of reason, or impartial inquiry into the state and tendency of the several workings of the human mind. But, after all that can be said in justification of prayer, we must acknowledge, that it is rather by the pure and refined feelings of a well-disposed heart, that any one can be brought to a full conviction of the worth and importance of this part of religion, than by the force of argument; which, at best, can only extort the cold assent of the understanding, or silence its vain reasonings.

We proceed now to the third thing proposed, namely, to point out the advantages which arise from the sincere and stedfast performance of this important duty. And, here,

In the first place, when we take the most general view of prayer, we cannot help discerning the usefulness and importance of it. When we consider that mankind, in their present state, are deeply immersed in the business or enjoyments of the world; that external objects are perpetually striking upon their senses, playing before their imaginations, and making impressions upon their hearts; it evidently appears to be an unspeakable advantage to them, to have regular and stated seasons, of recalling their minds from the numberless avocations of a vain world, and fixing them upon God, and spiritual things. The surest method of counterworking the impressions made on the soul by that crowd of worldly thoughts which pass thro' it, is to banish them entirely for some time, and lay it open by prayer and contemplation, to the impressions of those heavenly and eternal objects, which by their greatness, importance, and excellence, will engage and command attention. And, indeed, without proper seasons allotted to retirement and devotion, and frequently recurring, we are in the greatest dan-

ger imaginable of being under the full and uncontrolled power of these vain and perishing objects, which surround us in the world; and which are perpetually engaging the attention of our minds, and soliciting the love and affection of our hearts. Our Saviour, in the words of the text, takes notice of this, as one great advantage of prayer, that it is a preservative against the temptations of the world. 'Pray, (says he,) that ye enter not into temptation.' Now, prayer has a natural tendency, in a great variety of ways, to break the force of those temptations to which we are necessarily exposed in life. It keeps alive in our minds an habitual sense of our danger; disposes us to keep a watchful eye on those things from which our danger arises; and puts us in a proper posture for resistance and defence.---It turns away our attention (as has just now been observed,) from those objects which raise impure desires and guilty passions in our bosoms. It calls up such a lively sense of the divine presence, as must check the first risings of irregular inclinations; and fill us with dread and shame, of thinking, saying, or doing any thing unworthy of those who aim at the approbation and favour of the great Judge of all. It presents the divine perfections to our view, and inspires us with an abhorrence of every thing that would render us unlike to them. Whenever therefore we are assaulted with a temptation to gratify any impure and violent appetite, or passion, let us accustom ourselves to stop, till we have lifted up our hearts to God, in sincere and fervent prayer, that he may assist us in the conflict, and give us the victory; and we shall soon feel the violence of the temptation abated, that we are enabled to exert a hidden strength, and, for the present, to obtain an entire mastery over it.

Secondly, As prayer fortifies us against temptations to sin; so, it inspires us with the love, and animates us to the practice of every virtue. By offering up our most earnest desires to God, that he may more and
more

more beautify our souls with all worthy and good dispositions, our love to them is increased; and we are the more disposed to employ every proper means of establishing and strengthening them in our hearts. When we pray that the venerable image of our Maker may be stamped upon us, the divine perfections are necessarily presented to our view, and contemplation; our love and admiration of them is heightened, and we are fired with the noble ambition of drawing nearer and nearer to them, by greater degrees of resemblance. When we contemplate the deformity and misery of vice, under the actual sense of the presence of God, and intreat him to preserve us from it, we cannot but look upon it with the highest indignation, and form the most steadfast resolutions to abandon it. When we view the beauty of holiness, as our Creator's glory, and lift up our souls to him in ardent prayers, to adorn us with it, we must feel our hearts warmed with the love of it, and lay ourselves under the strongest vows of adhering uniformly and invariably to it, through the whole course of our lives. When we give full vent to the ardent breathings of our souls after the love of God, gratitude to him, and confidence in him; these pious affections are immediately awakened, and strengthened in some degree in our hearts: and when we indulge ourselves in frequent and ardent prayers for the prosperity and welfare of our fellow-creatures, this exercise of the kind and benevolent affections contributes greatly to enliven and invigorate them: moreover, those views in which prayer presents our brethren of mankind to our minds, tend greatly to soften our hearts and heighten our good-will and tenderness for them: when we consider them as a part of the same great family of God, with ourselves; as partakers of the same nature, as liable to all the same dangers and distresses, as groaning under the same darkness of understanding, disorder of heart, and violence of passion; it will be impossible for us not to love and pity them with the
greatest

greatest tenderness, and pray with the utmost ardor, that they may be at last established in some better and happier state.

Thirdly, Prayer puts us into the best frame and situation of mind for receiving the influences of heavenly light and grace. It promotes a certain softness and tenderness of heart, which renders the soul easily susceptible of the impressions of spiritual and divine objects: the soul, when duly softened and humbled by prayer, feels and sees in quite another manner than when it is hardened and puffed up with pride and vanity. A deep sense of our ignorance disposes us to attend to, and follow every ray of light, how small soever: whereas, pride of understanding shuts out the light, and turns away the attention from it. We should therefore consider prayer, and exercise ourselves in it, as the great means appointed by God for drawing down that wisdom from above, which is necessary to guide us to our higher country, and to settle us in eternal rest and happiness, in our Father's house: see, for the proof of this, many solemn passages of Holy Scripture, James iv. 6. Psal. xxv. 9. *Isai.* lxvi. 2.

Fourthly, True devotion raises the human soul to an uncommon pitch of grandeur and elevation. The mind of man seems to adapt itself to the different nature of the objects with which it is conversant: it is contracted and debased by being employed in little and low things; and it is proportionably enlarged, and exalted by the contemplation of those things which are great and sublime. The perfections of the Deity, his universal and eternal Providence, the excellence of virtue, and of those general laws of God which are the foundation and support of the order, the beauty, and happiness of his whole rational kingdom; the dignity and immortality of the human soul, whereby it is capable of vast and endless improvements; these are objects of such a striking and exalted nature, that they must ennoble and enlarge the
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the mind employed in contemplating them. All worldly and transitory things must appear unworthy the love and pursuit of that soul, which is raised above all created things, and which aspires to, and pursues that happiness which arises from the love, the resemblance, and enjoyment of the great Creator of all. There is no greatness of mind equal to that which springs from the divine ambition of aiming at a resemblance of God; and from the glorious hope of seeing him as he is in some future period of existence. ‘Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.’ 1 John iii. 2.

Fifthly, True devotion gives a wonderful strength and firmness to the soul which is under the full power and influence of it. That man must adhere with inviolable constancy to whatever is great or good in life, who is animated with the hope of the divine approbation, and who relies with assured confidence on the friendship, protection, and assistance of the great Ruler of all things. No difficulties, no dangers can terrify him, who has that great Being on his side, who is alone the sovereign disposer of all events. No temptations of pleasure or profit can allure him who trusts in an almighty friend, who is able to make him happy, in ten thousand methods beyond what he can conceive. Every worldly thing vanishes at the presence of him, ‘before whom the world is as nothing, less than nothing and vanity.’ Even death itself is stripped of all its terrors to the pious man; when it is considered only as a removing that veil of flesh, which interposes betwixt him and the invisible world. Nay, death itself is desirable; as it discloses new scenes of wonder and delight; and admits the devout soul to the more immediate presence of its God, ‘where there are rivers of pleasures for evermore.’

Since then prayer is a reasonable thing in itself; since there are so many, and so great advantages arising from

from the sincere and stedfast practice of it; it must be both our duty and our interest to continue instant in it. And that we may be animated with fervour and sincerity in the exercise of this part of our duty, let us frequently inculcate on ourselves, that we are weak, indigent, and ignorant creatures; and that we depend intirely on our Maker for all we possess at present, or hope to enjoy hereafter. The first and most obvious reflection convinces us, that we are nothing of ourselves; but that it is by the power of God we have our existence: no man was ever so presumptuous and absurd, as to imagine or assert that he was author and original to himself; or that he felt a mighty power within, by which when brought into being, he could continue himself in it as long as he pleased. Every one acknowledges that he finds nothing in his own nature to warrant his subsistence in this world for one moment; and far less to ensure it for ever in another. Nay, even supposing our existence continued to us by that almighty Being who gave it, we are conscious that we cannot conduct ourselves surely to that state of perfection and happiness, which our natures are capable of, and for which they were designed. When we have viewed ourselves on all sides, we find we are in the most forlorn and helpless condition imaginable, without the friendship of a superior and almighty Being. In order to represent our deplorable state without a firm reliance on the all-sustaining and all-conducting Providence of our great Creator, let us suppose, that in a morning when we awake, we should find ourselves sailing along, with all our nearest relations and dearest friends, in a wide, unconstant, and seemingly boundless ocean; where we see storms and tempests gathering around us, hovering over, and very soon to break upon us; being utterly incapable ourselves to steer our vessel to any safe harbour, and without any hope of assistance, either from men or invisible powers; so that we could expect no relief, but must be in perpetual dread of being tossed up and
down

down at the pleasure of winds and waves, till we should be starved to death, or, until our vessel split upon some unseen rock, and we should sink to the bottom. Would not our case be extremely lamentable? Yet this is but a faint image of our state here in this world, without an assured trust in the wisdom and goodness of an invisible and almighty Friend, who will lead us safely through this dangerous voyage of human life, and land us at last on some peaceful shore.

We find ourselves placed here in a wide, and to our view, a boundless world, and in the midst of an incomprehensible scheme of things: we know not whence we came, or whither we are going: we behold an eternity before us; but know not what shall befall us while we continue here, at our departure hence, or in any period of that endless duration thro' which we may pass. We see other persons around us, of the same nature, and in the same circumstances with ourselves: they are as ignorant and as weak as we are; and can give us neither information nor assistance. When we reflect on what passes within our bosoms, we must own, that our inward tranquility is frequently disturbed and interrupted. Sometimes, indeed, pleasing desires, joyful hopes, and delightful affections, enliven and gladden our hearts: but, at other times, vain desires, alarming fears, and guilty passions, disquiet and torment them. It is not in our power, to preserve uniformly the gentle emotions, and happy effects of the former; or to banish entirely the unquiet workings and baneful influences of the latter. When we look back on that part of our life which is already past, we cannot avoid being self-condemned for many instances of sin and folly; which sometimes awaken within us dire forebodings of a just punishment awaiting us in some future period of our existence: and, when we look forward to that part of life which lies before us, we find reason to dread we shall be guilty of the same, or the like departures from the paths of wisdom and righteousness. Let any one
retire

retire from the noise and hurry of the world, and reflect seriously with himself upon his present state, as a state of trial, in which there is a certain path marked out to him by the great Author of his being; and that according as he walks in it, or departs from it, he shall be happy or miserable in this, and in another life: and after he has imprinted on his mind a just and awful sense of this interesting and important truth, that his eternal happiness depends upon his behaviour; let him further consider, that through the weakness of his understanding, the strength of his passions, the fickleness of his best resolutions, and the numberless temptations of the world, he may be led astray from the path of life; and he shall find himself struck with such a sense of his danger, as will force him to break out in these or such like meditations, intermixed with prayers, ‘O my soul! how great is thy darkness, how deep is thy corruption, how manifold are the dangers to which thou art exposed in this thy passage through this world! thou knowest not where thy true happiness lies; thou art ignorant of the way that leads unto it; thou hast frequently wandered in a vain pursuit of false appearances of it; and thou art in the greatest danger of still wandering farther from it.’

‘O Father of lights, open mine eyes to see what my true happiness is; point out the road clearly that leads unto it; and never suffer me to depart from it. Send forth thy light and thy truth, let them lead me and bring me to that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness: guide me with thy counsel while here, and afterward receive me to glory.’

Further, let the same person continuing his retirement and meditation, survey with seriousness and attention the whole extent of his duty to God, to mankind, and to himself, and the manifold awful obligations he lies under to fulfil it; and he shall scarce be able to contain himself from giving vent to the lively

workings of his heart, in these or some such mournful acknowledgments, and ardent petitions.

‘ O my God, how faint and imperfect are my views
 ‘ of thy infinite perfection and glory ! how little do I
 ‘ feel of that adoration and praise, that love and con-
 ‘ fidence which are indispensably due unto thee ! Tho’
 ‘ thou hast presented to my view part of the great
 ‘ frame of nature, which is a standing monument, a
 ‘ perpetual remembrancer, of thy creating power, thy
 ‘ marvellous wisdom, and eternal Godhead ; though
 ‘ thou hast made me capable of contemplating the
 ‘ wondrous fabric of the heavens, whose august mag-
 ‘ nificence, immeasurable extent, and beneficial influ-
 ‘ ences on this lower world, afford me at once a lively
 ‘ representation and convincing evidence of thy infi-
 ‘ nite glory, thy boundless immensity, and diffusive
 ‘ benignity ; though thou hast placed me here in an
 ‘ apartment of thy world, where I see thy inexhausti-
 ‘ ble power and munificence, perpetually employed in
 ‘ raising up, supporting and providing for innumera-
 ‘ ble families of thy creatures around me ; though
 ‘ thou hast given me an organized body, fearfully and
 ‘ wonderfully made ; bearing the strongest marks of
 ‘ divine wisdom, and kind intention, in the contriv-
 ‘ ance of every part and member of it ; though thou
 ‘ hast placed a noble inhabitant within, whose fa-
 ‘ culties and dispositions, with a capacity of endless
 ‘ improvement in knowledge and virtue, are the surest
 ‘ proof, and truest image here below, of thy infinite
 ‘ wisdom and goodness ; nay, tho’ thou hast favoured
 ‘ me with a revelation of thy will, containing the
 ‘ clearest and most express discoveries of thy perfec-
 ‘ tions ; and of what adoration, praise, and confi-
 ‘ dence, are due to them : yet, alas ! all these various
 ‘ and striking manifestations thou hast given me of
 ‘ thyself, make but very feeble and transient impres-
 ‘ sions upon my heart. How manifest is the disorder
 ‘ of all the powers of my soul ! The insignificant and
 ‘ transitory

‘ transitory pleasures, riches, and honours of this vain
‘ world, employ my understanding, strike upon my
‘ imagination, and captivate my heart; while thy
‘ perfect excellence, thy unbounded goodness, and
‘ eternal providence, are either intirely disregarded
‘ by me, or thought upon with a stupid coldness and
‘ indifference.

‘ O heavenly Father, author of every good and per-
‘ fect gift, rectify all the disorders of my soul! restore
‘ all my faculties to their original and worthiest em-
‘ ployment! May it henceforth be my chief delight
‘ to contemplate thee in all the discoveries thou hast
‘ made of thyself in thy wondrous works, and in the
‘ revelations of thy will! Give me such clear and af-
‘ fecting views of thy supreme glory and excellence,
‘ as shall kindle that flame of love to thee in my
‘ breast, which shall never be extinguished, but burn
‘ stronger and stronger every day! Penetrate my
‘ heart with such a deep sense of all thy mercies to
‘ me, and of thy constant bounty to thy whole crea-
‘ tion, as shall stir up all that is within me to bless and
‘ praise thy name for ever and ever! Establish my
‘ soul in such a firm persuasion of the infinite good-
‘ ness and wisdom of thy universal and everlasting
‘ Providence, as shall engage me to throw myself, and
‘ all my great interests upon it, with a boundless con-
‘ fidence! O Lord of Hosts, blessed is the man that
‘ trusteth in thee! I shall be kept in perfect peace, when
‘ my mind is stayed on thee.

‘ I must acknowledge before thee, the searcher of
‘ hearts, that I discern and feel other marks of depra-
‘ vity in my nature, besides an habitual forgetfulness
‘ of thy unchangeable goodness, and a stupid insensi-
‘ bility of thy inexpressible glory and greatness. Thou
‘ hast surrounded me here in thy world, with my fel-
‘ low creatures, the children of thy family; and made
‘ me capable of exercising kind affections towards
‘ them; of rejoicing with them in their prosperity;
‘ of sympathising with them in their adversity; and

‘ of performing kind offices to them in every state :
 ‘ but, alas ! how often have I failed in this part of
 ‘ my duty ! I am conscious to myself, that my friendly
 ‘ affections, at best, are but too weak and limited ;
 ‘ frequently interrupted, sometimes overcome, by the
 ‘ workings of the selfish and interested passions. O
 ‘ great Father of all, who art love, and dwellest in
 ‘ love, teach me to imitate thy perfect and universal
 ‘ goodness ! Enlarge my heart to embrace the whole
 ‘ human kind ! Make me feel a perpetual flow of good-
 ‘ will to all thy children around me ! Check the
 ‘ growth, nay, kill the seeds of all malice, envy, and
 ‘ ill-will in my bosom ! Raise me to that happy state,
 ‘ in which I shall forget myself, and place my chief
 ‘ delight in spreading peace, joy, and happiness all
 ‘ around me to the utmost of my power ! Let all the
 ‘ tender and generous affections increase in strength,
 ‘ in fervor, and extent, in my soul ; till I become fit
 ‘ to be transplanted into that happy kingdom, where
 ‘ peace and concord, love and friendship, reign in full
 ‘ perfection for ever and ever.

‘ O my soul, under how many hinderances of thy
 ‘ improvement and progress toward perfection dost
 ‘ thou labour ? The appetites and passions of thy
 ‘ mortal body, interrupt the exercise of the nobler
 ‘ affections, weaken the sense of what is heavenly and
 ‘ divine ; and usurp that dominion which belongs
 ‘ unto thee. Under their tumultuous government thy
 ‘ understanding is darkened, thy affections corrupted,
 ‘ and thy inward tranquility almost quite destroyed.
 ‘ O God, who hast the hearts of all men in thy hand,
 ‘ and turnest them whithersoever thou pleasest, esta-
 ‘ blish thou that part of me which is immortal and
 ‘ divine, in its just supremacy ; subject all my lower
 ‘ passions to its authority ; and make me to enjoy that
 ‘ inward composure, and serenity, which is always
 ‘ to be found under its gentle sway ! O thou righteous
 ‘ judge of all the earth, who renderest to every one
 ‘ according to his works, when I take a calm and se-
 ‘ rious

‘ rious review of all the motions of my heart, and ac-
‘ tions of my life, I must acknowledge with deep re-
‘ gret, that I find many things which I cannot approve;
‘ nay, many things for which I am self-condemned;
‘ and which I cannot recal to my remembrance, with-
‘ out feeling the peace of my mind sensibly disturbed,
‘ my confidence in thee greatly damped, and the aw-
‘ ful dread of thy displeasure strongly awakened.

‘ Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering,
‘ and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy
‘ for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and
‘ sin; forgive my innumerable follies and transgres-
‘ sions; deliver me from the dreadful consequences of
‘ them, and punishments due to them, in this and an
‘ eternal world! whatever moral imperfections are still
‘ remaining in me; direct me to the knowledge of
‘ them, and to the proper means of removing them.
‘ Whenever I wander from thee, thou eternal fountain
‘ of light and life! shew me my error, tho’ it should
‘ be by fatherly correction; let pains or sorrows bring
‘ me home; but never leave me to myself! direct me
‘ to the right improvement of all the assistances thou
‘ hast afforded me, for purifying and perfecting my na-
‘ ture! Teach me to understand clearly, to believe
‘ firmly, to value justly, and comply sincerely, with
‘ that last and brightest revelation thou hast given
‘ me by Jesus Christ: give me a just sense of the un-
‘ merited, unsolicited, and wonderful friendship of the
‘ eternal Son of God; who tho’ he was rich, yet for
‘ the sake of apostate sons of men, became poor, and
‘ was made flesh, and suffered, and died, that he might
‘ enlighten their darkened understandings, purify their
‘ corrupted hearts, exalt their debased natures, deliver
‘ them from the punishments due unto their sins,
‘ set open the gates of immortality before them, and
‘ conduct them into the presence of their God. Teach
‘ me to hearken to his divine instructions; to copy
‘ after his spotless example; to approach to thee by
‘ him, as my great Mediator; and to expect the for-

‘ giveness of my sins, on the terms marked out in his
‘ gospel! Let the serious consideration of my need of
‘ such a Saviour, beget and preserve in me the deepest
‘ sense of my own unworthiness; and let the conside-
‘ ration of thy love and mercy in appointing him, to
‘ be the Saviour of men, inspire me with the humble
‘ and modest confidence of being restored by him to
‘ the enjoyment of thy favour and friendship. Carry
‘ me still forward, O heavenly Father! by all the
‘ methods of thy providence and grace, in the paths
‘ of righteousness, till I become fit to be transplanted
‘ into the higher world of spirits; where I shall live
‘ in everlasting security from all danger; where I
‘ shall no more bewail the darkness of my understand-
‘ ing, and the disorder of my heart; but where I shall
‘ see thee my Maker unveiled; where I shall love
‘ thee entirely, rejoice in thee triumphantly, and cele-
‘ brate thy praises to all eternity!’

DISCOURSE VI.

A concise Account of the Doctrine of the New Testament concerning the Lord's Supper.

[K I P P I S .]

I C O R. xi. 29.

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh Damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body.

THERE are scarce any parts of scripture which have been more misunderstood by the genuine disciples of the blessed Jesus, than what the great apostle of the Gentiles hath wrote to the Corinthians, concerning the nature of the Lord's supper, and the qualifications for partaking of it. And yet this cannot have arisen from any difficulty in the place, when compared with the connection, or the design of the author, but is entirely owing to the unhappy interpretations, and the corrupt glosses and additions of mistaken or crafty men. For several persons have deduced such strange consequences from St. Paul's doctrine, and have insisted upon such a variety of circumstances as necessary to communion, that hence have proceeded the error and the infelicity of vast numbers. But a juster sense of things hath begun to prevail. A delightful and resplendent light

hath appeared, where formerly there was nothing but darkness, or at best, gloomy clouds. And this light is at once so agreeable and so useful, that it ought to be communicated as extensively as possible, for the information, the satisfaction, and the benefit of all who are disposed to receive it.

With a view to promote so valuable an end, I have pitched on the words of the text, in treating upon which, I shall

I. Consider wherein the eating and drinking unworthily, and the damnation consequent upon it, mentioned by the apostle, consisted.

II. Explain the nature and design of the Lord's supper, in order to shew what is necessary to a worthy participation of it.

III. Represent the obligations we are under to partake of this ordinance. And,

IV. Conclude with some inferences.

I. I shall consider wherein the eating and drinking unworthily, and the damnation consequent upon it, mentioned by the apostle, consisted. And it deserveth to be remarked, that St. Paul is not here directing himself to Christians in general, but to the Corinthians in particular. What he hath written was not originally composed with a reference to the state of believers, in all ages, places, and circumstances; but arose from some peculiar errors of the persons whom he addressed. It is certain that if the first converts had not fallen into mistakes and evil practices with respect to the Lord's supper, the passage would never have been found in the epistle. It must indeed be acknowledged, that it is at this day extremely useful to form and rectify our notions; but nevertheless, as it hath an immediate view to the conduct of the Corinthian disciples,

disciples, we must enquire what that conduct was, in order to discover its real meaning.

If we look back in the chapter, we shall find the apostle severely reprovng the Corinthians, because when they met together at the sacred table, they acted in a manner directly contrary to the nature and design of the ordinance. One instance in which they did so, is recorded in the eighteenth verse. *For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you ; and I partly believe it.* It is well known that one intention of the Lord's supper is to testify the relation which the followers of Jesus stand in to each other, as members of that society of which he is the common lawgiver and sovereign ; and to shew their obligations to cultivate a mutual affection. But the Corinthians were, it seems, split into parties and factions, at the very time when they met to celebrate this holy and social institution. The other particulars in which they had behaved amiss, may be drawn from the twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second verses. *When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other, his own supper : and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What have ye not houses to eat and to drink in ? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not ? What shall I say to you ? Shall I praise you in this ? I praise you not.* It is visible in these words, that there are two things which St. Paul setteth himself to correct ; an error and a crime. The error against which he remonstrates in the persons to whom he writeth, was their partaking of the Lord's supper, as if it had been a common banquet. It was usual amongst the Greeks to have entertainments at the house of some friend, where every one brought his own provision, which he might eat at pleasure. At these entertainments, as might naturally be expected, the provision was very different, both in quantity and quality, according to the different inclinations and abilities of the guests. Such

Such a kind of collation the Corinthians supposed the sacrament to be ; but from what foundation they had taken up so strange an opinion, we are not able to say. This, however, they seem to have done ; and the apostle condemneth the notion with great strength and great reason. For the least attention to the nature of the ordinance, will convince us that it is purely a religious act ; and consequently, that it ought not to be confounded with any of the ordinary occupations of life.

The error of the Corinthians was succeeded by very criminal behaviour. As they did not sufficiently distinguish between their customary banquets and this sacred festival, they observed it in a confused, disorderly, and intemperate manner. They carried the provision for their entertainments into the places where they assembled for christian worship. The rich had a needless superfluity, which, however, they did not offer to their poor brethren, who were destitute. The rich man was drunken, that is, he abused his abundance to a riotous excess ; for we cannot suppose that he was actually intoxicated. On the contrary, the poor man was hungry, and in all probability murmured. And in this impious, this shameful situation, they pretended to celebrate that solemn, that divine institution of our great master, by which he designed to excite our gratitude and obedience to himself, and to animate our love for each other. When we read these things, can we avoid being astonished that original converts, that persons who had been instructed by the most illustrious of all the apostles, and who had extraordinary powers and gifts among themselves, should be guilty of such a disgraceful ignorance, and such a scandalous behaviour ? How contrary was their deportment in every respect to the purpose of the Redeemer ! It was his intention that by the social act of eating and drinking together, as brethren and fellow-disciples, we should open the heart to the most generous and tender sentiments, and lay ourselves out

in offices of reciprocal kindness. And yet the Corinthians gave way to schisms, strife, and debate. It is plain that so holy an institution as that of the Lord's supper, should be separated from the ordinary business and amusements of life, performed at a select time and place, and with a decent solemnity. And yet the Corinthians united it with their customary collations. It is evident that on such an occasion our minds should be composed, our thoughts serious, our affections raised to the warmest fervours of a rational and exalted devotion. And yet the Corinthians came only to the table of gluttony, and the cup of intemperance: they loaded their bodies, and disordered their souls with excess.

Such was the conduct reprov'd by the apostle; after which he proceedeth from the twenty-third verse of the chapter, to give an account of the original appointment of the Lord's supper, as he had it by immediate revelation from Christ himself: an account directly conformable to what is recorded of the matter, in the writings of the Evangelists. St. Paul then goes on from this foundation in the twenty-seventh verse, to shew that those were guilty of a great crime, who joined in communion unworthily; that is, without duly considering the nature of the ordinance in which they engaged. He advises them therefore in the twenty-eighth verse, to examine themselves by a diligent enquiry into the purposes of the institution; that by such an examination they might be led to partake of it, in a manner agreeable to the intention of the blessed Jesus. To this succeedeth the text; *for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* That is, he that eateth and drinketh without properly reflecting on the design of the ordinance, without distinguishing it from a common banquet, and even converteth it to the ends of intemperance and faction, exposeth himself to the divine judgments. Thus we see, that the eating and drinking unworthily,
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mentioned by the apostle, hath an immediate reference to the irregularities of which the Corinthians had been guilty.

The damnation spoken of, as the consequence of this unworthy participation of the sacrament, hath been as much misunderstood as the other part of the text; and the mistake hath occasioned prodigious uneasiness to humble and sincere persons, and great harm to the christian world. The original word might with equal propriety have been translated judgment: and so the verb, from which it is derived, is a little after, actually translated. It is very well known by those who are acquainted with scripture-language, that it doth not always signify the final condemnation of the life to come; but that it is frequently applied to the temporal instances of our Maker's displeasure. That this was the case in the text, we learn in the following verse. *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* From this passage so expressly connected with the preceding one, it is undeniably apparent, that the damnation treated of is not the future punishment of an eternal state, but the present chastisements of the Deity. The Almighty had been pleased to visit some of the offenders with a decay of their health, others with violent disorders, and others with death itself. Even with regard to these last, however they might have failed in the performance of a positive duty, it is reasonable to believe they would be accepted by God, provided they had not wilfully transgressed against inward conviction, and were upon the whole, real Christians. As to the rest, the judgment they are said to have brought upon themselves, was so far from being an everlasting one, that we are expressly told it was a merciful correction inflicted upon them, on purpose to prevent their final ruin. Verse 32. *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* Such visitations as the Corinthians received, might at that time be extremely proper, to keep up a reverential

rential regard to an ordinance which was then newly appointed; and the usefulness of which might have been totally frustrated at the beginning, if the profanation of it had not been immediately checked by some extraordinary method.

From all that hath been said, it is, I hope, quite evident, what little reason is afforded by the text, for sincere Christians to fill their hearts with anxiety. It is indeed possible for persons to eat and drink unworthily, who are not guilty of the particular actions which the apostle condemneth. But then they must be guilty of the evil dispositions from which those actions proceeded. Wherever St. Paul's argument by parity of reasoning will reach, so far it may be lawfully extended. If any man at the time of his eating the bread, and drinking the wine, hath no regard to the duty in which he seemeth to engage; if he doth not religiously commemorate the death of his divine Master; if he retaineth no sense of the obedience to which the Saviour is entitled; if he feelth no affection for his christian brethren: if on the contrary, his thoughts and behaviour are directly inconsistent with the nature of the institution, and the temper he is obliged to cultivate in his approach to it; he then certainly partaketh of the ordinance in an unworthy manner, though he may not have offended in those particular instances of indecency with which the Corinthians were chargeable. Yet even in this case it ought to be observed, that if a person hath acted ill at one opportunity, it doth not follow that he should abstain from the next. He should seek to the mercy of God for pardon, and to his grace for assistance; and endeavour on future occasions to be found in a more holy and heavenly frame. Thus the guilty Corinthians were not forbidden to come again to the sacred table, but were exhorted to do it hereafter, with greater regularity, decorum, and piety. I now proceed,

II. To explain the nature and design of the Lord's supper, in order to shew what is necessary to a worthy participation of it. It is only by considering the genuine intention of the Redeemer in his appointment of it, that we can be able to ascertain the qualifications which are requisite to our joining in the ordinance. This is the method which was taken by St. Paul, in the chapter where the text lies. After he hath given a full account of the manner in which it was instituted by the blessed Jesus, he then directeth the Corinthians from that account to examine their views and their dispositions, in order to judge whether they had a right to communion. We must therefore have recourse to the declarations of the Son of God himself, as recorded by his disciples, if we desire to obtain proper notions concerning this matter.

Now from the relations of the Evangelists and St. Paul, we are authorised to assert in the first place, that the grand leading purpose of the Lord's supper, is to keep up a religious memorial of the death of Christ. This is evident from the words of the institution. Our divine Master, when he had taken the bread, had given thanks, and had broke it, distributed it to the apostles, and said, *This is my body, which is broken for you.* So likewise, when he took the cup, *This cup is the new covenant in my blood.* To which if we add the observation of St. Paul, that *as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we do shew the Lord's death till he come,* it will be apparent that the principal view of the Saviour in this ordinance, is to maintain in all ages of the church, even until his final manifestation at the last day, a standing commemoration of his obedience to the will of God, and his affection to sinners, in dying upon the cross. By the breaking of bread, the wounds and agonies which the body of Jesus underwent, are represented; and

in the pouring out of the wine, we have a lively emblem of that blood by which the new covenant of pardon was ratified; that blood which was shed for many, for the remission of sins. In short, it is intended by these transactions, that we should publickly acknowledge and call to mind this grand fact, that the Messiah suffered unto death. Nor are we to do it in a formal and careless manner; but with souls deeply affected at the contemplation of a scene of such mighty importance.

In consequence of this, secondly, it must be the design of the Lord's supper, that we exhibit a general testimony of our faith in Christ, our acceptance of his religion, and our subjection to his laws. This is a point incontestably plain from the original notion of the sacrament, as a religious remembrance of our great Master; a notion which evidently implieth in it, that at the same time we profess our belief in his sacred authority, our submission to the method of acquiring the divine favour by him appointed, and our regard to the obligation of his precepts. It is likewise upon this supposition that the apostle argues, when he sheweth that Christians ought not to join with heathens, by feasting in their temples, upon what had been offered to their false gods. 1 Cor. x. 21. *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.* The intention of St. Paul is here undoubtedly to prove, that as their uniting at the table of the Lord, was a solemn declaration of their being his disciples, it was therefore wholly inconsistent with any degree of even seeming veneration for the pagan worship; and should prevent them from eating openly of the sacrifices that had been dedicated to demons. Indeed when our Saviour ordered the wine to be drank as a representation of the covenant confirmed by his blood, it must certainly have been his purpose that by this rite we should be led to con-

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sider the nature of that covenant, and assent to its demands.

The third and last view of the Lord's supper is to testify the connection we have with each other, as disciples of the same Jesus, and obliged upon that account to maintain a mutual affection. It is true that this idea is not expressly mentioned in the original institution. But that it is included in it, is apparent from the fundamental design of the ordinance. For as it is intended to be a public testimony of the relation we stand in to Christ as our common master, it must necessarily signify that we are members of that one body of which he is the head. Eating and drinking together is as much a social act as any thing can possibly be; and eating and drinking together in a religious manner, was among the ancient nations in general, regarded as a token of reciprocal friendship. But the matter is put out of doubt by the apostle St. Paul, 1 Cor. x. 16, 17. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion, or joint-partaking, of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion, or joint-partaking, of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.* From these words it is abundantly plain, that as in the joint-partaking of the bread and wine, in commemoration of the Redeemer's death, we declare our fellowship with him; so likewise we profess our communion with each other. We acknowledge ourselves, as Christians, to be nearly and intimately related; to constitute one entire society, distinct from the rest of the world; and obliged by virtue of this union, to be kind, tender, and placable; even as God in Christ hath forgiven us.

Having thus considered the nature and design of the Lord's supper, nothing is more easy than from hence to shew what is necessary, in order to communicate in a worthy manner. If a person desireth to
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member the death of Jesus with gratitude and affection; if he is willing to proclaim his belief in him, and his acceptance of him, as a master whose laws he will study to obey, and a Saviour whose terms he will endeavour to comply with; if he is solicitous to testify his love towards those who are united with him in the same bonds of religion; he hath then not only a right, but it is his duty to approach the sacred table. But if any man hath such a disregard to the Son of God, that he doth not care to commemorate his dying compassion to the world; if he rejecteth his divine authority, refuseth to own him as his lawgiver, and despiseth the blessings that are by him dispensed from the great Parent of mercies; if he doth not choose to acknowledge the votaries of the Redeemer as his fellow-disciples and brethren, he ought to abstain from communion. In such a case, his heart is absolutely unfit for it, and he should have no part or lot in this matter. The questions therefore which a person who seeketh to know the state of his soul, should put to himself, are such as these. Am I so sensible of the amazing things which Jesus Christ, in obedience to the will of the Father, hath performed for mankind; and particularly, of the grand instance of affection he exhibited on the cross, as to desire that I may ever maintain a flow of the most pious and thankful passions on this account? Do I so firmly believe in him as the prophet and head of the church, that I would willingly be saved by him in the method of repentance and universal holiness which he hath commanded? Have I such a value for the covenant established by my Saviour's blood, that I am resolved to accept it with gratitude, and to adhere to it with my whole soul? Have I such a regard to all Christians, that I wish to behave towards them with that candor, harmony, and kindness, which the connection we bear, as followers of the same master, requireth at my hands? Whoever can answer to these questions with a genuine approbation of his inward

dispositions; whoever can appeal to the Almighty in the sincerity of his heart, and say that he is ready to testify his grateful acknowledgment and remembrance of the Redeemer's death; that he is desirous to assent to his demands, to obey his precepts, and to embrace with the open arms of good will and tenderness the human race in general, and especially every real servant of Christ; that is the man who is qualified to participate of the sacrament, and who should hasten to comply with the institution of the Son of God.

To this he is strongly and undeniably urged in the New testament; as will appear while I represent,

III. The obligations we are under to partake of the Lord's supper. It is allowed by all who understand the nature of true religion, that when moral and positive duties interfere, the preference must be given to the former. The reason is, that moral precepts are eternally and unalterably binding; are in themselves beautiful, excellent, and useful; and are the grand ends in subserviency to which rituals are appointed. Whereas the positive ones are only beneficial at particular times, and in particular circumstances; and derive their principal value from their tendency to promote other things, of inward and essential importance. I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, is the declaration of sacred writ; a declaration agreeable to all the dictates of natural light, and confirmed by all the tenor of revelation. It is the determinate doctrine of both the Old and the New testament, that to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God, is vastly superior in worth to the strictest observation of external institutions, even when prescribed by the supreme Being himself. But though these truths should ever rest upon our minds, as what are of the highest necessity to regulate our conduct; yet no argument can hence be formed, to justify a neglect of positive appointments. Because when
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weightier matters do not intervene, we are obliged to comply with them, if plainly commanded by a divine legislator.

With regard to the christian religion, we are convinced by a variety of evidence, that the lord Jesus was a mighty personage sent from God, to teach men the way of knowledge, holiness, and happiness. We are convinced that the Father hath made him the prophet, the lawgiver, and the sovereign of the church; and that whatever precepts he hath delivered, it is our indispensable duty to obey them. Now although the general series of our Saviour's commands, hath an immediate reference to those virtues of piety, benevolence, integrity, and self-government, which are dictated by the light of nature, and which the relations we stand in to the Deity, to ourselves, and our fellow-creatures, at all times require at our hands; yet we find in the gospel some few external rites. We are in particular, directed to meet together at certain seasons, in the places appropriated to divine worship, and there publickly to eat bread and drink wine, as tokens that we religiously remember our dying Redeemer; that we receive his laws, accept his covenant, and venerate his authority; and that we possess a sincere affection for each other. This we are ordered to do, in four different places of holy writ. The precept was given by our Lord himself; it was uttered with the greatest solemnity; and it was attended with actions, as well as words. For the blessed Jesus did not only instruct his disciples to observe the institution hereafter; but made them instantly perform it. The expressions he used are as plain as can be devised. He was now at the approach of death; a circumstance which rendereth the injunctions of friends peculiarly forcible; and we are assured that this rite is to be observed in all the succeeding ages of the world, even until his second coming, at the final consummation of things. That the sacrament is an ordinance of considerable import-

ance, and intended for a perpetual memorial, is further apparent from our Saviour's delivering the account of it to St. Paul, by immediate revelation. We find likewise that at the first propagation of the gospel, all professing christians partook of it. The distinction between hearers and communicants had not then taken place; and therefore it seemeth to have stood on the same foundation with our obligation to attend public worship in general.

All these circumstances being compared together, I would ask in what possible manner we can pretend to evade so evident a command? Shall we say that we are not obliged to obey it, though it is absolutely enjoined by the Son of God? This we cannot do, without renouncing his authority. If then we call ourselves the disciples of Jesus, what justifiable reason can we assign for the wilful neglect of any precept, that is insisted upon by our divine Master?

It deserveth also to be considered how much satisfaction we may lose by trifling in this matter. It must undoubtedly afford some uneasiness to a sincere servant of the Redeemer, when he reflecteth that he is pursuing a course which his own mind telleth him to be contrary to his character and obligations, as a follower of Christ. Not to mention, that by such a behaviour, we are deprived of the consolation which ariseth from joining in an ordinance so delightful, as that of the Lord's Supper; a consolation which springeth in general, from the sense of having discharged our duty; and in particular, from the pleasing views of our honour and happiness as christians, which at that time engage our contemplations. May it not likewise justly be expected, that a person who continued in the neglect of a command which he believed to be prescribed by his Saviour, will want that full tranquillity and joy at the hour of death, which he might otherwise have experienced?

Should, after all, any be inclined to think that the sacrament is a mere ceremony, a trifle not im-

portant enough to require much of our attention ; we may observe that nothing can be a trifle which is ordered by God, and that it is calculated to produce excellent purposes in the heart, even the purposes of inward piety, and substantial goodness.

Several other thoughts might here be added ; but what hath been already said may suffice to shew that if we believe the divine mission of Jesus, we are bound in this, as well as other instances, to obey his precepts. I must however beg leave to be here understood as making a great difference between those who abstain from communion, in consequence of a wilful disregard to it, and those humble upright minds who are held back by nothing but their unhappy fears and scruples. The last persons are indeed objects of tenderness and compassion ; and I would earnestly recommend to them the careful consideration of what hath been suggested under the first head. It now remaineth

IV. That we conclude with some inferences. And,

1. We may see the wisdom and goodness of the Son of God, in his appointment of the Lord's Supper. I am not insensible that much difficulty hath been raised upon this head ; and that persons disaffected to Christianity, have endeavoured to expose the gospel on account of its positive institutions ; as if its design was to make religion consist in outward observances and useless ceremonies. But nothing can be more unjust than the least insinuation of this kind. Some degree of external form is necessary to keep up the appearance of piety in the world ; and it is the excellence of the New testament that it requireth no more of it than is highly important to the best inward purposes ; no more of it than is proper to restrain the superstitious fancies, and prevent the foolish inventions of men. We find by experience that it hath been the practice of mankind in all ages, to multiply the rites of worship in a needless and ridiculous man-

ner. Now had there not been any outward appointments in the revelation of the blessed Jesus, the professors of it, having no direction from their great Master, might have thought themselves at liberty to follow their own imaginations without controul. But a strict adherence to the ordinances of Christ, and to them only, would put a stop to such a conduct, and become the best foundation of a rational homage to the Deity. Indeed the whole history of the church will inform us, that where a careful attention to the rules of the gospel hath been maintained, there the publick service of God hath been plain, solid, and edifying. While, on the other hand, a departure from the simplicity practised and directed by our Saviour and his Apostles, hath produced an exuberance of folly and superstition that is quite astonishing, and hath brought infinite scandal on the christian name.

As the wisdom and benevolence of the Redeemer is thus apparent, in admitting some few external institutions into his system of religion; so with respect to the Lord's Supper in particular, what appointment could we think upon, that is less liable to objection? It is plain to be understood; it is easy to be observed; and every end it is intended to answer, is desirable and important.

The manifestation of the Son of God is the most illustrious and momentous event that can possibly engage our meditations. To his life and death, his resurrection and glorification, we are indebted for our hopes and assurances of pardon, peace, and happiness. For our benefit he made the most amazing stoop from the dignity he enjoyed with the Father, poured divine instructions from his lips, and shone forth with an all-perfect, all-lovely example. For our benefit he submitted to a course of the most evil treatment from his bitter enemies, to the agonies of the cross, and to become the subject of death. For our benefit he rose again with power and lustre, ascended into the mansions of eternal bliss, manageth our affairs

fairs with God, and holdeth by commission from him, the reins of government. And shall the amiable, the excellent, the beneficial deeds of this Saviour, be buried in oblivion? Forbid it gratitude, duty, interest! forbid it every consideration that can work upon the mind! With great wisdom and goodness therefore did Jesus institute a rite which should call his love to our memories, and awake each pious passion in our breasts. A rite, which by the breaking of bread, and the pouring out of wine, should especially represent to us that most signal proof of his and his heavenly Father's affection, when his tender frame was exposed to wounds and bruises, and streams of precious blood issued from his sacred veins.

The more we consider the matter, the more we shall perceive that there was a peculiar propriety in pointing out, by a particular ordinance, a fact of such immense importance in the scheme of revelation. Nay, we might venture, perhaps, to assert, that in some dark and corrupted ages, when the scriptures were held from the common people, and very little studied by the priests, the death of Christ would have been almost forgot, had not the remembrance of it been constantly kept up, by the celebration of the sacrament.

Again; the vanities of the world, the allurements of sensual pleasure, the charms of ambition, the splendour of riches; in short, temptations from present objects of every kind, have often too fatal an influence on our temper and conduct. They have a melancholy aptitude to draw the soul aside to folly, and to obliterate the impressions of divine things. It was therefore a wise and kind intention of the Redeemer, by a frequent repetition of the Lord's Supper, to call back the wandering heart of man to a sense of his duty and obligations as a christian.

Once more: though the religion of Jesus is altogether gentle, generous, and beneficent; though its whole tendency is to correct the humours, sweeten the

dispositions, and enlarge the affections of men; and though it enforceth all this upon us by motives surprisngly powerful and affecting, yet such is the perverseness of the human mind, that jealousies and contentions, envy, wrath, and malice, too often find admittance there. Was it not then an instance of our Saviour's wisdom and benevolence, by uniting us together at the sacrament, to urge the putting away of bitterness, and anger, evil speaking and revenge; and to inspire us with condescension, compassion, and love?

2. From the account that hath been given of the nature and design of the Lord's Supper, we may perceive the folly and iniquity of those unscriptural terms of communion, upon which great numbers have insisted. It is well known that subscription to a set of articles; an assent to some particular doctrines either not found at all in the gospel, or, at least, not mentioned as essential; and a compliance with certain ceremonies and gestures, have in one church and another, been required of their members. By such impositions the peace of the christian world hath been prodigiously disturbed, and endless disorders and calamities have prevailed in the earth. Nay, in consequence of such impositions, rivers of blood have been shed among professors of the same religion. And the continuance of these impositions is still a grand cause of the divisions, strife, and uncharitableness, that subsist amidst those who are called after the name of the merciful Jesus. But what can be more impious than for persons to prescribe laws and tests, which Christ himself hath not prescribed? Is not this to set ourselves up in his stead, and to wrest the dominion out of his hands? The sacrament, as it was by him appointed, was intended to be an uniting ordinance; and none ought on any pretence to be excluded from it, who profess, and appear, to be his sincere followers. We should therefore be studious to keep exactly to his institution, without mixing our
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own fancies, or bigotry, or temporal policy, with what the Saviour alone had a right to direct.

3. From what hath been said we may correct the superstitious and dangerous notions which many entertain concerning the Lord's Supper. The papists suppose that the body and blood of Christ is actually present under the forms both of the bread and the wine; and that he is swallowed whole by every communicant. Not to insist upon the infinite absurdities and absolute contradictions with which this opinion is clogged; absurdities and contradictions that no words can exaggerate, and which must fill a thinking mind with the highest astonishment, and the warmest indignation; the opinion itself, without regard to the impossibility of its being true, is contrary to the very nature of the ordinance. For as it is designed to be the memorial of a past fact, and must be performed in remembrance of Jesus as a person corporally absent, how can he be actually present? A careful examination will, I am persuaded, convince us, that the expression, *this is my body*, doth not immediately and exclusively relate to the bread only, but to the whole action of eating; and in that case, there is not the least ground for the doctrine of transubstantiation, even taking the words in their most literal sense.

The protestant world hath also been prodigiously infected with errors upon the same subject, though not of the same kind with that just mentioned. Some are ready to think that they have communicated in an unworthy manner, because their passions have not been violently moved. Others carry their ideas of the sacrament too high, by placing it at a vast distance from the common duties of religious worship; and by preferring it even to prayer, which is certainly the most solemn act of devotion, in which a creature can engage. Others imagine that it sealeth to them the pardon of their sins. Nay, great numbers look upon it as a sort of charm, that will give them a passport to heaven, whatever their inward dispositions may have been.

been. This is a supposition extremely fatal in its tendency, and is too much encouraged by the manner in which the communion is frequently administered to dying persons, and especially condemned malefactors; which leadeth both them and others into false hopes that are destructive to their souls. Such sentiments, and the practices which favour them, are in reality a scandal to the christian name. The only use of the Lord's Supper is to impress those affecting views of the death of Christ, and that deep sense of our obligations as his disciples, which shall be calculated to render us truly and internally holy, just, and good; and should this end not be answered in our minds, it is at best an idle, and if trusted in, a dangerous ceremony.

4. And lastly; we should each of us be solicitous to attend upon the sacrament, with proper qualifications, views, and dispositions. If it be asked what kind of preparation is peculiarly necessary, in order to our approaching the sacred table; it may be answered, that the real followers of the Saviour should always be in a prepared state. There is nothing in the nature of the ordinance which forbiddeth our partaking of it on the most sudden warning; provided we understand it in any tolerable degree, and are inclined to communicate in a serious manner. Since however, particular seasons are generally set apart for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, which we are previously acquainted with; it must certainly be very useful to collect our thoughts before-hand, and to furnish our minds with suitable reflections. We should therefore employ our meditations on the design and excellency of the gospel; on the noble system of doctrines and duties it containeth; on the illustrious, divine and complete example of the blessed Jesus; on the important privileges, the valuable promises, and the ravishing prospects his revelation affords; and on the bright and convincing evidence with which it is attended. We should contemplate on that essential
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and unparalleled benevolence of the Deity, from which the whole scheme of our redemption was derived; on the readiness that was manifested by the Son of God in undertaking our cause; and on his wonderful transactions, in the prosecution of his great work. Above all, we should impress upon our souls a strong sense of the special and immediate purposes for which the sacrament was appointed.

When we actually join in communion, we should be concerned that our affections are properly directed, and warmly engaged. To have our hearts fixed upon the vanities, or profits, or cares of the world, while we are present at the sacred table, is certainly a direct violation of the ordinance: and therefore we should be extremely desirous to maintain a right temper and behaviour at that time. We should study to abstract our thoughts, as much as possible, from every foreign, every terrestrial consideration; and to have our pious passions fervently employed in the solemn service. ‘Retire, O my soul,’ we may each of us say, ‘from this inferior scene of things; from all its pleasures, and all its pursuits; and hold communion with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ. Meditate upon that infinite grace of God which contrived the amazing plan that displayeth pardon, peace, and endless happiness, to so undeserving a creature as thou art. Recollect that surprising condescension and tenderness of the Redeemer, which induced him to bring down salvation from heaven to earth. Call to mind the admirable instructions he offered, the charming pattern he exhibited, the hard labours and sufferings he endured, in the course of his ministry. Especially call to mind the ignominy, the reproaches, the agonies he went thro’, when he hung upon the cross, and brought in everlasting mercy. Think upon these affecting subjects, till thy heart is filled with sorrow for thine iniquities; till thy faith becometh lively, active, and fruitful; till thy gratitude and love are elevated to the highest pitch; till thy
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‘ obedience is rendered uniform, steady, and complete.
 ‘ Hast thou, O my God, and Parent of universal na-
 ‘ ture, so illustriously manifested thy compassion to
 ‘ sinners, as not to spare thy own Son? Hast thou sent
 ‘ the Saviour into this lower world, in order to raise
 ‘ the children of men to immortality, perfection, and
 ‘ glory? And am I now in thy presence, on purpose to
 ‘ celebrate that institution, which requireth me to com-
 ‘ memorate the death of the Messiah; to declare my
 ‘ public acceptance of his excellent revelation, and
 ‘ my regard to my christian brethren? May then the
 ‘ remembrance of his beneficence dwell upon my
 ‘ mind and my tongue, for ever and ever! May I con-
 ‘ sider, and comply with the intention of his gospel!
 ‘ And may the sentiments of kindness and charity to-
 ‘ wards all my fellow men and fellow disciples, reign
 ‘ in my breast, with increasing purity, and increasing
 ‘ zeal!’

Such are the views which should possess our souls, when we partake of the Lord’s Supper. But it will signify little, to entertain these views at that time, unless the effects of them are apparent in our future conversation. A transient flow of affections, or sallies of immediate delight, were not principally intended in the ordinance. The blessed Jesus did not ordain it as a ceremony, or a charm; but as a proper method of establishing our hearts in pious and virtuous dispositions. Though you have therefore, O! christians, obeyed the Redeemer’s command, in this appointment, and have found your passions greatly moved; yet that is not the whole that is required at your hands. For hence it may justly be expected that you should live to the honour of your divine Master. As you have solemnly professed your faith in him, and your love towards him, the reality of your faith and love should be evidenced by walking more strictly in the way of his precepts; and by abounding in that heavenly character and temper, which his spotless example so engagingly recommendeth. Thus only, will

will the sacrament become subservient to the most beneficial purposes. Thus only, will it be instrumental in qualifying us for sharing in the dignity and felicity possessed by our exalted Saviour. And God grant that all the followers of his Son, may by uniting together at the communion, advance from holiness to holiness, till they shall arrive at the regions of everlasting bliss. *Amen.*

DISCOURSE VII.

On the Nature and Foundations of religious, christian, and social Worship.

[BULKLEY.]

JOHN iv. 23, 4.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

THESSE words are part of that conversation, which passed between our blessed Saviour and a woman of Samaria; and which we have recorded at large in this fourth chapter of faint John's gospel. The woman perceiving, by the knowledge he had of some of the circumstances of her own life, that he was a prophet, proposes to him a question which was much agitated, between the Jews and Samaritans of those days, in order to have his determination and judgment upon it. "Our Fathers, says "the, worshipped in this mountain, (meaning mount "Gerizim) and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place "where men ought to worship."

Upon the death of Solomon the Israelites were divided into two kingdoms, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin

jamin adhering to Rehoboam his son, and the other ten tribes chusing Jeroboam to reign over them. In process of time Efer-haddon king of Assyria, carried the ten tribes captive, and sent a colony from some of the other provinces under his government, to take possession of and inhabit their country. These strangers, upon their first coming to dwell in the cities of Samaria, continued in the practice of their former idolatries, till Efer-haddon sent amongst them some of the Israelitish priests, whom he had carried away captive to instruct them in the Jewish manner of worshipping the true God of the universe, to which they conformed, but still joined to it the worship of their other Gods and their graven images. But, after some time, many of the Jews being intermingled with them, they wholly left off their idolatrous worship, and adhered to that of the true God only, according to the method prescribed by the law of Moses and the practice of the Jews inhabiting Judea, excepting that instead of offering up their sacrifices and performing their more public and solemn rites at Jerusalem, they used for these purposes the temple built by Sanballat on mount Gerizim, in opposition to that which was at Jerusalem. In vindication of themselves, in making mount Gerizim the place of worship instead of the Jerusalem-temple, they pleaded that their forefathers had worshipped in that mountain; and thus consecrated it in a more special manner for religious services, long before that temple was built, referring to what is recorded in the book of Genesis concerning Jacob's building an altar at Shalem a city of Shechem. This brief account is sufficient for explaining the question which the Samaritan woman here proposes to our Saviour. Let us therefore now proceed to consider the answer he gives to it. And, in the first place he intimates to her, that her question was not of near so much importance as she seemed to apprehend. The point she desires him to give his judgment upon was, whether Jerusalem or
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mount Gerizim was the proper place of worship ; and he assures her, in answer, that the time was coming, when neither in the one place nor in the other should men worship the Father, plainly referring to the gospel-dispensation, which he himself was about to introduce, by which the whole ceremonial law, and consequently all such distinction of places, would be abolished, and which would inculcate upon men no other worship than what might with equal ease and propriety be performed in one place as in another. Having thus informed her, that her question was of little or no importance, he proceeds to observe to her that, whatever was determined as to the place, it was certain that the worship itself was more regular and exact among the Jews, than among the Samaritans ; that they had juster notions of the God whom they worshipped, and that the nature of true and acceptable religion was better understood amongst them ; for this is evidently the meaning of those words, “ Ye worship ye know not what ; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews.” He then enlarges upon his first hint, and assures her that, by the gospel-doctrine, which was then begun to be published to the world, it would appear in the strongest and clearest light, that those were the only true and acceptable worshipers of God, who worshipped him with an honest intention and a good heart ; that all such would most certainly be accepted of him, in whatsoever place their religious services were performed ; and that whatever regularity there might be in the external performances, they would not be in the least degree acceptable, if this goodness of disposition were wanting in the worshiper : and that it could not possibly be otherwise, considering the nature, perfections, and character of God ; who is a pure spirit, possessed of all the excellencies of a most perfect mind, who, therefore, cannot be pleased with mere external and bodily services, but must regard them no farther than as they are performed with a good intention,
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and on account of their tendency towards confirming and improving good dispositions in the heart. “The hour cometh and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” As the remarks, which these words considered in connection with that whole conference, of which they are the concluding part, do immediately suggest to our thoughts, are of such a kind, as most clearly to point out the nature and foundations of religious and christian worship, it will be highly useful to enter upon a more particular consideration of them. And

First, we cannot but reflect a while upon the superior excellency of the christian religion, in being so much better calculated for giving men just and worthy sentiments upon this head than the law of Moses. When we find the Samaritan woman ushering in what she had to say to our Saviour, by telling him that she perceived him to be a prophet, it might have been expected that she was about to ask him some important question relating to the nature, perfection, and government of God, to the grounds of acceptance with him, or to the rewards and punishments of a future state. Yet it seems that what was uppermost in her mind, what immediately occurred to her as a matter of great importance, and highly proper to be proposed to a person of so extraordinary a character, as our blessed Saviour appeared to be, was only, whether it was more acceptable to God that men should worship him at Jerusalem or on mount Gerizim? Nor was there any thing in this that was greatly foreign to the nature and genius of that religious institution, to which she adhered. For the Samaritans, as we have observed, did, as well as the Jews, receive the law of Moses as of divine authority. And as it is well known how very particular and circumstantial that law is with respect to the ceremony

and outward part of worship; so its peculiar exactness as to the place of worship may be seen at large in the xii. chapter of the book of Deuteronomy. However wise and well ordered observances and rites of this kind may appear, when we consider the circumstances, situation, and taste of the people to whom they were prescribed, yet persons, who have any tolerable notions of God and religion, cannot but look upon them in every other view as justly deserving their contempt. Accordingly the New Testament constantly speaks of them in very diminishing terms. Saint Peter calls them a yoke, which neither the Jews of his time nor their forefathers were able to bear. Saint Paul in his epistle to the Galatians calls them “weak and beggarly elements.” There is verily, *says the author of the epistle to the Hebrews*, “a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof, for the law, *meaning the ceremonial law*, made nothing perfect.” Such burdensome and ceremonious institutions, however, may well serve as a foil, by which to illustrate the superlative excellency of the christian religion, which has intirely abolished all the peculiarities of the Jewish; as appears, not only from a variety of passages in the epistles, but likewise from those very words of our Saviour addressed to the Samaritan woman, which we are now considering: it being evident that the various rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law had a close and necessary connection with the temple-worship. When therefore our Saviour declares, that by the gospel all the peculiar sanctity of that place and worship should be made to cease, it was in effect declaring, that the whole ceremonial law should be abolished and laid aside. And as the gospel had thus annulled these carnal ordinances and commandments, so it every where inculcates the most enlarged, sublime, and exalted notions of religion, teaching us, as in the text, that the only true and acceptable worshipers, are they who worship God in spirit and in truth, that “in every

“ every nation, he who feareth God and worketh
“ righteousness is accepted of him ;” that God “ dwells
“ not in temples made with hands, neither is wor-
“ shipped with mens hands, as tho’ he needed any
“ thing, seeing he giveth to all life and breath and
“ all things.” The spiritual and refined nature of
religion, the universal acceptableness of pious and holy
dispositions in the sight of God, and his high delight
and complacency in the prevalence of righteousness
and goodness amongst men, is beautifully represented
in the gospel, by way of allusion to the rites and ce-
remonies of Judaism, of which it expresses a just dis-
dain when compared with its own more enlarged and
elevated principles, by the application of its phrases
to other subjects of a more interesting and far nobler
nature ; not only to the condescending love of Christ,
to his innocence, patience, meekness, and consum-
mate virtue both in life and death ; but also to the
virtuous temper and actions of all who profess his re-
ligion, speaking of the whole collective body of
good and worthy Christians, as the temple of God.
 (“ Know ye not, says Saint Paul, that ye are the
“ temple of God ?”) and of every one, who leads a
life of devotion, sobriety, and charity, as a priest
offering up the acceptable sacrifices of praise, love, and
obedience. For thus saint Peter elegantly describes
that temper and disposition of mind, with which the
gospel was intended to inspire all who should embrace
it. “ Ye also as lively stones are built up a spiritual
“ house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sa-
“ crifices, acceptable to God, by Jesus Christ.” And
as these allusions to the rites and ceremonies of the
Mosaic law are so just and beautiful, they seem like-
wise, to be very happily calculated for weaning the
Jewish people, after a gradual and imperceptible
manner, from their excessive attachment to the things
themselves, by suggesting a sublimer sense, in which
they might make use of the very terms that denoted
them. The great and important principles of in-

ward sanctity, of the devotion of the heart to God, and of the conformity of the temper and life to the character and example of the supreme Deity, in order to the being accepted of him, and as the necessary and only foundation for his favour and esteem, are indeed apparently and frequently insisted on in the law of Moses, and inculcated with great earnestness and strength by the prophets, together with the utter vanity and insignificance of all external services without this inward goodness, as might be made appear by a variety of beautiful and lively passages to that purpose. But still the very great mixture of ceremonial rites and observances, which make the peculiar and distinguishing part of the Mosaic dispensation, and with which it so greatly abounds, and which did not tend to answer any directly moral purposes, but only, in the general, to draw off the people's minds from the abominable idolatries of the neighbouring nations, by fixing their attention to ceremonies that were at least of an innocent and inoffensive nature, and the very nice and punctilious exactness, with which these ceremonies are enumerated, and the observance of them enforced, must needs render it by far less lovely and engaging to generous minds, and make it appear to be not at all adapted for being the universal, fixed, and standing religion of mankind, or for raising its professors to any sublime and elevated improvements in virtue and likeness to God. Whereas the gospel, by its refined precepts of morality, by the inward goodness, by the unfeigned, warm benevolence it so strongly inculcates, and the noble and disinterested motives it makes use of, appears to be the religion of pure and uncorrupted nature, the religion of angels and of heaven. And by these considerations we easily see how much Christianity is injured and dishonoured by those who represent it only as a more perfect Judaism, who draw their ideas of its worth and excellence not from the essential and unalterable principles of nature, but
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from the peculiarities of a religious dispensation, designed to be only temporary, and adapted to the taste and inclinations of a people peculiarly stupid and perverse, and who, when they would be thought to exhibit its most important doctrines, do it only by carrying those peculiarities to a higher degree; thus transferring not merely terms and phrases, but ideas and sentiments of a comparatively mean and despicable nature, to a character of the most consummate worth and dignity, and in proportion to the stress which is laid upon these things must the moral force and energy of the gospel be abated, and consequently its great and ultimate design obstructed and opposed. But I proceed to a

Second observation, which is most directly and immediately suggested in the words of the text; and that is, that the spiritual and true worship of God, which the gospel so much insists upon and recommends, and in the inculcating of which, after so strong and powerful a manner, its glory and excellency consists, is likewise most clearly and evidently founded upon our natural reasonings from the perfections of God. This is plainly supposed by our Saviour, when he says, "God is a spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Since God is a pure and perfect spirit, without any of the properties of matter, and without any of those affections which result from an organized and bodily frame, it must from hence immediately follow, that no external or bodily services can be, upon their own account, in the least degree, acceptable to him, or at all available towards recommending us to his favour. No enlargement can make this inference plainer than it does at first sight appear. And as it may be thus clearly and immediately deduced from the general notion of God as a spirit, that external services alone, and considered merely in themselves, cannot have any the least tendency to recommend us to his favour,

fo by confidering thofe attributes and thofe moral perfections which are effential to this fupreme eternal mind, and of which he has given fuch abundant and convincing proof in the furrrounding works of creation, it will ftill more evidently appear, that nothing but inward purity and goodnefs of difpofition can be available to thefe purpofes. Can it ever be thought that mere external fervices, the homage and humble gelfures of the body, or the facrifices of the lips will in the leaft degree recommend to the favour and approbation of the fupreme Creator, one, who notwithstanding thefe outward appearances of devotion and worfhip, plainly manifefls, by his irregularities in relative and focial life, by the little care he takes to do good according to his abilities, or even to avoid injuring others and difturbing the peace, order, and quiet of the world, that his temper is quite the reverfe of what appears, by undeniable demonftration to be the character of Deity ; and that he has not, whatever may be his pretence, any inward veneration for the moral perfections of God, or gratitude for the mercies and favours which he has received from him ? Is it poffible that a kind-hearted and friendly man, who is warm in the interefl of his fellow-creatures, eager and ftedfafl in the purfuit of every defign, which he apprehends to be calculated for the good of others, fhould have any the leaft degree of efteem and favour for one, who, whilfl he flatters and applauds him, and profefles to admire his benevolent and ufeul conduct, his great and generous defigns, does plainly prove by the tenor of his life and converfation, directly repugnant to all views of this kind, that he has no manner of real efteem and value for him ? And fhall that inconfiflency and contradicflion in moral character, be imputed to the infinitely pure and all-perfect Deity, which we could not, without the greatefl impropriety, afcribe to a truly good and virtuous man ? Nothing can poffibly afford the leaft fhadow for expectations of divine favour, founded upon

upon mere external and bodily services, be they ever so pompous and solemn, and ever so often repeated, without supposing that, notwithstanding the pure spiritual and holy nature of God, he may yet be deceived by these specious appearances, and be made to apprehend that there is in the temper of the mind a disposition answerable to them when really there is not. But even here the natural notions, which we have of the self-existent and eternal spirit, the original source of all beings, will most clearly convince us of vanity and presumption. For must not he who made heaven and earth, and who continually supports and upholds them in existence, of necessity fill both with his presence? Must not he who first framed the human heart, and by whose incessant and never-failing agency the soul of man is supported in life, consciousness, and activity, be thoroughly and intimately acquainted with whatever passes within it, and with the real and true principle of mind, from which our various actions and forms of outward behaviour proceed? Thus by contemplating the attributes and moral perfections of God, and the nature and design of his government in the world, may we easily and most clearly discern, that from such creatures as we, who are capable of being convinced by the surrounding evidences of nature, of a supreme and all-directing Deity, and of observing the tokens and footsteps of his goodness, with admiration and delight, and with affectionate gratitude and love, and of cultivating in our own minds the similar principles of benevolence and goodness, that from us, I say, such dispositions are indispensably required, in order to our being qualified for the divine favour, that the true and proper worship of God must consist in our exercising, cultivating, and endeavouring continually to improve in them, and that without this all outward and bodily services whatsoever, must be looked upon by him with the highest resentment and disdain. And from what has been said to illustrate this and the former observation,

and from the manner in which our Saviour points out to the Samaritan woman, wherein the true worship of God consists, we may most naturally take occasion to remark further, in the

Third place, how much the religion of nature and the gospel harmonise with each other, and conspire in giving us the same ideas and sentiments with respect to that which is of such high, essential importance in every religion, namely, the nature of those services by which we may become acceptable to Deity, and be qualified for his approbation. That God is a pure and perfect spirit, the merciful and benevolent father and governor of the universe, that he is infinite in knowledge and understanding, and therefore most thoroughly and exactly acquainted with the intentions and dispositions of all his reasonable creatures, is the plain and obvious dictate of nature and reason: from whence immediately follows that other great principle of natural religion, that, in order to our serving him acceptably, we must have an inward reverence and love of his character, and must endeavour to form ourselves into a resemblance of his perfections and excellencies. And these are the very principles and this the manner of reasoning, which our Saviour himself makes use of, when instructing the Samaritan woman in the nature and principles of his own religion. The like harmony might be easily observed and traced out in other particulars; and indeed in this instance alone, this mutual connexion and agreement between natural religion and the Christian institution, so far as relates to a rule of temper and the governing maxims of life and conduct, and the necessary and certain qualifications for the divine favour, may not improperly be said to appear in its full view and real extent; since the worshipping God “in spirit and “in truth” includes in it every thing that relates to moral practice, every thing that is of essential and intrinsic worth, either in the religion of nature or of Jesus, the whole of that temper and conduct which
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It is the design of both to promote and establish amongst men. Thus it appears that as to their leading and fundamental principles, as to their ultimate design and end, as to those things which both recommend and enforce upon us, as of supreme and ultimate importance, they are one and the same, and that in this respect no distinction at all can with any justice or propriety be made between the religion of nature and the religion of Jesus: that they are different religions in no other sense than as they are different methods, (the one in subserviency and subordination to the other) of enforcing the same grand truths, and of answering the same important purposes of virtue and of likeness to God, in the holiness and felicity of his nature; and that the best and most perfect notion of the Christian institution is, that it confirms our natural ideas relating to the perfections and character of God, and the designs and views of his government in the world, that it has been a signal and illustrious instrument of providence in directing mens thoughts to these most important and interesting subjects of speculation, that by its miraculous attestation it bears an additional testimony to all moral obligations, that it contains additional motives arising from its peculiar discoveries to the practice of that virtue, which is the essential, invariable, and universal law of nature, and that by such additional evidences and motives, to which its positive institutions are designed to engage our attention, it furnishes us with the compleatest aids and assistances for our attaining to the true dignity and perfection of our being, and for the improving ourselves in every thing that is agreeable to that rank and order, in which we stand amongst the creatures of God. A thorough and intimate acquaintance therefore with the principles of natural religion, and the considering Christianity as introduced and established with a sole and intire view to the promoting of moral virtue and goodness amongst mankind, must be the true key by which to understand the writings
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of the New Testament, without which verbal criticisms and alphabetic indexes can be of little significancy or avail, can at best only amuse, but will indeed rather perplex and confound us, and under the vain and specious appearance of knowledge confirm us the more in our ignorance and our false apprehensions of things. And all those, who instead of applying themselves to the diligent and careful study of the religion of nature, depreciate and undervalue it, must of course and exactly to the same degree, depreciate and undervalue the religion of Jesus. Nor can any thing be more directly inconsistent with our Saviour's own practice, who, we see, when informing the Samaritan woman concerning the genius and design of his own religion, has recourse to the principles of nature and the deductions of reason, expressly representing it as the end of the gospel-dispensation to promote a conformity to them. Thus have I endeavoured to point to you those reflections which naturally arise from that part of our Saviour's conference with the woman of Samaria, which relates to the place of worship.

As a proper improvement of the whole, let us be careful to act in a manner agreeable to those important principles of religion, which nature, reason, and christianity thus jointly conspire in recommending to our most serious attention and regard. Nothing that has been said can, if rightly understood, be thought in the least to derogate from or disparage the reasonableness and advantage of an external and public worship. In the mere form of which, considered in itself, tho' there can indeed be nothing that will avail towards giving any real worth to our characters or towards rendering us acceptable in the sight of God; yet it is evident we live in a world, the cares or pleasures of which are almost perpetually employing our thoughts, and are apt to engross by far too much of our attention and regard, and to leave little or no room for that reflection upon religious and moral subjects, which is of such evident and great importance

for supporting the life and vigour of virtuous affections in the soul, without which it is to be so greatly feared that the snares and amusements of the world will have an unhappy and fatal influence upon our tempers, and to the want of which we may justly suppose the degeneracy of mankind to be principally owing: and that therefore it is highly expedient and necessary that there should be some regular method of exciting and renewing men's attention to the great truths relating to religion and moral practice; for which purpose nothing can appear better or more directly calculated than the exercises of religious and social worship. Nor can any thing surely, without the greatest impropriety, absurdity, and contradiction, be represented as foreign to true religion, which tho' it be not religion itself, is yet a most natural and likely means of promoting that which is so. Nay farther, tho' nothing can indeed be more insignificant and worthless than the engaging in these outward forms of devotion, without a religious intention and serious engagement of the mind; yet as these things are so natural and likely a means of encouraging, strengthening, and improving the virtuous temper in the soul, the applying and making use of them with this express intention and design, must partake of the nature of virtue, and be a direct instance of that true and spiritual worship, which our Saviour represents in the text, as that alone which is or can be acceptable in the sight of God; since to design, aim at, and intend virtue, must be in itself virtuous. And as an external worship is so natural a method of cherishing and confirming the virtuous temper, so it is, in another way than that just now mentioned, as to some of its parts, a natural and therefore a just and proper expression of such a temper: for it is, I believe, scarce possible for creatures of our social make, if we feel in our own minds any warm and lively sentiments of devotion, reverence, and love towards God, and admiration of his glorious perfections, not to take a
plea-

pleasure in joining with others, whom we apprehend to have the same pious affections in their minds, in offering up public and united thanksgivings, praises, and adorations to the benevolent and most merciful father of the universe. This is the meaning, these the natural ends and uses of the instrumental duties of religion; thus consistent are they with the nature of religion, considered as a spiritual worship, and as the devotion and obedience of the heart; and thus directly are they calculated to promote and improve it. Let us therefore be exceeding careful that in making use of them we do it with that seriousness and good intention of mind, without which the external performances will be nothing but a solemn mockery of God, and, instead of answering any good and valuable purpose, can only aggravate the guilt and dishonour of a vitious and corrupt temper, and increase the divine displeasure against us. We are indeed to remember that every thing which goes under the name of religious worship is not equally well calculated for subserving those valuable and excellent purposes of which we have been speaking. The original and true design of external services in religion and the public exercises of devotion is to encourage fixed and lively contemplations upon the adorable attributes of God, to inspire a warm and steady affection towards him, to humble our minds under a sense of the scantiness and imperfection of our virtuous attainments, to impress them with firm apprehensions of the real importance, of the absolute and unalterable necessity of conformity to the rules of virtue and the image of God, in order to our fulfilling the obligations of nature and the appointed duties of our social character, and to our enjoying that substantial and sublime happiness, which must be the result of divine approbation; to excite the sentiments of extensive and universal benevolence, and to engage us by the strongest and most powerful motives to the unwearied practice of goodness: and it is solely from their tendency to

pro-

promote these purposes that they derive their worth and excellency. Consequently, when those, who are called upon to conduct the public solemnities of religion, represent the attributes of the supreme Deity in a manner that tends to give us unworthy conceptions of his nature, and to lessen our sense of the amiableness and unrivaled excellence of the divine character, when religion is by any such exhibited to view in gloomy and forbidding colours, when other things are proposed and recommended as of equal, if not of greater importance than the essential laws of moral goodness, when the sour, uncharitable temper of bigotry and party-zeal is strenuously inculcated, then are our religious and public solemnities perverted from their genuine and true design, so far is their glory departed from them, and so far are they calculated for encouraging a temper quite opposite to that which constitutes the essential nature of pure and undefiled religion.

Before I dismiss this subject, it may not be improper to remark, that the appropriating some particular day for the exercises of religion, is founded upon exactly the same principles as public worship in general. If the one be reasonable and proper, the other must be equally so; since it is evident that public worship cannot be carried on with any tolerable decency or convenience, unless there be some stated time set apart, by common consent, for that purpose, and therefore all those passages of the New Testament, which encourage and injoin a public worship, are so many obligations upon us to the observance of such a day. And for observing that particular day, which we call the Lord's-day, as the season for the public solemnities of religion, the general concurrence and agreement of the community to which we belong, is a foundation abundantly sufficient; especially as it seems countenanced by the example of the very earliest Christians, and even of the Apostles themselves. As for what is, strictly speaking, the sabbath, which was kept

kept on the seventh day of the week, it is observable, that our Saviour expresses himself concerning it in such a manner, as naturally to direct our thoughts to Moses, as the original author and founder of it. The passage I refer to (John vii. 19.) is as follows: "Did not Moses give you the (or *a*) law, and yet none of you keepeth the (or *that*) law:" meaning the law of the Sabbath; since he is there speaking of the general violation of that law among the Jews, by the circumcision of their children on the sabbath-day, as what was a full justification of himself to them, for his making a man whole on the sabbath-day. This observation is farther confirmed by considering that in this very discourse, our Saviour distinguishes circumcision by this note of peculiarity, that it was "not of Moses, (that is, not of Moses only and originally) but of the fathers;" by which distinction our Saviour has most probably pointed out the very principles, upon which the Jews themselves proceeded, in making the law of the sabbath to give way to that of circumcision, whenever there happened to be a competition between them, namely that circumcision was a prior, and therefore (as they presumed) a more sacred institution. And thus we are authorized to look upon the sabbath as an ordinance purely Jewish, on the mention made of it in the book of Genesis, as no other than an historical anticipation, according to what has been so justly and pertinently alledged upon this head, and upon the whole to consider it as no more binding upon Christians than any other part of the ceremonial law; which has been long since abolished by the gospel.

To conclude, let us by a regular and serious attendance upon the social exercises of divine worship, and by every other well adapted method, be endeavouring to cultivate in our minds, that principle of universal charity and sincere benevolence, that reverence towards God, that unfeigned and lively gratitude for all his mercies, and that conformity to his per-

perfections and character, which so far as they prevail will infallibly secure to us the favour of our great, supreme Creator, remembering that this spiritual and refined worship is not less agreeable to our own natures, than it is conformable to the divine character and perfections. How inadequate and insufficient mere external form and shew, be it ever so glittering and splendid, must be for answering the purposes of human happiness, and how vastly they must fall short of the true dignity of our natures, must be evident to every one who has not dreadfully debased the original powers and principles of his mind, by groveling aims and low pursuits. Whereas by cultivating in our hearts the temper of piety and benevolence, by a constant endeavour to improve more and more in these amiable dispositions, we assert our rank and dignity as men, we act in a manner agreeable to the order of nature, engage in that pursuit, which is, by the make and constitution of our minds, pointed out to us as the highest and noblest, enjoy the sublimest pleasures, lay the foundation for a perpetual increase of them, and shall, by continuing stedfast and unshaken in the practice of virtue, be continually advancing into higher and more glorious degrees of likeness, not merely to the angelic, but even to the divine character.

DISCOURSE VIII.

The Reasonableness and Advantage of publick Worship.

[HOLLAND.]

HEBREWS X. 25.

*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,
as the Manner of some is.*

TO enquire into the ground, and original of *publick worship*, is both an entertaining and profitable speculation: it is entertaining, as it may help us to account for a practice, that has prevailed in all ages and nations of the world: and it is useful, as by this means we may learn how far, and for what reasons, we are obliged to comply with it.

And first, There are some principles in human nature, which powerfully incline men to worship God in society. Mankind in general, are so formed, as to feel great pleasure in real devotion. To reverence the king of heaven and earth; to adore his wisdom and goodness; gratefully to acknowledge the past, and to supplicate the future care and bounties of his providence; are delightful employments to every pious mind. The pleasures which flow from these exercises, are not inconsiderable, when they are enjoyed in private; but being shared with others, they become far more exalted and ravishing. It is then the
devout

devout passions arise in us with the greatest ardor, and are attended with the most exquisite delight, even when we observe the expressions of them in the words, countenance, and gesture of those about us. Our own devotion is kindled, or increased by that of others, and the satisfaction we take in it, heightened by considering, that numbers are partaking with us the same entertainment. Upon these accounts we may venture to assert, that mankind are naturally disposed to join together in divine worship; and, that supposing neither God nor man had made any laws about it, it would have been no more extraordinary, if they had assembled for *this* purpose, than for the enjoyment of any other pleasures.

But in almost all nations, lawgivers and magistrates have encouraged this propensity of mankind to religion. It was easily understood, that piety was a main support of justice; and that the sense of a supreme power, the inspector of human affairs, the avenger of wrong, and the patron of virtue, had a manifold tendency to strengthen the bonds of society; to restrain men from *secret* wickedness; to check the insolence of the great, and tame the wild passions of the people. No wonder then, if in all well regulated polities the publick should have interested itself about religion, in which its welfare is so nearly concerned. Temples were every where built; rites and ceremonies espoused; an order of men appointed to preside and officiate in sacred things; and certain days fixed, when the people should assemble for *religious purposes*. Indeed, as to the objects, and manner of worship, less care than ought to have been, was generally taken. The magistrate was content to authorise the current belief, though ever so absurd and ridiculous; and to recommend those gods and ceremonies, which the people were best disposed to receive. It was thought sufficient, it seems, if, by publick and solemn acts of religion, a general sense of some over-ruling powers could be impressed and frequently renewed

in the minds of men. Nor was this the only advantage gained by instituting religious assemblies: The people by thus joining in one common worship, were put in mind of their relation to the state, and to one another, which contributed not a little to strengthen their affection for the publick, and to promote amity, and good correspondence among them.

But in some nations this practice, so highly beneficial to mankind, was enjoined by an authority superior to that of human governors. God himself in the system of laws he delivered to the *Jews*, by his servant *Moses*, commanded them to sanctify every *seventh* day; abstaining from the common business of life, and employing themselves chiefly in devout exercises. He also appointed other festivals, when the people were to come together from all parts, and join in the celebration of religious exercises.

And, in what concerns the observation of the *sabbath*, Christianity confirms the Mosaical law: our Saviour, whose practice ought to be a rule to Christians, attended upon the publick worship in the *Jewish* synagogues: and the apostles followed his example, till they had gained a sufficient number of converts to Christianity, in one place, to form a church. Then they constituted regular assemblies of Christians, and set apart proper persons to instruct the people and assist them in their devotions. We find also in the writings of the apostles, which are acknowledged to be of sacred authority, frequent exhortations to join in the *publick* worship of God: as particularly in the words I have now read to you: *Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.*

In further discoursing on this subject, I would lay before you some arguments to engage your constant attendance on divine worship in publick. And,

First, Let me urge the divine command; which of itself will be an effectual inducement with every *pious* mind, to keep the sabbath; and reverence the sanctuary.

Add to this, the laws and institutions of our country ; which next to the authority of God, ought to be held in the highest veneration. For, though under our present happy government, we are allowed to worship God according to our consciences, yet we are not left to our own choice, whether we will attend his worship at all, or not. It is pity indeed, the useful laws relating to this, are not more strictly executed, and that greater care is not taken to punish the violators of them. But an honest man, and a lover of his country, will pay a sacred regard to the injunctions of the publick, even when he might transgress them with impunity ; and will not need to be awed into a compliance by the threatenings and rods of the magistrate.

Despise not therefore the joint-authority of God and *man*, by neglecting to attend on the *publick* offices of devotion. And if you consider how many, and what great advantages arise from hence to society ; you will be in less danger of indulging yourself in such a criminal negligence. Were *piety* towards God utterly banished from the earth ; it is a question, whether *fidelity* and *justice* would be able to stay long behind. It is certain, wickedness might then go boldly to work whenever it could escape human observation. Oaths would be insignificant : the mutual confidence between the *people* and their *governors* would be very much diminished, if men were released from all apprehensions of a SUPERIOR BEING, to whom they are accountable. Nay, I know not, whether, in that case, a man could safely trust his friend, or a guest be secure from those, that entertain him. Thus, if religion were taken away ; human life would be thrown into confusion, and the bonds of society weakened, if not quite *dissolved*. And how is religion to be maintained and cherished ? By what means can a sense of God, and providence be more effectually propagated, and diffused among the generality of the people, than by their meeting together at *stated* times, and joining

in solemn acts of worship? Our publick assemblies, our temples, our ministers, though sometimes represented as useles burdens to the state, contribute more than any thing to keep piety alive in the world, and to spread the knowledge both of *natural* and *revealed* religion. Since then society could not well subsist without religion; nor a general sense of religion be maintained without the publick worship of God, it is evidently the part of every good citizen to encourage it as much as possible, by his influence and example.

Wherefore, if you absent yourself habitually from publick worship, you cannot answer it to your neighbour, to mankind, to your country. By such a neglect, also, you but ill consult your own advantage, and pleasure: for, nothing is at once more agreeable and improving to the mind, than sincere and fervent devotion. Do you desire to be made wiser and better? — Would you grow in that virtue, which is the only source of peace in life, hope in death, and happiness for ever? the best advice I can give is this; Go to church, and attend on the publick institutions of religion, as often as necessity, and the great duties of life will permit you. Here, if you apply yourself with sincerity and diligence to the solemnities of devotion, you will find, that to worship God in the assemblies of the people, is, by no means an unprofitable employment.

While you join heartily in adoring the most perfect and best of beings, your own mind will be insensibly wrought into a likeness to that character, which you admire and worship. To acknowledge him as the universal Parent, will remind you of the near relation you bear to mankind, and strengthen the principles of humanity and benevolence. By reviewing his goodness to you, and to all men, you will cherish in your breast the noblest sentiments of love and gratitude towards him: and when you pour out your soul in fervent prayers, you will improve in that resignation to providence and trust in God, which will support

port you in afflictions, and enable you to pass through life and death with serenity and chearfulness. The frequent repetition of these exercises will inspire you with such a sense of the divine inspection and presence, as will be the surest guard to your innocence and virtue, at all times, and in all places.

Thus every part of devotion is calculated to refine the temper, and mend the heart: and as it enobles and exalts human nature, so it demonstrates in the strongest manner its original excellence and dignity. The capacities of which we are apt to boast, are in some measure common to us, and the brute creation. In the inferior animals, we may observe some spark of reason, though not so perfect as our own: they are also many of them led by the instincts of nature to herd and associate with one another. Wherefore, the brutes are to a degree rational and social as well as men: but they are all of them utterly incapable of religion. This it seems was reserved to be the distinguishing glory of man; that he alone, of all earthly beings, should be capable of knowing and worshiping the Sovereign Mind, in common with the angels.

Let therefore the usefulness and dignity of devotion, engage you to attend on its publick offices. Besides, if you go to church with a real desire to be instructed, you may there improve in the best and most profitable knowledge. By hearing the word of God read and preached, you may grow in that wisdom, which leads to a good behaviour in this world, and to everlasting happiness in the world to come.—To this you may object, that you can read the Scriptures at home; and perhaps, you have conceived such high thoughts of your own wisdom; and such a mean opinion of pulpit-instructions, that you despair of reaping much benefit by them. Now, far be it from me, to call in question your understanding and knowledge. I will even suppose that with less opportunity, and leisure for improvement, you are in fact, much wiser than your *ministers*: but then I assert, that this cir-

cumstance is so far from justifying your absence from the church, that it even affords a strong argument against it.

For, though you are so happy as to need no instruction, there are multitudes of mankind, who live in miserable ignorance; concerning whom we may say, without suspicion of vanity, that they are not so wise as their ministers. Out of pure compassion for them, you ought to frequent those ordinances, from which, it may be, you cannot expect to receive any advantage yourself. Your example will doubtless have a great influence upon them, and powerfully entice them to cast themselves into the way of instruction. They can hardly avoid making this, or the like reflection—If such a *knowing* man finds it worth his while to attend constantly on *publick* worship; much more does it concern us to be there, who have so much greater room for improvement.

And indeed, after all our complaints of the profaneness of the age, it must still be confessed, that the men of real sense and virtue, are not wanting in their endeavours to keep religion in countenance. It has many friends, of whom it need not be ashamed; and few enemies, but what do it honour by despising it. I appeal to experience.—Do not the wise, the sober, the honest, the faithful in every place, observe the Sabbath? and as to those who are seldom seen in any religious assemblies; who, I beseech you? and what are they? Are they not the very dregs of all conditions? in *high* life; the vain, the empty, and debauched? among the *lower* sort, the lazy and profligate? of all which, it is not easy to determine, whether vice hath made them *profane*, or *profaneness* hath made them *vicious*. So true is this, that were you to go quite through the nation, I am confident, you would meet with few persons of real integrity, and good sense, that habitually neglect the publick offices of religion.

It is therefore scandalous, as well as criminal to be a stranger at the church.—But perhaps, the services there performed are dull and *disagreeable* to you.—Now, though devotion is in itself the most delightful employment in the world ; yet, I acknowledge, there are some things, that may render it unpleasant : as *first*, If your mind is haunted by superstition, it will fill your whole life with gloom and terror ; and especially the time which you spend in devotion. Or if your conscience labours with guilt ; you may well be uneasy, while your thoughts are directly fixed upon the *all-seeing* and *righteous* governor of the world. Or, lastly, If you engage in religious solemnities with indifference and coldness ; no wonder you find them insipid and tedious. But, if you address yourself to the worship of God, with a mind free from guilt and superstition ; believing in him, as the just and benevolent Father of all ; if you also adore him with sincere and lively affections ; your own experience will convince you, that devotion is attended with a noble and exquisite pleasure. For never is the human mind in a happier state ; never is it more thoroughly and sincerely pleased, than when employed in admiring what is great and beautiful : and where shall we find an object more grand, than the almighty and eternal God ; the author of all things, who continually actuates and governs that immensity of beings, we call the universe ? Or, where shall we search for excellence, but in him, who is the original unexhausted source of whatever is good and valuable in the whole creation ? Does the view of what is beautiful in a human character inspire us with delight ? And must there not result the highest pleasure from contemplating the divine, which is perfectly and supremely amiable ? Is there not also a satisfaction in being grateful ? In owning our obligations to a generous benefactor ; in expressing our delight in his prosperity ; in celebrating his merit, and depending with absolute security on his favour and protection ? And must not the most

exalted pleasures arise from acknowledging the greatest obligations to the most perfect goodness? From contemplating the infinite happiness of the Deity, and professing our grateful sense of his bounty and providence? And then; what a firm tranquility and solid joy must it give, when we think of the folly, inconsistency, and viciousness of mankind, and the uncertainty of all external enjoyments, to reflect upon ourselves, as ever encompassed by almighty wisdom and goodness; as ever under the care of our best friend, who, if we don't make ourselves unworthy of his favour, will conduct us safe through the wilderness of this world, to a state of perfect and eternal happiness?

Such are the elevated pleasures of devotion. Nor can you enjoy them half so perfectly when alone, as in company: for society heightens every delight! the gratifications of our senses, the melody of sounds, the fair prospects of nature, and the lower pleasures of the taste; none of them yield such a lively satisfaction, when we enjoy them in solitude, as when we share them with others. In like manner the pleasures of religion, though they are highly satisfying to one that contemplates God in privacy and retirement, yet they yield a much nobler entertainment to him that joins with a worshipping assembly.

It is the property of a sullen and unsocial spirit, to affect a recluse and solitary life, and avoid the places of publick concourse. — A benevolent man, on the contrary, delights to be present in the assemblies of the people; and is pleased to see a number of his own kind met together; especially, when they associate for such valuable ends, as the worship of their common Creator, and the improvement of their own minds. And if their devotion is not of the *false* and *gloomy*, but of the *free* and *affectionate* kind, he will there gather joy from every countenance around him. The whole assembly, declaring by the cheerfulness of their looks, that they take delight in their sacred employment,

ployment, will reflect pleasure upon one another, and mutually give and receive a most agreeable satisfaction.

Besides, to join with our fellow-creatures in worshipping God, is highly conducive to kindle or increase our own devotion: for there is a kind of contagion in human passions. Every motion of the heart has a certain air peculiar to it; and when we observe in others these visible signs, the affections, from which they proceed, naturally arise within us. Devotion therefore will be more warm, the divine enthusiasm more sensibly felt, and the elevation given to the mind be greater, when, with a numerous assembly, full of the sense of the Deity, and his providence, we engage in his worship. If here we catch not the sacred passions, we shall have reason to complain, not that devotion is dull and unpleasant, but that our minds are insensible and stupid.

Upon the whole then it appears, that as we ought to attend on the publick worship of God, out of regard to the divine command, and the institutions and welfare of civil society; so this practice is highly conducive to our own particular benefit and pleasure. Hence we shall gradually become wiser and better: enjoying at the same time a sublime satisfaction, far superior to all the delights of sense; and even to the nobler pleasures of private devotion.

I shall only add, that devoutly to worship God in the assemblies of the people, has an immediate tendency to fit us for the employments and pleasures of heaven. No sooner shall the soul have dropt this body of flesh, than all those pleasures that depend wholly upon the body, must vanish of course. Wherefore it is evident, the happiness of a future state consists in nothing but in *mental* satisfactions: in the exercises of virtue and friendship; in contemplating the wonderful harmony of the immense universe; in admiring and praising the sovereign mind, its former and preserver. Accordingly the Scripture represents the departed spirits of good men, as happy in the worship,
love,

love, and adoration of the Supreme Being, whose nature and perfections they will then more thoroughly understand, than when their minds were enclosed in this covering of flesh. It is therefore of infinite concern, that, purifying our souls from sensual inclinations, and despising all mean and transitory pleasures, we cultivate a relish for the noble and eternal enjoyments of the mind, and particularly for those of social devotion. Thus, whenever it shall please God to remove us out of this life, we shall be duly qualified for joining with the celestial choir of angels and spirits, in celebrating his praise, through the ages of eternity. — Which, that it may be the happy case of every one of us, God of his infinite mercy grant, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord.

DISCOURSE IX.

The Excellence of moral Duties above
positive Institutions.

[BENSON.]

MAT. xii. part of the 7th verse.

I will have mercy and not sacrifice--

IN matters of religion, we ought to keep close to the appointment of *God*. But as, among the things, which *God* hath commanded, all are not of equal importance, it highly concerns us to understand what stress we ought to lay upon every part; that we may, in the most just and rational manner, comply with the will of *God*, and at last be happy in his favour.

The Pharisees were a superstitious sect among the Jews, who made great pretences to religion; and, at the same time, were immoral men. And (like superstitious persons of all ages and countries) they were guilty both of teaching for doctrines the commandments of men; and of laying the greatest stress upon things of the least moment, in their observation of the laws of *God*.—They had certain traditional rules, about washing their hands, before they sat down to meat; and about washing of pots, and cups, and brazen vessels. And these they observed, as matters of religion;

religion; while they neglected those *moral* precepts, which are of the highest importance. Again; they tithed mint, annise, and cummin, and were very curious in proportioning the tithe of those small seeds and herbs. But, at the same time, they omitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, fidelity, and the love of God. Whereas *they ought to have done the one and not to have left the other undone.*

In the beginning of the chapter where our text is, we find, they blamed the disciples of our Lord; because, as they walked through the corn fields, on the sabbath day, they gathered some of the corn, rubbed out the ears, and eat them, to satisfy their hunger. It was not, because the corn was another man's property: for it was one of the Jewish laws, *When thou comest into the standing-corn of thy neighbours, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle into thy neighbours standing-corn,* i. e. they were not to cut down and carry away a large quantity. But any Jew might have plucked the ears with his hands; and have eat what he had gathered, in that manner. Those superstitious Pharisees would have accounted that action of the apostles lawful, on any other day; but, as it was, they looked upon it as breaking the sabbath. Accordingly, they said unto Jesus, *Behold, your disciples do that which is not lawful to do, on the sabbath day.* Our Lord vindicated his disciples; because they were hungry, and therefore had occasion to eat. So the hunger and present necessity of David, and the young men that were with him, led the priest to give them *the shew-bread*; which, in other circumstances, it would not have been lawful for them to eat. But necessity had no law; and therefore David and his company, who were not priests, did in their pressing necessity, eat of it, without any blame.—There is another reason assigned by our Lord, *viz. That the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:* or that such positive duties were enjoined for the use and benefit of man; and

and not man created, that he might observe such positive institutions, to his detriment; or when moral duties came in competition with them.—Again; The outward rest of the sabbath day was enjoined in the Jewish law. For *six days they were to labour and do all their work: but the seventh being the sabbath (or rest) of the Lord their God, they were not, on that day, to do any manner of work.* In that, their law was very plain and express. And yet, whoever made use of his reason, in the interpretation of that law, must needs see that works of necessity and mercy were to be excepted; and that in such cases, men ought to work. So the priests, on that day slew the cattle, and laboured very hard, in one of the courts of the temple, in preparing and offering the sacrifices required. And, though they profaned (or broke the outward rest of) the sabbath day, they were blameless, and did nothing but what was their duty to do. And, if the temple-service excused them, *Jesus*, who was of greater excellence and dignity than the temple, could dispense with his disciples, in that particular. And then come in the words of our text; *But, if you had known what that expression meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. Wherefore, upon all these accounts, the son of man is Lord of the sabbath day,* and can dispense with the outward rest of that day, in his disciples, in cases, where it is proper, or when any good reason requires it.

The words of our text are a quotation from one of the antient prophets, where it is thus expressed. *For I desired mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt-offerings.* Our Lord made use of this passage, at another time, to vindicate his own conduct. The Pharisees pretended that to touch, or converse with publicans and other vicious persons, was contracting defilement, and rendered a religious person impure and polluted. Our Lord intimated, that that positive injunction of their wise men was not to be regarded by him, who kept company with them,

in order to reform them; for God will have mercy and not sacrifice; or God regards the promoting good morals more than any ceremonial, or positive, injunctions.

God required sacrifices of the Jews, as well as mercy. But the Hebrews, very frequently, when they would express the comparative excellence of one thing above another, deny the one and assert the other; and, in this case, represent God, as saying, *I desired mercy and not sacrifice.* But we should express it in our language after this manner, *I desired mercy rather than sacrifice;* or, *I preferred mercy to sacrifice.* Though I required both; yet I laid the greater stress upon *mercy*; and *sacrifice* was comparatively of less moment, being a thing that might, upon some occasions, be dispensed with, like the outward rest of the sabbath day. Whereas works of mercy are necessary, or evermore obligatory, and can never be dispensed with.

Mercy is one of *the moral virtues*, or one of the branches of everlasting righteousness: whereas *sacrifice* was appointed by *positive institution.* And, as our Lord extended that fine passage of the prophet's to the case of his disciples, to prove that they might lawfully, on the sabbath day, rub out the ears of corn, to satisfy their hunger, though thereby they broke the outward rest of that day; so we may, by way of parity, extend it to all *moral duties* whatever; and from hence learn, "to prefer such duties to all *positive institutions.*"

But, as this is a subject of great moment, it may be highly proper to enter into a more particular consideration of it. For there are few things, which more concern our practice, as Christians.—Some pretend that, by *morality*, we are to understand external civility, or honesty, temperance, and sobriety: that we must restrain *morality* to mere outward actions, without regarding the principle from which such actions flow; or that it concerns our duty towards *men* only, but does not take in our duty towards *God* also.

also. Whereas *the sum of the moral law is to love the Lord our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and our neighbour as ourselves*, i. e. it comprehends all the branches of righteousness, or true holiness. And, in this comprehensive sense would I be understood all along, in this discourse, to make use of the words, *morality, the moral law, moral virtue, moral duties*, and the like. And would have you take particular notice, and carefully remember, that, by *morality*, is to be understood *the loving of the Lord our God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as ourselves*; or those duties, which we owe to *God*, our neighbour and ourselves, as far as they are deducible from *right reason*, or the nature of things. But, by *positive institutions*, we are to understand such duties, as we could not have deduced from the reason and nature of things; but which are appointed of *God*, and discovered to us by *revelation*.—And, that such *moral duties* are of greater importance than *positive institutions*, will evidently appear, from the following particulars,

I. *Moral virtue* (or true holiness) is enjoined both by *reason* and *scripture*: whereas *positive duties* are enjoined by *scripture* alone.

Moral duties may not only be deduced from the reason and nature of things, or from the several relations, in which we stand, to *God* or men; but they are likewise commanded of *God*, in *scripture*, and there enforced by the divine authority. Whereas our obligation to observe *positive institutions* takes its rise from the divine authority, and could be known no otherwise, than by *revelation*. Now, where there is greater light and evidence, concerning any part of our duty, and more obligations to practise it, there a greater stress ought certainly to be laid upon it. This, I think, we may justly infer from the known wisdom and goodness of almighty *God*. For, as he cannot be thought to require as much from him, who had

had no such opportunity of knowing his will, as from him, who knows, or may know, it; so he cannot be thought to require, that an equal stress should be laid upon any part of his will, where he himself has not laid an equal stress.

Moral virtue (or everlasting righteousness) he requires twice, or upon two accounts, by *reason* and by his own *authority*, declared in *scripture*. But what is *positive* is enjoined by the divine *authority* alone. *The moral law* is founded upon the eternal, unalterable reason and fitness of things; and might have been found out, by a careful, impartial inquiry, without a *revelation*; it being *that law, which* (as St. Paul expresses it) *is written upon men's hearts*; and by which their consciences are led to applaud them, when they do well; and to accuse them, when they do wickedly. But the most fair and sagacious inquirer could not, with the utmost diligence, have discovered his obligation to just such particular *positive institutions*; unless the divine being had signified it, by *revelation*.

II. *Positive duties* are all instrumental, and have the nature of means to an end: but holiness, or *moral virtue*, is that end itself.

There are, indeed, some means enjoined us by the light of nature; such as study and attention, prayer and praise; and these may be called *the necessary or natural means*. But the *positive institutions* of Christianity are also *means*, well calculated to promote piety, universal, fervent charity, and every *moral virtue*. In holiness, we resemble *God*, the most perfect and amiable being; and therein consists our highest glory and perfection. But, in the observation of *positive duties*, we bear little or no resemblance to *God*. *Moral virtue* was good and excellent in itself, antecedent to all positive laws, and therefore enjoined upon us and upon the whole rational world. Whereas *positive institutions* are not good in themselves, but good only as means to holiness, which is the great end of all.

And

And were it not for their subservience to that end, God would never have given us any *positive injunctions*. They, therefore, must in consequence be of comparatively less value than the *moral virtues*, which they were designed to promote; as *the means* are, in all cases, of less value than *the end*. The weightier matters of the law of *Moses* were not sacrifices, or tithing of mint, annise and cummin; but the great *moral duties*, which are of everlasting obligation, *justice, mercy, fidelity, and the love of God*.

Weak and bad men have frequently placed religion in the bare use of *the means*, without a proper care to become holier and better by them. But such a behaviour is highly unreasonable in itself, as well as greatly displeasing to almighty God. When the wicked Jews offered numerous and costly sacrifices, God himself asked them these pungent questions, *who hath required these things at your hands? Or, ordered such persons, as you are, to tread my courts? And then he adds, bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination to me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth; they are a trouble to me. I am weary with bearing them. And, when you spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you. Yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear.* The reason of these grievous complaints is added, *Your hands are full of blood.*—They were murderers and oppressors; and therefore all their zeal about rites and ceremonies, and even such *positive institutions* as God had commanded, was disregarded and abhorred of God. But, as the prophet goes on to tell them, if they would reform, then God would yet be gracious, and accept them, “*Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, saith the Lord; cease to do evil, learn to do well; and then all your sins, of how deep a die soever, will be pardoned, and you shall have the divine blessing.*” The same

thing is elsewhere inculcated; *Unto this man* (says God) *will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.* But, as to other men, who disobey my word; *He that killeth a bullock,* with a view to offer it in sacrifice, upon mine altar, *is as odious to me, as if he murdered a man: he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offered swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol.* The reason is added, *Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in their abominations.*—As the means are, in all cases, of less importance than the end, so are *positive institutions* of less importance than *moral duties*; because *positive institutions* have only the nature of means to an end. Whereas holiness, or *moral virtue*, is that end itself.

III. *Positive institutions* are of finite, or limited duration; but *moral virtue* (or true holiness) is unchangeable, and will be everlasting. And this is another thing, whereby the superior excellence of the latter may appear.

The positive laws of God have actually been varied, according to the different circumstances in which mankind have been placed. In *paradise*, our first parents were commanded to abstain from the fruit of one tree, in token of their subjection to God, and as an acknowledgment that they held, all they had, by grant from him. But, besides that *positive injunction*, they had also the *moral law*, written upon their hearts, as their general rule of conduct.—After the fall, sacrifices seem to have been of divine appointment. For I can hardly think that *righteous Abel* would ever have attempted to please God, by slaying a brute beast and offering it up to him; unless God had, some way or other, intimated his will concerning it. Much less would God have respect unto Abel and to his offering, if he himself had not commanded it. He would rather have testified against it, as *superstition and will-worship*.

In about ten generations after *the flood* men degenerated into *idolatry*, as well as many other vices. And God gave a law to *Israel*, which abounded with rites and ceremonies and *positive institutions*; all which were highly proper, at that time; and appointed of God, with great wisdom, to be a standing monument against the customs of the surrounding, idolatrous nations; to keep the *Israelites* employed in the service of the true God; to point out, by way of emblem, their obligations to *moral purity*: and to lead them to, or prepare them for, *Christ Jesus* and his religion, which St. Paul has called, *the end of the law for righteousness unto every one that believed*. But, when the christian revelation was given, as a more excellent preservative, in that state of the world, against idolatry and vice; then the ceremonial law was laid aside, *as a yoke upon the necks of the disciples, which neither their fathers nor they were able to bear*. Some parts of the *Jewish law* were very expensive, and others very burthensome. Our Saviour therefore hath, with great wisdom and singular goodness to us, abolished *the ceremonial law*, and hath set up his law, contained in the New Testament, of which *the positive institutions* make but a very small part; being few in number, easy to be understood and observed, not pompous, not expensive or burthensome, no way tending to, or encouraging of *superstition*; but, if carefully kept to, guarding men against it.—The *positive institutions* of Christianity are these two, *baptism* and the *Lord's Supper*.—By *baptism*, we are initiated into the church of Christ, being charged with all the obligations, and intitled to all the privileges, of his disciples. The washing with water denotes that purity of mind and life, which is required of every Christian. And, as we have been, in this solemn manner, initiated into that religion, which God, the father of all, sent his son from heaven to publish, and which he sealed and confirmed by the miraculous gifts of the spirit, we ought to use the greatest care and diligence to understand the Christian

tian doctrine, and to live accordingly.—*The Lord's Supper* is a memorial of Christ's dying love; designed to perpetuate the remembrance of some important facts, upon which the truth of *Christianity* depends; and to excite, in our minds, the sincerest love to *Jesus Christ* and to one another, as his members or followers. Hereby we are induced to abound in all the virtues of an holy and good life, and to behave in that exemplary manner, which becomes those, that are duly affected at the remembrance of the astonishing love of *Christ*, in dying for us.

These are the *positive institutions* of pure and uncorrupt Christianity. But, since the first planting of this religion, many errors and corruptions have crept into the Christian church; and (among other things) the number of rites and ceremonies hath swelled to an amazing degree; not by the appointment of *God*, but by the mere contrivance and invention of weak, or corrupt, men. And the *church of Rome*, more especially, hath rendered them very numerous and burthensome. But, from what has been said, you may see, that many *positive institutions*, which were of divine appointment, ended together with that dispensation of which they were a part. And the *positive institution* of *Christianity*, will end, at the furthest, with the present state of things. For, though Christianity be the last dispensation of grace, yet it must give way to the kingdom of glory. Then will all the ordinances of the gospel cease, and the use of the present means be intirely over. But, as *moral virtue*, (or everlasting righteousness) has been the same, in all past ages, so will it continue to be, in all the ages to come; and will never cease, or vanish away, but will accompany us into the unseen world, be found to be the very temper of heaven itself, and will there be our glory and happiness for ever. Like *tongues* and *prophecy*, *faith* and *hope*, must all *positive institutions* vanish. But *charity*, and all the other *moral virtues*, will abide with us, world without end. And, this

is another reason, why we should prefer *moral duties* to *positive institutions*. For that, which will abide, hath certainly a greater glory than that which is to vanish away. When the building is completed, the scaffolding is removed, as no longer of any use. And, in every case, where the end is fully and completely attained, the means are no longer of any value. It is only, in this state of trial that such helps are useful; when we come into the happy state of recompence, we shall want such helps and institutions no longer.

IV. Though our obligation to *positive duties* is derived from the will of *God*; yet they are not in themselves things wholly arbitrary, or indifferent: but were appointed of *God*, with great wisdom and goodness.

The will of *God* is always according to the reason and fitness of things; and he commands nothing merely for commanding sake, or purely to make trial of our obedience. Without such, there are commands enow to imploy our whole time and care; and many and powerful temptations sufficient to try our virtue and obedience. And *God*, the wise, the gracious governour of all, will never act the part of a tyrant, or arbitrary governour, toward any of his intelligent creatures. For, as such arbitrary commands would be of little or no service, on the one hand: so, on the other hand, they might prove of disservice; as disobedience to them would increase our guilt, and aggravate our condemnation.

Weak and designing men have been apt to confound *arbitrary* and *positive* injunctions, as if they were intirely the same thing: whereas they are altogether distinct things, and ought by no means to be confounded. For *arbitrary laws*, there can no reason assigned; but the mere will, or humour, of him that appointed them. But, for *positive institutions*, *God* saw sufficient reason, before he enjoined men to observe them. And, though men could not discover their obligations, nor

See the reasonableness of them, antecedent to the divine appointment; yet, now they are commanded, and the design of them plainly laid before us, we may clearly perceive that they are very far from being *arbitrary*, or unreasonable. They are calculated to excite useful reflections, and lead us to a proper course of action; which was the wise and gracious design of *God*, in appointing them. They are as *food*, to nourish our souls in virtue, and true goodness; or like *physick* to heal the diseases of our souls, which are liable to be disordered by the temptations that abound in the world. We are sensible, as well as rational creatures, and what affects the senses commonly attracts our regard, more strongly than the objects of reason, or understanding. It is, therefore fit that, by some sensible representations, our minds be called off, from a too great regard to temporal things; that we may consider what we are, in what relations we stand, how far we are pursuing the end of our creation, and of our being planted for a few years upon earth; whether we are doing our duty, and performing the main business, for which we were sent into the world:—that we may rectify what is amiss, and strengthen those habits which are wise and good.

There are some considerable advantages in *God's* appointing *positive institutions*; for hereby superstition, and will-worship is prevented, or detected: seeing their manner is determined, their number limited, and the nature and design of them is clearly described and ascertained.—It is almost incredible how much the *priests of the church of Rome* have captivated the minds of the people, by magnificent buildings, splendid vestments, enchanting music, and numberless rites and ceremonies of human invention; by which means, they have carried on their own covetous and aspiring views; and raised themselves to immense riches and great worldly dominion and grandeur. But the progress of virtue and true piety has been thereby greatly obstructed; and ignorance, superstition, idolatry and vice

vice have been maintained and promoted. Whereas, in *the gospel*, purity and simplicity are altogether consulted. There the *moral law* is enjoined by divine authority; and such *positive institutions* added, as promote men's regard to that law. For, though, before or without such divine appointment, our reason laid us under no obligation to observe such things: yet, now they are revealed, they appear to be laws highly worthy both of the wisdom and of the goodness of God.

V. Though *positive institutions* are not equal to *moral duties*; yet it would be ridiculous, nay wicked, upon that account, to despise or neglect them.

Though tithing mint, annise and cummin was not equal to the weightier matters of the law of *Moses*, judgment, mercy, fidelity, and the love of God; yet neither of them were to be omitted. *These things you ought to have done*, (says our Saviour) *and not left the other undone.* Though *sacrifices* were not of equal importance with *mercy*; yet the *Jews* were commanded to offer sacrifice, as well as to shew mercy. When God commands any thing, it no longer remains an indifferent matter, whether men regard it or no. But he is guilty of *immorality*, who, through contempt or neglect, observeth not the *positive institutions*, which God hath graciously appointed, as helps to virtue and piety. For king *Saul's* disobeying a positive precept, the prophet *Samuel* reprov'd him, when he declared "rebellion (*against God*) to be as odious as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness to be like injustice and idolatry." There are some, who acknowledge *baptism* to be a standing ordinance in the Christian church, and yet live and die unbaptized. There are many more professed Christians, who have been baptized, and yet neglect the observation of *the Lord's supper*; notwithstanding it was Christ's dying command to all his followers, *this do in remembrance of me.* They would do well to consider, whether they pay a due

regard to Christ's authority, and how they will answer it to him, when they stand before his tribunal, in the last day; and he shall demand of them, "Why they have not complied with that dying request and injunction of his?" I am afraid, they will be speechless, and confounded, before their judge, at his coming.

Such *divine institutions*, are highly proper, especially at this distance of time and place, to preserve the *Christian* name and religion in the world.—Miracles are ceased long ago; but a standing church is instituted, to preserve and maintain the knowledge of Christianity in the world, *to edify the body of Christ*, and to train men up, in piety and virtue, for a better state.—Now a visible church, without *positive institutions*, is a mere creature of the imagination. The observation, therefore, of *positive institutions* is necessary to preserve and continue the Christian name and religion in the world. Nor let any persons plead "that they have attained to an equal measure of holiness, without the use of such means." For, as that would be false in fact; so would it be, in effect, an arraigning the wisdom of *God*, who appointed those means; and a contradicting the experience of some of the best of mankind, who have found great benefit from the use of such institutions. Whoever would act like a rational creature, and a Christian, must neither rest in the *means*, as if they were the *end*; nor neglect the use of them, because they are of less value than the end. The right way is *to do the one, and not leave the other undone*.

It is laudable, in you, to keep holy the *Lord's day*, to hear the word of *God*, and not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of too many is, in our day. But, though you hear never so many sermons, and have the clearest knowledge of divine things; yet, if you rest in the bare hearing the word, and are not doers, as well as hearers, you greatly deceive yourselves, and cannot profit thereby.—You have been devoted unto *God*, in Christ,
by

by *baptism*, and laid under early and lasting obligations to all that purity, which the Christian religion requires. But what will your baptism profit you, unless you renounce the sins of a wicked world, and keep the holy will and commandments of *God*, as long as you live? You have (several of you) been lately at the table of the Lord, and there eat and drank in memory of Christ's dying love. But what can it avail you, in that solemn manner, to shew forth his death, 'till he return as judge; if you be not constrained, by the love of Christ, to live unto him, who died for you and rose again? You pray to *God*, in the name of Jesus Christ; (I hope you do so, in your families and in your closets, as well as in the house of *God*;) but is your temper and practice agreeable? Do you consider that *the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the holy and upright man is his delight? We know that God beareth not sinners; but, if any man be a worshiper of God, and doeth his will, him he beareth. He, that offereth praise, glorifieth God; and unto him, that ordereth his conversation aright, shall be shown the salvation of the Lord.*

But, tho' holiness of heart and life, the love of *God* and our neighbour, the regulation of our passions and appetites, be the great end of religious worship, and therefore preferable to it; yet religious worship is by no means to be neglected. Though renouncing the sins of a wicked world and leading an holy life is of much more importance than *baptism*, or washing of the body with water; yet baptism is not to be neglected. Though spiritual union and communion with Christ, and his disciples, is of much more moment than the bare eating bread and drinking wine, in the *Lord's supper*; yet every professed Christian ought, by all means, to attend upon that sacred ordinance, in order to promote *moral virtue*, or holiness of heart and life. And would to *God* that that dying

dying command of our Lord's were more universally observed.

[VI. Lastly.] Though *positive institutions* ought not, by any means, to be slighted, but most religiously observed; when time and place, and all other circumstances will allow us to make use of them: yet *moral duties* ought always to be preferred, whenever they come in competition.

The less weighty matters of the law ought unquestionably to give place to the more weighty; and therefore *mercy* is more acceptable unto God than *sacrifice*, and obedience to the *moral* precepts of more account than whole burnt-offerings. Accordingly, our Saviour, who was born under the law of *Moses*, and obliged to fulfil all righteousness, did frequently prefer *moral* duties to *positive*, very commonly choosing to work cures on the sabbath day, and vindicating himself, in not observing the outward rest of that day, by the practice of the Jews in general, who took care of their cattle on that day, and were right in so doing. Thus, when health and all other circumstances will allow, it is your duty to hear the word of God, to keep holy *the Lord's day*, and to attend at the table of the Lord; but, suppose your life or health would be thereby endangered, or some other great evil follow, or some greater good could be done, at that time, which could not be done at any other time; in such a case, God has declared, *he would have mercy rather than sacrifice*, or that he prefers *moral* to *positive* duties. But, generally speaking, these two kinds of duties do not come in competition. And, in all such cases, *you ought to do the one and not leave the other undone*.

To conclude: what I aim at, is, to give every duty of the Christian life its proper weight, and place it in its due order. To lay a different stress upon any part from what God has laid upon it, would be to misrepresent the divine will, and give an handle to superstitious or profane men, to abuse or pervert it. But

to represent means only as means, on the one hand; and to teach men not to expect to attain the end as well without them, on the other hand; would be to set Christianity in the most clear, rational and amiable light; and be the most effectual method of putting the infidels to silence, and of settling the minds of all who are in earnest in their religious inquiries. And I am well persuaded that there is no way, that can equally promote the glorious cause of truth and righteousness, and consequently of the happiness of mankind:---in order to promote which, any good man would desire to live, and some would even dare to die.

DISCOURSE X.

Of the Obligation upon Christians to give thanks in every Condition, even the most afflicted.

[GROVE.]

I THESS. V. 18.

In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

IT has been thought by many learned men, that the Stoic philosophy comes the nearest of any to the christian religion, both in its principles and precepts. But I must own, I can hardly be of this opinion, were it only for this reason, that they differ so widely in their very foundations; one of them having its original in pride, the other in humility; one of them robbing God of his glory to adorn man, the other representing man in his true meanness, and weakness, and guilt, in order to exalt the glory of God, and the honour of divine grace. It is true, they both agreed in this, that they profess to teach a contempt of the present world, in regard to its good or evil things, and abound in paradoxes, or strange sayings, which sound extremely alike. *Cicero* has given us an account of several of the stoical paradoxes; such as these, “ That virtue is the only
“ good;”

“ good ;” (to which may be added, as a natural deduction from hence) “ that vice is the only evil ;” there being nothing of evil in such things as are grievous only to the flesh. “ That the good man, (in whatever circumstances he be) cannot want for any thing to make him happy. That all sins and virtues are respectively equal. That the wise man alone is free, rich ; in short, every thing that can be imagined desirable and estimable.” These paradoxes of the Stoics are easily to be matched by a much greater number, which is to be collected out of the writings of the New Testament. To go no further than this chapter, the Apostle has two or three injunctions, which persons not well affected to religion, will be sure to disapprove, as impossible to be put in practice. *See that none render evil for evil to any man.* Revenge is not permitted in any case. *Rejoice evermore.* The Christian’s joy is to be perpetual, and to subsist like fire in water, amidst all the troubles and calamities of this life. And in the text, *in every thing give thanks* ; without exception of any state or circumstance, tho’ never so sad and afflictive. But then, when we come to examine things, we shall find this great disparity in the case, that many of the Stoical maxims are really extravagancies, inconsistent with the present frame of human nature, and no way suited to the present state of human life ; whereas Christianity advances nothing but what is truly practicable, and what the grace of God has enabled great numbers to exemplify in real life. The Stoic philosophy had no consideration of the weakness of nature, but required of men to divest themselves of their natural appetites and passions, and to do and suffer things utterly beyond their own strength, without directing them, at the same time, where they might have that strength which they wanted ; whereas the gospel makes allowance for the weakness of nature, supposes (a) *no affliction for the present to be joyous*

(a) Heb. xii. 11.

but grievous; gives us leave to (b) mourn and be in heaviness, and to (c) indulge to our other passions, so we do not suffer them to transport us beyond the bounds of reason and religion. If the gospel commands us duties above the common rate or standard of morality, duties for which we may seem badly fitted in this state of imperfection, it likewise promises uncommon (d) assistance, supernatural and divine assistance; and does not expect we should (e) renounce the ease and pleasure of the world, and (f) rejoice in tribulations, but on the account of that state of unchangeable and everlasting glory which it has revealed, and in hope of an abundant recompence hereafter. So that Christianity in its highest demands is modest and reasonable, and boasts of no more that it is well able to make good. The command in the text, *that in every thing we should give thanks*, if it be taken in this view, is altogether just in its obligation, and in practice not only possible but easy. I shall give you the sense of the words in this general proposition.

It is the will of God that in every condition of life, how grievous and melancholy soever it may outwardly be, the Christian should exercise himself in giving of thanks.

In handling this proposition, or doctrine, I shall

I. Premise two things for the better understanding it.

II. Prove it to be the will of God, that the Christian should give thanks in the most afflicted condition, by assigning the principal reasons of this most excellent duty.

III. Shew, in several particulars, for what the pious Christian ought to give thanks at such a time.

(b) Rom. xii. 15. 1 Theff. iv. 13. 1 Pet. i. 6. (c) Eph. iv. 26. (d) 2 Cor. i. 4. (e) Matt. xvi. 24. (f) Matt. v. 10---12. 1 Pet. iv. 13.

I. I shall

I. I shall premise an observation or two for explaining the precept.

1. Tho' thanksgiving be a duty never out of season, yet it must be owned to be in peculiar manner seasonable at certain times. Singing psalms of praise is one way of expressing our grateful joy, and the most proper time for such an employment the Apostle plainly intimates, where he says (g), *Is any merry, let him sing psalms.* The heart filled with pious gladness will not be able to contain itself, but will flow out into thankful acknowledgments of the bounty and goodness of our great benefactor. In the days of prosperity, when the body is healthy, and the mind chearful, when the candle of the Lord shineth upon our tabernacle, when our designs succeed, when providence guides our way, and the rock pours us out rivers of oil; when trouble is far off, and all those enjoyments at hand, which a reasonable man can desire, particularly when we have received some signal marks of God's providential care, either in a remarkable deliverance, or some very favourable event, we are then most inexcusable if we do not give thanks, because as the circumstances we are in loudly call for it, so one would think they should naturally beget a disposition to the performance of this duty. Upon any mercy vouchsafed, or the removal of any judgment, the least we can do is to confess it by some public act of devout gratitude. Thus the waters being retired from off the face of the earth, the first thing *Noah* does at his leaving the ark, is to erect an altar for a monument of the divine mercy and his own thankfulness, and to offer thereon thank-offerings. (b) *And Noah built an altar to the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar.* In like manner, after God had appeared to *Abraham*, promising to give the land of *Canaan* to his posterity, 'tis imme-

(g) James v. 13.

(b) Gen. viii. 20.

diately added, *(i) there built be an altar unto the Lord.* Every new manifestation of God's providential goodness, or covenant mercy, should provoke our love, and draw forth the warmest expressions of a sincere and fervent piety. And yet so strangely degenerated are we, the divine benefits have not always, no nor generally, this effect. The most prosperous are not the most thankful; if men rejoice, it is not in the Lord; God being ofteneft forgotten by those, who have most reason to remember him, and from those to whom he gives most largely, he has the most sparing returns. Pride, discontent, and an irreligious contempt and neglect of God's worship, are the weeds which usually spring up in the fattest soil, instead of that humility, zeal, love, and thankfulness, which might be expected to abound in proportion to the effects and discoveries of God's distinguishing kindness towards us. Yet this hinders not what was first said for remaining true, that thanksgiving is in a peculiar manner the duty of some persons and times; and tho' always seasonable, is yet more particularly so in a time of ease, health, and prosperity. At such a time we should not need a monitor; common ingenuity should instruct us, and the tongue, as it were, of itself break forth into the language of heaven.

2. The other observation I would premise is this, that adversity is a time for the consideration of our ways, confession of sin, and humble prayer. These are the duties and exercises most directly adapted to such a season; when our spirits languish, and our flesh decays; *(k) when we are consumed by the anger of our offended God, and by his wrath we are troubled; when he sets our iniquities before him, our secret sins in the light of his countenance;* or at best, when we are tasting of those sufferings which are the bitter fruits of sin, if not the marks of the divine displeasure for any particular misdemeanours and irregularities which we

(i) Gen. xii. 7. *(k)* Psal. xc. 7, 8.

have been guilty of, and which argue the present state not to be a state of innocence. Now, surely, is a time to humble ourselves before God, and to think why mercy should grieve and afflict us; and by what means, in case we have gone astray, we may regain the favour of our heavenly Father. Have we sinned? I am not speaking of sins of infirmity, from which none are exempt, but of more presumptuous and deliberate offences; we should turn unto God by unfeigned repentance, and bind ourselves by vows of greater faithfulness, and a more exact and ready obedience for the time to come. This last indeed we should do, though, upon examination, we should not be able to charge ourselves with wilful transgressions; since it is much if we have been so lively in our devotions, so vigilant in our conduct, and so abundant in good works, as we might, and therefore ought to have been. And who doth not see the suitability of prayer to a time of affliction? In *Psal. cvii.* we have several kinds of distresses enumerated, into which men are brought by their own folly, or the wise and righteous providence of God, and in every one of them it is added, *They cry unto the Lord in their troubles, and he saveth them out of their distresses.* Nature does by a kind of instinct turn to God, its author and preserver, when hard beset with any calamity; and much more may this be expected where there is a principle of grace. (l) *Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray.* Let him have recourse to this, not as the last, but the best remedy, and which often succeeds when all others fail. And to serious and profitable reflections at such a time, the wise man advises, (m) *In the day of adversity consider.* The consideration of our own ways and doings (which it is likely we shall find to have often declined from the way of God's commandments: if not outwardly, and grossly, yet secretly; if not as to actions themselves, yet with respect to the manner and circumstances of them; if not by a failure in the whole

(l) James v. 13.

(m) Eccles. vii. 14.

kind of any duty or virtue, yet in the degree; this consideration of our own ways) should be joined with the consideration of the design of God in afflicting us, the temper of mind and outward behaviour which we should labour to maintain under the rebukes of providence, the instructions which may be received from such a dispensation, and the several advantages to be made of it; and, finally, the holy purposes and good resolutions which 'tis fit we should take up in reference to our future life and conduct, if God be pleased yet again to shew us his goodness in the land of the living. It cannot sure be necessary for me to add, that in time of trouble it is highly convenient we should addict ourselves to penitential exercises; that when God afflicts us, we should afflict our own souls, not by dejection of spirit, not by casting off our hope in God, (this can answer no good end) but by humbling ourselves for our sins, accepting the punishment of them, and acknowledging, *(n)* that after all which is come upon us, God has corrected us less than our iniquities deserve. *(o)* The scripture therefore calls men to humble themselves under the hand of God; and to shew how acceptable a soft and contrite spirit is in the sight of God, it is recorded concerning the king of Judah, *(p)* that because his heart was tender, and he did humble himself before God, when he heard the word of the threatening, and did rend his cloaths, and wept before him, the Lord had therefore mercifully heard him.

These then are duties and exercises which have a visible agreement with a state of affliction. And it may be thought, that if these are suitable to it, thanksgiving cannot. But certainly giving of thanks is very consistent with the duties before-mentioned, as there are several other duties which have no real repugnance one to the other, tho' they seemingly clash. Our divine master pronounces, *(q)* *Blessed are they that mourn.* His apostle St. Paul, in the chapter out of

(n) Ezraix. 13.

(o) 1 Pet. v. 6.

(p) 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27.

(q) Matt. v. 4.

which my text is taken, faith to the Christians of *Thessalonica*, *Rejoice evermore*. How shall we clear these two places of a contradiction? Very easily; since tho' mourning and rejoicing are different acts, yet having respect to different objects, and not being raised to the most intense degree, they may be exercised at one and the same time. Of which we have a very apposite instance in the *Thessalonians* (*r*), *who received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost*. And much more is thanksgiving reconcilable with consideration, prayer, confession of sin, and humiliation for it; all which are so far from being hindered by giving of thanks, that they are greatly promoted thereby in the evangelical performance of them, and are so regulated as not to end in unbelief and despondency. Of which use of thanksgiving, in a time of affliction, I shall have occasion to say more very soon.—To proceed,

II. I am to prove it the will of God, that in the most afflicted and calamitous condition, the Christian should delight in giving thanks. And this I shall do by assigning the principal reasons of this excellent duty, such as these following.

I. To signify that the real Christian, the man beloved of God, in whatever condition you suppose him, is a happy man. How often do we meet in scripture with such expressions as these, (*f*) *Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly*; (*t*) *who maketh the Lord his trust*; (*u*) *who feareth the Lord*; (*x*) *who is pure in heart*; (*y*) *who endureth temptation*. All these are so many parts of the good man's character, to each of which a blessedness is annexed, without the least intimation that this blessedness depends upon the Christian's circumstances in the world, and lies at the mercy of a thousand exter-

(*r*) 1 Theff. i. 6. (*f*) Psal. i. 1. (*t*) Psal. xl. 4. (*u*) Psal. cxii. 1. (*x*) Matt, v. 8. (*y*) James i. 12.

ral accidents. Nay, in one place 'tis expressly said, (as it is implicitly affirmed in a great many others) (*z*) *blessed is the man whom thou chastenest*. He cannot but be blessed to whom the marks and characters before-mentioned belong, because this is the (*a*) *man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and whose sin is covered; who is delivered from the curse of the law, and intitled to all the blessings and promises of the gospel; who is a (b) child of God, the (c) friend of Christ, (d) a favourite of heaven, (e) the charge of the Almighty, and (f) conducted by unerring wisdom thro' all the labyrinths, and hazards, and difficulties of this mortal life to eternal happiness and glory.* Can such a one, think you, be otherwise than happy? Happy in the midst of trials and afflictions assaulting him on every side? I confess in such a situation, if we set aside the consideration of those privileges which I have just mentioned, it is impossible that any man should be happy. An afflicted state, could the Christian hope for no other, would be a miserable state. But take all things together, and consider the Christian as possessed of the favour of the Almighty, and of great and glorious hopes which can never deceive him, he may at any time, and in any condition, be pronounced blessed. And who is under obligations to give thanks, if the happy person be not, whose interest in both worlds is secured? As the true Christian is a happy man, and knows it, if he knows himself, it is fit he should let the world see that he thinks himself happy; that he should shew himself contented and well pleased by his chearful submission to divine providence, and constant thankfulness for that blessed state into which he is brought thro' the unspeakable goodness and mercy of God. All they who see good reason to conclude themselves the objects of God's special favour, would not exchange conditions with others who are strangers

(*z*) P^{sa}l. xciv. 12. (*a*) P^{sa}l. xxxii. 1, 2. Gal. iii. 13. (*b*) 1 John iii. 2. (*c*) John xv. 14. (*d*) P^{sa}l. cxlvii. 11. (*e*) 2 Tim. iv. 12. (*f*) P^{sa}l. lxxiii. 21.

and enemies to him, for the whole world, for ten thousand worlds; and their condition being in their own account, so highly preferable to that of a great part of mankind, what excuse can they have for a repining, fullen, unthankful demeanour? A little trouble in the flesh will not furnish them with an excuse for this, because there is no comparison upon the whole (and to this they ought to attend) between their misery and their happiness, between their evil and their good things.

2. It is the will of God, that the good man, tho' afflicted, should give thanks, because his so doing is an argument of an ingenuous and Christian spirit. That gratitude which dies away as soon as it ceases to be fed by the usual stream of benefits, which has respect to present favours, and none to those which have been some time past, is not true gratitude, but the sign of a base mercenary temper. He who forgets innumerable obligations, because the sense of them is not every day renewed by fresh instances of liberality on the part of his benefactor, shews himself void of all worthy and generous principles, and to be acted only by that most fordid of all principles, a mistaken self-interest. And yet how common is it for men to behave thus towards the blessed God, to whom they are under infinitely greater obligations, than 'tis possible for men to lay upon one another? I will not say, does God stop the course of his bounties, and suspend all influences of his kind providence? For then, alas, we should immediately perish, or pass into a state of being worse than none; but does he continue us in the enjoyment of numberless mercies, only withdrawing some particular comfort which we were lately possessed of? Presently we are out of temper, our spirits are all upon the ferment; the great number of mercies which we still enjoy will make no compensation for that one which we are denied; we slight what we have, and are so far from giving thanks for it as we ought to do, that we can scarcely forbear repining

at the will of heaven, and complaining as those who have not right done them. Are these the marks of a Christian spirit? Far from it. We may reason here, as our blessed Saviour does in another case, if you bless and praise the name of the Lord only while he is loading you with his benefits, and gives you your desires in every thing, what thanks have you? What commendation is there due to such a kind of devotion and gratitude? Do not even some men the same, who have little in them of the spirit of the gospel, and are little acquainted with its precepts? But if, when God chastens you sore, throws you into a horrible pit, plunges you in the mire, and by the dealings of his providence seems to have become your enemy; if, in such a turn of things, you can bless the hand which smites you, admire that God should have been so patient and long-suffering towards you, and now that he corrects you, should do it so gently, your reward will be great, and it will appear that you are the children of the highest. Now this is the very guise and complexion of the perfect Christian, the person on whom the spirit of Jesus rests; that good spirit which inspires none but noble sentiments, and when our outward comforts are embittered, prevents the bitterness of our souls, producing in us a peaceable serenity of mind, a quiet submission to that will which none ever resisted but to his own hurt, and the liveliest sense of God's undeserved kindness to him. Such a one will think how early the mercy of God received him into his arms, even as soon as he fell an helpless infant on this unfriendly world; and how it has followed him ever since, never intermitting its needful aid. He will think how many years he hath been a debtor to divine providence, and what a multitude and variety of kindnesses during all that time he has received, and wonder how he could be so insensible and unobservant of the gracious hand of God, and do so little, when he enjoyed so much. (g) *The Lord has*

(g) Job i. 21. ii. 10.

given,

given, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. Have I received good at the hand of God, and shall I not receive evil? And this when the good so exceedingly out-weighs the evil? "Yes, O Lord, do with me as thou pleaseth, bind me as a victim to thine altar, I will make no complaint or resistance; I will still maintain that thou art a gracious God. No sufferings, I trust, shall ever prevail with me to speak otherwise of thee; mindful of what thou hast done for my soul, and not without hope that thou wilt again hear my humble prayer, and save me."

3. It is the will of God that the Christian should give thanks in every condition, even the most afflicted, because such a behaviour is greatly for his glory, and for the credit of religion. When a person is erect and unbroken in adversity, and not only maintains his integrity, but his wonted calm and contentment, is employed in thanksgiving when others are tempted to murmur and repine; they who are eyewitnesses to an example of patience and gratitude so little common, are moved to enquire what it is supports this man, that gives him so much bravery, lightens his burden, or fortifies his spirit, and makes him bear it up under his pressures, as if he hardly felt them. What can this secret resource be but the grace of God possessing his soul, a divine energy or power on high, and the excellent principles of Christianity heartily believed, duly considered, and thereby incorporated with the very principles of reason? What wonders will these in conjunction do, surpassing the utmost force of unassisted nature? What is there they cannot do? The most fearful have by these means been rendered fearless, and the weak enabled to surmount those difficulties, and endure those hardships which are an over-match for the strong; according to that of St. (b) Paul, *And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in*

(b) 2 Cor. xii. 9.

○ 4

weakness.

weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The grace of God is all-sufficient, and the power of Christ invincible. And if I may but be one chosen of God, in whom to manifest and exemplify his powerful grace, (and why should I doubt of this, if I do my part?) I shall think myself happy in contributing to the glory of God, tho' at the expence of my ease and health, or any other bodily and earthly enjoyment. This was the great desire of that excellent apostle whom I have just named, that he might by any instance of self-denial whatsoever, be a means of bringing greater honour to his blessed Saviour.

*(i) According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed; but that with all boldness, as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. But when is Christ magnified in the bodies of his faithful disciples? Not merely by suffering bodily pains and afflictions, but by suffering them with a magnanimity becoming the gospel, with an invincible constancy, and a heart fuller of love, and praise, and gratitude, than of sorrow. 'Tis such a temper as this, if we can attain to it, that advances the glory of our Redeemer and his religion; for this demonstrates that parting promise of his to his disciples, *(k) that the Father would give them another comforter, who should abide with them for ever*, not to have been in vain. This demonstrates the divinity of the Christian religion, and the peculiar excellency of the Christian faith, the fruits of which are so wonderful. What can awaken in a man a perception of spiritual and invisible things, and thereby deaden, tho' not quite destroy, the sense of present evils? What can do this like Christianity, which, by the discovery of a future world, exalts the affections of its genuine professors above this, and forms their minds, to be as it were absent from the body, at the same time that the body is encompassed*

(i) Philip i. 20.

(k) John xiv. 16.

with many troubles? The Christian in all he suffers, as well as in all he does, should reckon himself obliged to consult the glory of God, which he hardly ever promotes more than by a resigned thankful frame of spirit, showing itself in all his words and actions.

4. 'Tis the will of God that the Christian should give thanks without ceasing, even in a time of trouble, because this employment of his time and thoughts will be the very best way to render his troubles supportable. Whence is it that some, of whom notwithstanding we cannot but hope well, are so apt to faint when God rebukes them, are immediately driven from their hold, look upon their punishment as more than they can bear, and in their impatience cry out, *(l)* will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Is not the reason of all this, that they are perpetually poring on their trouble, love to aggravate them, and run over in their minds the great number of those who are in health, and following their business or their pleasures, while they are cast upon a bed of sickness or of languishing, or some other way incapacitated for joining in the mirth and bustle of the world? And thus by their envy at the prosperity of others, they rub up the sore place, and lose the little patience which was left them. Whereas they should be thinking more of the mercies of God, his wonderful love to mankind in Jesus Christ, of the rich promises of the gospel, more to be valued than thousands of gold and silver, and more than sufficient to support the mind under the greatest burden of temporal evils; and how great and many their enjoyments have been in comparison of their sufferings; for such thoughts as these would be of singular use to keep out others, that are good for nothing but to perplex and torment the mind. By which means they would be able to say as the *(m)* Psalmist, *that in the multitude of their thoughts within them, the comforts of God delighted their souls.* They should at least refrain

(l) Pfal. lxxvii. 7, 8.

(m) Pfal. xciv. 29.

from all expressions of fretfulness and impatience, and teach their tongues the language of praise and thankfulness, in spite of their tumultuous passions, which are too ready to break forth into indecent words and actions, if not hindered. And thus by talking of the goodness of God, they will by degrees increase their inward sense of it, as well as lessen their inclination to complain. It may be added, that a grateful temper, and the exercising of it in acts of praise and thanksgiving, produces an immediate pleasure. For this being the disposition most natural to the soul in its state of uprightness, and which God most approves, 'tis wisely and graciously ordered, that it should be accompanied with an unspeakable delectation and refreshment, both as a present reward, and the earnest of a much greater one to come. Surely by none is an affliction esteemed so light, as by him who sets his hope in God, makes it his resolution that he will die praising him, and (as 'tis expressed by the prophet *Isaiab*), (*n*) *glorifies the Lord in the fires*. Such a one has no leisure to attend to those uneasy discontented thoughts, which his troubles suggest to him; he is much better employed, and intent on the contemplation of objects, at once more delightful and more useful.

5. Another consideration, which shews it to be the will of God, that the Christian, in a time of trouble, should abound in thanksgivings is, that the practice of this duty will be of great advantage to him in performance of the other duties incumbent upon him at such a time, and prove an excellent preservative from those excesses or defects he must otherwise run into. These duties, I have observed, are chiefly three, consideration, repentance, and prayer. In regard to the consideration of our ways, and repentance for whatever has been amiss in them, there is this double advantage in joining with them the consideration of God's

(*n*) *Isai. xxiv. 15.*

mercies, that it does at once promote the sorrow which is after a godly sort, and prevent that which tends to despondency; the reflection on that goodness against which every sin has been committed, my abuse of prosperity, or neglect to make the improvement of it I ought to have done, my forgetfulness of God in the time of my health, and when he showered his blessings upon me, or at best not remembering him, and serving him in the manner I ought; the reflection on these things must needs be pungent, if I have not lost all sense of shame, and pierce me to the very heart; insomuch, that considering the usual lowness of spirits in sickness and trouble, and that heavy gloom which sometimes hangs upon the mind, and gives an air of sadness and terror to surrounding objects, there would be great danger of a person's being driven by a sense of his unworthiness and guilt into despair, if the consideration of the divine goodness, which we have all along experienced, and which is so clearly revealed, and wonderfully displayed in the gospel-dispensation, as it aggravates our ingratitude, did not also administer ground of hope and relief, and keep us from sinking under the billows which break over our heads. I see abundant reason to be sorrowful, but the same thing which is a reason why I should sorrow, is a very good reason for my not sorrowing as one without hope. While I meditate on the mercies of God, and thankfully acknowledge them, methinks the day-spring from on high visits my benighted soul, I no longer sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death; my confidence that the tender mercies of God will not utterly abandon me encreases, and by degrees my tears dry up, and sorrow and sighing flee away. Our prayers, as well in trouble as at other times, derive their main value and acceptableness in the sight of God from the faith accompanying them; and what is there so likely to beget and cherish this excellent disposition, as recollecting the several instances of God's care over us, and readiness to hear and

and help us in times past, in order to the exercising our thankfulness for them? Therefore, on the solemn day of fasting and humiliation, observed under (c) *Nehemiah's* direction, the confessions and prayers of the day were uttered in with the voice of praise, *Stand up and bless the Lord your God for ever and ever; and blessed be thy glorious name which is exalted above all blessing and praise. Thou, even thou, art Lord alone, thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all things that are therein, the seas and all that is therein, and thou pre-ferrest them all; and the host of heaven worshipeth thee. Thou art the Lord the God, who didst chuse Abraham, &c.* And from hence *David* in his *Psalms* so often mingles thanksgivings, complaints, and prayers together. For a particular example of this read the xith psalm, in the beginning of which he celebrates the goodness of God, *which had set his feet upon a rock, had established his goings, and put a new song into his mouth, even praise to his God. Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts to us-ward they cannot be reckoned up unto thee; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.* Perhaps we may be ready to think, when this was penned, the psalmist was in perfect rest, and had nothing else to do but to give thanks; read on, and you will find at the 12th verse what his circumstances were; *Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me.* Then he proceeds with the prayer which he had begun at the 11th verse, *Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make hast to help me! Thou art my help and my deliverer, make no tarrying, O my God!* God had been his help, and therefore would not now forsake him. So that whether we pray for the pardon of sin, or for deliverance out of evil, we cannot do better than to

join our thanksgiving for the mercies we have received and do still enjoy: hereby to strengthen our faith in the promises of God, who will in no wise cast off those who come to him in the way which he has appointed. Let this conclude the second general head.

III. The next thing incumbent upon me, is to show, in several particulars, for what the pious Christian ought to give thanks in a day of affliction. But this I shall reserve for another discourse.

DISCOURSE XI.

Of the Obligation upon Christians to give thanks in every Condition, even the most afflicted.

[GROVE.]

I THESS. v. 18.

In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

IN a former discourse on these words, I gave you their sense in the following proposition.

It is the will of God, that in every condition of life, how grievous and melancholy soever it may outwardly be, the Christian should exercise himself in giving of thanks.

In discoursing on this proposition, I have,

I. Premised two observations for the better understanding it, *viz.* That tho' thanksgiving be a duty never out of season, yet it must be owned to be in a peculiar manner seasonable at certain times, as times of health, prosperity, and the like. And that adversity is a time peculiarly proper for the consideration of our ways, for confession of sin, and humble prayer. I have also,

II.

II. Proved it from several considerations to be the will of God, that in the most afflicted and calamitous condition, the Christian should delight in giving of thanks. It remains that,

III. I show you, in several particulars, for what the pious Christian ought to give thanks in a day of affliction. And he ought to do it.

I. For all the mercies of God, of whatever kind they are, according to the apostolic rule *(a) give thanks always for all things to God the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.* We are to give thanks *always*, in sickness, and in health, in peace and in trouble; and *for all things*, for the benefits of creation and providence; and above all for the grace of redemption, for the love of God in Christ to an apostate world, and the accomplishment of its kind purposes, by his death and resurrection, thro' which we have good *(b) hope toward God, and can rejoice even in tribulations.* And for this reason, whatever instance of divine goodness we happen to overlook, this should never be forgotten, being a kind of summary of all other blessings. For as in respect of the end, the enjoyment of God in glory is the sum of all felicity, so in regard of the mercies, which as means are preparatory to this our last end, they are all comprehended in the gift of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; the remembrance of whose victories over the world and death, and all the powers of darkness, will greatly help to raise our spirits when depressed by afflictions and sufferings, and give new life to our languishing hopes. To this which should always be the principal article in our thanksgivings, it will be proper to add a survey of that undeserved bounty and goodness which first bestowed life upon us, and has so long preserved and sweetened it to us; calling upon our *souls (c) to bless the Lord, and upon all that is within us*

(a) Eph. v. 20.

(b) Rom. v. 1,—

(c) Psal. ciii. 1,—

to speak well of his holy name; who forgiveth our iniquities, healeth our diseases, and crowneth our lives with loving kindness and tender mercies. The thought of that paternal providence, which with so much tender care nourished us up in our helpless days, carried us in its arms, and sheltered us under its wing; which watched our steps in the dangerous paths of youth, kept us from running headlong into ruin, hid temptations from us, discovered to us rocks on which there was danger of our splitting, or without our perceiving them, by a secret hand directed our course safe betwixt them, preserving us to the present period of our lives, as examples of its powerful protection; which in our temptations was full at hand with its timely succour, comforting us in our sorrows, and in straits, out of which we were ready to think it impossible for us to be redeemed, being environed on all hands with frightful difficulties, made way for our escape: the thought, I say, of this wise and gracious conduct of divine providence, will increase and establish our trust in it, notwithstanding the clouds which at present hang over us, darkening our prospects, and threatening storms and tempests. Finally, God's promised mercies, the great things we hope for, should likewise have a share in our thanksgivings. The promise is present, tho' the thing promised be future, and hope is itself a blessing, and a most valuable one too; for as it does in some measure anticipate the fruition of its object, so it diffuses a kindly warmth through the heart, which was before frozen with fear and grief, and as a rich cordial recovers the fainting soul, and brings back life when it was just upon the wing: wherefore, in giving of thanks, not only our enjoyments, but our hopes too, should be gratefully acknowledged, as the performance of this duty, especially in the day of adversity, will always carry along with it a reward of its own. Thus should we give thanks for the mercies of God in general. But more particularly,

2. There are several things relating to a state of affliction itself, which exact a tribute of thanksgiving. As,

1. We should bless God that he is pleased to take notice of us, and make the welfare of our better part so much his care. It may sound strange, but nothing is truer, than that God shows his condescension in afflicting us; and not his condescension only, but his goodness too; since our meanness and guilt throw us infinitely below his regard; which regard, how unworthy of it soever we are, he extends not merely to our actions, but to our happiness; stooping so low, as to chasten us with his own hand, not as a judge, but as a *(d) father, not for his own pleasure, but for our profit.* Alas, who or what are we, the sinful children of men, that the infinitely great God should, from the throne of his glory, have his eye continually upon us, and employ his wisdom in contriving methods for effecting our final blessedness; and others failing, should make use, tho' not without reluctance, of afflictions! It is just matter of wonder, that in *chastening us, God dealeth with us as with children; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?* That the majesty of heaven should thus abase itself, and exalt us; for really, even while he humbles, he exalts and magnifies us. So holy *Job* thought, who in the midst of sufferings, which were perhaps never paralleled but by those of the Son of God, and which tried the strength of his patience almost so far as to break it; even then when his *soul chose strangling and death rather than life,* was not yet unmindful of the condescension of God in afflicting him; *(e) What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him, and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?* “ I acknowledge, O Lord, that thou mightest have suffered
“ me to go on in the way of mine own eyes, and af-

(d) Heb. xii. 9,—

(e) Job vii. 17, 18.

“ ter the imagination of my vain heart, as regardless
 “ of my wellfare, as I have been apt to be of thy
 “ glory. If the obstinate creature will not harken to
 “ my voice, nor be conquered by my benefits, nor
 “ heed the warnings which I have given him in my
 “ word, and by his own conscience, let him take
 “ his course, and reap the miserable fruits of his sin
 “ and folly. I am under no obligations to him, and
 “ shall have no further concern for him. In such
 “ language as this might thy justice, O Lord, have
 “ express’d itself, but thy merciful kindness interposed,
 “ thou wert pleas’d to stop me in my way, as the
 “ angel did *Balaam* with a drawn sword, not permit-
 “ ting me to pursue my sinful and vain purposes, or
 “ to enjoy my fatal ease. I adore and bless the hand
 “ which corrects me, and own it to be the singular
 “ favour of heaven, that while thousands are des-
 “ troyed by prosperity, thine heart as well as thine
 “ hand is upon me, and thy providence discharges
 “ the part of a faithful tutor and governor over me.
 “ *Lord, what am I, that thou shouldst be thus mindful*
 “ *of me!*”

2. In affliction bless God that your sufferings are no greater. That he corrects you in measure, and with so gentle a hand, and tho’ he wounds you, yet not to the heart. Is it in your outward state that providence touches you? Bless God that your persons are free. An affliction which is without us, may, if we are wise, be kept where it is, and be denied entrance into the soul, to disturb and unsettle its peace. Thus, in the case of *Job*, all that he had was first put into satan’s power, only on (*f*) *Job* himself he was not to stretch forth his hand. The envy of this wicked spirit made him diligent in trying *Job* to the utmost of his permission; he stript him at once of all, so that of the greatest of all the men of the East, as he was before, he became of a sudden poor to a proverb.

(*f*) *Job*. i. 12,—

But how did this good man receive the messengers of ill news, who trod one upon the heels of another? He fell down upon the ground and worshiped, saying, *Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.* Is it some disease or pain of body under which you labour? Bless God it is not more grievous and intolerable; or that you have the outward comforts and enjoyments of life, together with peace of mind; that your souls are not filled with the terrors of the Almighty. *Solomon* observes (g) that the spirit of a man can sustain his infirmity; by a natural fortitude of spirit, and the strength of resolution, a man may do a great deal towards supporting himself under bodily disorders, but, saith he, *a wounded spirit who can bear?* Be thankful that the arrows of God are not poisoned, that your hearts are not restless and disquieted. Perhaps the distress is partly inward, yet still you are bound to give thanks if it be not overwhelming. It is a mercy that I have my reason entire, by means of which I am capable of commanding my thoughts and passions in some measure, and much more my words and actions, and applying the comforts of religion to myself, as well as discharging its duties. Let me consider how many, not excepting the most eminent servants of God, have, in each of these three kinds of affliction, of soul, body, and outward estate, undergone abundantly more than 'tis probable I do. *Job* bore all three together, and all in extremity, yet did not abandon his patience, which he found to have great recompence of reward. *Job's* life was the only thing privileged from the malice of satan; whereas it may be I am afflicted in a single kind, and comparatively, in a low and moderate degree of that kind. *God is not wroth very sore; in the midst of judgment he remembers mercy.* All the ingredients of my cup are not bitter, there are great mixtures of a more agreeable

(g) Prov. xviii. 14.

kind. If I am in trouble, have I not friends to sympathise with me and comfort me, whose good company and christian advice is greatly to be valued? If I am sick, yet can I say I want for what is needful and convenient for me in such a condition? Am I utterly friendless and helpless? Should God have laid the cross upon me at another time, should I not have been worse able to bear it? Can I not discover the mercy of God in the time or circumstances of my affliction, which should dispose me to be more contented and thankful?

3. We are bound to thank God for the assistance which he gives, or offers us, to bear our afflictions after a christian manner. Does he enable us to behave suitably to the character of Christ's disciples, who, like their master, should not complain when they suffer, but say, as he did, in his bitterest agonies, *(b) not my will, but thine be done?* Are we effectually taught, by the grace of God, to be like him we call our master, examples of submission to the divine will, tho' in a far inferior degree? Let us freely own that 'tis the grace of God which teaches us to be so, and be thankful that he gives us the grace to suffer his will after having done it. Yea, if we have the natural impatience of our tempers somewhat restrained, so as not to dishonour God and disgrace our christian profession by visible fretfulness and discontent, 'tis reason enough why we should be thankful, since hereby a great part of the trouble and shame is prevented, which every sincere Christian, who carries it indecently during his affliction, has in reflecting upon it afterwards; and we can with a better grace, and with more freedom, tell others their duty, whom we are called to visit in their affliction; whereas otherwise we should be very unfit to administer that good counsel which we did not take ourselves. You are very forward, would they say, to instruct us in our duty, and to preach patience as a

(b) Matt. xxvi. 46.

thing easily practised, but pray remember how indifferently you acquitted yourself when you was tried. A reproach like to that which *Eliphaz* makes *Job* in his sufferings, (*i*) *Behold, thou hast instructed many, and thou hast strengthened the weak hands; thy words have upheld him that was falling, and thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.* This charge, as brought against *Job*, was very unjust, whole sufferings are invidiously exprest by the diminutive term of *God's touching him*, as his behaviour under them was very different from what his friend here intimates it to have been. The charge, I say, was very unjust with respect to *Job*; but is every day verified in the generality of Christians, who can talk as bravely as they suffer poorly. The consideration of which should excite us to be thankful, if, thro' the aids of God's spirit, we have been instances of a contrary demeanour. But without considering the assistance actually vouchsafed us, 'tis sufficient ground of thankfulness, that God kindly, and as sincerely as kindly, offers us his assistance, and in the gospel has made such ample provision for our comfort in the greatest afflictions, by its excellent doctrines, its wonderful discoveries, and most inestimable promises; more particularly, the promise of his spirit, under the title of the (*k*) *comforter*, (*l*) *saying, Ask, and ye shall receive.* And this may be one ground of the expression of its being *the will of God in Christ Jesus, that we should give thanks.* It signifies, that, as Christians, we have such peculiar advantages for bearing afflictions, that nothing can excuse us from being thankful in such a condition. What name does that man deserve, who having this provision laid in against the time of need, is neither thankful for it, nor makes any use of it? Surely not that of a genuine disciple of Christ.

4. We should bless God for the benefit we receive by affliction, as well as for that which he further de-

(i) Job iv. 3, 4, 5.

(k) John xvi. 7.

(l) Luke xi. 9.

signs us by it. Is my heart become more tender and relenting, my temper more devout? Are my sense of the evil of sin, and the excellence of holiness, and desires after greater measures of this divine attainment, more quick and vehement? Is the animal life more weak and languid, and the divine life, the life of faith, awakened into greater vigour and activity? Can I perceive my affections deadened to present things, and fixed on things above? My convictions of the vanity of the world, the emptiness of the creature, the all-sufficiency of God, the wisdom of religion, the folly of a wicked life, the solemnity of a dying hour, and the terrors of the last judgment, more entire and better settled? These are very good effects of the visitation we are under; and in case they prove abiding, we shall have great cause to rejoice in them. This is certain, that affliction has in itself a tendency to bring a bad man to consideration, and to make a good man better. The providences of God are all instructive, and they who are truly wise, will be instructed by them; but for the generality of mankind, they are taught more by a single affliction, than by a long course of prosperous events. Which perhaps is one reason why the word *παιδεία* is used for affliction, which signifies both correction and instruction; of which were it necessary, instances might be easily given. (m) *God does not willingly grieve and afflict the children of men, much less his own children, not to destroy, but to reform us.* (n) *We are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* This merciful design of God in chastening us, is what we should be sensible of, and labour to comply with. Blessed be God, who while he is correcting me, (o) *teaches me out of his law*; by the sickness of my body promotes the health of my soul, impoverishes that he may enrich me, casts me down that he may lift me up, and wounds in order to heal. I am convinced that if I am not in a resigned thankful

(m) Lamen. iii. 33. (n) 1 Cor. xi. 32. (o) Psal. xciv. 12.
frame

frame of spirit, 'tis because I have not profited as I should have done by my affliction. This happy frame is indeed one of the main advantages which good men get by adversity, and I believe almost inseparable from the rest, some of which were mentioned before; insomuch that where this is not, we are not to look for the rest.

5. The truly religious have reason to bless God for the prospect of an end to their sufferings. Such a prospect they have, not in fancy and imagination only, but by faith, a rational and well-grounded faith. For (p) *his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.* And more fully yet in another psalm; (q) *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.* My sufferings are not like the punishments of the damned, without any redemption, and therefore, not to be called miseries, but trials; nor is my darkness like theirs, to be everlasting. *Why restless therefore, (r) why cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* A most excellent motto this for the afflicted Christian—I shall yet praise him—in this world, and for deliverance from my present distress I shall praise him, if he sees it to be for my good; the cloud with which he has covered me in the day of his anger will blow over, and brighter days will come. (s) *Job* in those triumphant words, *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he will stand at the latter day upon the earth. And tho' after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I shall see God;* is thought by many to have had a presage of that wonderful change in his condition, from the lowest depth of worldly sorrows, to a degree of worldly prosperity which he never before enjoyed, which you know was the end of that good man. And *David*, when his life was threatened,

(p) Psal. xxx. 5.
(s) Job xix. 25, 26.

(q) Psal. xxxiv. 19.

(r) Psal. xlii. 5.

says, (1) *I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.* But however that be, I have the haven in view, which will shelter my weather-beaten vessel from all storms and tempests, and 'tis at no great distance. The grave is equally a refuge to the good and bad from all the troubles and infelicities of this world; and yet there is a wide difference in the death of one and the other. Since the bodies only of the wicked are at rest, and that only till the resurrection, but the souls of the righteous; to these death is not a more certain escape from all the evils of the present life, than security from all others, since nothing can invade the peace, or interrupt the joys of heaven. Then and there, if not before, I shall exchange a spirit of heaviness for garments of everlasting praise; my past sufferings will but serve to enhance my happiness, and sorrow and sighing will flee away for ever. All that remains is to apply what has been said. And,

I. If in every thing (the most afflicted condition not excepted) we are to give thanks, it follows, that they must be utterly inexcusable who perform not this duty, when the very circumstances they are in invite them to it. As when the bounties of providence flow in upon them, shall not the hand of God be acknowledged, when it is thus open to them? Or when they are lately come out of an affliction? Of the ten lepers who were healed by our Saviour, nine never returned to give thanks. Ah, what an image is this of mankind, who are as clamorous before a benefit is conferred, as they are silent after it! 'Tis but to change the object of our devotion, and we have in the antient *Romans* a better example to follow, among whom it was a custom for those who suffered shipwreck, upon their escape to land, to hang up votive tables in the temple of *Neptune*, as testimonies of their gratitude to this fictitious god of the sea. Let us pay our vows to the true God, as they did to their false deities, and

(1) Psal. cxviii. 17.

whatever deliverance or other mercy we have received, give him the praise. And let us remember, that if truly thankful, we shall be diligent and watchful too; and so much the more so, as we are the more thankful. Let this then be the test of our gratitude, the care we take, by a holy and heavenly conversation, to credit the gospel of Christ, which is such a blessing as exceeds and improves all the advantages and enjoyments of life.

2. Let me exhort you to the duty before discoursed on. If it has pleased God, or shall at any time hereafter please him, to involve us in trouble and affliction, let us be persuaded to adorn our Christian profession by putting the duty of the text in practice. Let us acquiesce in the will of God; nor merely acquiesce in it, but approve it, and offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving. I would press this advice with some considerations, besides those before mentioned.

1. Consider how it was with you before you were afflicted; in what temper of mind with regard to spiritual and divine things, and after what manner you lived. Did not a spirit of slumber insensibly creep upon you? Did not the world, and the things of the world, get ground in your affections? Was not your time almost wholly devoted to the cares and pleasures of this transitory life, while God was too much forgotten, your souls too little minded, and the duties of religion, or some particular duty of it, even wholly neglected, or slightly and indifferently performed? Could you not have perceived yourselves tied faster and faster to this life, and to have an increasing aversion for death, as the dissolution of your bodies, and a removal from all your present acquaintance and enjoyments? Were not your passions inflamed by the objects of sense, and in a manner engrossed by them; kindled with ease, but not to be governed and allayed without difficulty? *David*, the man after God's own heart,

heart, confesses of himself, (*u*) *that before he was afflicted he went astray.* Hardly ever was there a spirit more devout than his; he seems to have been impatient whenever absent from the house of God, and in a transport all the time he was there; yet, such is the power of sensible things, and the dangerous nature of prosperity, that this angelical devotion, this holy fire, was very much damped by a free conversation with the world, and an uninterrupted flow of its delights. I make no doubt but this is a case too common with those whose souls have long dwelt at ease, and will therefore suppose it might be yours; and if it was, think of the reason you have to bless God for taking this method, perhaps the best that could be taken, not to say the only one left, to cure you of the sensuality of your affections, and to restore you to yourselves and to him; especially if this method be successful, and you have ground to hope you shall be able to add, as the Psalmist does, *but now have I kept thy word.* It is happy for you, if being forced off from the business and the delights of life, you retire to God and his word, and have greater delight in conversing with them. It is well if correction makes you see your faults, and mend them, and revive the practice of those duties which had been too much neglected.

2. Consider that sense is not the proper judge and measure of good and evil; I mean of what is to upon the whole. It is no doubt, generally speaking, the best judge of what is good or evil for itself, because it best knows what is agreeable or disagreeable to itself; which agreeable or disagreeable impressions on our senses, were intended by our wise Maker as admonitions, what things are beneficial to our bodies, and what things are hurtful to them. But tho' sense judge for itself, and for the body, let it not judge for the man and for the Christian; the reason is, that sense is confined to the

(*u*) Psal. cxix. 67.

present impression, whether grateful or the contrary, and can give us no notice before-hand, because it has none itself, of what will be, or is likely to be the consequence of this or that action or thing; whereas, that is good or evil, for the man and the Christian, which is so upon the total computation, and in the final issue of things. And forasmuch as sense is no judge of this, it cannot be the standard by which we are to estimate what is good or evil for us. To an eye of sense it was an evil thing, a most terrible misfortune for *Joseph* to be sold into *Egypt*, tho' the event proved it to be otherwise. The same sense being judge, *Pharaoh* was happy in his advancement, and the extensive power which he had in his hands was a very great good; and yet it was the means of corrupting him, and giving a loose to his tyrannical humour, which brought on him the judgments of heaven, that pursued him till he was utterly destroyed. And does not God himself tell him by *Moses*, (*v*) *in very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up, (i. e.)* furnished thee with opportunities for gratifying thy ambitious wishes, and relieved thee from immediate ruin) *that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth*; for the terror of all such as should after him arise, and oppress the church and people of God. Consult with sense in affliction, and it will persuade you, that your case is deplorable, and be ready to say to you, as *Job's* wife did to him; (*x*) *Why dost thou yet hold fast thine integrity? Curse God and die.* But let sense dictate to brutes, men have a higher principle to govern them, their reason, and true Christians a yet nobler principle, even faith; and let but faith be your teacher, and it will instruct you much better in the nature of things, making you sensible, that many things which pass for good are really evil, and others that are accounted evil, to be numbered among the Christian's good things. It will tell you, as the apostle does the Christian converts at *Co-*

(*v*) *Exod. ix. 16.*(*x*) *Job ii. 9.*

rintb, that all things are yours, afflictions as well as comforts, and death as well as life; death, I say, which nature is ready to call, of all terrible things, the most terrible.

3. Consider how God has carried you thro' former trials. The Christian lives, and is strengthened by faith, and the life of faith, (or if not its life, yet its liveliness and strength) by the experience he has formerly had of the care and goodness of God's providence, and the truth of his promises; therefore our blessed master, when he would reprove his disciples for their want of faith, and at the same time raise them to a better disposition, bids them search their own memories, and see whether from thence they might not be furnished with a remedy to their present distrust. *(y) And when his disciples were come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Then Jesus said unto them, take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, it is because we have taken no bread. Which when Jesus perceived, he said unto them, O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not understand, neither remember, the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up? As they had seen him perform a thousand miracles, he might have sent them for conviction to any of these; but he chuses rather to expostulate with them from examples more particularly to the present case, and performed upon a like occasion, as knowing such instances would be more awakening than others. In like manner, if we are in affliction and trouble, tho' it will be proper to look over the record of God's mercies of every kind, and in every state and condition of life, yet may it be more particularly useful, to think of the relief we have had heretofore, in circum-*

(y) Matt. xvi. 5---10.

stances

stances like to those we are now in. God is the same still, his power and his readiness to help the same. He who has delivered us will deliver; I am satisfied he will, sooner or later, one way or other, by life or by death, and do therefore now praise him, and resolve to praise him as long as I live, after which I shall with holiness be made perfect in praise.

4. Consider that *this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* “ It is the will of God who is my
 “ rightful Lord, and has authority to command me
 “ what he pleases; so that if he should bid me do
 “ some great thing, I should be obliged to do it.
 “ How much more when he only saith, be thankful.
 “ It is the will of God, who can give me strength to
 “ do what he commands me, and will command me
 “ nothing but what he is ready to give me strength
 “ to do. It is the will of God, that I should give
 “ thanks, and therefore surely he is no enemy to my
 “ happiness, since he hath made it my duty to be al-
 “ ways in a joyous grateful frame of spirit. This
 “ alone is a manifest argument, that if he put me to
 “ pain ’tis not from any delight he takes in seeing me
 “ uneasy, for then he would also be pleased with my
 “ being uneasy in mind as well as body, fretful and
 “ melancholy as well as afflicted. By laying this
 “ command upon me to give thanks for every thing,
 “ and in every condition, doth he not design that I
 “ should take it for an intimation that there is a state
 “ after this, wherein good men shall have no occasion
 “ for any other passions but love, joy, admiration, and
 “ thankfulness; and that all my present afflictions
 “ have the nature of means to prepare me for that
 “ happy state, and are so intended by my merciful
 “ God? Otherwise is it any way probable, that if
 “ this mortal life, uncomfortable as it is, were to be
 “ succeeded by one more wretched, he would call
 “ upon me to be thankful? Praise is the work of hea-
 “ ven, the constant employment of the blessed spirits
 “ above.

“ above. It is the will of God in Christ Jesus, who
 “ has disannulled every curse, and redeemed every
 “ forfeited blessing. Christ himself was a man of
 “ sorrows, yet an example of patience, resignation,
 “ and thankfulness. My Saviour having given me a
 “ pattern of this virtue, well may it appear reasonable
 “ for me to practise it, and as it appears reasonable,
 “ so become easy. I can contentedly bear the cross
 “ which Christ bore before me, submit to an afflicted
 “ state, since my Redeemer has sanctified it; descend
 “ into the grave, since he was willing to lie there, and
 “ is risen again from thence *as the first-fruits of them*
 “ *that slept.* This enforcement of the command can-
 “ not be in vain. Let me only meditate on the name
 “ of Christ, and I cannot but be thankful; thankful
 “ for him the prime gift, and through him thankful
 “ for those other innumerable benefits which he has
 “ purchased for me, revealed to me, and bestows
 “ upon me. For me, who have the great advantages
 “ of the gospel revelation, and can tell where to go
 “ in all my distresses, for me to repine and be de-
 “ jected, can never be excused.”

5. Often meditate on eternal things, for then these
 temporal things, whether good or evil, will be hardly
 of any estimation. We shall then be thankful that
 (z) *these light afflictions, which are but for a moment,*
shall work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal
weight of glory. Doth the Christian forget himself in
 prosperity? Does he fall upon a little worldly success?
 Is he growing secure and confident? Or, on the other
 hand, does worldly sorrow sink him to the ground?
 Does he think it hard in affliction to forbear impatient
 and discontented language? The reason is this, that
 these things fill up his thoughts. He has no just no-
 tion of the blessedness of the righteous after death;
 perhaps does not firmly believe it, or seldom, if ever,
 entertain himself with the serious and delightful con-

(z) 2 Cor. iv. 17.

templation of it. For in proportion as these everlasting things were more stedfastly believed, and more intently and frequently thought on, they would more deeply affect the mind; and the more these things affected the mind, the slighter would be the impression which all the events and occurrences of this life made upon it. “O hell, the abode only of despairing wretches, ’tis no wonder if in thee nothing is seen and heard, but weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth; or that they should be sorrowful, whose sensual pleasures must have this sad conclusion! Blessed be God, we are not appointed to this place of torment, if we do not take it by force. O heaven, the bright and peaceful habitation of angels, and of beings next to angels; as the voice of thanksgiving and praise alone is heard within thy walls, so there is all the reason in the world, that they who hope for thee, be their condition at present never so afflicted, should yet give thanks; were it for nothing else, yet for this hope, which gives the Christian an anticipated enjoyment of the future inheritance, and, as the spies did, takes a view of the promised land, before he himself is permitted to enter there!”

Let none think themselves without all concern in the present subject. What, if at present the heavens smile upon us, and we meet with no evil occurrence, or none that is very grievous and troublesome? At the same time that we remember to bless God for the favourable circumstances we are in, and to be more active in doing good, let us watch against a practice too common for those who have no afflictions and troubles of God’s sending, to create them to themselves, and to be discontented they know not why. And withal let us call to mind, that we have no certain possession of health, or any other good belonging to this life; so that the time may come, and may be nearer than we are aware, when we may have occasion for all the support and resolution which we can lay up
in

in store to ourselves. Let us fortify ourselves with such considerations as these before-mentioned, sit more loose to every temporal enjoyment, maintain a greater evenness of temper, regularity of conversation, and fervour of devotion, and prize the pleasures of religion most, when we are most capable of the pleasures of the world, that so when deprived of these, they may abide with us. Let us *(a)* rejoice as if we rejoiced not, and then we shall weep as if we wept not; let us use the world as not abusing it, while we possess it, and then we shall not so much feel the want of it when it is taken from us. Let health be well improved, and sickness will not be so insupportable, being accustomed to thanksgiving in our prosperity, we shall be the better able to continue the exercise of it in our adversity. The review of a life well spent will afford us great refreshment of spirit, and by opening a glorious prospect into a better world, will fill us with peace, and joy, and thankfulness, when passing through the most rugged paths of life, and through the dark valley and shadow of death, to the regions of everlasting life and happiness.

(a) 1 Cor. vii. 30, 31.

DISCOURSE XII.

Of the prevailing Love of Pleasure.

[BARKER.]

ISAIAH xlvii. 8.

---*Thou that art given to Pleasures, that dwellest carelessly,*---

THESSE words were spoken of *Babylon*, after it had been marked out by Providence for an intire and perpetual destruction, and while they intimate how much it was deserved, plainly declare how little it was expected.

The prophet *Daniel* tell us, that *Nebuchadnezzar* the king of *Babylon*, as he was walking in the palace of his kingdom, expressed himself in this lofty and arrogant language, *Is not this the great Babylon that I have built for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty*?* *Babylon* was one of the most antient cities, and had been so improved by this monarch, as to become the wonder of the world †. Nor could the magnificence of his works be equalled by any thing but the haughtiness of his heart. However, this vain-glorious boast was no sooner uttered, than there came a voice from heaven, saying, *The kingdom is departed from thee* §.

* Dan. iv. 30.

† Vid. Prid. Connect. Part i. B. 2. p. 44, &c.

§ Dan. iv. 31.

This sudden and signal denunciation of divine vengeance, though it had a good effect upon *Nebuchadnezzar*, had none at all upon the successors to his throne, or the subjects of his kingdom, who still continued addicted to luxury and self-confidence (the too common effects of ease and opulence) for which vices *Babylon* had been long notoriously infamous; and whereby it at length incurred that severe threatening which follows the words of the text: *Therefore bear now this, thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly, that sayest in thine heart, I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children. But these two things shall come to thee in a moment, in one day, the loss of children and widowhood; they shall come upon thee in their perfection, for the multitude of thy sorceries, and for the great abundance of thine enchantments.*

The person who was the instrument of accomplishing this awful prediction was *Cyrus*, who after he had made a great figure in the world, finished his character and his conquests in the overthrow of the *Chaldean* empire; and having gained a victory over the king of *Babylon* in the field, drove him into his capital, and invested it. The prodigious strength of the place †, and

† The walls of it were 29 yards thick, 117 high, and 60 miles in compass, in the form of a square; 15 miles each side, (this is *Herodotus's* account who was himself at *Babylon*) all built of large brick, cemented together with *bitumen*, a mortar that soon grew much harder than stone. On the outside of the walls was a vast ditch, filled with water, and lined with bricks on both sides; and of the earth dug out of the ditch, were the bricks made for the walls. On each side were 25 brazen gates; four great towers at the four corners, and three between each gate; each tower above three yards higher than the wall. From these 25 gates went 25 streets, to the gates that answered them on the opposite side. So the number of streets were 50, each 15 miles long; of which 25 went one way and 25 the other, dividing the city into 676 squares, each of which was above two miles in compass. On the outside of these squares stood the houses, three or four stories high; and the middle of each square was all void ground, used for yards, gardens, orchards, &c. A branch of the r. e. *Euphrates* ran quite cross the city; over which in the middle of

and the plenty of provisions with which it was supplied, occasioned the siege to continue two years. During which time, *Cyrus* was frequently insulted by the *Chaldeans* from their walls. However, he found means at length to become master of the city in one night, by the following stratagem.—Not far from the river *Euphrates*, which ran through the city, there was a canal leading to a large artificial lake; the bank between the river and the canal, he gave orders should be broke down, by which means the whole current of water was turned into the lake. Then collecting all his forces together, he posted one part of them at the place where the river ran into the town, and the other where it came out, with orders, to enter in through the channel of the river, as soon as it became fordable. These orders were obeyed, and both parties entering the city at the same time, advanced directly to the palace, where they surprized and defeated the guards; and when on the uproar which this occasioned, some within the palace opened the gates to know what it meant, the enemy rushed in, and finding the king with his domestick friends and servants, they slew him, and those that were with him, valiantly fighting for their lives; whereupon the city immediately submitted. But the success of this bold enterprize was in great measure owing to the neglect and security of the inhabitants, who were celebrating a grand festival that very night, with excessive intemperance and debauch.

This astonishing revolution casts a light on many passages in the writings of this and the other prophets, and at the same time carries our thoughts forward to mystical *Babylon*, *that mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth* *, and to those predictions which we

of the city, was a bridge of a furlong in length, and ten yards in breadth. At one end of this bridge stood a palace, and at the other end another palace, and the temple of *Belus*; which last was reckoned the most magnificent edifice in the world. Vid. *Herodoti Hist.* l. 1. cap. 178, &c. *Prideaux's Connect.* Part i. Book 2. p. 95, &c.

* Rev. xiv. 8.

have of her approaching overthrow ; when it will be as truly said of her, as it now may of *Babylon* of old, whom she so much resembles both in magnificence and iniquity, *Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication* *.

From such events as these, it is natural to remark, that there not only usually is in the wise constitution of Providence, an appointed time when God inflicts heavy vengeance on corrupt and profligate nations, of which his unerring wisdom directs him always to make the most exact and perfect judgment ; but that there are certain sins which in their own nature as necessarily tend to the destruction of society, as some kinds of diseases do to the dissolution of the animal body ; vices which are not only shameful and infamous in themselves, but draw after them a train of publick calamities, and are apparent symptoms of decreasing strength and departing glory ; vices of that rank and fertile nature that almost all others grow out of them. Such I mean, as were the first omens and the immediate forerunners of the *Babylonians* destruction, for they could never have been conquered by the arms of *Cyrus*, if they had not *been given to pleasures, and dwelt carelessly*. Their character and their overthrow are therefore left upon record, as a memorable warning-piece to all succeeding nations, to avoid the same sins, as they would not share the same desolation.

Pleasure abstractedly considered, and its general nature, is innocent and desirable ; it is attributed to the Deity, and said to be the final portion of his friends and favourites ; *In his presence is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore*. And the reasonable gratification of those faculties and appetites with which our Creator has endowed us, is such a happiness as we are under no obligation to deny ourselves : for although our faculties are greatly impaired, and our appetites depraved, by that general

* Rev. xvii. 5.

defection from God, in which the whole human race is involved, yet undoubtedly there is still a very allowable and laudable satisfaction and pleasure that may be enjoyed, even in worldly and sensible good, to alleviate the burthens and soften the cares of life. The danger and mischief to which we are exposed from this quarter, lies only in the excess; but the danger being imminent, and the mischief most extensive and fatal, they cannot be guarded against with too early and assiduous a care.

Man is a compound being, rational as well as animal, and therefore capable of pleasures of various kinds, which may be distinguished into those of the senses, of the imagination, of the understanding, and the pleasures of the soul, or such as are moral and divine. Brutes partake with us in the first, in the last we have communion with angels and the blessed spirits above; the former bespeak us children of the earth, and betray our kindred to worms; the latter proclaim us the genuine offspring of the eternal and unchangeable source of excellence: by any excess in the one, we debase our natures, and decrease our degeneracy; but we promote our dignity and perfection, by all advances in the other.

These things considered, we may easily judge what kind of pleasures it was, for which the *Babylonians* are threatened in the text, *viz.* an addictedness to sensual pleasure, with a carelessness or total unconcern about those that are intellectual and divine. *Thou that art given to pleasures, that dwellest carelessly*; for indeed carelessness or want of sober thought and reflection, is the true cause why the streams of pleasure proceed with so rapid a torrent as to overflow their banks, and lay waste some of the fairest and most delightful productions of nature. Thus *Babylon* the great, abounding in wealth and power, in every thing that could minister to safety and delight, falls a sacrifice to the debauchery and riot of its inhabitants. Amazing inconsideration! that with a victorious and ever-vigilant prince, and a nu-

merous army at their gates, they should suffer themselves to be surprized, by indulging to a security, and giving a loose to pleasures, that would have been highly criminal in a time of the most profound and uninterrupted tranquility.

And happy were it for us, if we in this nation had no reason to fear that *Babylon's* fate may one day be our's. But, alas! a prevailing and extravagant taste for pleasures, which serve for little else but to enervate the minds and corrupt the manners of our people, are threatening symptoms of our growing degeneracy and impending ruin; and so contagious is the disease, that no place or age, no sex or condition, no party or profession of men, seems intirely free from the infection. The grave as well as the gay, persons of mature age as well as giddy youth, men of business as well as men of pleasure, those who have their bread to earn, as well as those who have estates to spend, professors of religion as well as contemners of it, go great lengths in our licentious days, in practices that our forefathers would have been highly ashamed of. If *they* were too rigid and precise, we have relaxed beyond all bounds and measure. Not only this great city itself, but all the avenues to and from it, are thick set with houses and places of diversion; and trade, and arts, and learning, and religion, all pay tribute to them, and are forced to confess their power. There must be *elegance* now-a-days, in the dress, and table, and houses, and furniture of those, whose highest ambition ought to be *neatness*; and our indolent and effeminate *youth* claim indulgences, that used to be the utmost privilege of hoary and reverend *age*. But the poison is offered in a golden cup, and who will refuse to drink it? the ingredients must be grateful and salutary, because so many who have once tasted, are eager to repeat the draught; and who can be so rustick and unpolite as to decline the almost only pursuit, that engrosses the esteem and regard of the rest of mankind?

Thus pleasure is the idol to which the generality pay continual homage, and offer the most costly incense. They are never weary of dancing in this enchanted circle, and life hangs heavy on their hands, till they return to the bewitching chace. A man who was to sit down and observe the intenfeness and alacrity discovered by many in this pursuit, (and which they discover in nothing else) would be apt to imagine, that all the maxims of *Solomon* and other sages of antiquity, concerning the vanity of sensual delights, had been reversed and exploded by the experience of later days; that there is no such vexation or disappointment attending them, as some timorous enthusiastick people have been apt to pretend; and that amongst the improvements of the present age, one of the most extraordinary ones was to be imputed to the men of taste, who had hit upon an happy expedient for maintaining their pleasures in perpetual bloom, and their appetites in undiminished vigour.

But if we were to take a few steps into the crowd, and could see with respect to those especially who have been long engaged in the pursuit, the distraction or weakness of their understandings, the fretfulness and vexation of their hearts, the confusion and embarrassments of their worldly business, the incumbrances of their fortunes and estates, and the want of decorum and order, of peace and harmony in their households, what a melancholy and affecting scene would be opened to our view! we should discover them to be (notwithstanding all their glittering attire) a crowd of miserable mortals in disguise, seeking to impose upon each other, and upon themselves, endeavouring to unlearn the wise precepts of their ancestors, to hide themselves from the upbraidings of neglected duties and deserted families, and to drown the voice of conscience, and the voice of religion, in the tumult and uproar of wild and extravagant mirth.

That I may therefore shew the danger and evil of an addictedness to sensual pleasure in their true colours,

lours, and stripped of all disguise, and by that means, if possible, render so seasonable and awful a warning as that in the text, really beneficial to ourselves; I propose,

I. To consider the *nature* of sensual pleasures: and,

II. The *pernicious effects* of an undue indulgence of them, and that with respect to publick communities and particular persons.

I. I am to consider the *nature* of these pleasures themselves.

And besides the meanness of them, and that they are adapted to the lower and less noble part of our constitution, which is what I have already taken notice of; it may not be amiss to observe,

1. That they are *deceitful* and *unsatisfying*.

And we need not search into the treasuries of learning, or the records of antient time, to illustrate an observation so obvious and demonstrable as this. Who of us, in the time of our youth especially, ever found in a sensual delight, however innocent, much less if criminal, what we expected from it, and *that* promised us? Every moment seemed perhaps to linger and drag on, till the object of our wishes was enjoyed, but the instant we were to grasp the eagerly expected joy, it withered in our arms, or vanished from our sight. However, the next airy phantom that presented itself, was to make us amends for the disappointment of the former, but that bubble burst also as soon as the experiment was repeated; so that at length, however reluctant, we have been forced to confess, we had chosen for ourselves *a bed shorter than a man could stretch himself on, and a covering narrower than what he could wrap himself in* *.

* Isai. xxviii. 20.

But supposing we were not deluded, and that the enjoyment did in some measure answer our expectations; yet did it satisfy us? alas no! the sensual appetite may be easily cloyed, but can never be satisfied; it may be jaded, but after a little respite, becomes more restless and impetuous through indulgence. Frequent gratifications inflame, but never quench the raging thirst of passion. Its expectations will perpetually rise, as we give way to its cravings; so that what once perhaps were only gentle and soothing invitations to gain our consent, by degrees become peremptory demands, that can neither be complied with, nor resisted. We are first won upon by falshood and flattery, but ruled at last with a tyrant's rod, and find our slavery to be both unavoidable and intolerable.

And whose heart now does not glow with indignation at so cruel and inglorious a bondage as this, to be first betrayed by a harlot's painted charms, and then trampled on by her power? yet notwithstanding this, to how many in our day is that just and lively description of *Solomon* applicable; *With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattery of her lips she forced him, he goeth after her straitway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life* *.

2dly, Sensual pleasures are painful in the review.

There is something that mortifies and disgusts us in a reflection on the most moderate and innocent of our bodily pleasures; that they are so momentary and tasteless, that they have so much the appearance of waking dreams and fleeting shadows; insomuch that we are inclined to despise at one time what we eagerly pursued at another, to loath the object we have just embraced, and to look back with indifference and contempt towards what we looked forward with de-

* Prov. vii. 21, 22, 23.

fire and delight. But when our pleasures have been criminal either in kind or degree, and shame and remorse for *our own* wickedness, are added to our reflections on *their* vanity, how severely painful is the review! and yet painful as it is, how contentedly do men submit to be again and again imposed upon by the imposture they have so often detected, not suffering their own experience to make them wise, but still hunting the same vain objects their fathers and themselves have pursued without success, running the same ground over and over again, as if it were a new discovered track, till they are forced to add their testimony to that of those who went before them, of the fruitless toil and vanity of the chace, and probably as little to the benefit of those that come after them! which leads me to the next general head I proposed,

II. To consider the *pernicious effects* of an inordinate indulgence to such pleasures. And this,

1st, With respect to *publick communities*.

The prosperity of a nation consists in its wealth, its power, its improvement in arts and sciences, and its liberty and independency; but a general and prevailing love of pleasures, exhausts its wealth, enervates its power, leaves arts and sciences uncultivated, changes liberty first into licentiousness, and then into slavery. It destroys, or at least greatly diminishes that spirit of industry, frugality, temperance, and œconomy, that turn for trade and commerce, upon which the flourishing state of almost every nation depends, and it introduces that indolence, luxury, effeminacy, petulance, pride, discontent, contempt of authority, and those complaints of government and governors, which are the bane of society, render a kingdom divided, weak, and contemptible; first the scorn, and then the easy prey of any powerful ambitious neighbour; and as the natural consequence of a national and general depravity, draws down the righteous judgment of
Almighty

Almighty God, who for such sins and provocations as these, brought a sudden and overwhelming destruction (as we have just seen) on the city of *Babylon*, given her up to ruin and destruction, she having first given up herself to pleasures.

And though the divine vengeance is not usually executed till after great patience and long-suffering has been exercised towards such abandoned nations, yet nevertheless it will *certainly* be executed, unless prevented by a timely repentance and reformation, and it often comes down with additional weight and terror, for having been long held back by the arm of mercy. The utter and final overthrow of *Babylon* was the frequent subject of antient prophecy, before it was accomplished, as may be learnt from those words of the prophet Jeremiah, Jer. i. 24, 25, 26. *I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon, and thou wast not aware, thou art found, and also caught, because thou hast striven against the Lord. The Lord hath opened his armory, and hath brought forth the weapons of his indignation; for this is the work of the Lord God of hosts, in the land of the Chaldeans. Come against her from the utmost borders, open her store-houses, cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly, let nothing of her be left.* And Jer. ii. 6. *Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and deliver every man his soul, be not cut off in her iniquity; for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, he will render unto her a recompence.* But when neither the threatening aspect of Providence, nor the solemn predictions of prophecy, could rouse this lethargic nation out of its state of dissolution and impurity, desolation came upon her like lightning from heaven, and her *destruction as a whirlwind.*

Nor is *Babylon* the only city that stands as an awful monument of divine vengeance against a debauched and profligate people. *Jerusalem*, once the place of God's peculiar residence and delight, afterwards became execrable for the murder of that compassionate friend and saviour of men, who shed tears of the tenderest

dearest pity and concern over it, and at length fell a victim to the divine displeasure, when she had filled up the measure of her iniquities. And *Rome, imperial Rome*, the envy and terror of the world, and the instrument of *Jerusalem's* destruction, was itself not many ages after, over-run by barbarous nations, the foundations of her strength and renown having been first undermined by the most shameful and extravagant luxury.

I now proceed,

2dly, To consider the pernicious effects of an excessive indulgence to sensual pleasures with respect to *particular persons*; and this, in regard of their bodily health, their secular interests, and their moral and religious character.

1st. An addictedness to sensual gratifications has ordinarily a very bad influence on our *bodily health*.

This most valuable blessing of life, and the foundation of all the rest, often falls a sacrifice to excessive pleasures, as they naturally tend to weaken the nerves, exhaust the spirits, and impair the vigour of the constitution. And a person that has been any time devoted to soft indulgence, and relaxed with indolence, cannot bear those occasional fatigues, no more than discharge those necessary duties, which are not to be avoided in such a world as our's; not to reckon up the numerous accidents and hazards to which a blind and eager pursuit of pleasure, generally exposes those who are engaged in it, and which sometimes prove fatal to them; for when we have once laid the reins on the neck of our passions, we put an absolute power into their hands to carry us wherever they will at all adventures. And notwithstanding our daily observation convinces, or might convince us, that crowds of company, sumptuous banquets, and unseasonable hours, are followed with a train of diseases in the rear; yet the sparkling liquor, the enchanting musick, and

and enterprizes of gallantry, have such irresistible charms, that when consecrated by numbers, and backed with importunity, they soon overbear the sober purposes of the morning. Youthful passions urge and stimulate each other, and prevent the still dictates of reason, the gentle voice of conscience, and the friendly precepts of religion, from being heard in the tumult; and thus we are in danger of going from one stage and gradation of wickedness to another, as long as our passions retain their vigour, that is, till our health falters and decays: but at length, the constitution being shattered and broken, such men are made to *possess the iniquities of their youth*, and find that by indulging to irregular pleasures, they have rendered themselves incapable of enjoying those that are reasonable and innocent, and probably sink under the weight of diseases of their own procuring, and die martyrs to their lusts and vices.

2dly, An excessive taste for pleasure is very prejudicial to our *secular interest*.

Pleasure is an expensive pursuit, by which many have speedily squandered the estates their wiser fathers gained by honest industry, or increased by prudent œconomy. It branches out into a variety of extravagances, each of which has its temptations and inconveniences attending it, and which grow upon a man insensibly; one expence of this kind seldom comes alone, but leads on to another, men being generally in some degree, uniform in their follies and vices, whatever they are in their virtues. So that, if we are once captivated by the vanity of being *men of taste* and politeness, our dress, and furniture, and table, and equipage, (if we are of rank to have any) must be in the newest mode, whatever expence attends it; till at last disgrace is intailed on our name, and distress on our family; and even under want and infamy, the disposition cleaves to us, and not being gratified, reduces the man to the lowest degrees of contempt and wretch-

wretchedness, and perhaps drives him headlong into some desperate measures, that bring him to an untimely end, or some publick punishment.

But if the consequences should not prove so terrible and fatal as I have just represented, yet unbounded pleasures occasion a vast waste and havock of our time, that time which is allowed us for the grand purposes of life, and for the infinitely more important ones of eternity : but (at present) confining our views to the present life, it takes up our time that should be employed in that particular pursuit wherein we are engaged for the service of ourselves, our families, or the publick, whether it be manual labour, or trade, or commerce, or any learned profession. It takes off our attention from our main concerns, and fills our heads and hearts with the vain blandishments and amusements of life, occasions us to lose opportunities which others embrace, to come behind them in every valuable attainment, and prevents our arriving at a considerable degree of eminence in any branch of substantial and useful knowledge ; besides that it frequently stains our character, blemishes our credit and reputation, and deprives us of that good opinion and confidence of others, which is necessary to our success in any calling or employment.

And even suppose we are above all business, yet it will introduce such disorders and confusion into our families and affairs as cannot easily be repaired, and will prove of the most pernicious influence to our children and dependants. Nor ought they who have as yet no households of their own, to think themselves entirely unconcerned in this argument, if they have the least thought of ever having any, as it is very likely to prevent their entering into such alliances as might be most conducive to their interest and honour ; for persons of prudence will hardly esteem them fit to be trusted with their children in the marriage-relation, who are under the dominion of such irregular and expensive habits. But,

3dly, What is worst of all is, that such a predominant love of pleasure has the most fatal effects on a man's *moral and religious character*.

Setting aside all other disadvantages, this alone is enough to alarm and terrify every rational considerate creature, who knows he is living for eternity. This world is the first stage of our existence, but we are going forward to a vastly superior one, if we do not sink ourselves into a state of sensuality and wretchedness by the way. It is here the mind is to be cleansed and purified from the pollution which naturally cleaves to it, and to be trained up for the most refined and exalted delights. The amiable graces of meekness, and humility, and benevolence, and a generous contempt of the world, an ardent and unfeigned love of God and man, an uniform desire of being and doing good, and of improving and advancing in all the branches of a divine and heavenly temper, are not likely to flourish in a heart immersed in sensual pleasures. Religion is too tender and delicate a plant to thrive in so rank a soil. There is reason to keep a strict watch over ourselves, that our minds are not defiled by the *necessary* intercourse we are obliged to hold with objects of sense in our passage through the world, how much more then to abstain from such indulgences that are criminal either in kind or degree, and that unavoidably taint and corrupt us?

The strength and beauty of the mind is to be preserved and increased as that of the body, by proper exercise and application, and by avoiding such things as impair its health and vigour. Our moral and intellectual powers cannot expand, and try their strength, and stretch their pinions in so gross and foul an element as is most suitable and grateful to our depraved fleshly appetites. It is retirement and contemplation, and frequent converse with spiritual themes and objects, with perfect spirits above, and especially with the great *Paternal Spirit*, that must improve the faculties of the soul, exalt its ideas, extend its views,
and

and qualify it for the refined and sublime employments and delights of that blessed state, for which it was designed, and after which it should be continually aspiring. And nothing more apparently discovers the low opinion we have of the heavenly happiness, or the little regard we pay to the necessary qualifications for it, as our groveling with so much satisfaction in the mean and fordid delights of sense.

As for those who look upon the future happiness in the light of a *Turkish paradise*, or who have been early initiated and constantly educated in the school of sensual pleasure, who have been led on by the example of their nearest relations, and perhaps their *wife* parents, to esteem the gratification of their senses, and the indulgence of their appetites and passions, the principal aim they were to have in view—they are truly objects of compassion and commiseration, we pity and lament their infelicity, whilst we despair of their recovery to a better, and more manly, and christian temper of mind; no wonder the gay and glittering objects of vanity and ambition dazzle their eyes, and charm and transport their hearts; no wonder they are *given*, and given up to pleasure, are led captive in its soft and silken chain, insensible of their bondage, and unconcerned for liberty.

But methinks, I do not utterly despair of making and leaving some good impressions on such an audience as this. Have you forgot the wise, and faithful care, and tenderness, which was expressed in the education of many of you? How the principles of religion were early intilled into your minds, as more worthy your regard and reverence than all other principles whatsoever? Have you forgot that you were instructed and enjoined, to retire in the evening of the day, especially the Lord's day, for prayer, and reading the scriptures, and recollecting the serious and useful truths of which you had been hearing; and that what you were enjoined by your parents commands, you were instructed and encouraged in by their example? Have you no

remem-

remembrance of the calm and serene satisfaction you have felt in such seasons of devout retirement? Or, however, have you no reason to believe your parents felt a sublime pleasure in such genuine exercises of their piety and parental affection? And can you really persuade yourselves, that such employment turned to no good account, or that the modern employments of the evening, which are often protracted till midnight, in cards and company, at *plays*, and *assemblies*, and *operas*, are more wise, or manly, elegant, more becoming the dignity of rational creatures who are tending towards immortality, more improving to the mind, more conducive to the true enjoyment of life, to the flourishing state of business, to the order and œconomy of families, and to the decorum and good behaviour of children and servants? I am sorry such questions as these need be asked of persons, who still come up with us to worship the *God of their fathers*? and wonder *they* blush not to worship in the places their fathers worshiped, who lead lives so contrary to what their fathers led? For my own part I know not, whether to be most ashamed or astonished, to see persons come into our *religious assemblies*, under a pretence of purity of worship, who are frequently to be heard of in places that bespeak no great sanctity of life or manners.—But fashion and custom are the *phantoms* that frighten the youth of the present age out of their understandings, and the best principles of their education, and draw them into the most absurd and preposterous conduct. And because some persons have been, and still may be justly ridiculous for their singularity in what is weak or whimsical, they are frightened to the last degree, for fear of appearing singularly wise and good, for fear they should be laughed at by rakes and libertines, who are themselves the scorn and contempt of all men of sense and sobriety.

I am inclined to think, that were it not for the bewitching charms of fashion and custom, that is, of

doing as others do, be it ever so foolish, or ever so hurtful, we might easily persuade our youth, that have been well educated, that sensual pleasure indulged to excess, is the lowest and most vexatious pursuit in the world, that it is tedious and lingering in its approach, insipid or surfeiting in the possession, and loathsome and odious in its consequences, and that nothing which will not bear the reflection and examination of the mind and conscience, can be a fit happiness for man. But before the trial is made, good nature, and an easy credulous temper, often incline them to think what so many at their age covet and pursue, must have something in it desirable, and when they are once embarked, they are presently attached to their company, soon contract an intimacy that is not easily broken off, grow gradually more under the power of appetite, and perhaps there is a sort of unhappy pride in not treading back the wrong steps they have taken, which effectually prevents their retreat. Having once engaged, they esteem it a *point of honour* to persist, though it be to their utter disgrace and ruin, or at least the imminent danger of it.

But surely they ought to consider *their* rashness and obstinacy will not alter the nature and tendency of actions, they only entangle themselves and impair their strength so much the more, the longer they delay to extricate themselves; and a few years will wipe the paint off from the harlot's face, and shew her wrinkles, will make them despise the opinion of those they now so highly value, and cause them to wish they had never deserted the paths, and forsaken the footsteps of their pious ancestors.

But whatever gay and giddy youth may be weak enough to do, O! let not us of advanced years, who have sworn allegiance to our Lord and Maker, in the most solemn manner, and by repeated vows, engaged ourselves to him, return again unto folly! Shall we who have tasted the joys of faith, be enslaved by the pleasures of sense? Don't we recollect the divine entertain-

tertains of retired hours, the solemn ordinances and sacramental transactions of the house of God? Have we felt, and yet forgot the inward satisfaction rising high in our hearts, in close communion with God, the lively joy we have found in a sense of divine love, and an assurance of his everlasting favour? Let us therefore look down, Christians, with a sacred indifference and contempt on every carnal delight, let our thoughts ascend to God, and fix on him as our portion and happiness, let the ardent desire of our souls be to him, and to the remembrance of his name, and vent its pious breathing in some such devout language as that, *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; O when shall I come and appear before God!*

DISCOURSE XIII.

Of Repentance.

[ABERNETHY.]

MATTH. iv. 17.

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

THE *kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God,* does usually in the New-Testament, and particularly in the discourses of our Saviour himself, signify the gospel-state, that glorious model formed in the divine counsels for recovering sinful men to their duty, and restoring them to the favour of God. The Deity has a supreme unalienable right to our obedience, which necessarily results from our relation to him as the workmanship of his hands, endowed with those powers which render us capable of knowing and doing his will, continually depending on him, and receiving favours from him. But when mankind had corrupted their ways, and fallen short of the glory of God, it pleased him by a particular interposition, to favour some of them with a positive revelation of his will, to reclaim them from their errors, and lead them in the way to happiness. For this end was the constitution of *Israel* formed, which is significantly and justly called a *Theocracy*; God himself was king, the laws were given by him, nay, and he kept in his own hand the last resort of power in the execution. The people under that form of divine government

vernment were the special favourites of heaven ; God himself called them a *chosen nation* to him, a *peculiar treasure*, a *kingdom of priests*, and our Saviour tell us, that *salvation* was of the Jews. But whatever the special reasons might be, taken from the *genius* of that people, and the *circumstances* of the time, there was in that œconomy a great mixture of ceremony and external pomp, which rendered it imperfect, and unfit to answer the more extensive purposes of that grace, designed for mankind in the *fulness of time* : and therefore it must give way to a better constitution, a new kingdom of grace, which God erected and put into the hands of his son, to be wisely and graciously administered by him, for turning *the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, reducing to their duty the rebellious, not of one, but of all nations to whom it should be published without distinction, and so bringing many to glory. It is the excellency of this last and best scheme, that it proposes the first great principles of religion, with an admirable plainness, it gives such instructions concerning the Deity, his moral perfections, and his providence, and concerning the obligations and duties of morality, that is, of piety, temperance, righteousness, and charity, as are most answerable to the natural sentiments of mankind, and which our own hearts, if we seriously attend to them, cannot but approve ; it prescribes such a pure, simple, and reasonable worship as is worthy of God to accept, and of men to perform ; it declares these terms of acceptance, accommodated to the frailty of our present state, and the conscious sense we have of guilt, which gives the greatest encouragement to sinners who are willing to reform their lives and return to their duty, and at the same time, lays them under the greatest and most indispensable necessity of reforming ; and it enforces our obedience to the laws of God in the strongest manner, and by the most powerful motives, having brought *life and immortality to light*, and

declared, that God has * *appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness by that man, whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.*

This is that *kingdom of heaven* which our Lord says in my text was then *at hand*, it was begun to be erected, and the model of it would soon be completed; and that men might be the qualified approved subjects of it, and entitled to the great salvation it proposes, he exhorts them to *repent*. I shall at this time, *first*, consider the duty of repentance, and then, lay before you some motives to the practice of it. Surely, this, if any thing in Christianity, is of importance to men. The whole strain of the New Testament shews it to be of absolute necessity. The most important consequences depend upon it. The great author of our religion has told us that † *except we repent we shall perish*. After the resurrection of Christ, the apostles filled with the Holy Ghost, pressed it upon men in this manner, *repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out*, Acts iii. 19. The great doctrines of Christianity, which are declared to be of its very essence, do all point to it as their proper improvement. The death of Christ is represented as calling upon us to be *crucified with him*, to *mortify the deeds of the body*, and to be *renewed in the spirit of our minds*, that is, to repent. And that future judgment which God has appointed, and the declaration and assurance of which is a peculiar glory of the gospel, strongly enforces the same exhortation. These considerations will, I hope, engage your attention to that first and great instruction which our Saviour gave to the world.

The original word which is generally used in the New Testament for repentance, does properly signify *a change of mind*, and very agreeable it is to the nature of the thing; for that religious repentance which God enjoins, and peremptorily insists on as the condition of forgiveness, and our obtaining his favour, is a change

* Acts xvii. 31.

† Luke xiii. 3.

of our dispositions from evil to good; and as the genuine fruit of it, the amendment of our lives. The gospel supposes men to have universally *sinned and come short of the glory of God*, nay, it declares that those, to whom the great salvation was first offered, both Jews and Gentiles, were very corrupt. Among the Jews religion had degenerated into empty form, and trifling ceremonies were substituted in the place of substantial godliness and virtue. Under a specious shew of outward sanctity was covered reigning impiety, pride, and covetousness. The heathen were deep sunk in all manner of wickedness, in adultery, fornication, lasciviousness, revelling, drunkenness, unnatural contentions and animosities. Such were the persons whom Christ and his apostles called to repent, that is, to change their inclinations and tempers, to unlearn their vicious habits, *to bring forth fruits meet for amendment of life*, to become lovers of God and men, to *worship God in spirit and truth*, to be sober, patient, meek, humble, just, and merciful.

This is what the first teachers of Christianity mean by repentance, which they so earnestly and frequently inculcate, and they sometimes represent it by different notions, but which amount to the same thing in effect; as, by *conversion to God*, that is, whereas men were in a vile subjection to sins, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, they renounce the tyrannical usurpation of those *other lords who have had dominion over them*, and yield themselves to God as their only rightful Lord, *to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments*. Sometimes it is represented under the images of a *new creation*, and a *resurrection or revival from death*; which signify that important moral change in the tempers and manners of men, when, from a doleful depravity, wherein reason and conscience, and all the best sentiments, and affections of human nature, seem to be lost or asleep, and all the designs and pursuits of men are directed by selfish inferior appetites, or contracted vicious propensities; when I say, from this wretched degeneracy

they are recovered to the love and practice of *the things that are pure, and true, and just, and venerable, and virtuous; to seek the things that are above, to approve the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God, and to walk in newness of life.* These representations shew the efficacy of the gospel and the grace of God, for effecting such a change in men; but as it is all a voluntary change, wherein their own natural powers actively exert themselves, the whole is comprehended under the duty of repentance. Still it is to be remembered, that the essence of repenting consists in prevailing good inclinations, contrary to the evil ones which had the ascendant before, and good works directly opposite to those wicked ones of which sinners had been guilty. Thus, *John Baptist*, who first declared the coming of God's kingdom, and taught the doctrine of repentance for the remission of sins, when, having in general, exhorted his hearers to repent, they asked him more particularly what he meant by it, and what he would have them to do, explains it thus, *Luke iii.* from verse 11. accommodating his exhortation to their various circumstances; the common people he directed, instead of outward ceremonies and forms, in which the religion of that time chiefly consisted, to abound in works of substantial piety and charity, and to give out of their plenty for the relief of their indigent fellow-creatures; the collectors of taxes, called *Publicans*, he exhorted to perform what was given them in charge justly and mercifully, never extorting from any man more than what the due and faithful discharge of their trust required; and the soldiers, that they should not behave insolently and oppressively, but *be content with their wages.* This was the Baptist's doctrine of repentance, and it may very easily, by parity of reasons, be applied to all the various relations, circumstances, and conditions in human life. In general, let men forsake their wicked ways and unrighteous doings, and turn to the Lord, practising the virtues which are contrary to their former vices. And
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in particular, *Let him that stole, steal no more*; let him that has been covetous, break off his sins by *shewing mercy to the poor*; let the lewd and voluptuous become chaste and temperate; the wrathful and contentious *put on bowels of mercies, humbleness of mind, forbearing and forgiving the weak and the injurious*; in fine, let us * *put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*. All the sacred writers, with one consent, continually urge men to this, as the only effectual way to obtain reconciliation with God, and the remission of all their sins. The prophets under the Old Testament insist upon it as well as Christ and his apostles, assuring the *Jews*, that without it all their sacrifices and other external rites would be unavailable to their acceptance with God; that indeed God was ready to forgive their iniquities; *though their sins were as scarlet, and red like crimson, he would make them white as snow and wool*; but it is upon the condition of their *washing and making them clean, putting away the evil of their doings, ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well* †. No more taking pleasure in their former sinful courses, rigorously exacting the labours and services of the poor, and *grinding their faces by oppression, but dealing their bread to the hungry, and cloathing the naked* †: in short, exercising themselves universally in the works of true piety and righteousness. Sorrow for sin, and what is called contrition, humiliation for having offended God, and perverted that which is right; the confessing of our iniquities with shame and grief, and pious virtuous inclinations, a desire to become holy as God is holy; all these are necessary to repentance, but it is a fatal mistake to imagine, that it essentially consists, and is completed in any, or all of them; or, that any thing will be accepted without what I have already mentioned, a thorough and effectual forsaking all sin, and turning to God, and to the practice of our duty, universally.

* Ephes. iv. 22, 24.

† Isa. i. 16, 18.

‡ Ibid. Iviii. 7.

These preparatory exercises and dispositions of the mind, arise from the reason of things, and the very frame of our nature. As repentance is the rational exercise of the soul, wherein its intellectual and active powers are deliberately employed, what first and naturally occurs to the reflecting thoughts of a penitent, is his former conduct; and he cannot review it otherwise than with an ingenuous remorse and self-abhorrence. When a man considers that he has done wrong, it is impossible to avoid a deep concern; for it is the highest pleasure to be justified to ourselves, and the reproaches of a self-accusing heart are most painful; and this is the best and most effectual preservative from a relapse into former follies. * *Sorrow after a godly sort*, as the apostle says, is naturally productive of *fear*, and *zeal*, and *carefulness*; *fear* of offending God for the future, a *zeal* and *care* to please him in all things. And as this is the true foundation of repentance, that it may be firm and stable, nothing is more necessary for us to attend to, than that our *sorrow* be of the kind I just now mentioned, *after a godly sort*. There may be a grief even for sin, which is of another character; that is, when the penal and pernicious consequences of it only are considered, especially, the disgrace and the miseries to which it exposes sinners in this world. Such a sorrow is really no more than a painful sense of natural evil or unhappiness; and if sin is only considered as the occasion of that, without entering into its moral deformity, we can never imagine that sorrow arising thence, has any thing in it of that ingenuous remorse which is acceptable to God; or that it will produce, or indeed at all tends to a real amendment. But, the mind that grieves after a godly sort, dwells on the consideration of sin as it is in itself, and in the lights wherein the scripture sets it; it considers moral evil as an error, as unbecoming the rational nature, as a deviation from the eternal and unchangeable measures of right, as offensive to, and

* 2 Cor. vii. 9,---11.

disapproved by, the best of all things, as ingratitude to a benefactor who continually loads us with his favours, and exercises towards us the most amazing patience, and tender compassion; to all which the gospel adds, that most powerful motive taken from the death and passion of Christ. Our glorious Redeemer was, as the prophet speaks of him, *a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief**; and after a life of deep humiliation, poverty, and contempt, endured a most ignominious and painful death. And, when we remember that he suffered, and passed through all his scenes of grief for our sakes, *that he might redeem us from all our iniquities, and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works**; and finally bring us to the possession of an eternal rest and blessedness in heaven; when I say, all this is considered, it must be a hard heart that does not relent, that can *look to him that was pierced* for our sins, and not *mourn and be in bitterness*.

It is likewise very natural for men convinced, and sensibly affected with the remembrance of their transgressions, to confess them to God whom they have offended. Nature dictates a way of expressing our sorrows, and reason tells us that sorrow for injuries done, should be uttered in acknowledgments to the person injured. We are very ready to expect and demand it when wrong is done *us*, and can we question the equity of paying it when our hearts tell us *we* have done wrong; especially, this homage is due to the Supreme Being, when we have affronted and provoked him by violating his righteous laws. The confession of sin is a reproaching ourselves in the bitterness of our spirits, as polluted by the most nauseous and loathsome thing, which we can no longer bear. It is, as the scripture speaks, *taking to ourselves shame, and confusion of face*, and justifying God whom our transgressions dishonoured, making a solemn acknowledgment of the reasonableness of his laws, and the righteousness of the sentence which he has pronounced

* Isa. liii. 3.

† Titus ii. 14.

against the evil deeds of men. At the same time, it gives glory to his mercy and the truth of his promise, that he will *pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin*; the hope of which, far from lessening the malignity of sin, in the view of a penitent, it increases it rather, as the prophet says, in the name of the Lord. *Ezekiel xvi. 63. Thou shalt remember, and be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth, because of thy shame, when I am pacified towards thee for all that thou hast done.* For these reasons, the confession of sin is often enjoined in scripture, and great promises are made to the sincere performance of it; yet the stress is not laid on the performance itself, but the value of it depends on its tendency to a reformation, which chiefly is well-pleasing to God.

The result will certainly be a change of mind and affections from evil to good, a disposition to alter our course of action; for it is altogether an inconsistent supposition, that we should be sorry for having offended, and acknowledge it with shame, at the same time resolving that we will continue in the same course. But still all these are only preparations for repentance, it is not finished in them. Its true characteristic is a deliberate and resolved change of temper and behaviour; a firm purpose of amendment thoroughly executed; resolving to *keep God's righteous judgments*, and immediately entering upon the actual performance of it; no more *fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in ignorance*, but *as he that hath called us is holy, becoming holy in all manner of conversation* *.

To convince us of this, which I take to be a point of very great moment, let us, *first*, consider the express declarations of scripture concerning it. The apostle *Paul* discoursing of godly sorrow, (and certainly none can have a better character, it comprehends every good qualification of sorrow for sin) says †, *it worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of*; not that it is repentance unto salvation, for he maketh a plain

* 1 Pet. i. 15.

† 2 Cor. vii. 10.

difference as between the means and the end, the occasion or preparation, and the effect. Besides, in a great many other passages, a pious and virtuous life, a persevering obedience, and *patient continuance in well doing*, is the condition of our obtaining eternal life; which indeed is contained in repentance, but not in sorrow, confession of sin, or good inclinations. On the other hand, a vicious character and wicked behaviour, disqualifies men for the kingdom of God, whatever their griefs, humiliations, and pious desires, and purposes may be. The * *adulterer*, the *sorcerer*, the *railer*, the *covetous*, the *drunkard*, shall not inherit the kingdom of God, though they should often with deep humility and regret confess their sins, and in their confessions and griefs, incline and resolve to alter their course of life; yet they do it not, *but it happens to them according to the proverb*, as St. Peter expresses it, † *The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.*

I think no attentive person can doubt but this is the doctrine of the holy scriptures upon the head of repentance; at least, that a virtuous course of life, *ordering our conversations aright*, being *undefiled in the way*, *walking in the law of the Lord*, *doing no iniquity*, and *keeping God's precepts* diligently, is absolutely and indispensably necessary to our being blessed in enjoying the favour of God. It is a wonder that any Christians should have gone into other sentiments, some even in speculation and opinion, many more in the secret fond presumption of their hearts, not supported by any avowed principle, imagining that humiliation, and contrition, and ineffectual purposes of amendment, would at last be sufficient to their acceptance with God. If it were true, that repentance consists in these things, yet is it not evident from a multitude of scripture declarations, indeed from the intire strain of them, that a good life according to the mercy of the gospel-covenant, that is, sincere prevailing, though imperfect holiness in all manner of conversation, is the condi-

* 1 Cor. vi. 9.

† 2 Pet. ii. 22.

tion of eternal life? and therefore to understand the gospel consistently, we must conclude, that either repentance is not sufficient of itself to entitle to forgiveness, and acceptance with God, or a persevering conformity to the divine law is included in it, which seems to be the juster explication.

But, we may be farther satisfied, that repentance, as the term of forgiveness and reconciliation to God does not consist wholly in these particulars already mentioned, by trusting to which many deceive themselves; we may, I say, be satisfied of this, by considering the reason of the thing; for, in the *first* place, it cannot be reasonably thought that God has any delight in the sorrow of his creatures, merely for its own sake, because, that is contrary to his perfect goodness, which takes pleasure in the happiness of all beings who are capable of it; and the scripture tells us, that he delights in the prosperity and joy of his servants. If we could at all suppose that the griefs of sinners are pleasing to the Deity, as separated from the proper effect of them in their reformation; then still the more intense their griefs are, the more pleasing they would be, and consequently the hopeless anguish of the accursed objects of his wrath, would, as being the bitterest and the most painful, be the most acceptable. The howling of the damned be more grateful in his ears, than the ingenuous mournings of the penitent, which every one will judge to be absurd. Let us put the case of a human superior who has bowels of compassion; will he take any pleasure in the sorrows of an offending subject, any farther than as they are the salutary presages of amendment? Will a father delight in the piercing griefs of his child, or even a judge in the affliction of a malefactor? No otherwise, certainly than as their future obedience may be thereby secured. We ought not, then, to think that the best of all beings, the most merciful father even of his prodigal children, the most compassionate judge, who does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, will

will regard with pleasure and approbation, the deepest sorrows and humiliations of sinners on any other account, than as they are means in order to the end which he certainly approves, the bettering of their hearts, and reforming their conversations; and therefore we must conclude, that the repentance which God accepts is not consummated, nor, principally consists in sorrow for sin.

Secondly, The same judgment is to be made of confession, in which our penitence must not rest, nor will God approve it unless it end in the forsaking of sin; which *Solomon* comprehends in the condition of our obtaining mercy. *Prov. xxviii. 13. He that covereth his sin, shall not prosper, but whoso confesseth and forsaketh, shall have mercy.* I do not speak here only of a formal acknowledgment in words, which without the sincere and ingenuous contrition of the heart, cannot be pleasing to God, for it is hypocrisy; but, let us suppose it ever so serious, and accompanied with the deepest remorse and self-abasement, it is only so far valuable, as it terminates in holiness of heart and life. Consider how we would judge in a parallel case of our own. Suppose a child, a servant, a friend, or a neighbour, is guilty of a trespass, and makes profession of grief for it; humanity and christian charity require us to forgive the wrong; but it is always taken for granted, that the injurious shall not relapse into his former offences, but that his future conduct shall be just, respectful, and obliging; when it happens otherwise, and the conduct continues uninfluenced, and as bad as before, a repetition in that case of such fruitless professions is in itself offensive, and rather serves to heighten the provocation; and, if it be so, we cannot but imagine that God will count it an indignity, if his sinful creatures treat him after the same manner; if after many provocations, they, in order to obtain his favour, only make a confession of their
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guilt, and instead of forsaking their evil ways, return to them again.

And, in the *last* place, the dispositions and purposes of the mind will be unavailable, and are not true repentance, unless they are followed with a suitable practice. Let us judge in this case as we do in all others concerning the abilities, the qualities, the accomplishments, natural and moral, of the human soul. Reason itself, the distinguishing excellence of our nature, is discovered only by our conduct; if a creature in human shape should shew by its actions no other faculties than those which belong to the brutal kind, it could not be acknowledged to be of our species. But, particularly in determining characters and qualities of men, we have always a recourse to their behaviour. Thus we distinguish between a wise man and a fool, between just and unjust, between grateful and ungrateful, between a friend and an enemy; for these are never considered as, nor indeed are they in their own nature, idle, unactive qualities, resting in the mind. Dispositions are in order to action, and have a necessary relation to it, particular dispositions to particular courses of action, and without them, are to all intents and purposes to be considered as if they had no being.

After the same manner let us judge of repentance, considered as a disposition in the mind. To what is it a disposition? Surely to obedience, to the expressions of love and gratitude to God, and hatred of sin, to a course of action opposite to the former which is now repented of. Without that obedience, therefore, those expressions of love and gratitude to God, and hatred of sin, and without that change of our course of action, it must be accounted empty and void. The sinner very well knows how his former dispositions, he now pretends to repent of, and to have changed, exerted themselves; they were not unactive, they produced a multitude of transgressions, and not in thought only, but in word and deed; and shall not his now
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contrary repenting dispositions, inclinations, and purposes, exert themselves in the contrary works?

But, let us lay ever so great stress on all these particulars which are ingredients in repentance, or rather preparations for it, and tendencies towards it, on sorrows for sin, deep contrition, confessions, and pious dispositions, religious inclinations and purposes, let us even make the supposition, that the essence of repentance were in them, this important question will remain, how does their sincerity appear? It is an acknowledged principle, that nothing called religion can be acceptable to the Deity, let it be faith, repentance, obedience, charity, or whatsoever virtue, or good work so called; it cannot, I say, be acceptable without being sincere. Now, let any one judge whether there can be in the nature of the thing, any evidence without good works, or *fruits meet for the amendment of life*, as the scripture calls them, of these inward dispositions and affections, religious inclinations and purposes, or of godly sorrow for sin, or any satisfying evidence that men are sincere in confessing their sins.

Nay, upon the unhappy supposition that our repentance is thus imperfect, that we are sorry for our sins, confess them, and purpose to reform, without actually reforming, our guilt is thereby greatly aggravated; and the *separation between us and our God*, which our iniquities have made, is increased. I do not now put the case of insincerity, which is always displeasing to that God who *loves truth in the inward parts*, but allowing that men really, and in earnest, are grieved for their transgressions, and confess them with deep contrition of soul; upon that supposition, if it can be made, without amendment of life, the sins in which they continue are very much heightened, because they are committed against the plainest and most sensible connections of their own minds, and still the affront to God is the greater, the more it is done in defiance of light, and with our eyes open.

I cannot now finish what I intended in this discourse, and shall for this time conclude with exhorting you to consider seriously, the absolute, indispensable necessity of breaking off your sins by actual thorough amendment; by *turning our feet to God's testimonies, making haste to keep his commandments* *. Which that we may all sincerely do, God of his infinite mercy grant.

* Psalm cxix. 60.

DISCOURSE XIV.

Of Repentance.

[ABERNETHY.]

MATTH. iv. 17.

Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

IN a former discourse from these words, I endeavoured to explain the nature of that true repentance, which the scripture declares to be so absolutely and indispensably necessary to our acceptance with God. And what I intend at this time principally to insist on, are, the motives whereby this most important duty is urged upon us. But one observation will *first* be usefully made in order to our understanding it better, and applying what is said concerning it with greater advantage to ourselves, that is, concerning the difference between the repentance originally preached to sinners, both Jews and Heathens, as the condition of their entrance into the christian state, and that which is required of those who sin wilfully under the christian profession. The gospel was first declared to such as, by the account it gives of them, were very ignorant and very wicked; *all flesh had corrupted their ways, and the whole world became guilty before God.* The religion of the Jews had degenerated into empty formality; external rites and ceremonies were put in the place of substantial piety and virtue: and the Gentiles were *dead in trespasses and sins, foolish*

and disobedient, *servizing diverse lusts and pleasures.* Such were they whom our Saviour and his apostles called to repentance, to an entire change in their tempers and their manner of life, to become new creatures, to *put off the old man, and be renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness.* To this purpose very strong motives were set before them, taken from the death and resurrection of Christ, and from the hope of a glorious immortality, which Jesus Christ brought to light; and they came under a solemn obligation by baptism, which was a seal of their religious profession, and a sacred engagement upon them *to walk in newness of life,* as the apostles explain it. A persevering course of sincere obedience, as the condition of their claim to the benefits of the new covenant, was what all the followers of Christ were understood to be bound to, as the genuine effect, I may say, the continuation of that repentance which was begun at their conversion to Christianity, and into which they were initiated at their baptism. This repentance was supposed, when once sincerely begun, never to be revoked, nor to need to be repeated, as the apostle speaks, *2 Cor. vii. 10. Not to be repented of;* as the seal of it was never to be received but once; and therefore, in the 6th chapter to the *Hebrews,* repentance from dead works, as well as faith, and in consequence of both, baptism is reckoned as the foundation of Christianity, not to be laid again.

To suppose men called to repent in the same manner as at their first professing the religion of Christ, is to suppose that the foundation is destroyed, that indeed they have departed from Christianity, and renounced their baptism; thus falling from grace, and returning to that state of *death in trespasses and sins* wherein the world lay, like the unconverted Gentiles who walked in the *vanity of their minds,* and according to their *former lusts in ignorance;* and this is a supposition which is not made in the general strain of the New-Testament writings, (as it was not reasonable it should,

should) they are, therefore, to be understood in treating of repentance, to mean the first conversion of sinners, by the grace of God that brings salvation, *from dead idols to the service of the living God*; from an impious and immoral conversation in worldly lusts, to a sober, righteous, and godly life, in which they are bound by the laws of their religion and their covenant with God, to persevere and go on to perfection. 'Tis true, Christians are in some sense obliged daily to repent; that is, whereas this is an imperfect state, and they are liable to failures through surprising temptations, remaining ignorance, and many infirmities which compass them about, they ought continually by impartial self-examination to find out these failings, to regret them humbly, and set themselves in opposition to them, aspiring to higher measures of perfection, *leaving the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before*, as the *apostle speaks. But this is not what the sacred writers mean by repentance, but becoming new creatures, turning from a wicked and ungodly life to a sincere holiness and virtue; and their doctrine is, that sincere Christians being born of God, born of water and of the spirit, that is, truly repenting and being baptized, they do not, they cannot sin, because the *divine seed abides in them*; they do not commit sin, so as to be its servants, and under its dominion any more.

Nevertheless, it is a case which may be supposed, for it is sometimes fact, and the inspired writers themselves affirm it to be so, that men under the profession of the gospel fall into those courses, and into these practices which are utterly inconsistent with sincerity; *they † sin wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and depart from the holy commandment which was delivered unto them*. Not only an open and an avowed rejecting of Christianity, which some in the primitive times were guilty of, and it was extremely difficult to renew them again unto repentance; not only this, I

* Philip iii. 13, 14.

† Heb. x. 26.

say, but any wilful, deliberate sinning against the light and conviction of men's own minds, any known criminal practices frequently repeated, any of those things *for the sake of which the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience*, as adultery, fornication, drunkenness, fraud, violence, oppression, or others of a like nature and malignity, any of them knowingly and wilfully committed, especially relapsed into, after professed sorrow and purposes of amendment, is a violation of the Christian covenant, a forfeiture of our claim to the favour of God according to the laws of the gospel, and subjects sinners to his indignation. What in this case is to be done? I have said already these are not the persons to whom the doctrine of repentance was originally preached, nor to whose condition it is accommodated in the general strain of the New-Testament. Indeed their condition is much worse, their guilt is more aggravated by such bold and presumptuous defiance to the light of their own consciences, and contempt of the gospel-grace; the spirit of God is grieved, their hearts more hardened, and their reformation rendered more difficult, as *St. Peter* says, 2d Epist. ii. 21. *It were better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment.*

But after all there is no other remedy; repent they must or perish. Though the scripture speaks but sparingly of their case, and of that duty with an application to it, as it is not reasonable such ample encouragement should be given to them as to those who sinned in ignorance, and whose sins were in some sense connived at, yet the plain reason of the case will direct them to this, as the only way for obtaining forgiveness and salvation, notwithstanding all the disadvantages they have brought themselves under, and all the disabilities they have contracted for performing it. And yet the scripture is not wholly silent concerning this case, and the necessity, and even the hopefulness of repenting in it. The prophets often call upon the Jews
(whose

whose condition in this respect was parallel to that of Christians) in such terms as these, * *Return, ye backsliding children, for I am married to you.* The covenant on God's part shall still stand, if ye will forsake the sins by which you have violated it and revolted from him; and † *though thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return to me, saith the Lord.* That is, for so the figurative expression signifies, though thou art guilty of heinous aggravated offences, and particularly of idolatry, which was an essential breach of the covenant, yet there is room for repentance. And in the New Testament, as we find the case of apostacy supposed, or of insincerity, that is of wilful transgressions under the christian profession, and the wrath of God denounced against it, which is principally intended for the admonition of Christians, that they do not fall into such sin; yet a reserve for the repentance of those who are so guilty is not obscurely insinuated. The apostle *Paul* refers to a fact of this sort which happened among the Corinthians. One, and probably a teacher of no inconsiderable character, was guilty of such fornication as was not named even among the Gentiles, ‖ *that a man should have his father's wife.* Because the example was of a very infectious nature, and highly reproachful to Christianity, it was necessary that it should be censured with a peculiar severity; accordingly, the apostle, by virtue of his extraordinary miraculous power, delivered the offender to *satan*, meaning, that some uncommon temporal judgment was inflicted upon him. But what was the intention? was it that he should be immediately overwhelmed and swallowed up in remediless ruin? no, but for § *the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of Jesus Christ.* That is, that the sinner might be restored to a good state, and the hope of eternal life by repentance. And therefore, when the punishment had its due effect in the humiliation and repentance of the offender, the apostle exhorts

* Jer. iii. 14. † Ibid. iii. 1. ‖ 1 Cor. v. 1. § Ibid. v. 5.

the saints at Corinth to comfort him as a penitent, and receive him again into their fellowship. In the epistles to the seven churches of *Asia*, *Revel.* chap. 2d, and 3d, some are charged with great defection, and the divine displeasure is denounced against them, they are threatened with the *removal of their candlestick out of its place*, and other punishments; but still upon the supposition of impenitency; and it is expressly declared, that if they did repent, their destruction should be prevented. *Nay*, some of the most notorious transgressors, who seduced the servants of Christ into grossly immoral practices, are threatened indeed with death, but it is, *except they repent*. The apostle *Peter* himself is an example for the encouragement of offending disciples of Christ to repent; through fear he denied his master before men, for which sin his master pronounces a severe punishment; but he obtained mercy, having with deep sorrow for his sin, returned to a better mind and better resolution, which he testified through the whole course of his after-life, and even at his death.

There is, therefore, repentance also *granted* even to them, who professing Christianity, have deliberately and presumptuously sinned against its laws; and their repentance is of the same kind with that which the gospel describes in the case of converted infidels: a thorough forsaking, and *purging the conscience from dead works, to serve the living God, sprinkling the hearts from an evil conscience, and washing the body with pure water*. Let them never imagine that their condition is any thing the better for their having been Christians before the committing of their iniquities, and that from thence there remains any foundation of hope for them; their habitual course of wickedness utterly inconsistent with integrity, forfeits the christian character, and with it all claim to the privileges of the gospel-covenant. Their state is that of a total alienation from God; and their conversion to him, that it may be sincere and acceptable, must be attended with

an entire change of disposition and conversation, from evil to good; as *David* in his penitential exercises, after the most heinous transgression of his life, addresses God; not only with a deprecation of his displeasure for that particular offence, nor indeed, only with a desire and purpose of amending it, but with the utmost sollicitude that he might be wholly renewed; in the same manner as a new convert to religion would do, after an universally profligate and abandoned life, *according to his lusts in ignorance, * create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.* Nay, if there be any difference, it is this, that the repentance of such sinners ought to be peculiarly remarkable and conspicuous, as their iniquities have been accompanied with peculiar aggravations; and, especially, let it be remembered, that nothing can be to them a satisfying evidence of their sincerity, but an effectual amendment, an intire, resolved, abstinence from their former iniquities, and the steady exercise of the contrary virtues.

I come, in the next place, to lay before you the gospel-motives to repentance. But, before I enter upon them, it may not be amiss to consider a little the reasonableness of the thing itself, and its agreeableness to our natural sentiments. We have indeed this invaluable advantage by the gospel-revelation, that it adds new and very powerful inducements to our obeying the eternal and immutable laws of God; but still the first consideration which takes fast hold on the minds of men, is, that the things which those laws injoin are excellent and right things, most becoming a reasonable nature, and tending to its perfection, and its highest self-enjoyment.

Now, I think it will appear to every attentive person very rational and fit, that we should undo what we have done amiss; that if we have gone into any wrong course, we should not persevere in it, but upon conviction abandon it; that we should renounce our

* Psalm li. 10.

errors, and if we have done iniquity, resolve that we will do it no more; that is, that we should repent. It is true, indeed, that repentance is not directly contained in the original obligation of the law of nature, for it primarily enjoins what is good, without supposing the case of a departure from it; but in the event of sin, it imports a plain consequential obligation to forsake it, and return to our duty, as being that only which we can reasonably do in such circumstances, and whereby we can only have hope towards God, or be approved by ourselves.

But, *if the times of ignorance God winked at, he now commands all men every where to repent*; having published his law of grace, and that remedy which his mercy had found out for sinners. The kingdom of heaven is come, that new gospel-constitution *wherein the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith*; he has declared himself merciful to the unrighteousness of the penitent, and that their sins and transgressions he will remember no more. That law which is the unalterable rule of right, is cleared from the obscurities in which the ignorance and prejudices of men had involved it; there is a full discovery of that which is good and acceptable to the Deity, and he has ascertained a *glorious reward to them who diligently seek him*.

From this general character of the kingdom of heaven, or of Christianity, you will see that it contains very strong motives to repentance. The *first* I mention, is taken from the hope of success. This is the greatest encouragement, and does most effectually determine men to any valuable design, endeavours, or pursuit. The end is obtaining the favour of God, which is of so great moment, that one would think men should exert their utmost power, and use the greatest diligence for it, considering themselves as guilty, and under a forfeiture. The impression of this has been so strong on the minds of men, that all nations, sensible of having offended the Deity, have laboured to appease him, though for the most
part

part by methods very disagreeable to reason, and to our most natural notions of the Supreme Being. Repentance, indeed, is what the light of nature dictates, and all men who consider it, are convinced it is absolutely necessary to a reconciliation; but an express assurance from God, that it will be accepted, must be acknowledged an invaluable advantage; and this we have by the christian revelation. For however the divine goodness manifested by its liberal effects, and extending to all kinds of beings who are capable objects of it, might induce us to hope that God will be favourable to penitents, and make a difference between the obstinately wicked and imperfectly good, who in the general tenor of their actions, sincerely do what is lawful and right, though not without a mixture of infirmities; yet, still there might remain a suspicion that the wise governor of the world might see it fit to inflict some degrees of punishment in a future state on those who sinned in this life, even although they have repented. But this anxiety is superseded, and strong consolation is provided for penitents, by a positive declaration from a person who has a plenary authority sufficiently attested, that God will receive them into favour as if they had never sinned, and that there is reserved for them a complete and eternal felicity hereafter.

The method in which this mercy is dispensed carries in it very strong arguments to enforce our duty, I mean repentance and its genuine fruits. It is by the mediation of Christ; by the shedding of his blood, * *they are made near to God, who were far off*; and he † *was raised from the dead for their justification, saving to the uttermost all that come to God by him, because he ever lives to make intercession for them* ||. Now, this lays us under the most endearing obligation of gratitude to our Saviour, *who gave himself for us, to redeem us from all our & iniquities, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.* The New Testament

* Ephes. ii. 13. † Rom. iv. 25. || Heb. vii. 25. § Tit. ii. 14.

writers so represent both the death and resurrection of Christ, as it appears to be their great design to bring sinners to repentance, or to amendment and newness of life. *We are buried with him in baptism unto death,* (saith St. Paul, Rom. vi. 4.) *that as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the father, so we should walk in newness of life.* And thus he reasons, 2d of Cor. v. 14, 15. *The love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all once dead, that they that live should no more live to themselves, but to him that died for them and rose again.* In his other epistles, he speaks often in the same strain, and to the same effect, describing our repentance, as the very image and resemblance of Christ's crucifixion and rising to glory, for he calls it *being crucified and rising with him, putting off the body of the sins of the flesh thro' the feith of the operation of God, and putting on the new man, and being renewed in the spirit of our minds.* The same doctrine is taught by St. Peter, 1st Ep. iv. 1. *Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, own yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.*

Another argument for repentance, because the kingdom of God, or Christianity is come, is taken from the clear light of the gospel; and certainly a great weight is added to the obligation of our duty by the full and plain discovery of it; in effect the revelation of our whole duty is in this view the enforcement of repentance, which is nothing else but the practice of whatsoever is good, and pure, and virtuous, in opposition to *former lusts in ignorance.* *The former times did command at, but now commands all men to repent.* He had great compassion for them who lived in times of error, who were very ill taught, and received a corrupt conversation by tradition of their fathers, without any means of delivering themselves, but merely their own reason, which indeed, if duly attended to, might have discovered the folly and wickedness of the idolatry and immorality which then prevailed, but

in the generality of men was so weak and unimproved, through the unhappiness of their education, that it had very little influence; and its feeble effects were easily overborn by the clamour of imposture, prejudices, and vicious customs. But, now, that God has sent his son into the world to reveal his will to mankind, and he has done it with such perspicuity, that he *who runs may read*, and understand it, they must be inexcusable who continue impenitent and disobedient; * *and the servant, who knowing his Lord's will, does not prepare himself to do it, will deserve to be beaten with many stripes.*

I may add, under this head, the gracious assistance which the gospel affords, that men may be led to repentance. It is the glory of Christianity to be the *ministration of the spirit*. Not only was the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to attest it by miraculous gifts and operations at first, but the divine comforter abides always with the followers of Christ, to instruct them, to lead them in the way of truth, and incline them to the practice of their duty. Now as all their obedience is summed up in repentance, from which consolation naturally arises, and to the increase whereof it tends, the operations of the Holy Spirit may be said to have this for their end. The prophet *Zechariah* foretelling the glory of the last days, or of the christian dispensation, when the most perfect model of religion should take place, and real piety and virtue should flourish, says, chap. xii. 10. *It shall come to pass, saith the Lord, that I will pour on the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn and be in bitterness.* The Holy Spirit then poured out abundantly shall incline men to repent, and from a sense of their former sins, to renounce them with abhorrence, and do no more wickedly. When such aids are offered to

* Luke xii. 47.

us, and the Spirit of God strives, in order to reclaim and reform us, it must be a high aggravation of wickedness to resist him, and by such *hardness and * impenitence of heart, men treasure up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.* What more could have been done on God's part that he has not done? he not only calls upon us by the voice of reason and nature, which loudly proclaims his glory and our duty, and exercises great patience and long-suffering towards us; nay, he not only has appointed a propitiation for our sins, and thereby given us the most solemn and satisfying assurances of pardon, that by the hope of it we might be animated to a dutiful return to him; but he had such pity on our weakness, though it was in a great measure criminal, and contracted by our own fault, that he sends his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities, to enlighten our darkness, and to strengthen our feeble powers; and if after all we will remain impenitent, and defeat the best means, and gracious efforts of mercy for our recovery, our ruin must be wholly charged on ourselves.

And, *lastly*, the kingdom of heaven, or the gospel, has brought *life and immortality to light*, and since *we have entrance with boldness into the holiest of all by the blood of Jesus, by that new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.* The apostle's inference is very just, *Heb. x. 22. Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure waters;* that is, let us come to God in the exercise of faith and unfeigned repentance. It is true, that reason itself and natural religion carries no small light into futurity. When we consider the moral perfections of God, from which we infer that some time or other he will make a distinction between the good and the bad,

* Rom. ii. 5.

which is not done in the external administration of Providence here, for as *Solomon* observes, *Eccles. ix. 2.* *All things come alike to all, there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean, to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner, and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath;* when, I say, we consider this, we conclude very reasonably, that there will be a great difference made hereafter in the condition of men, by the appointment of their great judge.

But, Christianity gives us still a much clearer light into the other world. It represents a future judgment, and the awful important issues of it in the most affecting manner; that Jesus Christ, as the visible judge, will sit on his throne, summon the whole human race to appear before him, and distribute to every one rewards and punishments, according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil. By this powerful consideration, God requires all men to repent: the hope of an absolute and complete justification, and the enjoyment of an eternal rest, and of fulness of joy in God's presence, if they fulfil the terms of his covenant; if amending their evil ways, and breaking off their sins, they patiently continue in well-doing, is the strongest inducement that can be proposed to a reasonable nature. And, on the contrary, *the fear of that judgment and fiery indignation wherewith God will consume his adversaries*, one would think sufficient to awaken the attention of the most obdurate sinners, and dispose them to forsake their sins. Not that such fear is sufficient of itself to produce true repentance, but at least, it shews the extreme folly of impenitency; and as it is generally the first thing that takes hold of very corrupt and hardened hearts, it may excite such consideration as shall end in an ingenuous conversion to God.

I shall now make some practical reflections on all that has been said, and the *first*, which I think a very important one, is, that we should take care to avoid resting in false appearances of repentance, and substituting any thing else in the room of that true repentance which the gospel does indispensably require. They are gross errors of the papists, and of a most dangerous tendency, to place the power of forgiving sins in the hands of frail and fallible men, and annex that forgiveness to fastings, confessions, penances, or any thing of a like nature. These things are entirely different from repentance, and men are unhappily deceived who trust in them. When our Saviour gave commission to his apostles, and established their authority in this manner, *John* xx. 23. *Whose soever sins ye retain they are retained, and whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them*; it is contrary to the strain of the gospel, and reason itself, to imagine, that he has invested a succession of fallible mortals with a power of pardoning sins, and especially upon conditions different from those which he has irrevocably fixed by his laws. The plain meaning is, that having received the Holy Ghost as their guide, the apostles had commission, by their doctrine, to declare the perpetual unalterable terms upon which sinners might obtain the justification of life; and on the other hand, that kind of disobedience which would fix them under a sentence of condemnation. But, indeed the mistake of those protestants is as pernicious, (and in some respects more criminal, because it is gone into against better means of knowledge) who found their hopes of acceptance, and the remission of sins, on merely external acts, on the publick instrumental duties of religion, on confessions and prayers, and the sacraments, without amendment of life; this is nothing but hypocrisy, it is mocking God and deceiving our own souls.

Secondly,

Secondly, It must be extreme folly, and infinitely dangerous, to delay the necessary work of repentance till the approach of death. This general persuasion is fixed in the minds of men, that repent they must some time or other, since without it their destruction is inevitable. But through the deceitfulness of sin their hearts are so hardened, and their affections so obstinately cleave to their vicious courses and worldly interests, they incline to put off that work, which however confessedly necessary, yet is disagreeable, to a more convenient season; and the most convenient they can pitch upon is, when they must leave this world, and the pleasures of sin can be no longer held.

A great many arguments might be insisted on, to shew the absurdity of such a conduct. Any one that considers the mutability of human affairs, the uncertainties to which they are liable, particularly the life of men; our own observation furnishing a multitude of instances of men dying without any opportunity, or even possibility, of preparing for death; or having any deliberate thoughts about the issues of it: any, I say, who considers this, must see that it is imprudent even to madness, to put our salvation on such a risque as the design and expectation of repenting on a death-bed. And as wise Providence, to guard against our postponing the work of our salvation, has placed the manner and circumstances of our dying wholly out of our view, and made them to us utterly uncertain, so the dispensation of grace and divine aids may be lost, and the Spirit of God grieved by their transgressions, will at last strive no more with sinners, who are become *altogether flesh*, incorrigibly corrupt, having by a custom of doing evil, hardened themselves into an utter insensibility: Does not experience shew, and the least reflexion on the nature of habits, that the longer repentance is delayed, the more difficult it becomes? And must not every one be sensible how inconsistent, and indeed disingenuous it is, to commit sin with an inten-

tion to be afterwards heartily sorry for it, if there were no more in repentance than sorrow for sin?

But the consideration to which my present subject particularly directs our thoughts, is, that repentance, as it has been in this discourse explained, signifying an actual reformation of life, breaking off our sins, and bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, in the approach of death, is impracticable: I have shewn you that according to the scriptural notion of it, it consists in a thorough universal change of the heart and affections, of the dispositions and manner of life; at least, newness of life is absolutely necessary according to the gospel-declarations. But in the case supposed, what opportunity is there for all this? To be grieved for our transgressions, to acknowledge them with shame, to change our inclinations and purposes, and declare, that if we were to live we would return to them no more, which is all the repentance dying men can exercise, is not to do what God indispensably requires as the terms of our acceptance, but to substitute something else in the place of it. Besides, if ever so great stress was to be laid on these things, the sincerity of them in dying men, is always liable to suspicion. How little can be attained of that calmness and deliberation which is necessary to them, and how natural is it to fear that in the present circumstances of distress and consternation, seemingly religious dispositions are only extorted by the immediate shocking apprehensions of death, and of a future punishment? We should not indeed take upon *us* to pronounce judgment against men, who having lived wickedly, do in the immediate views of death exercise all the repentance which is then possible for them; no doubt it is the best they can do, and it is most reasonable to press them to it. But the scriptural declarations are not calculated for that case, and for aught I see, give very little ground of comfort. Their evident design is, to awaken sinners out of their security, and urge them by the
strongest

strongest motives, while yet there is space given to repent, and to amend their doings, and that being the case of every one of us, what remains but that we apply it to it ourselves, diligently *minding in our day the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.*

DISCOURSE XV.

Of Self-Denial.

[ABERNETHY.]

MATTH. XVI. 24.

Then said Jesus unto his Disciples, if any Man will come after me, let him deny himself.

THESE words certainly contain what is of the greatest importance to all Christians, for it is an essential part of the christian character. Whatever is particularly meant by a man's denying himself, our Saviour expressly declares it, has a strict connexion with being his true disciple; the universality of the demand, and the indispensable necessity of complying with it, could not be more strongly expressed in words, *If any man*, any one of mankind, however distinguished, Jew or Gentile, of whatever sort or condition he be, will become a follower of mine, he must deny himself; on no other terms will I acknowledge him for my sincere and approved disciple. Let us therefore apply our minds to the serious consideration of that *self-denial* which the religion of Christ enjoins; and to assist you in it, I will endeavour in this discourse, *first*, to explain, and *secondly*, to vindicate it from any just imputation of severity, and shew the reasonableness of it.

First, the word *denying*, in its primary signification, means either an act of the understanding, refusing its assent

assent to a proposition laid before it; or an act of the will, refusing its consent to an application, request, or desire which is presented to it. From this last is borrowed the figurative expression of denying one's self. As there are various tendencies in our nature, various appetites, affections, and passions, prompting us to different actions, when the mind deliberating upon them, comes to a determination of choosing some, and rejecting others directly opposite, those which are so rejected, are said to be denied. And because the motions, however contrary, are all from within; for though the occasion, or the object, may be foreign, yet the propensity or the affection, we know is our own; therefore the thwarting and controuling such motions, is called a denial of ourselves. For example, when the lower appetites and inclinations, which the apostle *James* calls *lust*, comprehending them all under one denomination, when this, I say, comes in competition with conscience, and the virtuous affections; the one, or the other, must be denied; and they are both comprehended in ourselves: but it is the former our religion requires us to deny. To speak in the stile of the sacred writer just now referred to, when the conceptions of lust are entertained and carry the determination of the mind, then sin is brought forth, when conscience prevails, and the practical decision is on its side, then an act of christian self-denial is perfected.

This notion of a diversity of practical principles, or springs of action in the human heart, is familiar in the scriptures, and other moral writings; nor without it can we understand the practice of virtue in our present state, which is a state of trial and discipline. We meet in the antient moralists frequently, with a distinction between the rational and irrational, the merely sensitive and the intelligent, the inferior and the superior part of men. There are some parts of our constitution common to us with the brutal kinds; for the animal nature to answer the ends of its being, and

its preservation, is moved by instincts to pursue its proper objects ; but we are capable of reflection, which the brutes are not ; of considering the ends of those instincts, and thereby judging of the measures and limits within which their direction shall be followed ; and we are indued with higher faculties and affections, to which the other are subordinated ; and with liberty to pursue the nobler ends of our rational and moral powers. Hence arises the struggle between the motions and tendencies of these different principles, which every man may find in his own experience, as the apostle expresses it, *the spirit lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and these two are contrary, the one to the other* ; a virtuous disposition consists in the prevalence of the spirit or conscience, and a vicious temper in the predominancy of the lower appetites.

But, I know no author who carries this distinction farther, and states it more clearly, than the apostle *Paul* in the 7th chapter of his epistle to the *Romans*. He gives a very lively description, as in his own person, of two opposite interests or principles in one man : one called *sin that dwells in him, the body of sin and death*, comprehending the whole complex of inward temptations, which take their rise from the body, so intimately near, that a man finds them often working in his heart, to entice and draw him away : the other called I more properly the *man*, the rational self-judging agent, that has the absolute supremacy by the order of nature, the right of restraining the lower *self*, which the laws of our religion oblige us to deny. Again, *St. Paul* distinguishes these two contrary springs of action, by the names of the *law of the mind*, and *the law in the members*, warring against it : they both, in some sense, operate like laws with sanctions upon our hopes and fears of pleasure and pain ; but the former only, that of the mind, is the true law of our nature as well as of Christianity : and the
other,

other, to be brought into subjection, or its government to be denied.

It is not necessary to enumerate the particulars contained in this general head, *the self*, to be denied. Every man knows, for he is conscious of them, the appetites of his nature to sensible objects, and which pursue the pleasures of the external senses, they are in some weaker, in some stronger, even by their different constitutions; but all have them in some degree. We find likewise aversions to bodily pain, and other outward uneasinesses of various sorts, too many to be mentioned; and we find impulses of anger, a strong inclination attended with vehement motions in the body, to repel violence offered or harm received from a voluntary invader; which is properly an animal instinct, for it is seen in beasts as well as in men, intended originally by the author of nature, for the safety of the animal; but often carried beyond the bounds which that end prescribes.

But, besides the instincts originally planted in us for the preservation of the animal life, and which terminate there, there are other desires and propensities contracted from our knowledge of the world, and the common course of things in it, which are also a part of the *self* to be denied. When we have begun to tread the path of life, and are capable of observing the conditions of men, we obviously discern a disparity in them: some have much greater measures of power, honour, and wealth, than others; and the advantage of superiority in these respects is as easily seen, for it furnishes more abundantly the means of various enjoyment. Hence arises, though without any previous excitations in nature, strong desires, and an eager pursuit of riches and grandeur; which having no connection with the highest ends of our being, are to be retrenched by the law of the mind; for, when they are indulged, they grow up to the pernicious vices of covetousness and ambition; or what the apostle *John* calls *the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life*; emi-

nent branches of the love of the world, which he pronounces utterly inconsistent with the love of the Father, or true religion.

A multitude there are of other principles of action, or which have the force of principles, affections, passions, and determinations, of one kind or other in the human mind, which may be considered in the same view, that is, as objects of self-denial, because their tendencies often interfere with a right moral conduct, or with the duty of Christians. Fear sometimes brings a snare; sorrow is frequently immoderate, both often misleading men from the path of virtue, and drawing them into the most dangerous errors in practice. But I will not insist on these things particularly.

It is time we should consider what is meant by denying them, or whatever may be called *self*: and certainly it is not that we should extirpate any natural affection, appetite or passion. Our constitution is what God has been pleased to make it. In vain should we attempt to make any essential alteration, and it is impious to think, that he requires it; for it would be to reproach his work as if it were faulty, and endeavour to destroy it. But indeed our whole nature is wisely framed, and no part of it unnecessary, so far from being evil. Every passion, every appetite, every instinct in the mind has its particular use, as well as each member of the body; as any one may be convinced who attentively considers that matter. Nor have we power over the first motions of our instincts, any more than over their being. It is their nature to operate in suggesting to the mind what is agreeable to them, and so far we are no more voluntary accountable agents, than in animal actions and motions, which have no dependance at all upon our choice. Can it enter into any one's mind, that the uneasy sensations of hunger and thirst, with the simple desire of meat and drink, common to all animals, and preventing any thought or deliberation, that these are sins? The perfectly innocent *Jesus*, altogether free
from

from every kind and degree of moral evil, had them as other men have ; though sometimes it is certain the desire, but not without a voluntary indulgence, grows to a criminal excess ; which is the vice of intemperance. The same must be said concerning other natural appetites and passions, the first motions whereof are not faulty, though they may be the occasions of, or temptations to sin, when they are not duly regulated and restrained, which is the province of reason and conscience. But,

Secondly, It is exceeding plain, that self-denial imports our absolute refusal to comply with any motion or suggestion in our minds, from whatever quarter it springs, so far as to do what we know to be sinful. There are some cases, wherein perhaps it is difficult to fix the precise limits of right and wrong ; but there are others, wherein it is not difficult at all, and these by far the most numerous. Some actions are so expressly prohibited by the law of God, and have such a glaring turpitude and malignity, as strikes the mind at the first view of them ; as adultery, murder, theft ; the lust of a man's heart may entice him to all these. His lasciviousness may prompt him to the most odious act of impurity ; his covetousness may solicit him to steal ; his wrath may push him on to the most destructive outrages against his neighbour. But self-denial must pass for nothing at all, if it does not restrain such exorbitances ; and a man is abandoned to himself in the worst sense, conscience having utterly lost its sovereignty, unless it interposes to forbid, nay, and effectually to prevent, those finished heinous transgressions. Let me add here, that sin is not only completed in external acts : when the heart deliberately consents to the temptations, and a resolution passes of complying with it, the guilt of that wickedness is really contracted, though the outward act should never follow. Thus our Saviour in his sermon upon the mount, *Matt. v.* expounds the commandments

mandments of the moral law, in opposition to the short and defective comments of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, at the 22 *ver.* he pronounces anger resting in the bosom, and breaking out into provoking and insulting words, tho' there be no blood-shed, I say, he pronounces this to be a violation of the sixth commandment, whereby the penalty of disobedience is incur'd, and at the 28 *ver.* he states a plain case, wherein he expressly declares that adultery is already committed in the heart, without proceeding any further. In other parallel instances, the same judgment is to be made, and therefore we must conclude, that the precept of self-denial reaches to the preventing sinful purposes of heart, as well as the perpetration of outward evil actions. And in this case to deny ourselves, is no more than what *St. Paul* tells us the gospel, or the grace which brings salvation, was intended to teach men; that is, to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts; as well as the acts of impiety and vice, to which they solicit us.

Thirdly, There are no appetites, desires, and passions, planted in the human nature, but what tend to an innocent, if it be a moderate gratification. The fault lies only in the excess; or in transgressing those limits which the obvious reason of things, or the laws of God have set to the affections, the pursuit and enjoyment. The desire of eating and drinking may be lawfully gratified, so far as the necessity of life requires, but in being *drunk with wine there is excess*, as the apostle speaks; indulging appetite in such a measure as to oppress nature, and render us unfit for rational, manly, pious, virtuous and charitable exercises: this is sinful, and ought to be denied. Natural affection to parents, to brothers and sisters, and to children is innocent; nay virtuous; and to be without it is one of the worst of characters: but it becomes criminal when it prevails to such a degree, that thro' the influence of our dearest relatives, or a solicitude for their interest,

interest, we desert our duty to God. Here the province of self-denial is very plain. It is to restrain our appetites, desires, and passions within due bounds, so as to preserve the supremacy of conscience; their just share to the higher affections in forming our tempers, and their proper influence in the direction of our conduct. And if the instincts of nature are to be so far under government, our obligation must be as great with respect to propensities we have contracted, which are sometimes strong even as nature itself, taking their rise from prejudice, custom, and false notions, which we have imbibed thro' inattention. And,

Lastly, It should be our constant care, that our thoughts do not unduly dwell on the objects of the lower appetites and passions; for the tendency of this is to strengthen our affections to them, and increase their influence on our practice. We cannot hinder the first impressions of these objects, nor the first motions of our affections and desires to them: but the entertaining them in our thoughts, and meditating upon them is more voluntary. The imagination is often employed actively in colouring them, and setting them off with advantage; in forming scenes of pleasure which heighten desire, and various projects in order to fulfil it. This might be in a great measure restrained, by a careful attention and purpose of heart to exercise our thinking powers in a better and more proper manner: but when our vain thoughts lodge within us, and the fancy, not corrected by reason, heightens the apparent agreeableness of tempting objects, the mind is thereby betrayed into a compliance with the motions of lusts beyond the bounds which God's law has set us: and this by frequent indulgence grows into habit, which becomes a strong principle of action, forming the temper, and depriving the superior powers of their just dominion.

As this is the natural progress of sin, whereby it advances to its reign in our mortal bodies, bringing
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the soul into the most abject slavery; in opposition to it, self-denial become habitual would recover us to true freedom, restoring the sovereignty of reason and conscience. And the acquiring of such a habit I would principally recommend as the very perfection of our obedience to our Saviour's command in the text. It is acquired as all other habits are, by customary practice or frequently repeated acts. Let us then arm ourselves with strong resolution, and in pursuance of it, accustom ourselves to watch over the first tendencies of appetite and passion; to examine carefully the report of the imagination concerning them; to suspend our consent to their motions, till we have maturely weighed and compared them with the just rules of action, and seen them agreeable; peremptorily to reject their demands when conscience gainsays, or is doubtful; and resolutely to oppose their dominion. When this kind of discipline is habitual to us, the difficulties of self-denial are conquered, and the practice of our duty is easy.

Indeed, when men have long gone on in an evil course, and have been used to indulge every appetite without controul, their first essays in the way of self-denying virtue will be painful to them. The * prophet *Jeremiah* compares the impotence of mind to act worthily, which is contracted by vicious habits, to natural impossibilities. *As the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots, so they who have been accustomed to do evil, cannot learn to do well*: which, at least, imports a very great difficulty. But even this difficulty is not altogether unconquerable. Strong virtuous resolutions, by the assistance of divine grace, have got the better of very bad habits. The conquest however cannot be obtained without a struggle; and they who will break off their sins by repentance, and return to the paths of righteousness, must lay their account to meet with pain and uneasiness, especially at the beginning. To this imperfect state of

* Jer. xiii. 23.

men's minds are accomodated the scripture representations of this duty, which describe it under the notions of *mortifying the deeds of the body and crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts* †. Our Saviour uses the figurative expressions of ‡ *plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right hand*, which mean the same thing with denying ourselves, only signifying, that violence must be done to vicious and worldly inclinations confirm'd by habit, and the reluctance arising from their prevalence in the heart must be overcome, be it ever so painful. This is the disadvantage which attends our infancy in a virtuous state; and therefore the scripture account of self-denial under the idea of mortification was well adapted to the new disciples of Christ in the first age, as it is to others in every age, whose condition is parallel in respect of weakness.

But Christians should always be growing up to perfection in every virtue: and in order to that increasing in self-denial, which it may be expected will go on the more successfully, because it still becomes more easy. And indeed it may be very useful for Christians of the highest attainments who are zealously pressing on to perfection, by a customary severity towards their inferior appetites, to lay restraints upon their liberty, within the limits of what is strictly lawful, that they may the more effectually restore and preserve a dominion over themselves, that thereby they may be the more steadfast, abounding in the work of the Lord. This kind of discipline St. Paul used, as he tells 1 Cor. ix. 27. *I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection*; that is, as appears from the preceding verses, by denying myself liberty in the use of indifferent things, in order to my being less incumber'd, and proceeding with greater expedition in the christian race; and that I may the better secure to myself the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

† Gal. v. 24.

‡ Matt. v. 29.

Secondly, I come now to vindicate this precept of self-denial from any just imputation of severity; and shew the reasonableness of it. This precept of Christianity has been objected against by men who attend more to the sound than the meaning of words, and are ready to lay hold on the first slender appearances of an argument against religion, without examining them thoroughly. They alledge, it is unnatural to require that men should deny themselves; that is, subdue, renounce, and mortify the desires and passions which God has planted in their hearts, to no purpose, unless to make them uneasy, if they are not to be gratified. Such reasoning will have very little weight with serious attentive minds: for the weakness of it presently appears when we look into the constitution of our nature itself. Who does not feel interfering tendencies in his own heart; desires at once to different objects, desires, which cannot be gratified at once, but one necessarily must yield to another? What then shall we take upon us to censure the work of God our maker, as an inconsistent self-contradictory system? Shall we say to him that formed us, why hast thou made me thus, with inclinations not to be satisfied; particularly, with desires of sensual and worldly enjoyment; with desires of revenge, or rather of self-defence, perverted by our own fault into revenge; and at the same time with affections of a quite different tendency, and with conscience, which remonstrates against the gratifying of our lower desires in many instances, and torments us if we do not restrain them? What then? Where is the inconsistency in all this? I hope the variety which appears in our constitution, is no argument against the wisdom and goodness of the author, since there is provision made for order and harmony, and for a high, a rational happiness to be obtain'd by us, if we will preserve that subordination in the exercise of our powers and affections, which the frame of nature itself clearly points to. But I need not carry the argument so far,

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my present subject does not require a defence of the foundations of natural religion and morality, it is enough to rest the defence of Christianity, that part of it I am now considering, upon them. Let us then take the constitution of human nature, as in fact we find it to be ; and, I think, every considerate person will be convinced, that according to it, we cannot be happy, but in the practice of virtue, and that we cannot practise virtue without self-denial. Now shall we find fault with the author of our religion for requiring us to do what our own reason requires, and without which we cannot have peace in our own minds, nor any hopes of a future felicity ?

Again, if we consider the life of man, as it now is within the limits of the present state, abstracting from the consideration of religious virtue, and of a future condition of being, we shall find that self-denial is necessary to our obtaining the ends of it ; and that this is a precept of prudence as well as Christianity. Man in his present state, which to every one who considers it attentively will appear to be a state of probation and discipline, may be considered in two different capacities, the natural and the religious ; between which there is a remarkable analogy : both are under the government of divine providence ; both terminate in such happiness as we are capable of, but of different kinds ; the one aims at, and has its complete end in our highest felicity, which consists in the perfection of virtue and righteousness ; the other, the natural capacity, pursues the greatest ease, prosperity, or enjoyment, which in the whole can be attained here : the attaining of these different ends, in a great measure depends upon ourselves. As virtue is improveable, and by degrees grows up to perfection by our own diligence ; so every one sees in the fruition of life, our interest is carried on, and our temporal happiness advanced by the proper exercise of our own powers, and the prudent diligent use of such means as providence puts into our hands. Both are obstructed by

the same means, and both promoted by the same means. The great impediments to our interests in this world, I mean the regular and successful prosecution of them, are appetites and passions, especially when confirmed by habits. Who is the man that enjoys life, easily attains to a comfortable worldly estate, and to a high reputation? not surely the glutton, the drunkard, the sluggard, the proud, the revengeful, and the cruel; or that any other way gives an unbounded liberty to his lusts and his passions; but, on the contrary, he that is master of himself, that can thwart his humours, bridle his inclinations, and deny his ease, or other sensual gratifications; and the same are the means of advancing to moral perfection. We see then that God, as the master of our lives and worldly estates, the guardian of our present condition of being, has taught us to deny ourselves; and that by the same kind of discipline which is necessary to our being wise in our present generation, we are inured to, and prepared for the best and most important wisdom, even that which is unto salvation.

Let us consider how great, how noble the ends of virtue, of moral perfection and the future happiness, are above those of the present life; and if wisdom requires our denying our appetites and passions for the latter, shall we complain of it as a hardship to submit to the same self-denial for the other? Is he justly counted a fool with respect to his concerns in this world, who will not curb his appetite of thirst to prevent or cure a dropsy; who will sacrifice a reasonable prospect of lawful gain to sloth and laziness; or who to gratify a little peevish resentment, will throw himself out of the way of rising to an honourable station in his country? and what shall we think of the man, who will wilfully indulge himself in these or such like passions, at the expence of his integrity, the inward peace of his mind, and his hopes of heaven?

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Thus you see, that this precept, so far from being an unreasonable imposition on the liberties of mankind, is excellently accommodated to the constitution and the state of human nature, nay, and absolutely necessary to the attaining its true ends. But our Saviour has made it a part of his religion, and he has enforced it with peculiar motives. It will always have great weight with every sincere disciple of Christ, that this is, by his own express declaration, an essential part of that character, and an indispensible condition, without which we cannot expect his approbation: *If any man will come after me let him deny himself.* Whatever you do in compliance with the christian institution, must pass for nothing, if this one duty be neglected. Though you believe the gospel, and profess it zealously, contend for the faith, and be ever so assiduous in attending all the positive appointments of religion; what will all avail unless you learn to deny yourselves?

Farther we may observe, that as divine wisdom shines in all our Saviour's instructions, so particularly his enforcement of this duty is adapted in the best manner to our state of infirmity and temptation. When men are vehemently urged to indulge their appetites and passions, as in the case of bad habits, or of some peculiarly strong worldly attachments, as when the interest of a tenderly beloved friend comes in competition with our duty; so that the soliciting affection is as dear as a right hand or an eye, in that case the mind, under a violent hurry and perturbation, cannot calmly attend to more ingenuous considerations, and therefore a stronger remedy is applied; the terrors of the Lord are set against the allurements of the flesh, and we are dissuaded from gratifying ourselves by the fear of future punishment. Thus our Saviour, supposing an inward cause of offence to tempt us very violently, and that so strong is our affection, we are as unwilling to renounce it as to suffer the amputation of a bodily member, even that itself

would be submitted to for saving life, and here a greater necessity is laid upon us; for we have no other choice than either to bear the uneasiness of denying present gratifications, or suffer the dreadful penalty of God's eternal displeasure, * *It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, or halt, or having one eye, than having two hands, and two feet, and two eyes, to be cast into hell fire, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.* And,

Lastly, The example of our great master himself is proposed to us. It is said of him, *Rom. xv. 3. That he pleased not himself.* He had no irregular appetites to gratify; but the same sensibility to the ease and innocent pleasures of life as other men: but he denied them, submitting to hunger and thirst, and weariness in attending the work his Father sent him to the world for, that is, glorifying him, and doing good. He was denied to the honour and esteem among men, which he had the best title to, enduring the contradiction of sinners, and bearing grievous reproach; and even to life itself, which he sacrificed to the cause of truth and holiness, and for the redemption of mankind. If then we *abide in him*, let us walk as he did, and follow his example.

* Mark ix. 43,--48.

DISCOURSE XVI.

Rules for the profitable reading the
Holy Scriptures.

[F O S T E R.]

JOHN V. 39.

Search the Scriptures.---

AS mankind are endued with moral powers, and consequently accountable creatures, it necessarily follows, that they had always a law or rule of action *sufficient* to direct their conduct. The *original* and *universal* law was what we call the law, or religion of nature: this their *reason* was capable of discovering; and it would have taught them, if they had consulted, and carefully attended to it, the being and perfections of God, his providential government of the world, the duties they owed to him and one another, and which related to the right government of their affections and appetites; and, in short, how to behave in the various circumstances and relations of human life. In like manner, it would have furnished proper motives to a regular and virtuous conduct,——from the excellency of virtue in itself;——its necessary tendency to the perfection and happiness of human nature, and the good of society;——and by giving a well grounded hope, in some way or other worthy his infinite wisdom, and concern for the

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rectitude and order of the moral world, of the special protection and favour of their Creator, and supreme Governour.

But notwithstanding this wise provision, by the natural light planted in every man's mind, the world became, in fact, *grossly* and almost *universally* depraved; ran into deplorable ignorance of God; into childish and very dishonourable conceptions of his nature and attributes; into idolatry, and an absurd, hurtful, and endless superstition; and their *religion* corrupted their morals. It was not because their reason was, *in itself*, insufficient to direct to better sentiments of things, but because it was not *improved* and *cultivated*. However, as mankind was really thus corrupted, and had lost, in a great measure, the knowledge of the true religion of nature, the expediency and usefulness of a revelation was not at all the less, merely because reason, if rightly exercised, was capable of discovering all the necessary principles of morality; nay, indeed, the advantage of it is altogether as evident, as it would have been, if men were *unavoidably* ignorant of the great truths of religion. For how they came to be out of the way is not the question, whether it proceeded from a defect in their natural powers, or from want of attention, and not using these powers as they ought; in both cases, 'tis certain, they *needed* to be set right again, and recovered to a just sense of their duty, and happiness: and accordingly God was pleased graciously to interpose, and give a revelation suited to the *circumstances* and *necessities* of an ignorant and degenerate world: but tho' this revelation was an unspeakable privilege *at first*, by putting a stop to superstition and wickedness, and diffusing light and knowledge amongst men; tho' it may *still* be of the utmost use, to the bulk of mankind, as a *standing rule*, by supplying them constantly with proper thoughts, which is what the common people, in all ages, have most wanted, and prescribing a plain, intelligible, and compleat rule of morals; notwithstanding, I say, that

revelation is so desirable a blessing, and may answer such valuable purposes, it is certain that men may pervert it, as well as extinguish their reason; and that if it be neglected and not examined into with care and impartiality, it will be, just as that natural light was, and is at present, in the more ignorant and superstitious parts of the world, *dark* and *useless*: of which the monstrous corruptions of Christianity in *Papish* countries, equal to any corruptions of natural religion; in the most barbarous *Heathen* nations, are a notorious and unanswerable proof.

It is indeed a principle of their faith, that the common people are not to examine into their religion; but take it *implicitly* from the church: and it must be allowed, that this is a necessary principle to establish *anticristian tyranny* over the consciences of men, and support schemes of doctrine which bid defiance to reason, and are inconsistent with the whole design and tenour of revelation: these things will not bear the light, nor stand a free and impartial trial, and therefore are sheltered under the covert of ignorance and darkness. But can any thing be more absurd than such a conduct as this? Does it not derogate, in the highest degree, from the excellency and perfection of the scriptures? is it not a very unworthy and injurious reflection on the wisdom and goodness of God? Nay, does it not entirely destroy all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation?

It will be needless to enter into a large proof of these things in any nation where *light* and *liberty* prevails, and persons have a just notion of their rights, either as *men*, or as *Christians*. For if God gives any revelation at all, the common sense of mankind determines that it must, in all essential and important branches of it, be a plain and easy rule; obvious to the capacities of all for whose benefit it is designed. For what is the end of a revelation? Is it not to instruct the ignorant, and consequently to lay down plain principles for directing and regulating their behaviour? Or is it to amuse and confound their minds yet more

with *deep subtilties*, with *perplexed* and *intricate* speculations? A revelation that is not intelligible is as much a contradiction, as to say darkness is light. And there is an unanswerable force in the common argument used upon this occasion, *viz.* either that God *could not* reveal himself clearly in those points which are of the greatest consequence to mankind, or that he *would not*: the former of these reflects upon his *wisdom*, the latter on his *goodness*; so that either way, the supposition is unworthy of God, and dishonourable to his perfections; since it represents him as a very *weak*, or else as a *capricious ill-natur'd* being, who intended not to assist, but bewilder his creatures, and lead them in a maze of uncertainty and confusion.

Again, a revelation that is dangerous to be read, and can't be trusted to the reason and judgment of mankind, that needs to be *illustrated*, *corrected*, or *supplied* by a *living infallible oracle*, and *judge of controversies*, is altogether as insignificant as no revelation at all. If men have a *standing rule* to have recourse to, it is, at least, possible, that if they seriously consider and search into it, they may frame just notions of things, a rational scheme to act upon: But if they are *blindly* to follow their spiritual guides, and swallow all their doctrines *implicitly*, they are liable to endless impostures; and can have no guard against the most *stupid enthusiasm*, nor even against *irreligion* itself.

Finally, a revelation designed for *general* use, which is evidently the case of the Christian, must be chiefly calculated for the bulk of mankind, and adapted to their capacities. The *ingenious* and *thinking* part have, in every age, been a very few; and the generality, persons of *little reflection*, who must be instructed in the most easy and familiar manner, and taught their duty with the greatest plainness and simplicity. To assert therefore that the scriptures are obscure, and unintelligible, full of mystery and darkness, renders them quite useless as an *universal* rule; and conse-

consequently defeats the very end of their being written, which was *general* instruction; And to deny the reading of them to the *common people* is to deny it to those, for whose benefit they were more directly and immediately intended. This is the manifest reason of the thing.

Agreeably hereto, we find the scripture itself is so far from *debarring* the people of this right, that it *insists* upon it, and *encourages* it in the strongest terms. There are no distinctions of persons, some to *lead*, and others *absolutely* to *submit* to their interpretations and decisions; but the exhortations and instructions are *general*. They were not the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, and *Doctors* of the law, but the *common sort* of *Jews* to whom our Saviour said in the text, *search the scriptures*; nay, whom he supposes not only capable of understanding the *plain* doctrines and laws of the Old Testament, but the more *obscure* and *intricate* parts of it, the prophecies relating to the Messiah; *search the scriptures, they are they that testify of me*: and for this the people of *Berea* are greatly commended, *viz.* for not believing the apostles themselves implicitly, but, *searching the scriptures daily, whether these things were so*. This practice of theirs is represented as the mark of a *noble* and *ingenuous* mind; whereas the contrary springs from abject and slavish prejudice. In like manner *St. Paul* speaks of *Timothy*, and describes it as what had been of great advantage to him, *that from a child he had known the holy scriptures*. And of those same scriptures he says, that they were able to *make him wise unto salvation*; and again, *all scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*. Now if it was the duty of *all* to search into the *Jewish* scriptures, and even into dark prophecies, the common people must certainly be proper judges of, and consequently obliged to examine into, the plain facts, doctrines, and moral precepts of Christianity, Nay,

it can't be reconcil'd to the wisdom of God, to suppose, that the *best* and most *perfect* revelation of his will is not also the *clearest* and *fullest*; or that the same characters of being *profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness*, which render it fit to be perused and studied by all, do not belong to that in a much higher degree, than they did to a *preparatory* revelation of *inferior* consequence, and more *limited* extent.

And as the right of all the people to search the scripture is evident, founded in reason, and strongly assisted in revelation itself; so are the advantages of it.—Reading the scriptures with seriousness and diligence, is the natural way for men to form a *consistent* and *rational* scheme of belief and practice, just notions of God, and of the extent of religious and moral obligations: by this means, they will have a *strait, easy* rule to go by, and build their hopes of happiness upon a solid foundation: whereas the want of it has introduced *incomprehensible* and *senseless* articles of faith, doctrines prejudicial to *morality*, *dark* and *gloomy* notions of God, and *superstitious* fears destructive of the peace and comfort of men's minds.—Reading the scriptures with impartiality, will inspire sincere and honest minds with *humanity* and *benevolence*, with *moderation* and *forbearance* in lesser differences: but the neglect of it occasions hot and angry controversies, blind and violent disputes, and a zeal without *knowledge* or *discretion*.—Again, by this means common Christians will better understand the *grounds* of their faith, and consequently be more firmly established in it: they will be more fully acquainted with the *intrinsic* excellence of the doctrines of Christianity, and the strength and force of its *external* evidence; and so be believers, not upon the foot of *tradition* and *authority*, which confirms all religions equally, but upon rational conviction and choice: they will also find it much more easy to detect the sophistry and false reasoning of its adversaries; whose
practice

practice it is (and in that they must soon be discovered by such as study the scriptures) to expose and argue against the corruptions and extravagancies of *party-schemes* as true Christianity.

But the greatest motive of all to a diligent search of the holy scriptures, is that mentioned in the text, that in them we *believe we have eternal life*: therein we have an assurance of a happy immortality, as the reward of true piety and virtue, which to reason is very *obscure* and *doubtful* at least, if at all *probable*. Reason may discover something, *in general*, of a future state of rewards, but gives very little ground to expect that they will be *eternal*: This is the *unspeakable gift* of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. As therefore the gospel is the only sure foundation we have of this glorious hope, we should read it frequently for the satisfaction and comfort of our minds, and carefully examine upon what terms we may hope to be entitled to it: this is the most important interest of our being, and should therefore be the chief object of our study. An error here may be of fatal consequence, which renders our utmost diligence necessary. And as these sacred writings contain the rule by which we shall be judged, and have our eternal condition determined, need any thing be added to excite us to search into them with the greatest exactness, as for the most excellent and beneficial knowledge; and with the greatest impartiality, that we may not be imposed on in so high and momentous a concern. Indolence or negligence, in this great point, is certainly most unaccountable and unpardonable stupidity. But I must content myself with just mentioning these things, that I may proceed to what I chiefly design'd, and judge to be the most useful part of a discourse on this subject, *viz.* to lay down some rules for the profitable reading the scriptures. By not observing these rules men have lost all the advantages of this study; and besides from hence have risen all those inconveniences,
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which have been represented as the natural consequence of allowing the use of them to the common people, and urg'd as arguments against it.

The first thing that I would recommend is, that we come to the search with honest and unprejudiced minds. In order to the finding out truth in the great points that relate to moral practice, *an acute understanding* is not so necessary as *a sincere upright heart*; and even the *plainness* of the rule itself does not contribute more towards it, than *integrity* and *impartiality* in those who are to be guided by it. *Prejudice* will pervert and darken the plainest rule. And therefore if men apply to the study of the scriptures with minds prepossess'd in favour of any particular scheme; if they take it for granted, before they have examined, that this is the religion of the Bible; all they have to do is, in the best manner they can, to *accommodate* scripture to it. By their being thus pre-determined, all farther light is precluded; passages of scripture are strained, and tortured, and darkned by *unnatural* comments; because men search the scripture not to find out the sense of *that*, but to make it speak *their own* sense. But, on the contrary, if their minds are free and disengaged, and they have no concern but for truth, the rule of scripture is so plain in all essential points, that they can hardly, with an ordinary degree of judgment, mistake it. In the natural course of things, such an honest ingenuous temper, divested of all prejudice, all attachment to favourite opinions, will lead to the knowledge of every necessary truth, and secure from dangerous and hurtful errors: it is indeed the surest ground-work and foundation of proficiency in divine knowledge; without which, the greatest abilities will serve but to *confound* and *puzzle* a man the more, as they furnish a thousand little evasions, and help him to give plausible colours to falsehood, and consequently will carry him so much the farther from the end propos'd.

2dly, In all our searches into scripture, let us keep this rule constantly in view, that revelation is founded on *reason*, and *natural religion*; and therefore that none of the peculiar doctrines of reveal'd religion can subvert that, or contradict any of its principles. The religion of nature is eternal, immutable truth, of certain and indispensable authority, and, consequently, can't be superseded, or, in the least, altered by external revelation: and if men had always thought of this, they would never have entertained opinions, upon a *pretended scripture warrant*, dishonourable to God, and destructive of the very principles of morality: they would never, for instance, have looked on any thing as the revealed truth of God, which is inconsistent with his unity, the fundamental article of all religion; never have magnified faith above virtue; or made true piety consist in outward formality; in an idle, useless superstition; nay, in a violent, injurious zeal, that tramples upon the obligation of justice and charity. They would never, from a few *obscure passages rigorously* interpreted, nay, from the *mere sound* of words, have conceived of the Deity as severe and implacable, slow to be appeas'd, but easy to be affronted; or as an arbitrary sovereign, whose will is his only law; and who, without any regard to their several qualifications, has absolutely determined the happiness of a few of his creatures, and consign'd over all the rest, vastly the greater number, to irremediable and endless misery. Had men, I say, form'd just notions of natural religion, and consider'd all its principles as of invariable and necessary truth, they could never have imagin'd scripture to contain such sentiments as these, which are evidently repugnant to reason; and, especially, to what the light of nature teaches concerning the unlimited goodness of the great Creator, which is so visible in the frame of the universe, and the general course of providence. Such *injudicious* interpreters of scripture little consider, how
much

how much they reproach revelation itself by fathering those absurd doctrines upon it, as well as abuse their own understandings: for the religion of nature cannot but be *true*? what then is the consequence of making any particular revelation oppose and undermine it, but that that revelation is necessarily *false*?

3^{dly}, In interpreting scripture always regard the *general scope* and *design* of it. Let those who have leisure read whole books at once, or at least, to the end of proper periods, that they may have an entire and connected view of the things contained in them. For it must give us but confused ideas to break off in the midst of a narration, or jumble together parts of different facts; so likewise to read only select portions out of epistles, and those, perhaps, injudiciously chosen, when there is *one design* pursued in the whole, and a continued *reference* throughout. Be careful likewise to attend to the *connection* of the writer, and the thread of his reasoning. For, in all writings, *independent* passages may be urged to serve all manner of purposes; by which means the gravest and most judicious authors may be forced to talk *ludicrously*, and *inconsistently*; and the best and most useful books, which are written with the strictest regard to virtue, be made to countenance *vice* and *impiety*.

And, indeed, it has happened, that the holy scriptures, of all other books, have been most grossly perverted and abused this way. Common writings have, in the main, and unless in the heat of controversy, been treated with fairness and candour enough: but the writings of the Old and New Testament, by picking out of them *little scraps*, and *separate portions*, (which can't be understood but by attending to their connection, nor urged as proofs of any thing, in opposition to the general view of the revelation, without rendering it perfectly unintelligible and useless) the sacred writings, I say, by being thus *mangled* and *torn to pieces*, have been represented as teaching the
 most

most absurd, nay, indeed, very impious and immoral doctrines. The building doctrines therefore upon *single texts* may lead us into great and dangerous mistakes. I might illustrate this by a multitude of examples; but I would not be tedious, and therefore shall confine myself to one instance, *viz.* the words of the prophet *Jeremiah*, *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?*

This passage, divided from the context, and considered as a general independent proposition, has been used to as strange a purpose as one can well imagine, *viz.* to prove that men are not acquainted with themselves; that tho' *self-consciousness* be inseparable from, and the distinguishing excellence and privilege of their being rational, they are strangers to their own hearts, know not what their own views and intentions are, nor what the prevailing habits and dispositions of their minds. This hasty conclusion, I say, has been drawn from these words (which if it was applied to *civil affairs*, as it is to religion, must create the utmost confusion) not only in opposition to the general sense and experience of mankind, but quite contrary to the design of the author himself. This will evidently appear if we consider the connection, and the general reasoning that he is pursuing.

For, in the 5th verse, God is introduced as denouncing a woe against all those who fix their ultimate dependence on human power and policy. In the 7th and 8th verses is described the wisdom and happiness of trusting in the Lord, and making him our strength. Then follows the text we are considering, which by all rules of good interpretation (since there is not the least mark of the prophet's beginning *a new topic* of discourse) must be referred to the same argument, and contain another strong reason against making man our confidence; *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?* i. e. "There may be infinite *devices* and *subtilties* in the hearts of men, which thou can'st not understand: while

“ while they promise thee fair, and make the warm-
 “ est protestations of affection and zeal for thy service,
 “ their intentions may be the contrary, and their *views*
 “ *private* and *selfish*: their resolutions are fickle and
 “ mutable, and many little circumstances may prevail
 “ with them to change their purposes; and so ren-
 “ der their promises vain and delusory. Nay, it is
 “ possible for them to arrive at such a pitch of
 “ *premeditated* and *desperate* wickedness, as to endea-
 “ vour, even under *friendly* pretences, to undermine
 “ their interest. Place not therefore thy supreme and
 “ ultimate confidence in man, but repose it in the un-
 “ changeable God; who, as by reason of the perfect
 “ and necessary rectitude of his nature he can’t de-
 “ ceive thee, so as he is absolute Lord of the universe,
 “ and the uncontroulable disposer of all events, he
 “ must be able with ease to effect every thing that is
 “ necessary for thy security and happiness.”

To the directions above-mention’d about observing
 the general design of scripture, and the connection of
 particular passages, which is necessary in interpreting
 all writings whatever; let me add, that it is proper
 for us to make some allowances for the *difference* of
 languages, and the *peculiar phrases* and *idioms* used by
 the people for whom the scriptures were *originally* and
 more *immediately* designed. I shall explain this a little
 by the words *for ever*, and *everlasting*, which are far
 from having the same force, in the sacred writings, as
 they generally have in our own language. For it is
 certain that they do not always signify a *strict* and *ab-*
*solu*te eternity, but very frequently a *limited* duration;
 and the sense of them is, in a great measure, to be
 determined by the subjects to which they are applied.
 Thus every one allows, that when we read of *ever-*
lasting mountains, the word means very differently from
 what it does when God is said to be *everlasting*. Again,
 when it is said of Christ, that *he shall reign over the*
house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall
be no end, we are to understand no more by it, than
 that

that he shall reign to the end of the world; for *then*, we are expressly inform'd by St. Paul, *he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father;--that God may be all in all.* In like manner, when we are told that Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth for an example, *suffering the vengeance of eternal fire*, nothing more is meant than a fire that made a full end of them, and was not extinguished, till those cities, with their inhabitants, were utterly consumed. In these passages, and in some others, which seldom regard things of real importance, we must allow for the *change* of languages, and *different use* of words; and the common people will, without much difficulty, fall into the true interpretation of all passages of this kind, if they follow but the natural and easy method of comparing one part of scripture with another.

4thly, Another rule of great importance is, to explain *dark figurative* passages, parables, metaphors, allegories, &c. by such as are *plain*, and their sense *uncontestable*. Those parts of scripture, which are express'd in the clearest and most simple manner, give a complete and rational account of the perfections and providence of God, and a noble scheme of morality. And explaining *dark* passages in a book, which, it is generally believed, can contain no contradictions and inconsistencies, by such as are *plain* and *indisputable*, must be allowed to be the most natural method of interpreting it. And if the common people take care to follow this method, and make any use of their reason, they can't be misled, by the *peculiar stile* and *phrase*, of scripture, into unworthy conceptions of God, or mistake the general nature of true religion. Whereas, if they *strain* figures to their utmost height, and put parables and metaphors upon the *rack*, they may, indeed, extort *strange* senses from them, and draw the most *wild* and *extravagant* conclusions.

In *figurative* ways of speaking there is one grand point intended, which is, generally, obvious to a fair enquirer:

enquirer : if he goes beyond this, and argues strictly and rigorously from every circumstance, what may he not deduce from scripture this way ? Thus when the conversion and sanctification of a sinner is stiled the *re-generation*, and *the new creature*, the general design of these expressions is only this, that he entered upon a new kind of life, has thoroughly chang'd his principles and methods of acting ; and is, indeed, in the temper of his mind, and prevailing dispositions, *quite another creature*, from what he was before. But is it not most unaccountable, that any should strain this metaphor so prodigiously, as to make mankind mere *machines*, who can do no more towards their reformation from sin to virtue, than a dead body towards restoring itself to life, or a creature towards giving itself being ; and, thereby, render all the exhortations and commands of the gospel to repent, and turn from our evil ways, *impertinent* and *trifling* ? The folly of this forced and unnatural method of interpreting is clearly seen in other instances, and universally allow'd ; for when it is said, that *the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night*, who ever imagined, upon the bare force of this metaphor, that it will be attended with injustice and violence ? And the true reason why men think justly on the *one*, and not on the *other* is, that in the one case they proceeded *impartially*, and, being under no *biass*, take the natural and most obvious sense of scripture ; whereas, in the other, their judgment is already determined in favour of some *party scheme*, which they take all opportunities and all advantages to support.

5thly, I would advise those who want leisure, opportunity, and, perhaps, capacity for *critical* enquiries, to read chiefly the plain parts of scripture ; those, especially which describe the perfections and providence of God, or contain practical instructions, and gospel motives and encouragements to virtue ; and to trouble themselves but little about doubtful passages that

that are only *incidental*, and have no immediate connection with the *grand design* of the revelation. For if Christianity be rightly understood in its *practical* doctrines, and as it is a *moral* rule, which, without doubt, must be the chief intention of any revelation; other obscurities, about ancient customs, manners, sects, philosophy, &c. nay, about any points merely *speculative*, signify just nothing. For as God would never have given a revelation, if the errors of the world had not been of a *practical* nature, but consisted only in absurd *theories*: so differences about such things may always continue, nay the bulk of the world may know but little about them, and yet all the ends and uses of the Christian revelation, as a standing rule, be completely answered. Those who have time, and proper abilities, may commendably employ their thoughts about these lesser matters; but others, who have neither a genius, nor opportunities for speculation, act wisely in not meddling with it, but confining themselves to more important and essential points.

In the last place, as the great end of revelation must be to promote the practice of virtue, we learn from hence a sure rule, by which to judge of the *importance* of the several doctrines of it: we should lay no stress upon any but as it tends to promote a holy life, and upon all, just in proportion to their tendency to this great and desirable end. And, upon this foot, what will become of most of the *controversies*, that have been so furiously agitated in the Christian world, in which the *best* part of religion is not at all concerned? Learn then to employ your chief zeal about the *weightier matters of the law, doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God*; and be but little solicitous about speculative opinions, and matters of *doubtful disputation*. Follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another: For then only will you have studied the scriptures to a right purpose, when ye have purified your souls, in obeying the truth thro' the spirit, unto un-

feigned love of the brethren; and learned to practise the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

I have nothing farther to add, but to commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

DISCOURSE XVII.

Our Lord's Temptations in the Wilderness considered.

[MASON.]

MAT. iv. 11.

Then the Devil leaveth him, and behold Angels came and ministered unto him.

I Have chosen these words (which conclude the detail of our Lord's temptations in the wilderness) with a view to give you a few plain observations, both critical and practical, on this extraordinary passage of the gospel history.

To which purpose, it will be proper for us carefully to peruse the whole narrative as it here stands, from ver. 1---11. *Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights he was afterwards an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their*

hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

It is generally supposed, that the several speeches and transactions which are here said to have passed between our Lord and the devil, were real fact; or that every thing which we are told was said and done by the tempter to our Saviour, was actually said and done just in the manner as it is here related. And what hath contributed not a little, I believe, to the currency of this opinion, is *Milton's* chusing this passage in the gospel history, for the subject of his *Paradise Regained*.

But from this method of construction there arise such difficulties and embarrassments, as I never could see removed or cleared up by any commentator I have consulted. For instance:

1. If we suppose every thing to have actually happened as here related, the very end and design of this part of the gospel history seems to be intirely defeated. This particular record of our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness, was intended to put us on our guard against the subtle insinuations of the crafty enemy of our souls, and to teach us, from the example of our Saviour, in what manner to repel them. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us, that our *great high priest was in all points tempted as we are* * : but if we take the history before us in its

* Heb. iv. 15.

literal construction, we find he was tempted in a very different manner from what we are. And therefore there being no likenefs at all between our Saviour's temptations and ours, his example cannot afford us all the direction, encouragement, and support it was intended to convey. Nay

2. Upon this supposition, it does not appear that he was under any temptation at all, at least, not under any so dangerous as those with which we are frequently assaulted; for the great advantage which the devil gains over us, in those temptations whereby he so often ensnares our souls, is owing to the care he takes to conceal his own agency; by secretly stealing into our minds before we are aware of his approach, and making his wicked suggestions pass for our own native thoughts. Were we sensible of his attack, we should be upon our guard: did he shew his cloven foot, he would fail of his aim; we should have time to collect our strength, and resist him in every shape and effort, as our Saviour here did; and especially if his attacks were as vehement, open, and audacious as these are here represented to be. In this respect then our Saviour had a much greater advantage over the devil than we have, who never assaults us in the same manner he did him, but in a more subtle, dangerous, and covert way*.

* An ingenious modern *paraphrast* observes upon this passage, that the devil, on this occasion, seemed to have assaulted our Lord in some visible form, and with an audible voice; for, says he, he could hardly do it otherwise, the human nature of Jesus being incapable of sinful thoughts. But involuntary motions suggested from without and immediately repelled, cannot be called *sinful thoughts*; especially when they arise out of images painted on the mind by a foreign hand, and are the effects of a disordered imagination, which seems to have been the case here. The same author immediately adds, however, the devil's strongest temptations are commonly those wherein he least appears, e. g. when he suggests evil images, in order to excite evil desires. *Macknight's Harmony* in loc. And how these foreign thoughts suggested to our Saviour's mind can be considered as inconsistent with his perfect innocence, I do not apprehend; they were only darts thrown at him (as they are at us) by the enemy of all good, but not sticking, rebounded back again on the head of the tempter.

3. Some things are here related which, if taken in a literal sense, appear extremely improbable and unaccountable : they baffle the understanding, and elude all our conceptions ; for instance, how must we understand the second temptation, *ver.* 5, 6, where 'tis said the *devil taketh him up into the holy city*, i. e. *Jerusalem*, by conveying him personally through the air, or conducting him along the public streets. If this was done invisibly it must be a miracle ; if without a miracle, what a strange sight to the astonished spectators ! who, notwithstanding, seem to take no notice of it.—After this he sets our Saviour's body on the pinnacle of the temple, where, without a miracle, it could not stand ; but if it were on the battlements, he must be exposed to the gaze of a multitude of people, who almost continually frequented its courts, and as soon as the temptation was repulied, conveyed him back again into the wilderness. What can we make of all this ? It appears extremely difficult to our conceptions, and looks more like a possession than a temptation.

Lastly, There are other parts of this narrative that are absolutely impossible, if taken in a strict, literal construction : for instance, the third and last temptation, wherein the devil is said to have taken up our Saviour into an *exceeding high mountain*, and to have shewn him *all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them* ; certain it is there is no such mountain in the world, from which such a survey could be taken. If it be said, that what is here meant is only a view of the whole land of *Canaan*, it may be proper to remember, that though the land of *Canaan* is sometimes by way of eminence called *the land*, or *the world*, yet 'tis never called *all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them*. This, therefore, being impossible to be fact, is supposed by commentators to have been represented in vision ; and if this, why not all the rest ? What can induce us to suppose, that part of these scenes were exhibited

hibited to the senses, and part to the imagination? The absolute impossibility of the thing in the last mentioned case, obliges us to suppose *that* scene to be purely visionary; and why should not the apparent improbability and impropriety in the two former, induce us to conclude the same concerning them?

In a word then, if we conceive the whole of what is here related to have passed in vision (not as real matters of fact, but only as strong and lively impressions of them made on our Saviour's imagination) then all the forementioned difficulties vanish at once, and every thing stands in a plain, easy, fair instructive light. For

1. Upon this principle, it appears that our Saviour was tempted much in the same manner as we are, only with more violence and to no effect. His animal powers having been enfeebled by long fasting, he sunk, we may suppose, into a kind of trance or dream: this opportunity the devil took to paint and exhibit the scenes here related, and strongly present them to the imagination (that power of the mind to which the devil has usually a more near and frequent access than we conceive) but the instant our Saviour discovered from what quarter those suggestions came, they were absolutely repelled, and never returned.

2. In this view, the temptations with which the devil assaulted our Saviour appear not only natural, but opportune and well adapted, and pushed on with greatest vigor when animal nature was weak, and the lower powers of the mind under some disorder; and at such seasons and upon such occasions, we may observe he is usually most busy with us now. If he can but get possession of the imagination, disorder the fancy, or raise a tumult in the passions, he knows the mind is then not so capable of attending to, nor so well disposed to resist, his sinful insinuations as it is at another time.

Some there are who seem inclined to believe, that the devil has now nothing at all to do with us; that to talk of the *secret hand of the enemy*, or the suggestions of the devil, borders upon enthusiasm; and that all the temptations we meet with, proceed either from the world or from our own hearts: but upon what sound principle, either of philosophy or divinity, they ground this extraordinary *hypothesis*, I know not. One thing I know, that this notion flies directly in the face of many plain precepts and cautions, contained in the word of God: and another thing appears equally evident, *viz.* that they who have the least apprehension of any danger from this quarter, are most exposed to it.

This sentiment concerning the access which the devil has to the imagination, has been doubtless mistaken and abused by persons of weak minds and low understanding, and so has almost every other principle of religious truth; but it does not follow from hence that there is nothing in it; for, by the same rule, we must expunge almost every other doctrine of the christian system. Again,

3. If we suppose every thing here mentioned, to have been transacted only in visionary scenes, or by strong impressions on the fancy, it will be no difficult matter at all to account for the two last temptations, which otherwise (or supposing them to be fact) appear to be altogether unaccountable. For when the devil found that he could not by his first temptation, prevail upon our Saviour to entertain the least thought of *distrusting* his father's care, he only shifted the scene, or introduced a new set of images, to tempt him to *presumption*. Thus a vigilant enemy, when he finds a fort impregnable on one side (where the whole force of the garrison is collected) will prepare to attack it on the opposite, in hopes of finding that more defenceless. He therefore transported our Saviour in his imagination, to the battlements of the tem-

temple; in which situation he suggested to him, “that he need not give himself the trouble to go down the ordinary way, since if he leaped from thence to the bottom, he had a scripture promise for his safety.’ But this was so apparently to tempt God, or to presume upon his providence without necessity, that our Lord soon apprehended from whence this suggestion must arise, and immediately repelled it.

This vision was then over. But the devil, though twice baffled, yet not beat out, was resolved to try one dart more; and that indeed was the most fiery and malignant of them all, dipped in the most fatal venom the old serpent could emit, and *set on fire of hell*, which was no less than—to tempt the *son of God* to worship him: to this he seemed to be moved by indignation and malice, more than by any hope of success. However, a bait must be laid to try, if it were possible, to bring him nearer to a parley. Satan could have but little hope of leading our Saviour directly into idolatry; but he might wish to discover or excite some secret spark of worldly ambition in his heart, which would be a good direction in what manner to form his future assaults. He therefore now paints on his fancy the most glorious and delightful scene that could possibly affect and charm it; and no less than all the kingdoms and empires of the world are presented to his view in all their glory: and he boldly offers to Christ the sovereignty of the whole, if he would but do *homage to him* for it. But this insinuation had in it so much impudence and impiety, that it raised our blessed Lord’s indignation, and with the utmost abhorrence, he immediately rejected both *it* and its author; and the perturbation into which this horrid suggestion threw his mind was so great, that it immediately roused and awakened his animal and mental powers; upon which all these visionary scenes vanished, and the devil’s temptations at that time were at an end.

Thus

Thus then you see that upon this supposition, that these scenes were only visionary and not real, every thing appears in a fair and easy light ; and this important part of scripture is far less embarrassed and much more useful, than it seems to be upon the literal construction.

I shall only add, that it is very common in the sacred language for dreams, allegories, parables, visions, and the like, to be introduced without notice *, and for those things that are only painted on the imagination, to be related as real fact ; because the mind contemplates them at that time as such, and is as deeply impressed by them as if they were †.

I

* Thus *Jacob's* vision of angels, *Gen.* xxxii. 2, *Satan's* conference with God, *Job* i. 6---12, *Michaiab's* vision, *1 Kings* xxii. 19---23, *Ezekiel's* eating the roll, *Ezek.* iii. 1---2, *Jeremiah's* making bonds and yokes, and sending them to the kings of *Moab*, &c. *Jer.* xxvii. 1--2, are all related as facts, without any notice of their being (what they certainly were) only visionary or allegorical representations : to which is now generally added the story of *Balaam's* ass, *Numb.* xxii. which indeed the prophet himself seems to explain in this sense, chap. xxiv. 3, 4, where he alludes to the very circumstance of his eyes being shut for some time falling into a trance. And in the same sudden and familiar manner are fables, parables, apologues, and allegories, often introduced into modern writings, and related as matters of fact, when the nature, design, and circumstances of them evidently shew that they are not so.

† But it happens here, that all the evangelists who have mentioned this affair, have given plain intimations that the whole is to be taken not in a proper and literal, but in a spiritual or allegorical construction ; for *St. Matthew* says, *Matt.* iv. 1. that *Jesus was led, or carried, up of the spirit (ἀνῆχθη ὑπο τῷ πνεύματι) into the wilderness to be tempted.* This *St. Luke* explains, *Luke* iv. 1, *he was led, or conveyed, in the spirit (ἠγείτο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι) into the wilderness,* which agrees with the expression in *Mark* i. 12, *and immediately the spirit driveth him: (αὐτὸν ἐμβαλεῖ) transporteth him out of himself) into the wilderness :* but he was actually in the wilderness already, *ver.* 4. This phrase *in the spirit,* therefore must here signify *in a spiritual manner ;* just as it does *John* vi. 63, *the words that I speak unto you they are spirit,* i. e. are to be understood not in a literal and carnal, but in a figurative and spiritual sense (*non carnaliter intelligenda sed spiritualiter*) as *Tertullian* and several others interpret them.

But that which puts this matter, I think, beyond all doubt is, that *Isaiah's* vision of the *dry bones* is introduced exactly in the same form

I proceed now to make some practical remarks on this subject, for our own instruction.

The temptations with which the devil assaulted our Lord were *three*, but each of them double, or calculated to lead him into two sins, which are naturally connected and commonly go together. By the *first* he aimed to draw him into impatience and a distrust of providence, by the *second* into indolence and presumption, and by the *third* into ambition and idolatry. And it is observable, that each sin rises in its guilt and aggravation: as indolence and presumption (the sins of prosperity) are greater and more dangerous than impatience and distrust (the sins of adversity) and ambition and idolatry greater than them all.

I shall make a few practical observations upon each of these temptations separately, and a few more upon the whole taken together, and all with a view to arm and fortify us against the like conflicts; and to shew in what manner we are to behave, in order to secure a compleat conquest in all our encounters with the great enemy of mankind, which is the principal instruction intended in this part of the gospel history.

1. Let us see what we are to learn from each of these three temptations separately considered.

By the first temptation, the devil aimed to excite in our Lord an impatient and distrustful frame of spirit, two sins which often go together, and naturally grow out of each other. This temptation was grounded

form of words, *Ezek. xxxvii. 1. The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley that was full of bones.* Now here (וּיִצְאֵנִי בְרוּחַ) answers exactly to *Luke's* (ἠγέρτο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι.) i. e. he was carried not really but (κατὰ φαντασίαν) in imagination only; (*mente non revera*) says *Menochius*, transported out of himself by intense thinking (*extra se raptum in mentis excessu*) says *Piscator*, not that he was corporeally translated, but saw these things in vision; (*significat non corpore se translatum, sed hoc vidisse ἐν σπτάσει*) says *Grotius*. And why the very same expression must be understood figuratively in the prophet, and literally in the evangelist, when there is the same reason for taking it in a figurative sense in both, I do not at present conceive.

on the indigence of his present situation, in which he felt the pain of hunger, *ver. 2, 3.* *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights he was afterwards an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.* Here we see the great artifice and subtilty of the tempter, in two instances.

1. In tempting to the least sin first; by which means he better conceals his agency, and has a fairer prospect of success. The same method he uses with mankind still; for were he to begin with his boldest temptations (or those which he successfully practises on hardened sinners, who are grown veterans in vice) he would terrify and shock them; they would be sensible of their danger, and put upon their guard; and, like *Joseph* under his temptation, would be ready to cry out, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God*?* The subtle tempter then, in practising on young and tender minds, begins (as he did with our mother *Eve*) first with some doubtful or distant insinuation, then produces a specious appearance, then presents a bolder suggestion, intimating, that what they are inclined to is no sin at all, and that nothing but an unreasonable scrupulosity of conscience can make it appear so.—O, how many thousands of young creatures have by this means been fatally seduced! *i. e.* by giving credit to the first secret suggestions of the tempter (in opposition to the express word of God, and encouraged by the example and practice of the multitude) have been unhappily drawn into presumptuous and destructive follies; and by making this first inroad upon conscience, have more easily been led into greater transgressions, till they have grown hardened in them, to the final ruin of their immortal souls!

2. Another instance of the devil's subtilty in this first temptation which he offered to our Saviour, ap-

* Gen. xxxix. 9.

pears in his taking the advantage of his present necessities, in order to make it the more successful. When the body is under any painful sensation (particularly that of hunger) the mind is more apt to be discontented and fretful, and to fall into the sins of impatience and a distrust of providence: at this season the devil very opportunely applied this temptation, as most suitable to the circumstances our Saviour was then in.

The sins of adversity are peevishness, discontent, impatience, murmuring, hard thoughts of God, unbelief, and a distrust of providence. Against these sins then we should, at such a time, be particularly on our guard; because the vigilant and subtle adversary that lies in wait for our souls, loves to *fish in troubled waters*, and takes care not only to suit his bait to our taste, but to throw it in at a time when he knows we are best disposed to receive it.

The general instruction we are to learn from this first *method* which Satan practised upon our Saviour is this, “ that in any exigence of our affairs or distress
“ of life, we should take care not to make use of any
“ unlawful or unwarrantable means to supply our
“ present wants; and that when we find ourselves
“ inclined so to do, to look upon it as a temptation
“ of the devil.”

Well, the devil now shifts the scene; and, by strong impressions on the fancy in a vision or reverie, he makes our Saviour imagine that he was on the battlements of the temple, amusing himself with a view of the multitude below. In this situation a thought came into his mind, “ what need he be at the trouble
“ of going back the ordinary way, since, if he cast
“ himself down from thence to the bottom, the pro-
“ vidence and promise of God were both engaged to
“ secure him from harm: for were he suffered to
“ perish in the fall, there would be an end at once of
“ all the grand designs he came into the world upon,
“ and

“ and therefore he might be assured that the divine power would preserve him.”

This is the second temptation *, in which there are two sins the devil had in view, into one or other of which he hoped he might betray our Lord in such a situation, *viz.* *indolence* and *presumption*; both frequently found in conjunction, and naturally rising out of a state of elevation and prosperity, and are in their own nature more heinous than the two former, *impatience* and *distrust*, because they argue more ingratitude and a greater abuse of the divine goodness. Hence then we may learn three things,

1. That the temptations of prosperity are greater than those of adversity: and indeed where do we generally find men more vain, confident, thoughtless, indolent, and presuming, than among those whom providence hath placed above the common level, and exalted to dignity and station? as if eminence had conferred upon them the privilege of being independent on that hand which raised them to it; and no persons stand more exposed to these temptations, than they whom providence hath *suddenly* advanced from a low and obscure, to a high and conspicuous station of life, unless they have a great share of wisdom, sense, and grace, to keep the ballance even; because being unaccustomed to this kind of temptations, they are less provided against them, and more in danger of being overcome by them.

2. As these two sins are the reverse of those to which our Lord was tempted but just before, we learn that when we are flying from one extreme, the devil is very assiduous to draw us into another: this is what we frequently see in human life. When persons are fully convinced of the absurdity or danger of one

* Saint *Luke* makes it the third, and the temptation to idolatry the second; but that *Matthæw* hath observed the natural order appears from hence, that immediately after the temptation to idolatry our Saviour said to the devil, *Get thee hence, Satan,* and then the devil leaveth him, ver. 10, 11, so that this must have been the last.

scheme of sentiments or course of conduct, they fly directly into the opposite, no less dangerous and absurd. For instance, the doctrine of merit, as held by the papists, is one of the most absurd and dangerous tenets of their church: fully sensible of this, and lest they should not fly far enough from it, some protestants have run into the extreme directly opposite to it, and no less unscriptural and pernicious, *viz.* that good works are not necessary to salvation, which is doing the catholic cause too much honour, by giving its advocates occasion to infer, that there is no such thing as shutting the door against popery, without opening it wide to irreligion and licentiousness. So among protestants, some think that they can work out their salvation themselves, others that they can do nothing but wait, and from one of those extremes often run into the other. And thus, in point of conduct, from a wild licentious course of life, some will run into unjustifiable singularities or superstitious feverities, which often betray them into spiritual pride and uncharitableness. Now the devil has a greater hand in all this, than they who are *ignorant of his devices* can well imagine; it is but the old stratagem which he practised on our Lord himself, played over again upon those that are more apt to be deceived by it.

3. Another thing we learn from this second temptation of our Saviour is, that when we run ourselves into danger wilfully and unnecessarily, it is presumption to depend on providence for safety. This is evident from the reply which our Saviour made to this diabolical suggestion, *'Tis written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

Thus is sin often concealed under the semblance of piety; by which appearance, if we would not be deceived, we should consider, that the circumstances of things frequently alter the quality of an action; so that what in some circumstances is a duty, in others may

may be sinful.—This is plainly exemplified in the case before us. When the devil could not prevail on our Lord to distrust his father's care and providence, he tempts him to presume upon it, under the colour of trusting it: as if he had said, “ You have, at this
 “ time, a fair opportunity of shewing that depen-
 “ dence on providence you just now so confidently
 “ professed; cast yourself down from the place where
 “ you now stand, and upon your own principle you
 “ need fear no danger; for depend upon it, that
 “ Providence in which you trust will certainly save
 “ you.”—But our Saviour immediately lets him know, that there is a wide difference between *trusting* God and *tempting* him; that though the former be the proper effect of faith, the latter is a plain act of presumption.—And this maxim is universally true, and applicable to every supposable case, “ that to
 “ profess to depend upon God for protection and
 “ help, without using the proper means in our power
 “ to protect and help ourselves, is not to *trust* God
 “ but to tempt him.”

But, 3. The last temptation is the most impudent, and the design of it the most virulent of all; and seems to proceed (as I before observed) rather from the indignation and malice of the tempter, than from any hope he could have of success.—The sins which the devil now tempted our Saviour to, were *ambition* and *idolatry*, the first in order to the last, and both greater than any he had before in view: *All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* This was only spitting his venom in the face of one in whom he could not fix his darts; and the impudence of the temptation appears in his usurping and declaring a propriety in what was none of his own: or in promising to give what he had no right to bestow, on condition our Lord would give him what he had no right to receive.—Hence then we may learn two things,

1. Where the devil cannot gain his ends by secret insinuations and artifice (the method he always tries first) he will not fail to make use of more bold and violent attacks, if it be only to disturb those whom he cannot devour.

2. Even in his most bold and malicious attacks, he proceeds with much subtilty and art. This hook like all the rest was doubly baited; the least hurtful bait was most shining, but so connected with the other, that it could not be seized without drawing that after it. The devil well knew that if he could but raise the least spark of ambition in our Saviour's mind, there might be some hope of drawing him into idolatry: but this attack met with a more shameful defeat than any he had tried before, in proportion to the greater impudence with which it was made.---O how many unwary souls are by this snare drawn into utter and everlasting ruin! through ambition and avarice the devil first gets the world into their hearts, then erects it as an idol there, and makes them fall down and worship it.

These are the remarks that may properly be made upon each of these temptations separately considered. I shall now conclude with making some general observations upon the whole.

1. We learn from hence then that the great enemy of our souls hath undoubtedly access to the lower powers of it, and especially the imagination; and can influence, amuse, engage, divert, or disturb it, in such a manner as he thinks most proper to answer the mischievous designs he has against us. External objects we know affect the imagination very sensibly, and so do bodily pains and pleasures; but what must we think of those strong and sudden workings and emotions which we sometimes find raised in the mind, without any conscious impression from outward scenes or inward sensations?---If they have a plain tendency towards any thing unlawful, we know what

they are and whence they came, and ought immediately to suppress them.

It is by means of this false colouring, which the wicked spirit throws on the imagination, that he so often inflames our passions, and hurries them into a criminal excess: and thus by making us look upon objects and incidents in too good or too bad a light, he excites our fears, our sorrows, our anger, or our joy, delight and desires, to an excessive and dangerous degree; and amidst this bustle and clamour of the passions, he conceals his own agency from our view, and effects his end before we are apprised of his design. This is a very common and successful device of Satan, of which we cannot be long safely ignorant.

In a word, next to a clear conscience, the greatest mental felicity we can enjoy in this world, is that of a sound judgment and a right and regular imagination, which will lead us to view every thing in its just and proper light: and it is not in the power of reason and philosophy only, without the concurrent aids of religion and divine grace, to give us the happiness of this most important part of self-government.

2. Hath the devil sometimes so secret and imperceptible an access to the imagination? this shews us then of how much importance it is to guard and govern our thoughts, especially our vain, remiss, and amusing thoughts; and to set conscience as centinel at the door of our hearts, to prevent the entrance of these dangerous intruders; to examine what they are, whence they came, and what they want; and if we suspect that they come from a bad hand, or on a bad errand, let us learn from this example of our Saviour immediately to dismiss them: an expedient indispensably necessary to keep the heart a pure and unpolluted temple, fit for the residence of the holy spirit.

3. The devil sometimes makes use of a wilful per-
 version or misapplication of scripture, as a temptation
 very proper to seduce those who profess a high veneration

ration for it, which is a bold attempt to turn their own weapons against themselves. This, you see, is the stratagem he used in his second attack upon our Saviour, when he would persuade him to throw himself down from the battlements of the temple, by assuring him of supernatural protection, according to that promise *Psal. xci. 11, 12. He shall give his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways; they shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.* The devil here shews his sophistry in two instances.

1. In curtailing this text, and quoting no more of it than he thought for his purpose; leaving out that clause (*in all thy ways*) which would make the application of it in the present case appear improper. *In all thy ways*; that is, at all times whilst thou art in the way of thy duty; for there is no promise, in the whole word of God, of a divine interposition for our safety, if we presumptuously venture out of the way of our duty, as our Lord would have done had he complied with this temptation.

2. In applying the latter part of the words (*in their hands shall they bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone*) in their strict and literal sense, that they might appear peculiarly pertinent on the present occasion.

And under his influence and concealed agency, how many are carrying on his work at this time just in the same way? that is, who pervert the true sense of scripture by quoting it by halves, or by taking in a strict literal sense what was intended in the figurative; and by this false construction of scripture, promote the cause of vice and error, and know it not.

And that the devil has a great hand in this, even when it is least suspected, we have no reason to doubt if we consider, that in this manner he enforced his temptation on our Lord himself: nor can any thing be more directly to his purpose; because this appearance of scripture-authority gives not only a sanc-

tion but a sanctity to error, rivets it on the conscience, and makes it take the strongest possession of the heart. Hence some of the grossest errors are looked upon in the light of divine doctrines, and the most unchristian practice as a service acceptable to God; which shews how cautious we ought to be in the interpretation of scripture, and how careful to attain the true sense of it, before we make it a determined rule of our faith and practice.

4. We learn from our Saviour's reply to every one of these diabolical suggestions, that the word of God rightly understood and applied, is the best defence against the temptations of Satan. This *sword of the spirit* (as it is called *Eph. vi. 17.*) in all our spiritual conflicts, is a weapon both of defence and offence: and as such we find it here used by our Saviour. In the two first temptations he used it by way of defence. *It is written, man liveth not by bread alone; it is written, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*, i. e. by a bold unwarrantable presumption on his power and providence: but in the last temptation, which was the most malignant of them all, he makes use of it by way of offence as well as defence; at once parries his antagonist's sword, and gives him a stab at the heart. For in those words, *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*, our Lord might mean not only that God himself is the sole object of worship, but to convey a sharp rebuke to the impudence of that foul and fallen spirit, in thus tempting our Saviour to worship him, who ought himself to have worshipped our Saviour as *the Lord his God*; and whose pride and arrogance, in refusing to pay him the honours due to the Son of God, was probably the occasion of his fall and ruin. This sense of the words, I say, 'tis possible our Saviour might intend; and it looks as if the tempter understood his meaning, and could not withstand the galling thought, for he immediately retired abashed and thunderstruck,

as full of confusion and pain as he was of indignation and rage.

Lastly, From the whole we learn, that the best way to resist and overcome the temptations of Satan, is immediately to reject them as soon as they are detected: to dally with them is dangerous, to parley with them is more so; but most of all to indulge them a vigorous and absolute repulse (*get thee behind me Satan*) enforced by a plain pertinent scripture, with a firm dependance on divine strength, is the best way to evade or baffle the boldest efforts of our spiritual enemy.

In a word, whilst we are in a state of warfare, in so much danger from a corrupt heart and a vain world (those fatal engines the devil is continually making use of to seduce and ruin us) we shall have frequent need of the aforementioned precautions. The scriptures expressly tell us, *That our adversary the devil, like a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour: from our Lord's example, we learn in what manner we are to meet and oppose him; and from both are assured, that if we resist him stedfastly in the faith, he will flee from us; we shall be more than conquerors through Jesus Christ, and that the God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly.*

DISCOURSE XVIII.

Funeral Consolations.

[E M L Y N .]

BEING THE
FIRST SERMON

Preached by the AUTHOR

After the Death of his WIFE.

JOHN xiv. 28.

If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said I go to the Father : for my Father is greater than I.

I Presume it is unknown to very few of this assembly, under what mournful circumstances I now appear in this place; or what that sorrowful occasion is, which in the choice of these words I have regard to, and which (by a due consideration of them) I desire to be relieved under.

The words are a very proper lenitive for assuaging the immoderate sorrow of Christians, upon the death of their lamented pious friends; a time when nature melts into tears, overwhelmed with a swelling tide of grief,

grief, which is hardly kept within the bounds either of reason or of grace. Alas! when our withering gourds are smitten of God, especially if with a sudden and early stroke, we are ready to think with *Jonab*, *We do well to be angry*, or to fret and pine: On this grievous occasion we hear little else but the voice in *Ramah*, *Lamentation and weeping*, *Rachel weeping for her children* (or friends) *and refusing to be comforted, because they are not*. So that it must be a very powerful argument indeed that can charm the tumultuous spirit of a deep mourner into a calm moderation of his anguish.

And if there be any argument in the world sufficient in the case, no doubt but our Saviour has chosen it here, who urges his disciples with a mighty dissuasive from too much grief; and this taken from that which was the very root and spring of it, *viz.* their unfeigned love to him.

The case was in short this; Our Lord *Jesus* was now about to die, and was taking his farewell of his disciples; *Yet*, says he, *a little while and ye shall not see me*; and again, *Whither I go ye cannot come*, John xiii. 33. Upon these melancholy tidings, their hearts were fore troubled: no wonder if they were loth to part with so kind a friend, or to lose so dear a master; such a wise guide and profitable teacher; especially since they were like to be left in a very forlorn case, as a poor naked prey to the rage and hatred of a blind and malicious generation. They seemed content to die along with him, if that might be, *Why cannot I follow thee? I will lay down my life for thee*, John xiii. 37. was the language of one and all of them; but they could not bear the thoughts of a disconsolate separation.

Our Lord seeing them thus dejected, endeavours to cheer and hearten them, *Let not your hearts be troubled*, John xiv. 1. or don't take on and grieve so, but hearken to what I have to say for your consolation: and then he applies several arguments to this purpose, *viz.* from

his design in going to *prepare a place*, where he and they might for ever live together; *I go to prepare a place for you; I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also,* John xiv. 3. A reviving consideration! that they should one day meet their dear friend again, and that their separation was to be but for a-while. Well, but for all this, death makes such a vast distance between friends, and we know so little of another state, that the disciples seemed to doubt, whether ever they should meet again, if once they parted: they knew not whither he was going, nor the way to follow him: Thomas saith unto him, *Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?* ver. 5. In answer to this *Christ* tells them, he was *the way, the truth, and the life*; i. e. that the sure way to follow him to heaven, was by a due observance of his doctrine and precepts, as being the ambassador and representative of God to men, to deliver his mind on earth: for this he desires their belief, at least, if they would not take *his word*, they might be satisfied from *his works*, which shewed the *Father* did dwell in him, ver. 11. Then he argues from the great advantage they would reap by his removing to heaven, to intercede for them, and to send down the *Holy Spirit* upon them.

But lest all this should not quiet them, he has one argument more in reserve in these words of my text, and that the most moving that can be; in which he desires them, if they loved him, that they would not so much mourn as rejoice at his departure; intimating that he would take it for a proof of their love to him, if they would mourn less. They thought doubtless, they shewed love to him in grieving for his death; and it may seem strange, that *Christ* should put such a contrary interpretation upon their friendly sorrow, or should require so unnatural a thing of them, as to rejoice for his departure: What, (might they think) shall we rejoice at so amiable a friend's removal from
us?

us? Or can we be glad that we shall see his face here no more? No, it is impossible; we have no heart, no disposition to be glad in this sad season: therefore he adds a reason to back this great paradox, *viz.* because he was *going to the Father*; that is, to be rewarded and glorified by *him who was greater than himself*, and so was able to exalt him; which could not be without leaving them: therefore, says he, *If ye love me, ye should rejoice, because I told you I was going to the Father.* Hence I lay down this proposition:

That true love to our departed pious friends should prompt us to rejoice at their translation hence to heaven.

I know indeed there were peculiar reasons why the disciples should rejoice at Christ's departure to the Father, *viz.* because by it he should do them more beneficial service, than by his stay. *It is expedient*, says he, *that I go away: for if I go not, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you*, John xvi. 7. But these are not the motives our Lord Jesus argues from in the text; this were to argue from their own interest, or love to themselves; whereas he argues here from their pure love to him; supposing themselves were to receive no advantage, but present loss by his death, yet for his sake they should rejoice at his happiness in going to the *Father*. So that it is an argument as truly applicable to the case of any other holy friend's departure, when on our part there is real love and affection to them, as the spring; and on their part it can be said truly, That they go to the Father, as the ground and matter of this joy.

In speaking to this point, I shall, *First*, Shew the meaning of our Saviour's words. *Secondly*, The force of his argument.

I. I shall consider the meaning of our Saviour in these words, both negatively and positively.

1. *Negatively*; (1.) It was not Christ's meaning by these words, to say, that there was no real love at the bottom of his disciples great sorrow for his death; or that there was no true love, where there was not visible joy on this occasion. That would have been an hard interpretation indeed of their friendly grief: they knew it was from love that their grief sprang; that if they had not loved much, they had sorrowed less: they were ready to make the appeal to him, *Thou knowest that we love thee*. Indeed he saw so much love in their sorrow, that it made him argue thus with them; *If, or seeing ye love me, &c. q. d.* I see you love me, and expressing your tender affection to me by your mournful countenance and words, which shew your regret at my departure; since then love so prevails and works, let me argue with you from that prevailing passion without extinguishing or discouraging it; let me direct it into a right course, and then that love, which now makes you grieve, shall much more make you to rejoice. He does not question, but supposes their love in these words.

In like manner, neither must it be said, that there is no love to our departed friends, whose decease we lament with a flood of tears: it is past the power of any man in the world to convince us of that; for we feel our love as plainly as we do our grief: and indeed our grief is nothing but our disappointed unsatisfied love; nay, it was from our Lord's own weeping over dead *Lazarus*, that it was said, *Behold how he loved him!* John xi. 36. It is love makes us feel the pain of an heart-rending separation between us and an amiable friend: it is love makes us miss the wonted desire of our eyes, its once so pleasant object: Why else do men weep chiefly for relations and friends whom they love, if love do not influence grief?

(2.) Nor does our Lord intend to intimate, that all such sorrow for our holy friend's departure, is an unlawful or unbecoming expression of our love.

Doubtless

Doubtless he was not displeas'd to see his disciples tenderly affected with his removal, and that he was like to die lamented of some. He, who shed tears at *Lazarus's* grave with sighs and deep groans, cannot be thought to forbid them wholly at his own: therefore he does not chide his disciples with angry reproaches, as though they were wholly in the wrong, but softly and tenderly reasons the matter with them in gentle persuasions, *Let not your hearts be troubled*, as rather pitying their sorrow than altogether condemning it. He who knows our frame will indulge the weakness of our frail natures a little in this thing, and will allow us to pay a small tribute of tears to the precious memory of an endeared friend; and to utter our parting farewell with an unusual accent of sorrow. Why should we not weep, when we are sure we shall see their faces no more? since for that very reason the Christians of *Asia* wept sore at *St. Paul's* leaving them; and they of *Cæsarea* on the prospect of his dying, (though somewhat remote) did weep, both to the breaking of their own hearts and his also, *Acts* xxi. 13. Indeed that same apostle, who seems to speak most against sorrow for the death of christian friends, aims not at more than to make some abatement of the usual excesses of grief among the Pagans. *Sorrow not as others, that have no hope*, 1 *Thes.* iv. 13. How that was we may learn in *Deut.* xiv. 12. it was with violent rage, like madmen, under the tyranny of a passion, to whose excesses they abandoned themselves without check.

Especially where the relation is nearest, (I mean the conjugal) and the separation most violent, there God will permit us to shew the deeper resentment, because he allows greater affection. He that requires such love to the *wife of our bosom*, especially when the *wife of our youth* too, as to bid us, *Rejoice with the wife of thy youth, let her be as the loving hind, and pleasant roe; be thou ravished with her love always*, *Prov.* v. 18. Again, *Husbands love your wives, even as Christ loved his*

his church, Eph. v. 25. And again, *So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies*, ver. 28. He, I say, knows well that so much love cannot (according to the make of human nature) but end in great grief at the dissolution of that near relation.

And tho' the antient patriarchs were men very renowned for their mortification to the comforts of this world, being truly pilgrims on the earth, yet methinks, I find holy *Jacob* expressing such a sensible sorrow for the death of his *Rachel* many years after, as shews that wound was not yet quite healed to his dying day: *As for me*, says he, *when I came from Padanaram, Rachel dyed by me in the land of Canaan by the way, when yet there was but a little way to Ephrath, and I buried her there*, Gen. xlviii. 7. He bemoans himself under the sense of his loss, *as for me*, or that which sticks by me, in a very sensible remembrance still; that which I am greatly concerned at, and cannot forget, &c. *as for me*, or as to my sorrowful part, *Rachel dyed by me*; and there I buried my greatest earthly delight. It is no unusual thing with good men, to lament under such circumstances: *Ezekiel's* case was particular, he was forbid to mourn for his wife, on purpose to amaze the people with his strange carriage, that they might ask the meaning of so monstrous and unusual a thing, as not to mourn for the taking away the desire of his eyes, *Ezek. xxiv. 16, 21, 22.* and it was to represent the greatness of their approaching calamity, that would be so great as to swallow up all private occasions of grief.

More especially may it quicken our sorrow, when we apprehend such a stroke to be the punishment of our iniquities, which withhold and withdraw good things from us; when we have reason to put that interpretation upon God's hand in the death of our dear relations, which she did on the death of her child, that it was *to bring our sins to remembrance*, 1 Kings xvii. 18. in this case grace falls in with nature, and by uniting their two streams the torrent of grief becomes the

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the more violent: for who can look upon his dear friend, whom he has pierced and slain, and not mourn bitterly? But,

2. *Positively*, That which Christ intends here, is,

(1.) That at least his disciples should mix some joy with their sorrow for his death; he does not say, *If ye loved me, ye would not grieve, but, ye would rejoice*; there should be some joy to allay and moderate their sorrow. And indeed as these two easily consist in the same breast, so there is a proper occasion for this mixture and confusion of our passions in the death of our pious friends; because in such dispensations, there is both a bright and cloudy side, the one in their gain, the other in our great loss; *so that in the multitude of our troubled thoughts within us, there are comforts that may delight our souls, Ps. xciv. 19.* and with David, we should have our hearts tuned to *sing of mercy and judgment* at once, *Ps. ci. 1.*

(2.) He intends to intimate, that their rejoicing should be more than their sorrow upon this occasion: for though he speaks not *exclusively*, in requiring them to rejoice, yet he speaks *comparatively* at least, that they should rather rejoice than mourn; joy should be our principal exercise, so that if it be inquired what our frame and carriage is under such a providence, it may be said we rather rejoice and triumph, than are dejected. True indeed, an external wanton mirth in jollity and laughter would be a monstrous deformity; but rational joy and satisfaction is a comely christian temper, that well comports with the gravity of such an occasion.

3. He suggests further, that to rejoice on such occasions is the most regular and noble exercise of love to such departed friends; it is the most genuine and regular exercise of love, since the nature of love is to incline us to a joyful congratulation of the prosperity of its endeared object; and it is then it carries most
evi-

evidences of love unfeigned, when we rejoice in our friends welfare, though no benefit (but rather damage) redounds to us thereby.

To say the truth, inordinate grief for the translation of a friend to heaven, is no proof at all of any love we bear to them, because it is not their case affects us, but our own: so that all which can be said of us in justice is, that we love ourselves very well, whatever we do our friends; yea, much better than we love them, since our own lesser loss causes a trouble, which the thoughts of their much greater gain cannot balance; so that we are liable to that reproachful challenge, *Is this thy kindness to thy friend?* Our cheerful satisfaction will better declare that.

And it is far the most *noble*, as well as most genuine exercise of love; it is a poor ordinary frame to mourn for our dead, as arising from mere sensitive nature: One needs no improvement of mind in order to this; there needs neither philosophy nor Christianity, virtue nor religion, to teach us this low lesson; but to rejoice in their happy change, to be glad that they are laid in a bed of everlasting rest, whilst we suffer the loss of their pleasant society, this is generous and truly noble love; this is such an ingenuous greatness of mind, as is only the product of divine faith and christian hope, which regulates our love, and raises it to so high a pitch, as nothing below the grace of God and the light of the gospel can advance it to. *So much for the explication.*

II. I come next, under the second general, to shew the force of our Saviour's reason, by which he justifies his inference, *viz.* that if they loved him, they would rejoice. Now the reason, on which he grounds this, is in these words, *Because I go to the Father, who is greater than I;* i. e. to one who could, and would exalt and reward him: *q. d.* I am going to be happy and glorious, to a blessed place, and blessed company, where I shall have no need of your pity or sorrow,
and

and therefore on this consideration you should greatly abate it.

Now allowing for the difference in the glorious rewards and exaltation of our master, and of his servants, the reason may be extended to others, and has its force in the death of any pious friends; for they also *go to the Father*: the spirit goes to *God who gave it*, not only as the spirit of the wicked, *viz.* to be disposed of by him: but the holy christian's spirit goes to him, as to his liberal rewarder, to see him, and enjoy him, to dwell and converse with him in that blessed acquaintance, which shall never be broken off to eternity; for they go to the same place with their Saviour, *where I am, there shall ye also be*, and shall have a mansion in the same Father's house, *Job. xiv. 3.*

Now let us consider what there is implied in all this, that should raise joy upon the departure of our holy friends in all that rightly love them. Now there are three arguments or grounds of joy which arise hence.

1. This implies that our pious and dear friends, though dead, are not utterly extinct and lost; for they only *go to the Father*: they pass from one place and company to another, but are not sunk into the black abyss of non-existence. It was but a slender consolation, which the Heathen philosophers oft offered to their mourners, in telling them, that though dead men enjoy no good, yet neither do they feel any evil. Indeed, supposing them lost in an utter extinction, 'tis all the comfort we have left concerning the best men; whereas we can only allow that to be true of the body; this having lost the active animating principle, is neither miserable nor happy; now like an useless idol, it has eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, and feet but cannot walk; it has lost its beautiful air and regular motions, and all its sensations of pleasure and pain. But we believe better than so of the invisible principle, that this has still the pleasure of life and activity about nobler objects: that

that immortal tenant is only removed from a crazy cottage of clay to a more excellent dwelling *not made with hands*. This indeed is better tidings than what sense reports; that represents them as lost for ever, but faith tells us, they are but translated: *the one* says, *Joseph* is utterly devoured by an evil beast, and now is not; by *the other* we understand he is safe and well in another land. This is so mighty a lenitive to our grief (which we owe chiefly to the gospel of Jesus Christ) that the apostle sticks not to say, that *he has even abolished death* by making this discovery of a future life, *2 Tim. i. 10*. Here then is matter of joy to think that our friends are not perished in the frightful shipwreck; but as we have sometimes seen the same boisterous waves, that break the vessel, do but waft the passenger over to the safe shore, so death has landed them safe on another coast, whose frail bodily vessel is dashed in pieces. No wonder if *Rachel* refuse to be comforted, if she think her dead children are not in being; but blessed be God, it is not so, for all, even the dead live to God, though not with us; they live, yea and they act, and think, and love more busily than ever, *Luke xx. 38*.

It is with them as with the sun, who at evening leaves our horizon under disconsolate darkness; and some very foolish persons may think its glory buried and extinguished, when it is only gone to the other hemisphere, and there shines with as much beauty and brightness as ever. Methinks this consideration should make us say as old *Jacob*, when on good tidings of *Joseph's* welfare he began to revive, *It is enough, he (or she) is alive*, *Gen. xlv. 28*. It is enough to put us into a transport of joy, to read what our blessed Lord said for the support of *Martba*, when grieved for her brother *Lazarus's* death, *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die*, *John xi. 25, 26*. Well then, we learn from our Saviour's argument here, that

that the surviving Christian has this to say for his comfort, that his dead friends are not raised out of being; they have shot the gulph, but are not lost in it. Be not then terrified at their death; it has killed the body, but could not kill the soul.

2. This consideration that they *are gone to the Father* implies, that they are unspeakably more happy, where they *now* are, than they were, or would have been, if they had continued *here*. This Christ plainly intends in the words, *viz.* that he should change *for the better*. It is better being with God above, than with their friends on earth: because,

1. They are hereby delivered from our (and once their) troubles. They, who pass out of our *Egypt*, do certainly go out of a place of great bondage, and shake off a mighty load of cares and fears, and many uneasy burdens, which being in this tabernacle they groaned under. The occasions of grief here are so many, either originally, or by sympathy our own, that of most who are departed hence may that account be given, *These are they, who came out of great tribulation*: they are gone off from the accursed earth, doomed to bear briars and thorns to the torment of man. Their life was but a tragedy filled with sighs and groans, not counterfeit but real; how many provocations to grief or anger filled their eyes with tears, and their mouths with complaints? One while crying with the *Skunamite's* child, *My head! my head!* and anon with the prophet, *O my bowels! my bowels! I am pained at my very heart*, Jer. iv. 19.

But now there are no thorns in the flesh to disquiet them; they are no longer harassed with painful diseases or feeble sickness, with faintings or weariness, or with ungrateful remedies, that could neither prevent the frequent alarms, nor the one fatal stroke of death. Nay, 'tis a great part of their deliverance, that they have now no frightful views of approaching dreadful death; the king of terrors, with his train of black

attendants, will return to them no more; they are got out of his dominion, they have felt his sting, they have shot the amazing gulph, have no more dying groans and sobs to fetch, nor parting agonies to fear, which terrify us mortals, who have that conflict yet to go through. These melancholy things with them are over and past; now the weary body is at rest in its bed; the grave is a quiet sleeping place, where all is hush and still, peace and silence; *the clods of that valley are sweet unto them*, Job xxi. 33. There they have found a quiet harbour, where they have unladen all their burdens and sorrows; there they have buried their cares and anxieties; there they have lodged an aching head, or tortured bowels, or pained limbs; that was the goal, at which their wearisome race and pilgrimage had its happy end.

Nor are they liable now to those spiritual sorrows, which once disquieted their tender souls; they have no doubts of the love of God, for they know and feel it abundantly; no more an aching heart about their eternal condition, saying, *What shall I do to be saved?* for they have heard, *Well done good and faithful servant, enter into thy Master's joy.* They have no more despondent suspicion of their own sincerity towards God, no lamented indispositions to his holy service, no spots nor wrinkles to render them a shame or burden to themselves; they fetch no more such deep sighs as that, *Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* Rom. vii. 24. They have no more such bitter challenges as those, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why so disquieted within me?* Psal. xlii. 11. They are satisfied with God's likeness.

They see no abominations in that holy land, to cause them to sigh and mourn; the evil serpent enters not their paradise, to tempt any to sin: their righteous souls are not vexed with seeing or hearing any filthy or miserable thing: no groans of the oppressed, nor cries of the persecuted; no tragical relations from our

Aceldama;

Aceldama ; no reports of this great slaughter, and that mighty desolation, which make up the history of this earth, and gain the applauses of the theatre ; no such doleful tidings, nor mournful spectacles disturb their quiet felicity.

Much less are they grieved for those consequences of their death, that now trouble us ; it grieves not them that they have quitted our world or company ; they are not sorry they have left their worldly possessions and estates, that the pleasant places of their habitation must know them no more ; it wounds not them, that they have left their once dearest friends in mournful sorrow, crying after them, *My Father ! my Father !* 2 Kings ii. 12. It troubles not them, that their once so beloved offspring are become exposed orphans in the world ; no, as *their sons may come to honour, and they know it not ; so may they be brought low, and they perceive it not,* Job xiv. 21. They mind not these petty troubles of ours ; it grieves not them (however it may us) that their comely countenance is turned to ghastliness and deformity, and their flesh become an habitation of worms, that once had a more noble inhabitant ; they are not moved at lying in the dark and solitary vault among the dead, nor at the gnawing of those worms that will die. We mention these things, or ruminat upon them with melancholy thoughts, but so do not they.

Nor have they any other sorrows in exchange for these of the lower world ; no, they have no more any pain, or sorrow, or crying ; *they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, &c.* Rev. xxi. 4. *For the lamb shall feed them, and lead them to the fountain of living waters ; and God shall wipe all tears from their eyes,* chap. vii. 16, 17. In a word, 'tis their jubilee, 'tis the year of their eternal release from all evil, in which they have not only cast off their bonds and fetters, but have also put off their armour ; have laid by the *shield of faith* and *helmet of hope*, and are sat down in everlasting perfect peace, in the *land of praise and*

joy, into which they have carried no discordant complaints. Is not this a great motive to our joy, when they are gone? Why should we grieve much for them, who grieve not at all themselves? Or why should rivers of tears run down our eyes, when God has wiped away all tears from theirs for ever?

2. By going to the Father they enter into exceeding great joy; they have not only left *Egypt*, but they have got into the good land of promise: they have not indeed all the felicity intended for them; there are some ornaments and glories, which they must not put on nor wear till the *marriage-day of the lamb*; but yet the lines are fallen to them in pleasant places, and they have already a *goodly heritage*; enough to warrant us to say, that *henceforth they are blessed*, because some reward of their works has followed them at present, *Rev. xiv. 13.* They are got into their father's house, to their best and dearest friend; he, who at their penitent return to him, (when they said, *I will go to my Father, &c. Luke xv.*) was so ready to meet them with compassionate embraces, to call for *the ring and fatted calf*, and to assure them of his gracious acceptance on earth, has doubtless with inexpressible kindness welcomed them to their everlasting home. He who before gave them the earnest, has now given part of the inheritance; in his good pleasure he has given them the kingdom; their master has bid them *enter into his joy*, and they have put on the *garments of praise, for the spirit of heaviness*.

They are gone to a blessed place, to a paradise of eternal delights; are got nearer to the heaven of heavens, the royal palace of the king of glory, where the high and lofty *One* dwells in inaccessible light, and fills that temple with his magnificent train; where he has erected a throne, on which infinite majesty for ever resides, at whose dazzling brightness the seraphim hide their faces, and pay their homage with the greatest veneration; where infinite beauty unveils its
face

face to open view, where it amazes, ravishes, and overcomes myriads of attentive spectators; its attractive charms draw and fasten all their eyes so, that they never look off from that *amiable object*, *they always behold him*, Mat. xviii. 10. where they need no books of devotion to warm their hearts; one view of his ineffable glory is instead of a thousand arguments, and wraps them up in the flames of ardent admiring love.

They are gone to blessed company, where all are most holy, most wise, good and happy; a society made up of the choicest and most excellent of the earth, whom God has been gathering together out of all the generations past, and has made much more excellent than they were; all of them kings and priests, and sons of God; all knit together in the indissoluble bands of truest love, which is ever cherished by the engaging charms of intimate endearing converse; so that they are dearer to each other, than ever our friends were to us, or we to them on earth. Oh! what a surprising change is this to them, who from a world made desolate by prevailing rage and malignity find themselves got into the very element of love! How then can it be but well with them! for they are gone to *Mount Sion, the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of the just made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant*, Heb. xii. 22, 23. They are with the Redeemer in his kingdom, and in a noble consort of spirits sing the song of *Moses and the Lamb, Hallelujah, salvation and glory to our God*. They, blessed souls, have all their wants supplied, all their needful desires satisfied, and their hopes fulfilled or well secured! They inherit all things, for God is their portion for ever: Him they now see and know in clear light, and if their faith did not satisfy them, their sight now does, which has cured all their deadness and coldness toward him, and has set all right for ever.

They are gone to a state of *perfect knowledge and unstained purity*: they are in a near conjunction with the *Father of lights*, that *eternal fountain* of all truth; from him their elevated understandings receive those vigorous rays of divine wisdom, which do both beautify and refresh; the greatest philosophers, who have made the most successful essays upon all the theories of nature, nay, *Solomon* himself, who had wisdom enough to reach from the *cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop on the wall*, in all the glory of his wisdom was not like to one of these; he that is least in that kingdom above, is greater than he; there they are, truly, as wise as the angels of God; all their imperfect partial knowledge is done away, because *that which is perfect is come*. They have found the way out of those labyrinths, in which we are mazed and lost; and found their joyful *εὐγενεα* over a thousand doubts and difficulties, which after all our laborious disquisitions, do pose and confound us mortals: they have found the happy way of increasing knowledge without increasing sorrow. How many doubts are with them resolved! how many mistakes corrected! how many unknown secrets revealed! O glorious and ample prospect, that from the mount *Moriak*, the mount of vision, has opened itself to their clear and satisfying view! Truly their light is sweet, and it is a pleasant thing to behold it.

No less is the pleasure of their perfect holiness, or the exercise of their consummate love. There is even now a very sweet relish in the exercises of a devout mind, while with *David* he is but *panting after God*, as the *hart after the water-brooks*; the soul feels an hidden pleasure in that divine warmth; it is marrow and fatness to it, and renders a day in God's courts *better than a thousand*: but it is a much more noble thing to love as those blessed do, who enjoy and see the God of love, and clasp about that infinite eternal good with the brightest flames of ardent unwearied zeal. How delightful is it to exercise that love in
high

high admirations, and to give it vent in the transports of endless praises ! How pleasant to serve so endeared an object, with a mind cured of all its infirmities, and disentangled from all impediments ! And above all, how satisfying to behold in themselves so lively a conformity to him, whose matchless excellencies have so many myriads of delightful admirers !

And is not here great reason why we should rejoice for them ? does not love teach us to be glad at our friend's felicity ? Oh, my brethren, can we indeed with seriousness contemplate the heavenly glory of the saints, so amazing, so unspeakable glory, and not be transported to think and hope, that our beloved dear friends are there ? Sure, if with *St. Paul* we had ever been taken up into the third heaven, and had heard his ἄρρητα ῥήματα, things not to be uttered ; or if, with *St. John*, we had in vision surveyed the *New Jerusalem* in all its glory, and heard the charming melody of the hallelujahs sung in her streets ; or had ever beheld triumphant saints walking in white robes with palms in their hands ; I say, sure we should be ashamed to weep for them who are there. Look up, Christians, and see if these be objects of lamentation. What ! they that have a paradise to dwell in, that have a kingdom to enrich them, that have angels to converse with, and an infinite God to enjoy ! are these to be condoled ? No, no, the more we loved them, the more we shall rejoice, because it is so very well with them. Would we indeed recal them from all this bliss and joy unto a partnership of our tears and groans, our sins and darkness ? What ! from the possession of all those great things, beyond what our eye ever saw, or heart conceived, but yet their eyes do see, and their hearts do rejoice in ? Have we such a grief as would dispossess our friends of heaven ? Verily, whatever we pretend, this is not from real love, for that principle is not so injurious.

When they were on earth, they oft wished for a release from this vain life ; had they had wings as a

dove, they had flown away sooner, and been *at rest*. They oft went up to mount *Pisgab*, as *Moses*, and gave many a longing look towards the promised land; desires and groans were the harbingers they sent before their arrival; and now that they have obtained their wishes, we ought rather to congratulate than bewail them; but by no means to wish them back again into the estate that was once so uneasy to them.

We have no reason to think that they look back in their hearts to our *Egypt*, for we ourselves find many temptations to desire a discharge, and be gone; and should we be so unkind to our delivered friends, as to wish them a burden, which ourselves would fain throw off?

The truth, in short, is, we quite forget whither they are gone (either through unbelief or inconsideration) and so, like *Jacob*, we mourn for *Joseph* as lost, when at the same time he is lord over all *Egypt*; or we think of them only with relation to ourselves, and our own want of them, without a regard to their good, else it would not be so hard to rejoice for them: for why should we lament their great deliverance? or, why should we hang *our* harps on the mournful willow, when they have taken *theirs* into their hands in the joyful choir of blessed spirits?

This consideration, that *they are gone to the Father*, affords us another ground of joy, in that they are gone to the same place, where we ourselves (if such as they) are hastening to. This is what Christ intimated more than once to his disciples, *John* xiv. 3. that they shortly should go to the *same place*, and *same Father*, to possess the *mansions* prepared for them in his great house: and here it was, that their love might find matter of great joy. It is the separation of our friends from us that grieves us; that we and they must divide into such a distance, as admits no more sweet and delightful converses: We are ready to say with *Thomas*, *Let us also go, that we may die with*

with him, John xi. 16. or with *Ruth* to *Naomi*, *Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried*; *Ruth* i. 17. as being loth to be parted by death itself. Let us but have their amiable society, whatever it costs us: this our desire is in great measure granted; God will indeed remove them from us, but then it is to that country and city, where we ourselves design to fettle for ever. They are gone, but 'tis to the same harbour, which we are bound to, and are upon our voyage for; nay, where we ourselves have already cast anchor by a stedfast hope, though we are not yet landed, as they are. Do we not profess ourselves to be pilgrims on this earth, and that heaven is our only home? Is it not your real hope, that you shall one day take up your rest in that city of God? If so, whither then could we wish our friends to be gone but where they are? Would we not have them to be there, where we may hope to find them again? We are leaving this world ourselves, and if they leave it not too, how should we hope to dwell together again? Were they always to have continued here, we could not have staid to enjoy them long; but where they are we hope to find them again, and to enjoy them for ever. That is the place, to which God the great arbiter of our lot has adjourned our next meeting, where there are mansions (not tabernacles) enough; one for *Moses*, one for *Elias*, and another for us, I mean for our holy friends and ourselves too, which our common master has prepared.

We have this then to comfort us, that we know whither they are gone, and the way we know to follow them; so that there is nothing else to trouble us, but only that we removed not together: and yet if we and they were in a foreign country on earth, how easily could we send them home some weeks before us, and be glad to hear of their safe arrival? It is much the same case, when they go to God before us, while we are following them; so that we are hoping heaven shall bring us together again: there we shall
soon

soon meet our dear and pious relations, like the meeting of *Joseph* and his brethren in *Pharaoh's* court, with joy and love enough; we shall surely find them somewhere among the multitudes coming either East or West, *Luke* xiii. 29. to sit down with *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob* in the kingdom of God, whither ourselves hope to be admitted: and this ought to revive our hearts, as something like it did very much affect the * heathen orator, when he cried out as one in an extasy, *O! præclarum diem! &c.* “*Ob! gaudiosus*
 “*day indeed, when I shall come to that assembly of di-*
 “*vine spirits!*” If a Pagan could with so lofty a rapture think and speak of that blessed day, when he expected to meet with the souls of the famous heroes and wise philosophers, (when yet his expectation was only supported by probable conjecture) how much more should it elevate the heart of an assured Christian into the warmest transport of gladness, to think of that day, when he shall meet with the patriarchs and prophets, and all the members of the church of the first-born, and his own endeared friends among them?

And the rather, because that last mentioned text seems to suppose a particular knowledge, who those blessed are that we shall then converse with, and what relations they stood in this present world; for if *Abraham*, *Isaac* and *Jacob* shall be then so distinctly known, why not others also? And if they are known to others, surely, it is known to themselves, that they were grandfather, father, and son, who once dwelt together, as heirs of the promise in the same tabernacles on earth; no knowledge nor love shall be lost, but what is imperfect and useless.

We shall not perhaps carry with us any sensitive ideas of face or features into another world, but shall probably put off these with the body, because they seem useless, since there will be no counterpart of these to answer them, by which to know our friends again in that world; no, not at the resurrection it-

* Cicero.

self; for their bodies will be then wonderfully transformed, not to be known by what they were formerly on earth, in their vile condition: I only say this is *probable*, because I will not pretend to certainty in so dark a case, or to see into the shadow of death; for I know not what subtle vehicle, or fine clothing the soul may carry away from the body, according to many philosophers both Pagan and Christian; nor whether those vehicles have organs of sight, or be objects thereof, nor what figures they will have, nor what ideas or memory we shall retain of past objects to compare them by; but yet I see not what warrant that antient christian writer *Irenæus* had to assert, that *separate souls carry the likeness and figure of their bodies, so that they may be still known thereby in another world.* However we may justly hope for a knowledge of them some other way, by revelation, information, or mutual discourse, &c. “ *I must profess from the experience of my soul, (says the excellent Mr. Baxter) that it is my belief that I shall love my friends in heaven, that principally kindles my love to them on earth; and if I thought I should never know them more, and consequently not love them after death, I should now love them comparatively little, as I do other transitory things, but now I converse with them with delight, as believing I shall converse with them for ever.*” No doubt but they who dwelt together here, as heirs of the same grace of life, joining their prayers, shall dwell together there, as joint inheritors of that life, joining their praises. Some not unfitly compare the saints of all ages to a fleet of mariners, all bound for the same port, though some arrive sooner, and some later; and they, who have been first there, welcome those that come afterward with joy and great affection: and what though our friends have outsailed us? it is likely we may come in with the next fleet, and meet at home, and then our love will be satisfied again. Perhaps, ere it be long we may mingle our own ashes with their

their beloved dust; however that be, our souls hope to join in the same choir, and work with theirs for ever, and therefore should rejoice now in this hope.

True indeed, we shall no more know them after the flesh, in the relation they once stood in in this world: there shall be no more *marriage, nor giving in marriage*, Luke xx. 35. except it be the marriage of the *Lamb*, which they are waiting for, and for which *the Lamb's wife is making herself ready*, Rev. xix. 7. When not we, my brethren, not we, but Jesus Christ himself shall be their glorious everlasting bridegroom! And as the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, *so will he rejoice over them!* Mat. lxii. 5. Therefore it should greatly pacify us, as it did *David*, to say, *We shall go to them: which is much better than their return to us: They have departed from us for a season, that we might receive them again for ever.*

I may add, that this is the most effectual consideration in the world, from whence an affectionate mourner can receive full satisfaction; because it rather supports than suppresses his love to his deceased friend: true love, above all things, has a strong principle of self-preservation; it resists all things that would extinguish it, and abhors forgetfulness; no waters can quench it, it is stronger than death, and will survive its object. Now this consideration of seeing them again relieves and revives our love; it tells us, we may cherish and keep it still, and that it shall have a fresh gratification in the presence of its restored object; we may love on upon a just ground, and may anticipate the pleasures of that eternal society with our dear friends expected above. So that upon this account, in midst of our anguish, we may imagine the angel's address to the disciples to be (with some alteration) made to us, *Why gaze ye so, and stand looking after them who are ascended? These same persons, who are taken up from you into heaven, shall ye see coming again.* Oh! that we could, like *Abraham*, by faith so see that day, though afar off, as to rejoice! This

is the way to perpetuate our memory of them, when they return with delight on our minds, and not as a frightful torment. If there be nothing but sadness and terror, it will soon weary us, and make us study some arts of oblivion, whereas we shall very freely repeat a grateful and welcome remembrance.

The useful inferences from this doctrine are as follow.

1. This shews us the excellency of Christianity, or how great a blessing the gospel is, which furnishes us with such an antidote, against these temptations to deep sorrow. Indeed it is a comfortable doctrine, which brings life and immortality to light! Which tells us they are but sleeping in Jesus, who have died in him, and helps us to put so mild an interpretation on so grievous a calamity. What a soft notion of dying is this, *viz. Going to the Father*, our gracious, compassionate, heavenly Father! Whatever dubious glances this way we find among some of the sagacious heathen writers, who confess they rather desired, than were able to prove it (as *Seneca* owns) 'tis certain, they had so little of an assured persuasion of eternal bliss after death, prevailing among them, that the apostle (in this respect opposing them to Christians) sticks not to describe them thus, *viz. those who have no hope*, 1 *Thess.* iv. 13. but where they had no clear hope, Christians have perfect assurance.

And whereas we are apt to be concerned for the outward tabernacle, those amiable bodies that were the desire of our eyes, and the instruments of conversation, whose very pleasing idea makes many a welcome return to our grieved minds, and which we love to cherish and preserve in a lively remembrance, the gospel answers this also, though it will be but of little consideration with wise men; for what are these lumps of clay without the animating principle more to be valued than the comely garments of a beautiful person? The soul was the true subject of those excellent and sweet dispositions, for which we once so admired them.

And

And yet even this flesh rests in hope of a blessed resurrection; the great Redeemer is the guardian of their dust; for *this is the Father's will which sent him, that of all which was given him he should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day*, John vi. 39. Nay, he *will change their vile bodies, and will fashion them like to his own glorious body*, Phil. iii. 21. He will one day visit their sepulchres with mighty power, when his spirit shall enter those dry bones, and make them to live. He will bring their separated spirits out of that state of widowhood, and reunite them to the body; but not such a corruptible body as we saw them here. We knew them *in weakness* and frailty, but he will raise them *in power*, 1 Cor. xv. 43. We knew them *in dishonour* base and vile; but he will raise them *in glory*. We knew it *a natural* or sensual body, but he will raise it *a spiritual*: it had not the glory of *a star* here, but then it shall have the beauty and brightness of *the sun*, Matt. xiii. 43. O sweet contemplation to think how that corruptible shall put on incorruption, and that mortal so beloved shall put on immortality! And therefore we do not throw them away carelessly, as things never to be looked after more, but we lay them up in the safe repository of the grave with solemnity and care, as a treasure in store; *Because the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth and live*, John v. 28. and then some use will be made of these deposited remains.

And is this the account the gospel gives of them, who die in the Lord! Is this the case of our deceased holy friends? Then, *O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?* Thanks be to God for this gospel; that we and our friends have lived under it, and can die more easily for it. Oh! what a black gulph is death both to the dying and surviving friend, when they see nothing certain beyond the grave and dry bones! but to Christians who see it shine beyond the clouds, there is comfort! there is hope! We part
a while,

a while, but it is as they who bid good-night, only for a little interval of rest. Thus has the gospel abolished and quite annulled death.

2. How much more may a well-prepared Christian rejoice in his own death, because he has a far greater concern in its advantages than his loving friends! Indeed death is so solemn a business, so important a crisis, the turning point of eternal happiness, or eternal misery, that leads to a judgment so accurate and searching, (the requisite preparation for which is so strict, and human frailties so many) the doom is so dreadful, and the sentence so decisive and irreversible, that no frame is more befitting or safe for poor sinful creatures to be found in, than that of a penitent humility, and a serious awful anxiety about the issue of so momentous a concern.

But when a Christian hath deliberately settled the grounds of his hope, and upon impartial search finds the characters of an heir of glory, and the uncorrupted testimony of his conscience concerning his integrity of heart and life; why should he not *rejoice with his trembling*, even when he is stepping over the border of time into a boundless eternity? Sure it should be a joyful thing to die and *go to the Father!* And no doubt but it would be so, if he were certain of that; they who are through humble jealousy apt to cry, *Lord, spare us a little*, would then welcome death with speed. As for a well prepared and assured Christian, who knows, if he were absent from the body, *he should be present with the Lord*; how can he but desire it? Why should he, like others, be hanging back and craving more delay? Why should he loiter, when a messenger from heaven calls him out of this *Sodom*? Rather, he ought to desire to be dissolved, *ἀναλῦσαι*, to loose from this port, and to go with full sails into the *haven of eternal rest*. It is indeed a rough passage, in which he is sure of the shipwreck of the earthly vessel; but the soul shall land safe in paradise. It is a dark step through the valley of death's shadow,

shadow, but he is led through it by a sure guide, who will shew him *the path of life*, Psal. xvi. 11. why then should he fear any ill? Rather let him say as *Zuinglius*, when he received the mortal wound, *Ecquid hoc Infortunii? What harm is this to me?* Indeed nature shrinks and shivers at the thoughts of untried agonies and groans, which we have sometimes seen others labour under. But what though it cost us a few sighs and pangs, who would not break his way through one half hour's pangs into everlasting joys, to have that great sight, *viz.* the presence of the *God of glory*? This is enough to make the Christian at once both to fight and triumph, while he bids his sorrowful friends rejoice, *because he goes to the Father.*

But, alas, it is astonishing to see how little of this holy welcome death finds amongst Christians! I doubt the most that the generality of men, esteemed religious, attain to, is only to be unwillingly content with heaven, when ungrateful death will no longer suffer them to stay. How few court his approaches in calm desires! when they have suffered an unwelcome shipwreck, they are content indeed to land on the celestial shore, rather than perish; but they had much rather put off the voyage. When therefore they are arrested with sickness or danger, what do we hear, but craving more delay, hanging back, and crying, *Lord spare me a little longer?* Where do we find the spirit of those pilgrims, who having heaven in their eye, *embraced the promise* with joyful arms, and with insatiable desires hastened to arrive there? They valued not their own country; ever since they heard of heaven, they would hear of no home on earth. Where are these children of *Abraham*, these *seed of Jacob*, that stand so affected towards heaven, as to rejoice in quitting their kindred and native earth at God's call? *Ileb. xi. 13, 16.* And how should our friends rejoice for us, in what is so unwelcome to ourselves? Let us not act so inconsistently with our principles, as to extol the felicity of our departed christian friends, and yet

yet be so averse to have their lot. Can we rejoice for them, and yet bemoan ourselves under the same fate? Or is it so well for them, and can it be ill for us *to go to the Father*? Nay, our desires should be so much the greater, because our dear Lord is gone before, and so many of our holy friends also. The departure of every amiable relation or friend to heaven is a fresh invitation to our desires to follow, since it is at once to go both to *the Father*, and to *them* too, which we perhaps have more sensible conceptions of. Were our friends *in hell* with *Dives*, the scripture tells us they would have us entreated not to come to that *place of torment*; but being *in paradise*, no doubt, they as earnestly wish us a share in their joys; and shall not our desires be the same? Let us learn then to converse with death as a friendly thing, which, as the philosopher said of his enemy, may kill us but cannot hurt us. We know where, and to whom it sends the good man; it makes him *absent from the body*, but *present with the Lord*: an exchange, to which he should be most willing!

3. Let this give a check to our inordinate grief for the death of holy friends. Here is the difficulty to put this in practice in a time of trial: our love is usually so carnal and sensual, that we know not how to raise it to so rational and spiritual an exercise as this. When death has unclasped those mutual embraces of our friends and us, (which nothing but death could do) our passions are soon in such a tumult as *David's*: *Oh! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom: would God I had died for thee, O Absalom my son, my son!* 2 Sam. xviii. 33. It is a time when our bowels will sound like a harp within us; when nature can frame itself to no voice but that of lamentation and weeping, and we refuse to be comforted: we cannot forbear *Jacob's* sorrowful moan, *Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and all these things are against me!* Gen. xxxii. 36. We have much ado to restrain ourselves from *David's* passionate exclamation,

tion, *I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been to me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women, 2 Sam. i. 26.* We can hardly suppress our inward wishes with *Job, Oh! that it were with me as in months past, when my children were about me! Job xxix. 2, 5.* This then is the time when we have need to call in all the aids of our Christian faith and hope, for calming our disquieted minds: and surely these should signify something with Christians. To what purpose have we the revelation of immortal life, if it be of no use on such occasions? Why have we *more hope* than others, if we have not *less sorrow*? Make not the world believe you think so meanly of heaven, by mourning for those who are gone thither, as though this world were better. Rebuke these unreasonable passions; it is their birth-day into glory; though there was sorrow when *the hour of travail came*, (when we saw our beloved friends in their pangs and agonies, when we saw pale death *changing their countenances, and sending them away*; then we stood round them with sorrow and tears, as if we shared in their agonies, and died with them;) yet now that they are delivered, and remember their anguish no more, we should carry it as sharers in their joy, and believing admirers of their felicity: Thus *David* washed and anointed himself, when it was said, *The child is dead.* *Philo* the Jew tells us, That the great veneration which the *Ilittites* expressed to *Abraham* in that honourable salutation, *Thou art a mighty prince, &c. Gen. xxiii. 6.* was because they saw him bear the death of his wife *Sarah* with more magnanimity and moderation, than was usual among them.

Philosophy itself has often laid these storms, and taught the wise Pagans to triumph over these infirmities of nature; and shall *Christianity* be baffled with them? *Plutarch* tells us of his wife, that when tidings met him on the road that his son was dead, and the company with him came home, they saw all things to
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serene and easy, that they concluded it was a false report, so calmly and indifferently had she managed herself. Nay, the poor barbarous *Americans* will sing over the remains of their friends, who they believe are gone to the region of spirits, while they recount with joy the little instances of their valour: and shall not we with more reason rejoice over ours, while we rehearse the evidences of their piety, and the fruits of their faith, and charity, and victory over the world? It is * *Seneca's* supposition (and may be our firm conclusion) of a good man, *Fortasse quem nos periisse putamus, præmissus est*; He is not lost at death, but only is sent before.

Upon how little a business of this life do we contentedly and patiently part from our dear associates for some weeks or months? and it suffices us to hear they are well, though absent: and shall we take it so very ill, when they are gone (perhaps not much longer) upon so great a business as taking possession of an *everlasting kingdom*? Can we love them, and not wish their happiness? Or can they be happy, and not die?

It may be, they are taken away from *evil to come*; such times may happen as shall make us say, *Blessed are the dead in the Lord, for they are at rest*: When we shall interpret God's meaning in their removal by those words, *Come my people, enter into your chambers and hide yourselves, till the indignation be over-past*, Isa. xxvi. 20. However, let there be never so great prosperity in view, they are gainers by the change in the best times; and the day of *their death*, is better than the day of *their birth*, for they have left a good name for piety and virtue, which is *better than precious ointment*, Eccl. vii. 1. or more fragrant than those *beds of spices and perfumes*, in which persons of eminent worth were laid at their death, or those aromatick ointments, with which they were embalmed, 2 *Chron.* xvi. 14. To which, it is like, *Solomon* alludes, in that expression, intimating that he dies with most ho-

* *Epist.* 64.

nour, whose memory is embalmed with the savory fruits of a virtuous life.

All this is most true, when we can say of our deceased friends, that *they are gone to the Father*, and this on solid grounds. When we have known them by divine grace powerfully biased toward God, holiness, and heaven, as the great centre of all their desires and aims: when we have seen them shine with the Redeemer's image in great meekness and humility, great inoffensiveness, and tender goodness towards all; (for let me tell you by the way, this sweet and quiet temper does not endear us to men only, but to God; *It is of great price*, says the apostle, *in the sight of God*, 1 Pet. iii. 4. so that when God comes to value a person, he makes high account of this meek and peaceable spirit, as being the great ornament of our profession; of which the whole family and others feel the comfortable charms :) when we have found them possessed and governed with a conscientious dread of offending God or man, (perhaps in some instances too scrupulous) diligent also in the daily duties of secret piety and devotion, with reverence and great seriousness: when we have seen them faithful in all their relative capacities, as therein serving the Lord, as well as men: when they have been eminently mortified to this vain world, to all the gaiety and bravery, the interests, divertisements, and pleasures of this life; and that in years and circumstances very capable of such temptations; and this because they rather chose *the better part*, which shall never be taken away: when we have beheld their submissive patience, and christian resignation to God, under misery; and after all, great humility in an abasing sense of their unworthiness, and need of mercy; but yet supporting their faith with honourable thoughts of the divine goodness, and a sense of their own sincerity; so as with hope and strong desires to breathe out their departing souls into their Redeemer's hands; welcoming his approaches with, *Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly.*

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When we can thus describe our friends, (and I know very well whom I could thus imperfectly describe) why should we not conclude *they are gone to the Father*? And why should we not rejoice in all the comforts of that consideration? How unreasonable is our immoderate sorrow, when all the rest of their friends rejoice? For, as themselves rejoice *to go to the Father*, so the blessed God their Father has welcomed them with joy to their everlasting home: Jesus Christ has presented them as his crown and joy, without spot or blemish; holy angels and spirits congratulate their arrival to their society, and cannot be supposed to rejoice less at the consummation of their victorious warfare, than at its beginning in their conversion; and shall we alone be swallowed up in sorrow? Rather let us comfort one another with these words, and ascend after them in holy desires to be in the same state and place.

For I must add, that we can never receive the comfort of this argument, unless ourselves be in earnest bent towards the same heaven, and can truly hope to meet our friends there. All who part here, do not meet again in heaven; and though they who are departed may be happy, yet if we never see them again, we lose the comfort of such a thought. If we must be separated from them by a dreadful unpassable gulph; if of us and our friends, us and our yokefellow, us and our children, it be found true here, that *one is to be taken, and the other left*; they admitted, and we shut out from heaven: this will make their death to be the beginning of an everlasting separation, never to be healed; only it may be prevented by our serious preparation for the same happy end and state.

Now the account given of that state, (here described by *going to the Father*) sufficiently points out to us, what that requisite preparation is. Since it is to dwell and converse with God as our Father, how necessary is it to such an end, that we here *love and*

serve him as our Father with all filial respects? that we bear a lively conformity to his holy nature in our correspondent wills and affections? that we walk and converse with him? that we relish the thoughts of him? and that by frequent approaches to him in acts of holy devotion we may begin the acquaintance which heaven is to perfect? Then may we speak freely of meeting them again, when ourselves are by faith and patience *following them, who are now inheriting the promises.*

4. Finally, Let this excite near relations so to live together, as to afford this ground of consolation to their surviving friends at their own death. Though at present I may seem to have been speaking what concerns *myself only*, yet it concerns *you* to hearken for the time to come, when the like case may be yours. How surely will death dissolve all your relations, and part you and your beloved friends? The time is coming, when the now desire of your eyes shall become the terror of them; when with great anguish of soul you shall see all your mutual endearing love, all your delightful and pleasant converses, ending in dying agonies and ghastly looks, and yourselves lamenting over their expiring groans and struggles. Oh! Sirs, what can comfort you then but this consideration in my text? or, what shall comfort your poor relatives whom you leave behind you but this, that they hope *you are gone to the Father*? Methinks I pity them, who sorrow without hope, who mourn for rebellious prodigals, for wicked though near relations, who they fear are lost in the horrors of an endless night of darkness and misery, and that the lamp of their lives, with that of their hopes, are both gone out together.

Oh! that therefore none of you would by your negligent, carnal, irreligious lives, be such a terror to your friends, nor make such a sword to pass through their souls! When you are sick, they tremble and are in pain; and that for two lives at once, that of the

body, and the more important life of the soul too. And when you shall die in that case, they will refuse to be comforted; they'll count themselves undone, through fear that you are so: whereas did they see you *working out your own salvation*, and seeking God's kingdom and righteousness in the first place; could they perceive your penitent return to God, after your long estrangement from him, and that you are for nothing so concerned, as how you may be saved; could they be confident of your pardon and acceptance with God in Christ, oh! how secure and easy would they be! When you shall be smitten with sickness, they will then go comfortably, as the sisters of *Lazarus* did to Christ, saying, *Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick*: and when you die, they can cheerfully resign you into his safe hands. When it will comfort their hearts to hear you say, *My heart and my flesh fail, but God is my portion for ever*: and to hear such a comfortable farewell from you, as Christ sent to his disciples, *John xx. 17. I am going; but it is to my God, and to your God; to my Father, and to your Father*. So mighty a difference is it to our friends, (much more to our own souls) in what condition we live and die.

I beseech you, therefore, to live together as the *heirs of eternal life*; provoking one another to good works, joining your prayers, and giving mutual examples of piety; that so you may fit each other for heaven, and leave a testimony in one another's bosoms, of your sincerity towards God, and your meetness for eternal glory; that so, whether husbands or wives, parents or children, brethren or sisters, die first, your surviving friends may trace you to heaven in their refreshing thoughts, and lodge you there. For *verily they will faint then, unless they can believe you are gone to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living*. So that when they have laid you in the dark grave, and the curtains of the night are drawn about you, they may entertain themselves with pleasant hopes, that your souls are among the saints in light, wrapt

up in the embraces of endless love and joy: that you are standing with the *Lamb upon mount Sion above*, where all his redeemed multitudes shall shortly convene, in order to that great *marriage-day of the Lamb*; when the glorious bridegroom shall put on all his beautiful ornaments, and appear in his brightest robes, not only with his own, but with his *Father's glory*, Luke ix. 26. and then shall *they also appear with him* in glory. When heaven shall empty itself of its blessed inhabitants, who shall all come down to be spectators of this great solemnity; ambitious to adorn the triumphs of the mighty *Jesus*, and to augment the magnificence of his appearance. When the spoils of the devouring grave shall be rescued by that triumphant conqueror, and the dead start forth at the sound of his thundering voice, and mighty trumpet. When all nations, high and low, shall answer the summons to his awful tribunal, and with attentive silence wait to hear their final doom. When, *come ye blessed, and go ye cursed*, shall send all to their eternal homes: these to everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. When death and hell, and all such frightful things, shall be cast into the *bottomless lake for ever*. Oh, most glorious hope! Oh, more glorious sight! when it shall once be, as it surely shall. When *the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy shall be on their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*. Isa. xxxv. 10. Wherefore, let us again comfort one another with these words, *Amen: Even so come, Lord Jesus*.

DISCOURSE XIX.

The Incurableness of Superstition.

[CHANDLER.]

In two DISCOURSES, delivered at *Little St. Helen's* to the Society that support the Morning-Lecture there.

MICAH iv. 5.

For all People will walk, every one in the Name of his God.

THough superstition hath nothing in right reason, or real revelation, to countenance or support itself, yet experience and the history of all past ages tell us, that it finds an easy entrance into the minds of men, and that when once it hath taken possession of them, it is with the utmost difficulty expelled, and too generally becomes incurable. The whole of the *Pagan* theology, in reference to the objects of adoration, the sentiments formed of them, and the methods by which they were worshipped, was little better than a mixture of fable, absurdity, and impiety; and yet mankind were obstinately tenacious of it, guarded it with numerous laws, treated the very attempt to introduce a reformation

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mation as a crime of a very heinous nature, and frequently punished with death those who opposed, denied, or deserted it, though they had the strongest conviction of its falshood, and embraced a more rational and worthy religion in the room of it. Yea we find this attachment to superstition and false religion is, too frequently, more powerful than the adherence to that which hath innate excellency and truth to recommend it; and what may justly seem wonderful, that men are more ready to desert the true religion for the sake of embracing a spurious and corrupt one, than to part with a corrupt one in exchange for another more agreeable to the nature of God and man. Thus we find that the *Jewish* nation, before the *Babylonish* captivity, had the strongest propensity to all the idolatries of the nations round them, and were continually relapsing into all their abominations, forsaking the true God, and the purer rites of religion that he had appointed them. Upon which account he speaks of their sickleness and inconstancy in this respect, as their peculiar reproach. *Pass over the isles of Chittim; and see, and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? ** Where is the nation to be found, from the west to the east, that hath forsaken their gods, even though they are false and fictitious ones? *But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit; they have deserted me, in whom they ought to have rejoiced and gloried, as the rock of their salvation, for those false gods, that are the shame and reproach of those who worship them, and cannot help and profit those who trust in them.* But the words I have read to you are a prophetic description of that better disposition, which was to take place under the kingdom of the *Messiah*, when many were to flow to the house of the Lord, and the law was to go forth of *Zion*, and the word of the Lord from *Jerusalem*, and the language

* Jerem. ii. 11, 12.

of those, who in multitudes flocked to receive it, should be this of my text: *For all people will walk, every one in the name of his God; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.* To *walk in the name of God* is publickly to avow and acknowledge him as our God, to make him the object of our worship, and steadily to adhere to him as such. And here

———*Fas est et ab hoste doceri.*

the worshipers of the true God may learn even from idolaters themselves, steadfastness and constancy in their profession. For if they will all of them unchangeably persevere in their respective superstitions, and in their acknowledgment and worship of their false and imaginary deities; surely we should so far make them our pattern, as immutably to determine never to depart from *the only living and true God*, and resolve steadily to continue in our belief, esteem, veneration, and worship of him, and diligently observe all the religious institutions he hath been pleased to appoint us. *All people will walk, every one in the name of his God; and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.* In speaking to which words, I shall

1. Enquire into the truth and certainty of the fact; the obstinate attachment of mankind to false objects and modes of worship.

2. Consider the reasons of it. And

3. Apply the whole to the occasion of our present meeting together.

I. I am to enquire into the truth and certainty of the fact; *all people will walk, every one in the name of his God.* That there is but one God, the creator, preserver, and governor of all things, is not only the constant doctrine of divine revelation, but evidently demonstrable by the principles of reason; and yet nothing was less perceived and acknowledged than
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this important truth, for a long period of many ages, throughout almost all the several kingdoms of the earth. Even those who were most learned and polite had not attained to this knowledge of the one God, and whatsoever improvements they made in other respects, here they continued mere *Barbarians*, as rude and uninformed as those who were the most savage and uncultivated. The sacred writers inform us of the many idols of the ancient nations; each country and city having a separate local, tutelary deity of their own, without calling in question the divinity of the gods that were acknowledged and adored by others. Under the *Ægyptian*, *Assyrian*, and *Babylonish* monarchies, the same principle of polytheism prevailed, and the most irrational and absurd rites were practised in honour of the gods they had consecrated. The wisdom of the *Greeks* was not sufficient to cure them of this folly, and though the *Romans* conquered the world, they were themselves abject slaves to this superstition, and held by their prejudices in bondage to the meanest and most impious idolatries. And so obstinate was their adherence to the corruptions and errors they had espoused, as that it evidently appeared to be beyond the reach of all ordinary methods ever to recover them from it; being proof against all conviction and reason, and treating the very attempt to unsettle them as to their opinions, and dissuade them from the rites they had been accustomed to, as an instance of the most offensive and criminal impiety.

Nor was their zeal in the least diminished, though the gods they worshipped had the most infamous characters, and often demanded from them sacrifices, which the dictates of nature and honour forbade them to offer up to them. Had their several deities been esteemed by them as benevolent, friendly beings, delighting in virtue, and acting as the patrons and guardians of it; concerned for the welfare of mankind, and always ready to promote it; this would have

have been some justification of their conduct, and rationally accounted in some measure for the warmth they expressed in the defence of them, and for supporting the honours and adorations that were paid them. But it is really at first appearance astonishing to consider, that beings confessed to be of the most cruel, revengeful, capricious, proud, lewd, dishonest dispositions, and stained with all the unnatural vices of human nature, should ever be put into the number of deities; or be looked on and acknowledged as objects of religious adoration; or that any should ever have imagined, that the murder of infants and children, the sacrifice of men, the prostitution of their wives and daughters, and other the like enormities and crimes, could possibly be methods of worship rational in themselves, and agreeable to the nature of things, or that could ever be demanded by and acceptable to superior beings, when they could not but be the abhorrence of all, that had any thing of humanity, tenderness, honour, or virtue, amongst the children of men. And yet such was the fanatical zeal for these infamous deities, and the absurd and monstrous worship that was paid them, that they not only acknowledged their divinity themselves, and practised these enormities in honour of them, supporting them by public establishments and laws, and rendering it capitally penal to introduce other deities, and other rites of worshipping them; but endeavoured by all the methods of authority, worldly advantages, artful persuasions, fraud and violence, to propagate the worship of them amongst others, to proselyte them to these foul idolatries, and to extinguish from amongst mankind all better sentiments of Deity, and all other forms of religion that were humane, pure, and worthy of the nature of *God* and man.

Thus we find in the most ancient times *, that the *Moabites* drew in the people of *God* to the sacrifices of *Baal Peor*, and scrupled not the price of their wo-

* Numb. xxv. 1, 2.

men's chastity to profelyte them to the worship of this idol. *Solomon's* wives were fond of the honour of making converts to their religion, and drew in that wise prince, in the decline of his life, by their wiles and subtleties, to go after *Astoretb*, *Milcom*, *Chemosh*, *Moloch*, and other gods, to build them high places, and to authorise incense and sacrifices to be offered to them. * The *Jewish* kings, who had forsaken *Yehovah* their God, and were perverted to the idolatries of the nations around them, employed all their power to corrupt their people, and persecuted and murdered his prophets for their stedfast adherence to him and his institutions, and preaching against the impieties and corruptions they had introduced and established; and so deeply were they prejudiced in favour of them, and so obstinately set on maintaining them, that neither the threatnings nor promises of God, neither judgments nor mercies, neither the strongest reasonings, nor the most unquestionable miracles, no sense of duty or interest, no prospect of good, or fear of evil, was able to reclaim them, and bring them back to the acknowledgment and worship of the Lord their God.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of *Babylon*, gave full proof of the fiery warmth of his zeal, by peremptorily decreeing: † *Whosoever falleth not down and worshippeth the golden image, shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace*; and in the rage of his anger thus imperiously demands, in the lordly tone of a royal furious persecutor ‡, O *Shadrach*, *Meshach*, and *Abednego*, *Do ye not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up?* And upon their presuming to answer: *We will not serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden image*, instantly orders them, as the punishment of their contumacy, to the flames.

The *Macedonian* princes that reigned over *Asia*, though most of them some of the worst of men, yet were great bigots to their gods and superstitions, hated

* 1 Kings xi. 5, 7, 8.

† Dan. iii. 6.

‡ Ver. 14.

the *Jewish* nation, and vowed their destruction, because the object and rites of their religion were different from their own. With this spirit *Antiochus Epiphanes* wrote to his whole kingdom *, That all should be one people, and every one should leave his laws; and to the *Jews*, That they should forsake their own religion, and consent to his; and that whosoever would not do according to the commandment of the king in this respect, should be put to death.

After the *Christian* religion had been introduced into the world, and by the great prevalence and spread of it, was found to be prejudicial to the established religion of the *Roman empire*, the name of Christianity was instantly made capital, *Christians* were condemned as impious and atheists, without trial or liberty of defence, merely for their refusal of that worship to the gods, their religion censured as an execrable superstition, and the most exquisite punishments inflicted on them for their constancy in professing the faith of *Jesus* and adhering to the worship of the true *God*, who alone was forbidden to be worshipped, whilst every thing else was allowed to receive adoration. The *Roman* emperors vindicated the majesty of their deities, by methods truly suitable to the character of those deities, even by the most iniquitous measures of violence and cruelty, spreading horror and destruction amongst all that dared to deny their divinity, and who refused to offer incense, when commanded, upon their altars. So enthusiastic and frantic was their zeal for the established superstition, as that they would not so much as tolerate any kind of opposition to, or dissent from it, and did not scruple to sacrifice the honour, the peace, and welfare of the empire, and innumerable lives of the most excellent and worthy men in it, to the mistaken view and ill-judged resolution of defending and supporting it.

I might here mention, that though *Mahometanism* was evidently the invention of an impostor, and is in

* 1 Maccab. i. 41—50.

its nature a mixture of absurdity and fable, yet it no sooner found reception amongst that barbarous and ignorant people who first embraced it, but it inspired them with a sanguinary zeal to propagate it, and drew the sword as the most speedy and effectual method of making converts, and gaining over mankind to the acknowledgment and profession of it.

But to leave all other instances, the truth of this observation: *Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no Gods? All people will walk, every one in the name of his God:* is confirmed in the most remarkable manner, by the obstinate and incurable adherence of those of the *Romish* church to the *Divi*, the gods they have introduced, and the idolatries and impieties they have established in honour of them. Though it is impossible to prove by any evidence of sense, or reason, or revelation, the truth of any one single proposition in the world, if some of the essential doctrines of popery are capable of proof; though many of the worst absurdities, superstitions, and abominations of all the false religions, that have ever been in the world, are united in it, and constitute the distinguishing form of it; though it is the most monstrous corruption of Christianity, and subverts the most essential principles and precepts, whilst it maintains and appropriates to itself the sacred name of it; though it holds up a morsel of bread to be adored as the eternal *God*, and pretends to a power, first to create the Saviour of mankind, and then give him to be devoured by it credulous votaries, and to create him in infinite numbers only to be as often adored and devoured; though it represents *God* cruel and relentless as the antient *Saturn* and *Meloch* of the *Gentiles*, and hath offered up thousands and ten thousands of human sacrifices upon his altar; though it is in its nature a savage institution, unsociable, intolerant, fatal to liberty, an enemy to inquiry, the bane of learning, the destruction of friendship and mutual confidence, the mother of ignorance, the sink of corruption, and the pro-

protectress of all the enormities and vices of human nature; yet how fast is the hold it hath taken in the minds of men, and with what an invincible spirit and ardor do they engage in the defence of it! To differ in any point from the established doctrine of it, is with them damnable and unpardonable heresy, and a crime not to be expiated but by blood. To dissent from her modes of worship, though scandalously corrupt, childish and wicked, is in her account a schism that excludes from all friendship with men, and cuts off from the salvation of God. And so obstinate is the attachment of those in her communion to the idolatries she hath established, under these apprehensions, that they dread nothing more than conviction, flee from all the means of it as infectious and pestilential, despise instruction, and even reject and cast contempt on the very oracles of God, lest a divine inspiration should pervert them, and the word of heavenly truth should seduce them from the path of duty, and the way of salvation. And as they will have no other religion themselves, they will allow none to have a different religion from their own; and such as have, are the objects of their hatred and malice, they envy them their very lives, and are always prepared by principle and disposition to extirpate them out of the world, and want nothing but the power to accomplish it. And of this they have given full and incontestable proofs, in every nation, where they have had the liberty to act agreeable to their inclinations, and that fierce inhospitable spirit, with which their religion inspires them. Thus we see that bigotry is the constant attendant of all false religions, and that there is nothing to which men are more obstinately wedded, than to the gods which their imaginations and superstitions have created, and the errors in religious principles and practice, they have been once persuaded to submit to. Let us now,

II. Secondly, enquire into the reasons of this surprising fact, and how this general adherence of mankind to false objects and modes of worship is to be accounted for; and I shall but little more than barely mention those, which have occurred to my mind.

And here we may lay it down as a general and certain rule, that as ignorance is the parent of superstition, so it is the great guardian and security of it. It comes in, and lives, and prospers by it. To this cause the apostle assigns the errors of the Gentile world with respect to God, and the corruptions of religion that universally prevailed amongst them. *Their foolish heart was darkened, and therefore they became vain in their imaginations; and though they had some notion of God, yet they glorified him not as God, but changed the glory of the incorruptible God into images made like to corruptible men, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things* *. And though many of those who introduced the idolatries and superstitions of the nations, were crafty, designing, politic men; yet they had to do with a rude uncultivated, uninformed and barbarous generation, easy to be deceived, and ready to submit to all the prescriptions of their leaders and governors, implicitly, and without the least examination. In such circumstances were the superstitions of almost all nations introduced; of *Egypt, Greece, pagan Rome*, the imposture of *Mahometanism*, and the corruptions of *popish Rome*; and by the same powerful cause men have been constantly held in a state of dishonourable slavery to them; upon which account *St. Paul* calls the long period, in which these superstitions prevailed, *The times of ignorance* †. And the patrons of false religion are so sensible of this, that there is nothing they so much discourage as inquiry, learning and knowledge amongst others, not willingly permitting any thing to be wrote or read in opposition to the established opinions or practices, condemn-

* Rom. i. 21, &c.

† Acts xvii. 30.

ing to the flames all writings of this kind, and not permitting the people to retain or study them. Thus the officers of Antiochus Epiphanes *rent in pieces the book of the Jewish law which they found, and burnt them with fire* *. And wheresoever was found the books of the testament—the king's commandment was, that they should put him to death. Dioclesian also ordered the sacred writings of the Christians to be consumed in the flames; a method that hath been almost constantly followed by the enemies of true religion, as one of the most effectual means to keep men in ignorance, and thereby to support the credit of their corruptions in doctrine and worship.

The generality of the world will not give themselves leave to reflect, nor willingly be at the pains and trouble of impartial examination and strict enquiry; especially into so abstract, difficult, abstruse and uncertain an affair as they imagine that of religion to be. They are too deeply immerst in the secular concerns of life, or too warmly engaged in the pursuit of sensual gratifications and pleasures, or have too prevailing an indifference to all subjects of a religious nature, ever to concern themselves about it. And therefore, if they must have a religion, they had rather take it by trust, and receive at a venture that which is ready prepared to their hands; and upon the same principle are against all innovations and changes, warmly contend for the things they have received from others, and without regarding whether they are right or wrong, adhere to them themselves, and are for enforcing them universally on others. Especially

If there hath been propagated an opinion of their divine original, and that these errors and superstitions have been introduced by gods, or men under the inspiration of the gods, are such as they have commanded and approved, and by any peculiar signs and manifestations have appeared in favour of; the veneration for them grows higher, the attachment to them

* Maccab. i. 56, 57.

more strong, and all opposition to them is condemned as wickedness and impiety. On this foundation the bigotry of the Gentiles to their sacred rites was built and supported, as they were taught to believe that they had their first rise from some deity, or that the first institutors of them had been favoured with divine converses, and particularly instructed in the mysteries of religion that they established, and which they imagined were afterwards confirmed and improved, upon extraordinary occasions, by immediate and special directions from above; and that therefore the Christian religion, as different and contrary to it, was to be looked on and treated as a very impious and execrable superstition.

'Tis another prejudice in favour of them, if they can pretend to high antiquity, and to have been derived down by a long succession from former ages. This gives them a venerable air, clothes them with dignity, and makes especially unthinking and weak minds look on them as grown sacred and inviolable by years, and esteem it a kind of sacrilege to alter or remove them. This was the reasoning of paganism, in vindication of its dominion over mankind, that it had been *held in perpetual uniform veneration, which had never been infringed, but rather increased by its long duration, and that the antients had always attributed to their temples and ceremonies a sacredness in proportion to their antiquity.*

And this prejudice is greatly strengthened, if besides the claim of antiquity, they have been delivered down to them from their fore-fathers and ancestors, as what their piety and wisdom approved, and what they lived and died in the belief and practice of. To deviate from their institutions is looked on as a kind of outrage committed on their memories and characters, as an high reflection on their knowledge and prudence, and as the severest censure that can be passed on their condition. And therefore the very natural instinct that men have to reverence and esteem their

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their ancestors, and hope favourably of their state after the present life, gives them a strong bias in favour of their religious sentiments and practices; which they look on and receive as the most valuable part of their inheritance, and of which they will not suffer themselves ever to be easily and willingly dispossessed. And this was a consideration of great importance and weight with the ancient heathens, and what they strongly insisted on: the gods, the ceremonies, the religion of their fore-fathers, as never to be departed from. Thus it was a law of the *Athenian* lawgiver: *Let it be an eternal rule to the inhabitants of Attica, for ever binding, to honour the gods and heroes according to the prescription of their ancestors.* Agreeable to this, *Plato*, in his treatise of laws, advises, that *there should be no innovations in the sacred rites that had been established, and that nothing relating to the sacrifices of the gods, that the laws of their ancestors had established, should be altered or prohibited.* This was the opinion of the *Roman* orator, who after disputing against the superstitions of his country, adds: *That it is the part of a wise man to maintain the institutions of his ancestors, and to preserve their sacred rites and ceremonies.* *Cotta*, in his dispute concerning the nature of the gods declares: *I will always defend, and always have defended those opinions, which we have received from our ancestors concerning the immortal gods, their mysteries, ceremonies and religions; nor shall any thing that can be said by any person whatsoever, learned or unlearned, ever move me from that opinion which I have received from our fore-fathers, relating to the worship of the gods.—I ought to believe our ancestors, though no reason can be given for it.* Agreeable to this was the advice given by *Mecenas* to *Augustus*. *By all means worship the deity yourself, according to the custom of your ancestors, and compel others so to do, and have in abhorrence and punish those who introduce any foreign rites.* Hence, in opposition to the christian doctrine, one who was then an enemy to it, argues. *How much better and more*

worthy is it to receive the customs of our ancestors as the oracle of truth, to maintain the religions they have delivered us, to adore the gods, which we have been taught by our parents to fear even sooner than to know them, and not to judge for ourselves concerning the gods, but to believe our fore-fathers, who from the very origin of the world deserved to have the gods propitious to them, or their kings.

If to this can be added the universal or general consent of nations, kingdoms, of lawgivers and kings, the rich and great, the wise and learned, the prepossession will be still proportionally more powerful, and the cure of it more difficult and improbable; for the generality will not easily be brought to think, that national establishments are founded in falsehood and iniquity, that the several constitutions of the world have been formed upon a plan of idolatry and impiety; that those which have been deemed the most sacred laws of all nations, have been only in support of irreligion and vain superstition, and that what almost all mankind of all ages, characters, stations, and circumstances have agreed in, can either be wrong in theory, or evil in practice. Hence this was urged as a strong argument against Christianity, and as an unanswerable vindication of the principles and customs of the heathen world. *We see, says one of them, throughout all empires, provinces, and cities, that all have their several national sacred rites, and peculiar gods; and that the Romans adopted them all; and that therefore, tho' to account for, and assign the origin of the gods, can't be done with certainty, yet since all nations consent in the belief and worship of them, I can bear with no man, who, swoln with boldness, and I know not what irreligious prudence, endeavours to subvert or weaken this ancient, useful and profitable religion.*

There is, besides all this, a pomp and splendor generally in all false religions, that is extremely captivating and pleasing, that catches men's attention, raises their admiration, and secures their approbation and esteem.

Pure religion, unadorned, in its native simplicity, without pomp and external solemnity, passes almost unobserved, or is looked upon with contempt; whilst the eye is fixed, and the ear charmed by the costly decorations of superstition, and the numerous rites that are almost constantly employed in it. And here the ceremonies of paganism had almost every circumstance of this kind to recommend it, stately temples, images and gifts of gold and silver, a splendid priesthood, rich endowments, solemn musick, vocal and instrumental; every thing to charm the senses, and excite an ignorant and bigotted zeal in favour of it. It was no wonder then that this should be an objection against primitive Christianity. *Why hath it no altars, no temples, or images?* Or that Christians themselves should be held in abhorrence by men, who were fond of these things, because they despised the temples of the Heathens, treated their gods with indignity, derided their sacred rites, and slighted the honours and purples of their priests.

If under the prevalence of superstition and false religions, kingdoms and nations have been favoured with all instances of worldly prosperity, with peace and plenty, with victory in their wars, and triumph over their enemies; this is farther looked on as a presumption, that their objects of worship are real, and the religious rites they perform, such as are grateful and acceptable to them; especially if their prosperity should be consequent upon some solemn ceremonies practised in honour of them, or some peculiar calamities should be removed by the superstitions made use of to propitiate and appease them. This will make such impressions, to the advantage of the worst kind of them, as will not be easily worn out. By this plea paganism endeavoured to defend itself. *The Romans, says Cæcilius, embraced the gods of all nations, and hereby their power and authority spread over the extent of the world; and they have propagated their empire beyond the paths of the sun, and the bounds of the ocean.--*

Whilst they guard their city with sacred rites.---Worship their conquered deities, every where seek after foreign gods, and adopt them as their own, and build altars even to unknown deities. And by thus receiving the sacred rites of all nations, they have merited the empire over them all. After which he enumerates particular interpositions of their deities, on some very solemn and important occasions, as carrying in them a very probable justification of the religious rites and ceremonies of their ancestors.

Or, if after any supposed defect in, or appearing contempt of the usual superstitions, or some temporary casual intermission of them, any remarkable calamities have happened to fall out, either to the publick or to particular persons who have been in a special manner chargeable with such contempt of them; this hath greatly strengthened the general credulity, and heightened the veneration for the deities, by whose displeasure these evils have been supposed to be inflicted. *Oftner than we have desired, says the pagan Cecilius, the contemned auspices have witnessed the presence of the gods; as at the battle of Allia, the slaughter of Flaminius his army, and the Parthians victory over the Romans; all imputed to the neglect or contempt of the usual ceremonies.*

Or if, upon the rise and prevalence of any religious principles and practices, opposite to the received and established ones, any extraordinary events should fall out, greatly prejudicial to the publick, and productive of some remarkable misfortunes; superstition immediately makes the connection, and by imputing them to the spread of such new opinions and methods of worship, rivets itself faster in the breasts of men, and awakens an incurable aversion to that religion, to which they impute them. Thus the ancient pagans attributed every publick calamity, every national evil to the Christians. *If the Tiber overflowed its banks, if the Nile did not ascend into the fields; if the heavens withheld the rain, if earthquakes, famine, or pestilence happened,*

happened, instantly the cry was, The Christians to the lion.

If those who renounce the ancient superstitions, and enter into a new scheme of religious sentiment and worship, are, as to the generality of them, men of low circumstances, without liberal or polite education, reputed ignorant and unskilled in languages and all parts of learning; superstition looks on them with indignation and contempt, to see such persons rise up in opposition to the establishments of kingdoms, the opinions of philosophers and wise men, and the general practice of the great, and honourable, and rich. With respect to our blessed Saviour, the language was: * *Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brethren and sisters are they not all with us? Do we not know what, and whence they are? And they were offended in him, and in the apostles, because † they perceived they were unlearned and ignorant men.* And with respect to the primitive Christians: *It is not, says Cecilius, without a general indignation and concern, that we hear of certain persons, and those ignorant of sciences, unacquainted with, and void of learning, and of the lowest occupations, of the dregs of the people, who take on them to determine concerning things of the highest and most awful nature, as to which the philosophers of so many sects, have been in all ages, and are even to this day, in a state of uncertainty and doubt.*

If, besides this meanness of their external condition, they are treated generally with contempt and despite, hated, persecuted, afflicted, and exposed to every kind of evil, superstition improves this into an argument of the badness of their cause, thinks itself right, and strengthens its hold in, and dominion over men, by teaching them to think, that persons thus miserable, can never be the favourites of heaven, nor that cause good, which God and man seem to conspire to oppress and extirpate. See, says Cecilius, *the greater, the best part of you, as you say, are in want, starved, oppressed with labour and hunger.* — See yourselves ex-

* Matt. xiii. 15.—57.

† Acts iv. 13.

posed to threatnings, punishments, torments, crosses, not now to be adored but suffered by you, and fires also, which you both foretell and fear. Where now is your God, who it seems can succour you when you revive, but is not able to do it whilst you are now living.

If invention and malice throws on them crimes of an odious nature, and holds them up to the publick as persons of great impiety and wickedness; superstition, ever credulous in its nature, and that lives by imagining and supposing what it can never prove, greedily lays hold of the charge, aggravates and improves it by the worst suspicions and jealousies, and peremptorily condemns the cause of the men, upon account of the enormities it falsely and rashly loads them with the commission and guilt of. It was thus that the enemies of Christianity endeavoured to prejudice the world against it, in its infancy, by representing the great author of it, as a magician and deceiver of the people; and his disciples, not only as *wholly useles* in life, because they paid nothing to their gods and ceremonies, but as atheists and impious persons; guilty of the vilest superstitions, in worshiping a god under the form of an ass's head, and a dead man as a god, that suffered the most extreme punishment for his crimes, even the cross itself; as practising the most criminal enormities, in feasting and binding themselves by an oath upon a murdered infant, and allowing themselves in the most unnatural impurities; as enemies to the emperors, for not sacrificing and praying for their welfare; and in a word, as the common enemies of mankind in general. Charges, which could they have been proved, would have justified the utmost severities that could have been inflicted on them, and been invincible objections against the religion they professed.

If the avowed principles of any religion be not only contrary to those of the established and popular one, but such as philosophers and men of learning and wit, represent as strange and incredible, and deride as improbable,

probable, absurd and ridiculous; superstition, that dares not examine, and is afraid of enquiry, immediately draws this consideration into its support, entrenches itself more firmly in the minds of men, and by the absurdities which it fixes on truth, destroys its evidence, and prevents the influence and belief of it. *What monstrous, what horrid doctrines, says the often mentioned Cecilius, do the Christians invent? They represent their God, whom they can neither shew nor see, as diligently inquiring into the manners and actions of all men, even into their very words and secret thoughts; running about as it were, and every where present, as troublesome, restless, and impudently curious and inquisitive, as conscious to every thing that is done, and in all places; when 'tis impossible he should attend on individuals, who is taken up with the care of the whole; or be sufficient for the whole, who is busied about individuals. What, do they not threaten the destruction and conflagration of the whole earth, and the very world itself, with all its stars? As tho' this eternal order of nature, constituted by divine laws, could be disturbed; or, as tho' the union of all the elements could be broken, and the heavenly link being dissolved, the whole fabrick that is kept together and encompassed by it, should be overturned and perish. Nor contented with this mad opinion, they frame even old women's stories, spreading it about, that after death, and tho' reduced to ashes and embers, they shall rise again; and such is their confidence, that they mutually believe each others lies. A double madness this, to denounce destruction to the heaven and its stars, which we all leave as we found them; and to promise to themselves, when extinct by death, eternity, when all die as certainly as they are born; with many more objections of the like kind, that may be found in the primitive writers.*

The very difference of manners taught by superstition and true religion, is urged by the former as a strong prejudice against the latter; and as rational piety condemns many liberties, to which superstition gives an encouragement and sanction, the generality of

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of men will not fail to be fond of that religion that lays the fewest restraints, and indulges them in the most unbounded freedom of actions. *We are cold,* says Tertulian, *to the desire of glory and honour — We renounce your publick spectacles and shews. — We have nothing to do with the madness of the circus, with the impurity of the theatre, with the cruelty of the stage, or the vanity of the xystus. But how do we offend you, if we presume to share in pleasures different from yours? Why, because we reject the things in which you delight.* Cecilius also urges the same objection. *You, Christians,* says he, *full of suspense and fear, abstain from worthy pleasures, you frequent not our shews, are not present at our solemnities, at our publick feasts you are wanting, our sacred games, our sacrificial food and libations ye abhor, ye put no garland of flowers upon your heads, ye grace not your bodies with sweet odors, but reserve your ointments for funerals, ye refuse garlands to the sepulchres, pale, trembling, and worthy the compassion even of our gods.* The Christians looked on many of the pomps, entertainments, festivals, and principal solemnities of the Gentiles, as utterly unlawful, and therefore entirely abstained from them; and for this peculiarity of their manners, were looked on by them with great displeasure, and their religion, which forbad them to have any share in those entertainments, was held by them in the utmost abhorrence.

And in truth, tho' all the foregoing causes concur in support of the interest of superstition, yet the main and principal one, and without which all the fore-mentioned would be in a great measure ineffectual, is, that all false religions are reconcileable with the passions and vices of men, indulge them in their favourite lusts, and flatter them with methods of safety even in the habitual pursuits of the most criminal gratifications. True religion represents the great object of worship as a being of infinite wisdom and rectitude of nature, and as taking pleasure in nothing but what resembles himself, governing his rational creation by laws

laws of the most perfect sanctity, requiring from them an internal worship of the mind and conscience, by the exercise of the most worthy affections, productive of the practice of the most substantial virtues; as admitting no compensations for men's wilful and habitual vices, nor allowing any thing in exchange for moral righteousness; and as approving and accepting nothing but what partakes of his moral image and likeness; and therefore as condescending to no terms of peace and reconciliation with mankind, without repentance, and those sacred fruits that are meet for it, the fruits of a new and cheerful obedience for the future. This is the unalterable condition that true religion prescribes of reconciliation and acceptance with God; a condition not at all relished by sensual men, which they censure as harsh and severe, and to which all their passions and inclinations reluctate, and render them strongly and almost incurably averse. And therefore they are more open to the insinuations of superstition, which teaches how to be pious without virtue, how to be religious without repentance and amendment, to appease the offended Deity without reformation and a better life, and to secure his favour without any resemblance to him in moral rectitude and perfection. The end superstition invariably pursues is to destroy the obligations of all true godliness, and to substitute somewhat, the shadow, the appearance in the room of the substance, speculation instead of practice, external forms instead of inward good dispositions, bodily exercises rather than those of real godliness, pomp and ceremony in the place of a spiritual and true worship, outward atonements and satisfactions without any change of heart, or reformation of manners; in a word, any thing, every thing, to the exclusion of what is absolutely important and necessary to the favour of God, and the true happiness of mankind. And therefore it is impossible but that men must be prejudiced against true religion, just in proportion as they are in favour of their vices, because

because true religion will not bend to inclination, nor pay any compliment to the crimes of the rich and great, nor allow them any hope without reformation, nor interest in the protection and friendship of God, without being in their measure *holy as he is holy*. But superstition is sure to charm them by complaisance and submission, doth not rudely interrupt their pleasures, doth not imperiously restrain their passions; kindly indulges their favourite inclinations, freely allows them to enter into all the liberties of the world, hath palliatives to calm the uneasy suggestions of conscience, and soft expedients to remove every troublesome suggestion that may distress them. It is no wonder therefore that Christianity, which gives *such great and wonderful precepts*, as *Trypho* thought, and all sensual men must always think, *none can ever observe*, should be treated with contempt and abhorrence; or that a false religion, with all these yieldings and generous concessions, should too often triumph on the ruins of truth and righteousness, and hold the generality of men fast bound in fetters, too strong for the most powerful human reasons and arguments ever to dissolve.

And finally, tho' the forementioned causes greatly conspired to promote the interest, and maintain the influence of superstition over mankind, yet still there is another remaining, without the concurrence of which it would often give way, and yield to the superior power and stronger convictions of truth: *viz.* The secular advantages arising from it, and its suberviency to promote the views and schemes of crafty and intriguing politicians.

Superstition is a very vague, uncertain, and intricate thing, that hath no fixed rules and principles to govern it, and is not to be carried on; with decency and success, without numerous hands; nor the dignity of it to be maintained, nor the ends of it secured, unless it be made the interest of those who are to manage the springs of it, to play it off with advantage,

tage, and dextrously to apply it, as times, circumstances, and emergencies shall require. When high honours, large revenues, and great immunities are annexed to the ministers of it, when their persons are declared sacred, and their services and functions venerable and divine, this will not fail to engage men of secular views and dispositions readily to engage in them, to support them with all their authority, and to use all the methods that art and subtlety can suggest to vindicate and maintain them. If they cannot approve them in their minds, as agreeable to the nature of true religion, they will approve them as lucrative and gainful; and when all their secular advantages depend on the continuance of them, they will themselves treat all opposition to them as the most criminal impiety, and excite others by all their fears and terrors for the defence of them. They will find means to disguise, or degrade the dignity of truth itself, to obscure the evidence of it, to keep it out of the view of the generality of mankind, or to render it contemptible and odious. They will give to falshood the honourable appearance of truth, cover over the most palpable absurdities with the sacred dress of *mysteries*, and convert the most impious idolatries into the reverend rites and ceremonies of religion, and vindicate them by such spurious glosses and artful reasonings, as shall somewhat conceal their native shame and deformity, and render them palatable to the unthinking, weak, and credulous. And that nothing may be wanting to give credit to the errors they live by, and those superstitious practices that are the fruitful sources of all their prophets and emoluments, they will not fail to employ pious frauds and lying wonders to support their cause, nor scruple to introduce the gods themselves, as vindicating their own divinities and rites by miraculous operations. To both these methods of false reasoning and forged miracles, paganism had frequent recourse for its protection and defence, and by these it combated primitive Christianity, which came

naked and unindowed with any secular advantages into the world, was never introduced with any lucrative designs, and had nothing to depend on to gain reception amongst mankind, but its own intrinsick excellency and worth, and that *demonstration of the spirit and power of God* that attended it.

Add to all this, the subserviency of superstition to promote the designs, and carry on the views of crafty and intriguing statesmen, and it will appear but natural, that they should join in full confederacy with the inventors and immediate ministers of, and dependents on it, to render it secure and inviolable. As it was first introduced, in a great measure, by policy and fraud, so it hath been constantly supported by these methods, as artful and designing men have found occasion for the use of it; who having themselves, too often, no fixed principles of religion, have never scrupled to impose on the ignorance and credulity of others, or to fall in with any kind of popular prejudices and errors, as often as they imagined the publick utility required it, or when necessary to gratify their ambition and pride, or when it appeared to them any security of their authority, grandeur, and power.

A false religion is every way applicable to these views, is tractable in its make, perpetually shifting and varying its form, as circumstances may change, is consistent with any kind of expedients that the intricacies of states, or the pride and pleasure of arbitrary princes may render necessary; and in a word, is as flexible to all the designs of political craftsmen, as they themselves can desire it to be. And therefore it is not to be expected, but that they will give it their countenance, support the patrons of it, establish it by human laws, guard it by the terrors of the civil power, render it in all its ministrations and offices honourable and gainful, and upon no pretence whatsoever admit of any kind of alterations for the better, after it is once introduced and established. And in order to prevent it, the creatures and ministers of princes will flatter
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them into an opinion and belief of their power to prescribe to others, in matters of religion as well as state, and insinuate into their minds the dangerous consequences of suffering this power to be disputed, their constitutions to be opposed, and the established doctrines and rites to be altered or set aside; and by suggestions of the bad effects of innovations, as tending to raise up a spirit of faction, to sow discord, and give occasion to numerous animosities and seditions, they effectually excite the civil power, by the most vigorous measures, to oppose them, and prejudice or deter all ranks and degrees against ever attempting or consenting to them. And tho' a zeal for what is sacred, and the preservation of the established religion, is often times the avowed pretence; yet real infidelity, and a contempt of all religion, any farther than the ends of government and power can be answered by it, is too frequently the true one. And tho' atheism and superstition appear as distant from each other as the two poles of heaven, and as irreconcilable as the greatest antipathies in nature, yet atheism often puts on the warmest zeal to maintain the rights and claims of superstition; and superstition, in return for the supports it receives from atheism, becomes subservient to all its views, and even dictates the very measures of accomplishing and securing them. The history of pagan *Rome* furnishes us with many instances of persons, who were unsettled as to all principles, and who saw the folly, and when they could do it with safety, derided the popular gods, and established superstitions of their country, who yet were zealous advocates for both, conformed to them upon all occasions themselves, and would by no means permit any direct publick opposition to either, merely from political principles, and that false maxim; that the disabusing the people, and the encouraging any change in their religious system, might be attended with those publick disturbances, as would draw after them consequences extremely prejudicial to the civil establishment, and

endanger the peace and safety of the empire. *Cotta*, in his dispute about the nature of the gods, spoke undoubtedly the sentiments of many of his contemporaries, when he said : *I myself, who am a priest, and who think that the publick ceremonies and religions are to be most sacredly defended, am willing to be persuaded that there are gods, tho' many things occur to me, which so perplex me, as that sometimes it appears to me, that there are none.*

These things considered, the prevalence of superstition in the world, and the difficulty of its cure, will be rationally accounted for ; agreeable to the sense of the inspired prophet ; *hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods?* Which words are a strong assertion, that no instance of this kind was ever, or but rarely, to be found ; and that no history could name the people that had done it. *All people will walk, every one, in the name of his God.* Let his character be what it will, they will maintain their veneration for him, and however absurd, irrational, unnatural, and immoral his rites of worship are, they will obstinately practise them ; and tho' this observation seems hardly reconcileable with the modern boasts of the absolute universal sufficiency and full perfection of human reason, without any divine assistance and instruction, but is the most convincing demonstration of the natural weakness, ignorance, and credulity of mankind, and shews how much they need some faithful guide in matters of religion, and how easily they run into the grossest and most contemptible mistakes in this important affair, when wholly left to their own reasonings and conclusions concerning it ; yet the experience of all past ages and nations, and even of the age in which we ourselves live, is such a confirmation of its truth, as leaves not the least room to question or deny it.

DISCOURSE XX.

The Incurableness of Superstition.

[CHANDLER.]

MICAH iv. 5.

For all People will walk, every one in the Name of his God.

HAVING shewn in the foregoing discourse the truth of the inspired prophet's observation, that *all people will walk, every one in the name of his God*, and endeavoured to account for the reasons of it; I now proceed to draw those practical inferences from the subject, that the nature of it suggests, and that may render it of common benefit and importance. And,

1. How extraordinary and truly miraculous doth the speedy propagation and prevalence of Christianity in the world appear, notwithstanding all the numerous difficulties there were to prevent the reception and success of it. St. Paul * himself was able to rejoice and glory in this, that as *the gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven*, to all nations without exception, to all ranks and conditions of men, *Barbarians, Scythians*, bond and free; so it had brought forth fruit; gained reception, and produced the fruits of faith and universal charity, amongst those who had

* 1 Colof. vi. 23.

heard it. They were, as *Tacitus* confesses, in *Rome* itself, under the reign of *Nero*, a great multitude. In the beginning of the second century *Pliny* informs the emperor *Trajan*, that there were many of them of all ages, every order, of both sexes, and that the contagion of *Christianity*, as he calls it, had spread not only thro' the cities, but the towns and villages, insomuch that the temples were deserted, the sacred solemnities had been a long while omitted, and few were found that would purchase the sacrifices. 'Till at length the Heathens clamoured, towards the end of the second century, that the cities were overspread with *Christians*; that they were in the towns, country, places, and isles; and that persons of every sex, age, condition, and station of dignity, took on them the *Christian* profession and name. 'Twas not, indeed, without great opposition, that *Christianity* did prevail with the nations to walk no longer in the name of their respective gods. But by what methods, by what arms and weapons did it conquer and prevail? Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Not by human policy and wisdom; not by forged miracles and lying wonders. But by much patience, by afflictions, by purity, by knowledge, by kindness, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the armour of righteousness, and by the power of God, bearing witness to the preachers of it with signs and wonders, and diverse miracles and gifts according to his own will. O glorious and important victory! How honourable the triumph of *Christianity* over the gods and superstitions of mankind! Superstitions rendered sacred by the pretence of a divine original, confirmed by the universal consent of nations, grown venerable by long prescription and antiquity, guarded by the superstitious fears of mankind, become inviolable by the laws of kingdoms, woven into their constitutions, defended by the power of kings and princes, supported by the tricks of priests, having the most prevailing advocates in the passions and vices of men, and that had constantly defeated all the attempts of human

learning, wisdom, and philosophy! Yet thus entrenched, thus guarded by the strongest bulwarks, thus defended by the united force of earth and hell, superstition, after innumerable struggles, and the fiercest opposition that could be made by it, yielded, though unwilling yielded, to *Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God!* Vanquished in every conflict, it gave way, by every kind of opposition lost ground, by the very arms employed in its defence was defeated. Put to open shame, it retired at the bright appearance of truth and righteousness; the gods it had created became the objects of contempt, the temples it had erected were deserted, the idols it had consecrated were cast *to the bats and moles*, and restored to their original and proper uses, and the rites prescribed by it rejected as mean, sordid, impious and execrable; till at length, pursued by the sword of the word and spirit of God, it yielded up the important victory, and left Christianity to triumph as the prevailing religion of the world.

I am, indeed, far from thinking, that mere success is in itself an argument of the goodness of any cause. But when it is considered, that the author of Christianity was put to an accursed death, as a common malefactor, by his own nation; his apostles, first friends, and immediate disciples, were harrassed by the most severe and relentless persecution; his religion endeavoured to be crushed in its very infancy; that all the powers of the world rose in opposition to it, *Jews and Gentiles* uniting their forces to prevent its reception in the world; that his doctrine was an offence to the one, and counted *foolishness* by the other; that the wise men scoffed at it; philosophy ridiculed it, and the learned treated it with contempt; that the constitutions of kingdoms denied it entrance, the laws of nations forbid the toleration of it, the pride of princes hated its instructions and restraints, the policies of the world absolutely renounced it, the superstitions of mankind abhorred it as the most formidable rival,

rival, and loaded it with charges of the most monstrous impieties, and unnatural crimes, and that the corruptions and passions of human nature were its irreconcilable enemies; that it had no aids of human eloquence and fashionable oratory, no assistance from policy and craft, no support of human authority and power; nothing but itself, its own intrinsic excellency to recommend it, nor any thing to rely on for its preservation and success, but its claim to be the truth of God, the supernatural evidence that attended it, and the protection of the divine wisdom and power in which alone it gloried; that thus solitary and destitute, naked and friendless, calumniated and reviled, hated and persecuted, void of every visible and secular advantage, and in spite of the most numerous and powerful discouragements, it should nevertheless bear down all opposition, make converts numberless as *the drops of morning dew*, spread its conquests so rapidly throughout all nations, and in defiance of all kind of methods to oppress and extirpate it out of the world, should become the general religion of mankind; this is an event so extraordinary, as that it never had a parallel, can't be accounted for by the known and ordinary course of causes and effects, nor indeed be considered in any other rational view, than as an event secured by the providence of that God, who *is great in power and excellent in working*.

2. How honourable an esteem, how high a veneration should this create in our minds for Christianity, which delivered the world from the bondage of superstition, *turned men from their idols, to serve the living and true God*, introduced the true, rational, spiritual method of worshipping him, and which, wherever it prevails in its native simplicity, renders the return of all superstition and idolatry absolutely impossible. Sure I am, that those who have learnt to treat Christianity with contempt, as an insignificant, useless institution, must be entirely ignorant, or extremely

tremely forgetful of the circumstances of the world, when it was first introduced into it. It would do them no hurt, if they could and would look over the apologies of the ancient Christians; which, however they may have learnt to despise, would teach them many things they ought not to be ignorant of, shew them the real condition of the heathen world, and present to their view such a rout of gods and priests, and such a scene of ceremonies and rites of worship, as are enough to excite all the different movements of laughter, indignation, scorn, and compassion, to think that mankind could ever be enslaved to such ridiculous, sordid, execrable superstitions; and that their sentiments of religion could ever become so base and grovelling, as to admit for objects of worship, impure and mischievous spirits, the vilest of men, the most infamous prostitutes, the very distempers of the body, its worst vices, the meanest passions of human nature, mere abstract ideas, and the most contemptible of animals; and practise such modes of worship in honour of them as would shock humanity, put modesty to the blush, and make a wise man laugh at the impertinence and folly of. As their deities were almost without number, so their religious ceremonies were endless; partly such as encouraged the most criminal enormities, and partly such as tended to excite a thousand absurd and irrational fears; and which, the more they are known, will heighten in all sensible minds, that understand how to take part in what relates to the honour and welfare of mankind, that value and love for Christianity, which it well deserves, for clearing the world of these destructive monsters, restoring the nations to their reason, dignity, peace and liberty, and settling amongst them a system of religion, that contains all the genuine principles essential to it, prescribes those duties which arise out of the very nature of it, and is absolutely free from those numerous, costly, and burthenome ceremonies, which however pleasing to weak, injudicious and superstitious minds, have no-

thing to do with real godliness; and generally, wherever they are practised, destroy the true spirit, life, and power of it.

3. What an abhorrence should this create in us for all the corruptions of true religion, and how careful should it make us not to revert to those idolatries and superstitions, which mar the beauty, and are absolutely inconsistent with the dignity and prosperity of it, and which 'tis the great design of God by the gospel to preserve us from the infection and infamy of. Christianity is, in its original frame, a plain, simple, unadorned institution, that teaches *one God, even the father of all, one only mediator between God and man, one method of worshipping God in spirit and in truth, one way of acceptance and salvation to eternal life, by the exercise of all worthy affections, and the practice of all the virtues of a good life, from this rational principle of faith, that God is, and that he is through Christ a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* It would have been well for the world, had Christians been contented with this original simplicity, and not depraved it by the doctrines and commandments of men; nor, under the pretence of ornament and splendor, introduced those foreign adulterous rites, which instead of adding to, have obscured the glory of Christianity, altered its appearance, and made it rather look like a painted, gaudy, impudent prostitute, than the pure offspring of heaven, and the chaste, the modest, genuine daughter of the God of truth. Such is the dress it wears in the popish church, so entirely is it altered from what it originally was, as that the primitive features of it are lost; so different from that fair, innocent, and lovely form, that was presented to his church by the Son of God, as that he hath declared and rejected her, as an *harlot* and a *for-cerefs*; so changed from what *Paul*, and the apostles, and many of the primitive confessors beheld her, as that were they now to see her, they would not have the

the least knowledge of her, or instantly declare her to be that paganism revived, which their doctrine had once extirpated, and wonder at the impudence of the men, that should presume to palm the imposture upon the world, under the sacred shelter of their authority.

For what have they in common with real Christianity? Not the one living and true God of infinite perfection, without mixture of weakness and folly; since the God they worship is an avowed enemy to truth, and that free impartial use of our rational powers, by which alone the knowledge of it can be obtained; requiring the belief of impossibilities, and the most absurd and palpable contradictions, the renouncing our reason, and the evidence of our senses, the rejecting all means of information, and the cherishing the deepest ignorance as the mother of an acceptable faith; is a weak, childish, superstitious being, delighted in shew and ceremony, in external pomp and pageantry, rather than in a rational worship and service; displeased, like the heathen deities, with ceremonial omissions, and as easily appeased by the renewal and multiplication of them; is a cruel, revengeful, inexorable being, inspiring his votaries with a fierce, relentless, savage disposition, spiring them up to the most iniquitous measures of violence and barbarity, and demanding, as the most acceptable sacrifices that can be offered him, sacrifices of men, eminent for piety, for usefulness, and the most amiable virtues of human nature; for every great and excellent qualification to recommend them to his favour and protection. This is not that God, whom I have been taught to reverence by the christian doctrine. It is a God whom I neither acknowledge nor worship. The God in whom I believe, as a disciple of Christ, is the God of truth, a friend to enquiry, the patron of wisdom and knowledge, the father of mercies, the author of peace, the lover of righteousness, that compassionates himself the weakness of human nature,
and

and inspires the souls of men, not with that infernal wisdom, *which is earthly, sensual, devilish*, but with that better wisdom *which is from above, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.*

And as I have no common object of worship with the church of *Rome*, so neither have I one common medium of worshipping the one God with them. They have *lords many, and Divi, gods and mediators many*; the christian church knows but *one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus*. The christian doctrine is: *In Christ we have redemption through his blood, and that there is no other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved*; with them the virgin *Mary* is co-redeemer, and *by her* he himself is made our Saviour. With them our blessed Lord is a mediator subject to his mother; the language of the true mediator to her acting in this high character, is: *Woman, what have I to do with thee? Who is my mother and my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother*. Their mediator is in heaven and earth, and present at innumerable places at once; not so the mediator of the church, whom *Peter* declares *the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things*. Their mediator is created by a priest; that of Christians, the Son of the living God. Theirs frequently created; ours, once born of the virgin *Mary*. Theirs crowded into a wafer, soul, body, and divinity all together; ours, seated *on the right hand of glory*, and perpetually invested with *the form of God*. Their mediator is eaten, digested, turned partly into the substance of their own bodies, and the remainder cast into the draught; a doctrine that a real Christian can't think of without shuddering, nor mention without abhorrence of so stupid an impiety.

And as we have neither object nor medium of worship common with those of the *Romish* church, so neither have we *one rule of faith* in common with them.

Their rule of faith is made up of the decisions of fathers, saints, councils, vagrant and uncertain traditions, school-men, monks, friars, popes; an admirable medley this, to extract an uniform consistent scheme of principles from; but the faith of Christians is solely *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*

And agreeable to these infinitely different rules, such are the doctrines they respectively dictate. By their doctrine there are seven sacraments; by ours but two. By theirs, in the sacrament of the Eucharist, there is truly, really, and substantially the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood of Christ*; to ours, this doctrine is wholly unknown, and we look on it as a monster, composed of ignorance, absurdity, contradiction, and impiety. By theirs, there is a purgatory to cleanse away the sins of the dead, and the souls that are detained there are relieved by the suffrages and assistance of the faithful here; by ours, the state of the dead is immutably fixed, no prayers for them are of any efficacy, and according to their characters, when they leave this world, such will be their judgment and state hereafter. By theirs, the departed saints intercede with God for us; by ours, neither saints nor angels share in this honour, which is reserved solely to the one mediator Jesus Christ. By theirs, indulgences for men's crimes are the heavenly treasures of the church, which the priests may dispense for money; by ours, the remission of the punishment of sins is declared to be the prerogative of God. By theirs, men may merit eternal life; by ours we are ordered, *when we have done all, to own ourselves unprofitable servants.* By theirs, matrimony is condemned and forbidden to a great part of mankind; by ours, *marriage is declared to be honourable in all.* By theirs, *meats which*
God

God hath created to be received with thanksgiving, of them which believe and know the truth, are commanded to be abstained from; by ours, the prohibition of marriage, and eating such meats, is expressly attributed to men that have departed from the faith, who speak lyes in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with an hot iron. By theirs, the pope is perpetual visible head of the church; and by ours, *Christ is the sole head over all things to it, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

And as we have thus no common faith with them, so neither have we any common method and form of worship. They venerate, invoke, and worship angels and saints, adore relicts, crosses, wafers, images, pictures, monks and friars; objects of adoration more numerous than were ever prescribed by the pagan theology. They perpetually offer up to God, as they pretend, Christ himself, as a true proper propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead. Their Eucharist is a maimed imperfect one, defective in an essential part of it, and wholly changed from the original intention and purpose of its institution. But the genuine christian church allows no worship or veneration of saints and angels, worships the *Lord God* only, in the name of the one intercessor Jesus Christ, is taught to esteem all idols and images as vanities, and to abhor them as impurities, and the adoration of them as prophane and impious, looks upon the reverence paid to dead bodies and relicts as a mean and sordid superstition, offers up no sacrifices to God but prayer and praise, and the like rational and spiritual oblations, celebrates plain, simple, unadorned sacraments, and in the perfection in which the Saviour of the world instituted them, and rejects all the cumbrous loads, the splendid sopperies, and lucrative follies of their superstitions, as corruptions of the worship of Jesus Christ, as defecations of its purity, inconsistent with the nature of Christianity, and even destructive of the great intention of it. And can these enormous corruptions

ruptions of the religion of Christ, in all the essential views and parts of it, ever be considered without the deepest concern, the warmest indignation, and the most fixed abhorrence? Shall any in these nations, whom God hath redeemed from them, whom he hath again and again almost miraculously preserved from being afresh brought under the infamous intolerable yoke of them, shall any of us lose the sense of the greatness of our deliverance, cherish a single thought favourable to these impious superstitions, and lend our own assistance to the restoration of them?

What, shall a free-born nation covet a prince, that is a slave and a tool to his priest, tutored by the oracle, and in the seat of idolatry, and bred up in the very sink of superstition, corruption and iniquity; that hath sucked in sanguinary principles with his milk, whose mind is enflamed by the furies of bigotry, disappointment, and revenge, who is well versed in all the *Italian* arts of fraud, dissimulation, perfidy, and persecution? Whose grandfather was a confessor for the doctrine of *Rome*; whose father hath been sed by her bounty, and found an asylum in her bosom; whose brother wears the very colour, by which the spirit of God distinguishes her, as *that great whore, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication*, and is a purpled son of this indulgent mother; and who himself is too great a bigot to her doctrine and discipline, ever to pretend the least favourable regard to the protestant religion, or to take one step, or make the most distant advance towards reconciling himself with the established churches of *Great Britain*? This may pass for ought that I know, as an argument of his sincerity in the *Romish* faith; but I am sure it is a dreadful specimen of what is to be expected from him, if ever these nations should be distracted enough to admit him, or Almighty God so far desert us, as to suffer him to be imposed on us; since if the prospect of a crown and kingdom will not bend and soften him into fair promises, and flattering methods of dissimulation,

lation, to deceive those whom it was his interest to secure ; no measures can be expected to be kept by him, should he ever get possession of the dignity and power he aims at, nor any measures to be left untried, that the zeal of his heart, and the policies of his church shall prompt him to make use of, to support and propagate her doctrine and worship. And is not such a dreadful prospect enough to alarm and terrify us ? Shall we seek our own ruin, and invite our change ? Shall we be principals or accessories in the sacrifice of the protestant religion ? Shall we tamely surrender the liberty of our consciences and judgments ? shall we invite the errors we have banished to resume their dominion, the idolatries we have been purged from once more to defile our churches, and the superstitions we have cast out with contempt, with all their various ministers and tools, to resettle quiet and unmolested in the midst of us ? What, shall we thus become the prey, the property, the scorn, the insult of lordly priests, pampered monks, ignorant zealots, and atheistical politicians, that piously thirst after the good things of this land, want to revel in our palaces, and divide amongst themselves our fairest patrimonies and estates ? O God, preserve us from this complicated substantial ruin, and suffer not the inhabitants of these lands madly to fall into, or favour those methods, that must sooner or later introduce it !

But it may be said : what occasion for all this panic ? Whence doth it follow, that the restoration of *the unfortunate exile* must be attended with the destruction of the protestant religion ? Contented with the profession of his own, the establishment of the national shall remain under him firm and unalterable. Beware, *Britons*, of this delusion. If you are deceived by it, you are undone ; and if once you are so abandoned to all common sense, as to make the experiment, nothing but a miracle, which God seldom works for fools, can prevent your absolute destruction. Your enemies desire and ask no more. Suffer me to guard

guard you against this fatal experiment, and observe,

IV. That this maxim of my text, *all people will walk, every one in the name of his God*, shews the absolute folly of the imagination, that the protestant religion and liberties can ever be safe, under the government of an arbitrary, popish, idolatrous prince. He may promise you security, but he will and must deceive you. And this will demonstratively appear from the following considerations.

I. All those of the *Romish* communion have the same common attachments to their errors, idols, and superstitions, that the Gentiles themselves had to the false religions that prevailed amongst them, and the same causes to render them warm, zealous, and furious in the defence and propagation of them. They are kept in a state of the most shameful ignorance, and princes and people prohibited from having recourse to the oracles of God, and reading those sacred writings, from whence only the nature of Christianity can be understood; and severer punishments, and more exquisite penalties are exercised on those, who presume to *search the scriptures*, than on robbery, adultery, murder, and the most enormous crimes, that can be possibly committed by the most profligate and infamous amongst mankind. They are permitted the use of no kind of writings, but such as have passed the review of those, who are to live by their ignorance and deception; such as they disapprove are condemned to the flames, and such as are permitted to appear in publick, first garbled and purged, if there be need, that nothing may appear to undeceive them, or raise in them, any doubts or scruples whatsoever. So that the same utter ignorance, that so long defended the fortrefs of pagan superstition, is to this day the bulwark and security of the popish. And herein there is no difference between the highest and lowest orders of men. And so despe-

rately and ingloriously are they sunk into stupidity, and so firmly fixed in ignorance, that their foundation-principle is, to resign their understanding, to renounce the liberty of private judgment, to take their religion, as the most expeditious method, wholly upon trust, and in all things to believe and act as their spiritual directors order and command them. The errors they have embraced, and the superstitions they have been taught to practise, they are made to believe have been established by apostolick authority, miracles, visions, revelations, and the infallible inspiration of the spirit of God, conveyed to popes, as the successors of *Peter*, and councils as representatives of the catholick and apostolick church. And upon this account their fears encrease their bigotry, the terror of being *damm'd if they doubt* makes them wholesale believers, and the apprehension of being cut off as schismaticks and heretics from the church renders them obstinately tenacious of all her dictates, and the sworn enemies of those who oppose them. They are told, and they believe it, that all these corruptions have the sanction of the most venerable antiquity, and are the real appointments of the first founders, the martyrs, and confessors for the Christian faith. They consider them as embraced by their forefathers, and descending down to them from a long train of ancestors. They see powerful, rich and polite nations receive and submit to them; princes and nobles encourage and support them; and men of wit, experience, and learning, all complying with them. They are captivated by the decorations of their churches, the purple and splendid vestments of their priests, the pomp and pageantry of their ceremonies, and can't persuade themselves, but that what so pleases their fancy must be as acceptable to God, and that what they count *the beauty of holiness* must equally be so in his esteem. They observe their princes live in grandeur, have often victory over their enemies, and securely oppress those of different religions; that their people enjoy all kind of earthly prosperity

prosperity ; that peculiarly happy incidents have sometimes close followed upon the practice of some very solemn superstitions, both in publick and private life ; whilst they have been taught to impute all national calamities to those opinions and practices, which their leaders have condemned as impious and false. Those who have had the courage to avow the genuine principles of Christianity, in opposition to the common corruptions, have been frequently, in former times, men in the lower stations of life ; and as such held in sovereign contempt ; they have been the objects of the general odium and hatred, persecuted by all the methods of cruelty, loaded with the imputation of the most execrable crimes, and painted in the blackest colours, that by rendring their persons the abhorrence of mankind, they may excite as general a detestation of their principles. And this they often do, by misrepresenting these principles as absurd and impious, or fixing on them opinions they never taught, destructive of piety, tending to sedition, leading to conspiracies and dangerous combinations, inconsistent with social peace, derogatory to the honour of princes, dangerous to their government, and subversive of the unity, settlement, safety and interest of their kingdoms. Yea their very virtues have been frequently made their crimes, and their not daring to fall in with the customary vices of the times they lived in, hath been construed into a suspicion of heresy and schism, and represented to the kings and princes of the earth as a criminal singularity, that reproaches the manners of mankind, and as therefore unworthy their countenance and toleration. Add to this, that popery is a religion peculiarly suited to the views of arbitrary princes, and the best adapted that can be to procure and establish them in the possession of a despotick and uncontrollable authority. As the consciences of the people are in custody of the priest, the priest is a servant and minister of the prince, and in order to secure his spiritual tyranny, becomes the instrument and tool to

introduce and establish a temporal one; and by applying all the arts and powers of superstition to eradicate the seeds and sentiments of liberty out of the breasts of men, makes them slaves by principle and inclination, and binds them down under the fetters of an eternal vassalage. Besides, it is an institution extremely convenient for sinners of the highest and lowest rank, in which they can have absolution without repentance, indulgence for all sins past, present and to come, and therefore without any necessity of amendment; in which, zeal for ceremonies is substituted in the room of piety, and penance and satisfaction void the obligations of habitual virtue; in which, men may find merits sufficient for their safety, who have little moral excellency of their own, and those especially, who have power, wealth and honours to bestow, may purchase by these grants a sure immunity from all the punishments of a future life; or if the grace should not reach thus far, from all but the temporary ones of an intermediate state, and have even these shortened and mitigated by the masses, offerings, and prayers of the living. Oh comfortable expedients these, in the room of Christian piety and goodness, to reconcile vice and happiness in spite of their repugnant natures, and to secure sinners of that salvation, from which the nature of things, and the constitution of the eternal God hath, by an immutable decree, for ever excluded them! Now, upon a view of all these powerful prejudices that retain men in the tents of popery, and render them firm by inclination and interest, fear and hope, principle and policy, in their profession of it and zeal for it, and by necessary consequence fill them with contempt, hatred and abhorrence of the contrary doctrines of the protestant cause; can any man of common sense ever induce himself to believe, that a popish prince can ever harbour an inclination to maintain a religion, that he never considers but with detestation, or can ever in reality become *a defender of that faith*, which he esteems as an

impious

impious heresy, or will ever fail to countenance and promote his own religion, which he looks upon as the only true one, in which he finds his interest, and the encouragement of which he must esteem his highest merit and glory? The same causes will, if not overpowered by a superior force, ever produce the same effects; and if the superstitions of paganism kept their ground for so many ages, under the shadow and protection of these very prejudices, and engaged all the kings and princes and governments of the earth, with all their influence and power, to support them, so that nothing could induce them to *change their gods, which yet were no gods*, nor renounce their superstitions, tho' impious and inhuman; it is not to be expected, it is the height of absurdity to imagine, that those of the Romish church will, under the weight of all the same prejudices, give up their gods and ceremonies, and ever suffer another religion to prosper that is injurious to the interest, and irreconcilable with the prosperity of their own. The different gods of the Pagans were all of them sociable in their nature, and therefore did not scruple to reside in the same temples, to be honoured on the same altars, and quietly to tolerate each others priests, adorers, sacrifices and ceremonies. But protestantism and popery are absolutely and immutably irreconcilable, and in their nature destructive of each other; and it is impossible that either can flourish in any kingdom, but to the diminution, weakening, and gradual destruction of the other. And therefore the supposition, that a popish prince will preserve and protect the religion of a protestant nation, is the same absurdity as to suppose, that a prince with power in his hand will protect the rival that would dethrone him, and exert his authority for the suppression of his own religion, which he believes himself under a thousand the most sacred obligations to preserve unhurt and inviolable. But supposing for once, there should be a popish prince, that had reso-

lution and prudence enough to surmount these prejudices, yet I would observe farther,

2. That there are other more powerful considerations yet, that render it impossible for the protestant religion to be safe under a popish prince and government, and put it absolutely out of the power of such a prince, if his inclinations were to do it, to give it any protection, countenance, or toleration. The *Roman* religion is in its very frame intolerant, and in the whole system of it irreconcilable with the being and sufferance of any other institution but itself. All its clergy are by principle and interest avowed enemies to liberty, impatient of contradiction, imperious in their commands, derive sanguinary dispositions from their holy mother, and by being prohibited from marriage, and excluded from the endearments that arise out of family-relations and ties, want all those tender charities and compassions, that would moderate and soften their zeal, and inspire them with sentiments of forbearance and charity. And accordingly they have entrenched their religion with fiery enclosures, and the bulwarks they have raised to defend it consist of all the penalties and punishments, that the most savage cruelty can invent, and the most adamant heart can put in practice. All differences in point of doctrine from their own is declared to be heresy, all heresy declared to be damnable, and as such worthy to be extirpated from the remembrance of mankind. And as the surest method of extirpating heresy is the destruction of those who maintain it, they have extraordinary and ordinary methods of effecting it. The extraordinary are wars, crusades, rebellions, conspiracies, assassinations and massacres; the ordinary ones, infamy, imprisonment, forfeiture of estates, dragooning, halters, fires, and the various tortures of an infernal inquisition. To harbour, favour, encourage and protect those who are condemned for it, is as capital as the crime itself; and hereby children are obliged to accuse and deliver up their parents, parents their children, husbands

husbands and wives each other, princes their subjects, and subjects to renounce their oaths and allegiance to their princes. They claim the power of the temporal sword, and make the use of it, in the hand of princes, to depend on the beck and pleasure of the priest, and thus subject kings and princes to their despotick and arbitrary commands; putting under the same sentence of damnation, and assigning over to utter destruction, and the forfeiture of all earthly and heavenly privileges, barons, counts, marquisses, dukes, kings, and emperors, who shall be by them pronounced hereticks, or favourers and encouragers of them. And that princes may not be held by the most solemn ties of oaths, or by the most sacred engagements of protection to those they have marked out for destruction, they have solemnly decreed that *no faith is to be kept with hereticks*, and claim the power of dispensing with, and absolving them from their oaths. What then signifies good nature, compassion, tenderness, and honour in a popish prince, when his very religion forces him to be cruel, and relentless, and he is taught to believe, that the suppressing all the sentiments of humanity is his duty, and meritorious of salvation? What signify the plainest dictates of policy to a prince, that is not permitted to follow his own, but the warmer dictates of his priest? Of what strength can the most repeated promises be to protect the religion of a protestant nation in one, who thinks himself obliged, under the penalty of eternal damnation, to forget, elude and break them. What security can his oaths be, who is *ipso facto*, absolved from them, and under the compulsion of one, who hath his conscience and soul in his keeping, never to regard them? It is not therefore in the power of a popish prince to protect the religion of a protestant nation, if he would. He is a persecutor of it by necessity. His enmity to it is irreconcilable and mortal. His dignity and safety here, and his eternal salvation hereafter depend upon

his using all his policy, power and authority, to ruin and extirpate it. Agreeable to this,

3. Experience assures us of this dreadful truth, that pure religion can expect no countenance or safety under the government of idolatrous and superstitious rulers. When the *Jewish* princes embraced the religion of the neighbouring *Gentiles*, they slew the prophets of the Lord, and forced his worshipers into caves and dungeons. The emperors of *Rome* defended their gods and superstitions by the butchery of the Christians, and inventing every method for their extirpation. The humane, the learned, the philosopher *Julian*, as it seems we must call him, was himself the most impiously and childishly superstitious, and his zeal, as a convert to paganism, drew him into all the most artful methods to prevent the spread of Christianity, and to profelyte his empire to the expiring worship of his idol-gods. Where is the kingdom or nation, where popish princes have had dominion, in which they have not used all their power and policy to extirpate the protestant hereby, and reconvert their subjects to the popish religion, or destroy them, if they could not effect it. Amongst ourselves, when Queen *Mary* ascended the throne, she positively promised the men of *Suffolk*, she would leave religion in the same state she found it, reserving to herself the liberty of professing her own religion; and afterwards declared in council, that she would use no force upon conscience in affairs of religion. But, as these promises were made with an intention never to keep them, how soon were they forgot, and with what a bloody and furious zeal did she prosecute the entire destruction of the protestant cause in these kingdoms? In the reign of king *Charles I.* who was himself a protestant, what condescension was there shewn to papists, what encouragement and protection given them, thro' the influence of a popish queen? Tho' king *James II.* solemnly promised to preserve the government in church and state, as by law established, and to defend and support the church of England,

yet

yet the one great measure pursued by him, throughout the whole of his administration, was the entire subversion of it, and the reconciliation of his kingdoms to the see of *Rome*. The inquisitions of *Spain* and *Portugal*, the massacre of *Paris*, and the revocation of the edict of *Nantz* in *France*, the tragedies in *Piedmont*, and the barbarities executed in *Hungary*, the wars, proscriptions and butcheries in *Germany*, ancient and modern, and the numerous fires that blazed in *Smithfield*, and destroyed the *British* worthies throughout the whole extent of our island, are the witnesses I appeal to on this important subject, and my vouchers for this assertion: *The liberties and religion of this nation can never be safe under the government of a popish prince*: And much less under the government of one, who by principles of gratitude as well as religion, by the motives of love as well as fear, must think himself obliged to seek the interest, prosperity and honour of that holy see, that put a period to the wanderings of his father, nourished him in his infancy, gave him royal education, expended her revenues for his support, and shewed him, throughout the whole of his life, the most cordial marks of her protection and friendship. And shall *Great Britain* ever intrust herself to the government of such a prince? Will she venture her religion and liberties into such hands? Shall party-animosities and hatreds force any protestants among us into such desperate measures, and to take so deep a revenge upon themselves, that they may satiate their revenge upon their adversaries? Forbid it, O God of mercy, and lead all amongst us to know and value their own interest and happiness!

V. Lastly, Let all of us be duly thankful to God, who hath brought to the throne of these kingdoms, and kindly settled amongst us an illustrious protestant family, to preserve us in all our civil and religious privileges and liberties. It scarce becomes a private station to inveigh against the male-administration of deceased

princes, or to mark out a whole royal family by odious characters and representations. But surely it can be no crime to say, what all our histories relate, that these were amongst the principal objects generally pursued by the royal house of *Stewart*, the introduction and establishment of arbitrary power, and the protection and encouragement of popery. And, as dissenters, we may be forgiven if we say, after having shared so liberally of their favours, that throughout the whole period of their government, we lived in an almost continued state of persecution, having been in one reign of that family only, legally exempted from the vengeance of the severest penal laws. And as the first of it expressly declared his high displeasure against us, and the last of it closed her reign and life by a law injurious to us, in the most essential part of our liberties, as men and Christians; we cannot, as well upon our own particular account, as for numerous reasons common to the whole nation, but rejoice on this day, which delivered us from all the apprehensions and fears that were peculiar to us, and the whole nation from the common dread of a popish, long disappointed, and revengeful successor.

His late majesty wore the fairest and worthiest character; did honour to his crown, and justice to our laws; loved liberty, and preserved it to all; was steady to his friends, and merciful to his enemies; possessed the virtues that render private life amiable, and the illustrious qualifications necessary to maintain the dignity of majesty and government; lived greatly beloved and highly honoured by all good men, and died universally lamented by his faithful subjects, as the true friend and father of his country.

His present majesty, what do we not owe him for his steady adherence to our constitution, his impartial protection of all in their respective rights, his resolution and firmness in circumstances of imminent danger, his care of us when insolently invaded by the pretender to his throne, his courage at the head of our
armies,

armies, his compassion to his enemies, and lenity to many of them, who did not so much as pretend to merit it by repentance for their past crimes, or the promise of becoming better subjects for the future! If the causes of that unnatural rebellion we are so lately delivered from the terror of, were enquired into, the real ones would be, his majesty's firm attachment to the protestant religion, and his generous regard to the liberties of all his subjects, in not giving encouragement to any spirit of persecution whatsoever. Other just reasons of disaffection and sedition his enemies had none, from violent inroads on the constitution, dispensing with our laws, illegal exactions of money, arbitrary fines, imprisonments and bodily punishments, keeping up standing armies, without consent of parliament, encouraging sham plots to draw any of his subjects into ruin, and laying snares to cut them off out of private revenge, or as standing in the way of more desperate designs on the publick. It is our happiness that we can say it, even without being suspected of flattery, that not a single violation of any of our laws, nor any one act of injustice to persons in social or private life, under his countenance and authority, can be imputed as a blemish to his majesty's reign, or urged in impeachment of his honour and justice. As divine providence hath supported him on the throne, both against domestick and foreign enemies, he hath been pointed out as the prince whom God *delights to honour*; for *he hath given him all his desire, and not withholden from him the requests of his lips*; and as our peace and prosperity is the great aim of his administration, our own interest points him out as the prince, that should be highly esteemed and beloved by us. And as all that is valuable to us, as men, Christians, and protestants, depends on the security of his majesty's government, and the continuance of the crown in his royal family, we cannot be indifferent to him or them, without being indifferent to our own wel-

fare, nor unfaithful to them, without betraying and ruining ourselves.

And it is no small satisfaction to us, and gives us no unpleasing prospect of futurity, that that illustrious personage, who stands so near in succession to the crown, hath given the strongest proofs of humanity, good-nature, and love of liberty; and by shining in the characters of an husband, father and friend, hath afforded us the strongest ground of hope, that he will equally adorn every publick station, to which, in the course of providence, he may be advanced. And I am sure you will join with me and say *Amen*, when I pray: That our most distant posterity may enjoy all instances of happiness, under the longest succession of princes in this true royal house; and have encreasing reasons, in the secure enjoyment of all the various blessings of a wise, steady, prudent, just and gentle government, the firm establishment of the protestant religion, and the fullest possession of all their liberties, to celebrate like us, with gratitude to God, affection to their sovereign, and abounding pleasure in their own hearts, to celebrate, I say, like us, with the voice of joy and gladness, *The glorious first of August.*

DISCOURSE XXI.

On the unfearchable Nature of Divine Providence.

[CLARK.]

Pſalm xxxvi. 6.

Thy Judgments are a great Deep.

CAn'ſt thou by ſearching find out God? Can'ſt thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven, what can'ſt thou do? deeper than hell, what can'ſt thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the ſea *. The nature of the divine exiſtence is ſo different from that of all other beings, that he muſt neceſſarily be removed far beyond the comprehension of any created mind; and as his perfections are infinite, it is impoſſible for any finite capacity fully to underſtand them. It is reaſonable therefore to expect that ſome part of his *works*, as well as the *diſpenſations* of his *providence*, may for ever remain a ſecret even to the moſt exalted of his creatures: what wonder then if *we*, who probably are the loweſt in the rank of intelligent beings, ſhould find many difficulties in the divine adminiſtration, and be often at a loſs to aſſign the reaſons of his conduct. After all the diſcoveries of philoſophy, how many appearances in *nature* continue to

* Job xi. 7—9.

this day as mysterious as ever? And the farther we pursue our enquiries, the more sensibly do we perceive our own ignorance. But imperfect as our knowledge is of the works of God, it is abundantly sufficient to discover to us the perfections of their great Author, and to lay a foundation for our reverence, trust and homage. And thus, though we cannot fathom the divine *counsels*, we see enough to convince us that all his ways are just and true, and that every event is under the direction of perfect wisdom and goodness.

The psalm, from whence the words of the text are taken, sets in a strong light the goodness and faithfulness of God, as opposed to the wickedness and insincerity of men; and expresses the most chearful trust in the care of providence, amidst the darkest scenes, and when the *judgments* of God could not but appear *a great deep*.

The word *judgment* has different senses in scripture; nor is it easy perhaps, exactly to ascertain the particular idea which the psalmist affixed to it in the passage before us: it is certain, however, that it may with great propriety be understood of the conduct of divine providence in general, which, however wise and good in itself, is in many respects to us dark and inexplicable. And as this is a truth, which though readily acknowledged by all is too easily forgotten, we shall make it the subject of the following discourse, in order to excite in us a more profound reverence for the blessed God, and dispose us to a more entire and chearful submission to his will.

With this view, we shall begin with enquiring in what respects, and on what accounts, the judgments of God, or the dispensations of providence, may be called *a great deep*; after which we shall point out the practical improvement to be made of the subject.

I. We are to shew in what respects and on what accounts, the judgments of God may be stiled *a great deep*.

deep. That they *are* so, we have already observed to be a necessary consequence of the infinity of the divine perfections. As his knowledge is unlimited, he must take in all the events of the most distant futurity, and therefore forms his plan upon this unbounded view of things. In like manner his wisdom enables him to distinguish between the various schemes that offer themselves, and will always determine him to chuse the best. How complicated soever it may be, he sees through all its mazes, and with perfect ease directs every circumstance to answer his wise and gracious ends; and as he is possessed of almighty power, and universal nature is subject to his controul, he can employ what instruments he pleases to accomplish his designs.—On each of these accounts, the dispensations of his providence must often appear mysterious to such imperfect creatures as we are, whose views are so contracted, and whose powers are so limited. The *ends* that are pursued in the divine government, and the *means* by which they are effected, lie equally out of our sight. The *ultimate* end indeed which the Deity proposes, seems (at least as far as we are capable of judging) to be the glory of his perfections, consisting in the communication of happiness to his creatures; and this cannot but approve itself at once to the mind as highly rational and excellent. But the various methods by which this grand design is attained remain a secret; some parts of the divine administration appearing quite inconsistent with and others quite foreign from it. In subordination to this, providence is carrying on an infinite variety of ends, many of which lie far beyond our reach, and these also are accomplished by means that are to us unsearchable. It is but a small part of the divine proceedings that falls within our notice; and with respect to these we are often at a loss to enter into the reasons of his conduct: and I may add, that even those dispensations, in which we are most nearly concerned, and which we seem to understand the best, may yet have *connections* and

and *relations* to which we are utter strangers.—Well may we say then with the apostle, *How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out* * !

But that so interesting a truth may make the deeper impression on our minds, we shall enter more particularly into it; and to direct our thoughts on so copious a subject, we shall endeavour to prove, that in the course of providence, the most important events are often produced by means that appear to us either *mean* and *inconsiderable*, and therefore inadequate to the effect; or quite *foreign* from the end proposed and altogether unconnected with it; or lastly, directly *opposite* in their nature and tendency. From a careful attention to these several particulars it will be evident, that the methods of the divine conduct must necessarily in many instances appear to us confused and intricate, and in the words of our text *the judgments of God*, however wise and good, will seem *a great deep*.

1. The most important events in providence are often effected by the most *inconsiderable* means, which seem to us altogether insufficient to answer the end proposed. We usually judge of the *ends* by the *means*: if therefore in human affairs, we see only weak, *inconsiderable* agents employed, it immediately suggests a mean and contemptible idea of the effect to be produced. Now this way of reasoning we are too apt to apply to the divine proceedings: if he in his infinite wisdom sees fit to make use of weak instruments, we can hardly allow ourselves to expect any thing great and excellent. The grandeur of the end is concealed in the obscurity of the means. The sacred history abounds with instances of this kind. We see amongst the plagues of Egypt some of the most despicable of all animals commission'd to spread terror and desolation throughout the land, and to execute the vengeance of God upon a haughty tyrant and a rebellious hard-hearted people. How often did God in the course of

* Rom. xi. 33.

his providence raise up deliverers for the *Israelites* from the most unexpected quarters. Sometimes a *woman* was employed to animate their generals, or to cut off the hopes of their enemies; and sometimes a *handful* of men were made to triumph over a mighty host. A *sling* and a *stone* in the hand of *David* proved the destruction of the haughty *Philistine*, who defy'd the armies of the *Israelites*. In the same view may be mentioned the conduct of God towards their great ancestor. When *Abraham* was an hundred years old, and his wife was yet childless, God declares his purpose of making him the father of a great nation, and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed: and accordingly, improbable as the event might then seem, from his son *Isaac* were descended a people numerous as the sands on the sea shore; from him sprung the great *Messiah*, the Saviour of the world.—The manner in which this illustrious personage made his appearance on earth will serve yet farther to confirm what has been asserted. Who that had seen a helpless babe lying in a manger, and destitute of the accommodations common to those of the meanest rank, would have imagined him to have been the *deliverer of Israel*, the person foretold by the prophet as the *son of David*, the *prince of peace*, the *desire of all nations*, of whose kingdom there shall be no end? Yet this is he, by whom God has accomplished the glorious scheme of our *redemption*, whom he has exalted at his own right-hand, and invested with all power in heaven and earth, angels, principalities and powers being made subject to him.—Again the instruments that were employed to propagate the Christian religion in the world were likewise in themselves weak and inconsiderable. Who could have expected that a few plain *fishermen*, destitute of all the advantages of learning, or the arts of address, and unsupported by the influence of the rich or the authority of the great, should have been able to withstand all the policy of statesmen, the eloquence of philosophers, and the power of kings? The
Greeks,

Greeks, who were proud of their wisdom and learning, when they heard the humble doctrine of the cross, deliver'd in such plain and simple language, despis'd it as *foolishness*. But in the event it appeared in a most illustrious manner, that *the foolishness of God was wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men*. It appeared that *God had chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despis'd, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are, that no flesh should glory in his presence* *. Thus the *stone*, which was *cut out without hands*, without any human power, encreas'd by degrees, and by the secret methods of providence, will still encrease, till it shall become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth.

The same observation might also be extended, to all those various changes, whether of a more public or private nature, which are produced by small and trivial incidents. How many instances does history furnish, in which princes have been exalted or deposed, the fate of empires has been determin'd, and the most important revolutions accomplish'd by some circumstance, which consider'd apart from its consequences seem'd quite trifling and insignificant.—Now, as we acknowledge God to be the supreme disposer of all events, who setteth up one, and putteth down another, who planteth kingdoms, and who destroyeth them; and as the scripture every where ascribes such effects to the divine influence, it will follow, that all those incidents by which such effects are produced, how casual soever they may seem to us, are to be consider'd as *instruments* in his hand, who by his secret interposition over-rules all second causes to answer his deep-laid designs. The reasons for which such inconsiderable means are employ'd perhaps it is not for us to penetrate: But this at least seems evident, that they serve to set in a more striking light the power and

* 1 Cor. i. 25. 27--9.

wisdom of God, and to display his royal magnificence, who is *abundant in means*, as well as *excellent in counsel* *.

2. God sometimes uses means, which, according to our narrow views, have *no relation* to the end proposed; and must therefore of necessity render us very improper judges of the designs of providence, and plunge us into unavoidable mistakes, when we attempt to explain the mysteries of the divine conduct.—Nor will this appear at all improbable, if we consider, that even amongst our own species, a person, who, to a natural sagacity and depth of genius, has joined close thought and long experience, will discover a multitude of connections and relations which escape the generality of mankind. Certainly then, that all-perfect being, whose understanding is infinite may well be supposed at one view to comprehend innumerable properties and relations of things, which lie concealed from the most piercing of created minds. Now, if this be admitted, it will necessarily follow, that wherever any means are used to accomplish certain ends, the mutual connection of which with each other is hid from us, the conduct of providence must in those instances appear dark and unaccountable. We shall be ready to imagine that no settled design at all is pursued, or one very different from that which is really intended. Thus it seems to us a mystery in providence, when persons eminent for piety and virtue are suffered to outlive all their capacity for usefulness and enjoyment, and are only a burden to themselves and those about them. It is hard for us to enter into the reasons of such a dispensation. Yet far be it from us to call in question the wisdom and equity of the divine conduct, and rashly to affirm that no valuable end can be answered, because we are not able to discover it. When the prophet directed the person, who had lost the head of his ax in the water, to throw a piece of wood into the place where the iron had sunk, he would probably have lost the benefit of the miracle

* If. xxviii. 29.

that was wrought in his favour, if he had found fault with the means prescribed, as having no connection with the end proposed. And thus if *Naaman* the Syrian had persisted in neglecting the prophet's advice to wash in the river *Jordan*, which he imagined could have no tendency to perform the cure, he would have continued a leper all his days. The same remark might be applied to the blind man, whom our Saviour healed by anointing his eyes with clay. And the propriety of mentioning these facts will be the more readily allowed, when we reflect, that, in the natural course of things, some of the most sovereign medicines seem to have as little relation to the cases in which they are applied, and produce effects, which, if not rendered familiar by experience would be equally surprising and unexpected.-----All history abounds with illustrations of the same subject. Thus, to go no farther than our own country, it is well known, that we owe the invaluable blessing of the *reformation* to the resolution taken by the prince then upon the throne of divorcing his queen, though it is certain he was very far from intending to introduce all those important consequences which followed upon that step.---To the same purpose might be mentioned that memorable story recorded in sacred writ, of the destruction of *Jericho* by the sound of trumpets and a solemn procession round the walls. In this, indeed, as well as in some of the other facts referred to above, there was an extraordinary and miraculous interposition of the divine power; but, as these means were appointed to be used in order to the production of the event, they may not improperly be considered in this connection.--These, and the like instances, then joined with the reasoning above, may be sufficient to convince us, that the divine being, in the course of his providence, does frequently employ instruments, which seem to us altogether unconnected with the end he has in view, and that this method of proceeding must render his dispensations very intricate and mysterious.

But that which sets in the strongest light the depth, and at the same time the wisdom of the divine counsels, is

3. That the designs of providence are sometimes accomplished by means which appear quite *opposite* in their nature and tendency, and from which therefore the *contrary* effect might be expected. As God at first created the universe out of nothing, caused light to arise out of darkness, beauty and order out of chaos and confusion, so in the government of the world, he often makes those events which promise nothing but sorrow, disappointment, and misery, productive of the most lasting and substantial good. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the story of *Joseph*. The cruelty of his brethren, and his slavery in *Egypt* proved the means not only of advancing himself and his family, but of saving a whole kingdom from being laid waste by famine. Little did the good old patriarch imagine what great and kind designs God was carrying on in his favour, when he cry'd out in the bitterness of his soul, *all these things are against me*. And thus it is with afflictions in general : how formidable soever their aspect, they are intended by infinite wisdom and goodness to answer the most gracious ends, to mortify our lusts, to subdue our passions, to strengthen our virtues, to raise us above the world, and train us up for the happiness of heaven. It is no wonder then, if they are represented as flowing from the affection and tenderness of our heavenly Father, who corrects because he loves, and scourgeth *every son whom he receiveth*.---Again, in the course of divine providence, persons of eminent piety and distinguished abilities are sometimes removed in the midst of their usefulness, and perhaps at the very time when their lives seemed most desirable and important. Such dispensations are indeed to us dark and mysterious : they may appear to our apprehensions inconsistent with the greatest happiness of those particular persons, whose opportunities for service are thus cut off, or with the

interest of religion in general, which seems to need every support. But it does not become us to prescribe to the Almighty, whose *thoughts are as far above our thoughts as the heavens above the earth.*----Another instance, in which the depth of the divine counsels appears, is in over-ruling the vices and passions of men, to answer the great and wise designs of providence. On various occasions, the wrath of man has afforded a tribute of praise, and the remainder of that wrath has been restrained *. Thus we find *David* was raised to the throne by those very steps which his enemies took to destroy him. The mischief which they had devised against him turned upon themselves, and their violent dealing came down upon their own head. Innumerable are the methods in which God *taketh the wise in their own craftiness*, and disappointeth the *counsels of the froward*. How remarkable in this view was the deliverance which providence wrought out for the Jews by the hand of *Mordecai*, when the proud and malicious *Haman* had plotted their destruction. The very means, by which that ambitious man thought to have secured the success of his design, were over-ruled to draw down infamy and ruin upon himself and his family.-----And in like manner, though God may bear long with the wicked, and suffer him to flourish like the green bay tree, yet he will at length cut him down and destroy him as in a moment, and all his former prosperity will only serve to aggravate his future condemnation.----Agreeably to the same general plan of the divine administration, we see the *enemies* of the church have been made use of to purify and refine it. Thus the *persecutions* in the primitive ages of Christianity were over-ruled by providence, to *strengthen* the cause they were intended to *subvert*, by

* Never was this observation more remarkably verified, than in the ineffectual attempt of the Emperor *Julian* to rebuild the temple at *Jerusalem*, which only proved in the hands of providence the means of its more entire and absolute destruction, and served to accomplish more fully those very prophecies, the credit of which he hoped by such an undertaking to have overthrown.

uniting its professors in stricter bonds, by separating the false brethren from the faithful and sincere, and by promoting a spirit of piety, zeal and fortitude; on which account it is well known, the *blood of the martyrs* has been called the *seed of the church*.---Sometimes wicked princes have been employed as instruments of the divine vengeance upon an ungrateful and rebellious people. Such was *Nebuchadnezzar*, whom God appointed as the scourge of *Judah* and *Tyre*, at the same time that he had nothing in view, but the gratifying his ambition and extending his dominion. This is strongly expressed by the prophet. *Is. x. 5---7. O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand, is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath, will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey. Howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few.*---Yea, the *infernal spirits*, as they are all subject to the divine jurisdiction, so they are used to execute his pleasure, and all their rage and subtilty are made subservient to the accomplishment of his wise and gracious designs. Thus when the great enemy of God and man had seduced our first parents from their allegiance, and had thereby introduced sin and death into the creation, the Father of mercies took occasion from thence to display in a yet more illustrious manner, his wisdom and goodness in the recovery of mankind by a Mediator, thro' whom life and immortality were brought to light, and a provision made for raising the human nature to a much higher degree of perfection and happiness, than that from which it fell.---And thus, the *rejection* of the *Messiah* by the *Jewish* nation, which seemed to threaten the very *existence* of Christianity, proved, as the *apostle* observes, the means of *spreading* it amongst the *Gentiles*, as well as of *increasing* its *evidence* to all succeeding ages: to which we may add, upon the authority of the same apostle, that *bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles* instead

of disgusting and exasperating the *Jews* as formerly, shall at length excite in them an earnest desire of being admitted to the same privileges; and so all *Israel* shall be saved*.---Finally, we may rest assured, that all evil, both natural and moral, shall in the end be overruled, to answer some great and wise purposes in the divine government; nor is the weakness of our understandings, which are unable to conceive how this can be accomplished, the least objection against the truth of the assertion. This ought to satisfy us, that the Supreme Judge will certainly do that which is *right*, though the *reasons* of his conduct may not always lie within our reach, and his *judgments* may be to us in many respects an unfathomable deep.

Thus have we attempted, as our feeble capacities would admit, to survey the grandeur of the divine counsels, and humbly to enquire into the methods of his dispensations. It is indeed but a very imperfect view we are able to take of so boundless a prospect; but we have seen enough to excite our reverence and astonishment. Let us then seriously lay these things to heart, and consider,

II. What improvement it becomes us to make of so awful a subject.

1. In the first place, let us learn to think and speak with reverence of the ways of God. It is natural for the mind to give a free scope to its enquiries, and it is too apt to imagine itself equal to every subject that comes under consideration. Hence it follows, when any difficulty arises which we cannot unravel, we easily conclude that it must be utterly inexplicable, instead of charging it to the account of our own ignorance and imperfection. It highly concerns us to beware that we are not guilty of the same presumption in our reasonings upon the nature and conduct of the blessed God. It is of importance indeed that we form ra-

* See Rom. xi.

tional ideas of his being and providence, as far as our *practice* is concerned; and for this we have sufficient light from reason and revelation. But it does not become us to indulge a vain curiosity in prying into things which our Creator has thought fit to conceal. Let us be contented with that portion of knowledge which is assigned us, and not impiously wish to be wise above that which is written; remembering that *secret things belong to God, and those which are revealed to us and our children*. It is not for us earth-born creatures, who are *but of yesterday, and know nothing*, to take upon us the government of the world, and presume to direct the Judge of the whole earth. *Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall man be wiser than his Maker?* Who is there in the whole compass of created nature, who hath perfectly known the mind of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him? The part we see of the works and ways of God is so exceeding little in comparison of the whole, and our faculties so inconceivably weak and limited, when compared with the divine mind, which is infinite, that it argues the height of presumption and folly in us to find fault with his schemes, or censure any of his proceedings. From what we are able to discover of the dispensations of providence, we have the utmost reason to conclude, that perfect wisdom and goodness are at the head of the universe; many difficulties will indeed arise as to the particular method of the divine administration; but these can never be reasonably admitted as a sufficient objection against the equity of his government, since they may so fairly be resolved into our own ignorance. From the view we have already taken, it is evident, not only that there *may*, but there necessarily must be, many things mysterious in the conduct of providence, and that it is impossible in the nature of things for us to enter into all the reasons of his procedures.

This observation may be applied to those objections that have been so often and so warmly urged against

the truth of Christianity, from its imperfect propagation in the world, and from the particular kind or degree of evidence attending it. These and the like difficulties are plainly founded in our ignorance. We are utterly incapable of judging what would have been wisest and best upon the whole; because we are so imperfectly acquainted with the schemes of providence; and for ought we know, those very things, which we are apt to look upon as objections to the divine authority of this revelation, would, if we thoroughly understood the whole design, appear beautiful and essential parts of the plan, and absolutely necessary for accomplishing the end proposed.

Let us learn then to be humble and modest in our enquiries and reasonings on these subjects, not rashly pronouncing concerning our Maker what is fit or unfit for him to do, not murmuring at any of his appointments, or calling in question the justice of his dispensations; but, from a deep sense of the weakness of our understandings, let us with silent reverence, acknowledge and adore the infinite wisdom of God, whose ways are unsearchable, and whose judgments are a great deep.

2. We may learn not to be too hasty in forming our judgments of person's *characters* from their *outward circumstances*. We have shewn, in the former part of this discourse, that the conduct of providence towards his creatures in particular instances, is often very different from what we might expect. According to our narrow views, the righteous should be indulged with uninterrupted prosperity and happiness, while the vicious part of mankind should be loaded with infamy and distress. Yet we see in fact that the reverse of this is frequently the case. Nor can we be at a loss for the reason of such a dispensation, if we reflect that the present life is not design'd as a state of *recompence*, but of *trial*: consequently men are not dealt with in every instance according to their true character. The goods
of

of nature and fortune are for the most part distributed amongst the children of men, without any distinction. The sun shines upon the *evil* as well as the *good*, and the rain descends on the *just* and the *unjust*, and all things seem to come alike to all. It is a dangerous error, therefore, to judge of the moral character of our brethren from their external condition in life. This was the mistake which Job's three friends fell into, and which was the foundation of those severe censures they cast upon that excellent man : and indeed it seems to have been the grand design of that book, to shew the falshood and unreasonableness of such a conclusion, by representing the incomprehensible majesty of the Divine Being and the unsearchable nature of all his works. Nor are there wanting in the sacred writings many instances to confirm the truth of this observation. Who that had seen *David*, when he was reduced to seek for refuge in the rocks and dens of the wilderness, could have imagined him to have been the man after God's own heart ? Or, on the contrary, had we beheld the great *Nebuchadnezzar* walking in his palace, and surrounded with all the pomp and splendor of the East, could we have believed that he was at that instant the object of the divine displeasure, and that the sentence was even then gone forth against him, by which he was stripped of all his regal magnificence and driven amongst the beasts ?—Again, who that had seen our blessed Lord, in the days of his flesh, despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, attended with all the sinless infirmities of human nature, and at last numbered with transgressors, and pouring out his soul to death on the accursed tree ; who that had beheld him in these circumstances, and had judged only from the external appearance, could have thought that he was the only-begotten and well-beloved son of God, and was at that time actually giving the highest and noblest proof of his compleat obedience ? Would he not rather have been inclined to reflect upon him as one *smitten of God and*

afflicted, and to have branded him as the vilest of men, who seemed to be thus abandoned by the Divine Being to all the power and rage of his enemies?—From instances like these, as well as from what we have seen of the unsearchable nature of the divine judgments, let us learn to correct this mistaken opinion, not presuming to *judge others*, and pronounce upon their characters from the circumstances of life in which they are placed, that we be not *judged ourselves*. Rather let us wait till this scene is closed, when the true characters of men will be discovered, and happiness or misery will be impartially awarded to each by their final judge.

3. Let us bless God for the assurance he has been pleased to give us, that all things shall work together for good to those that love and serve him. Reason and religion join in asserting this truth, that in the end it shall go well with the righteous. The perfections of God and the honour of his government require that a proper regard should be paid to virtue, and a final distinction made between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not. Revelation not only confirms and establishes this grand point, but assures us farther, that all the calamities and disorders of the present state, how unpromising an aspect soever they may wear, shall be so over-ruled by a wise and kind providence, as to produce a greater sum of happiness to the good man: for thus it is promised, that *all things shall work together for good to them that love God*. In a firm belief of the accomplishment of this promise, the apostle expresses himself in those sublime and animated words, *Rom. viii. 38, 39. I am persuaded that neither life nor death,-----nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.-----* When we confine our view to those scenes of confusion and misery which overspread the world, the prospect is indeed gloomy and melancholy, and might seem sufficient even to fill us with despair: but, when we consider the Divine Being

Being as presiding over the whole, and directing all events to answer the purposes of his providence and grace, every uncomfortable thought vanishes, and the mind of the good man is *kept in perfect peace* amidst all the storms of life, while it is thus *stayed on God*. How hopeless soever our case, how deplorable soever our circumstances, let us not indulge to any desponding thoughts, as if God had forgotten or cast us off; but let us rejoice to think, that while we are found in the way of our duty, all these things, how different soever their tendency may now seem, shall under the influence of our heavenly Father issue in our true happiness; and we shall see abundant reason to acknowledge that all the *judgments of God are right*, and that in *faithfulness he afflicted us*.-----It is natural to infer from hence,

4. That it becomes us to submit with all cheerfulness to the dispensations of providence, and to acquiesce in all his disposals as perfectly wise and good. What though to our narrow views they may wear a contrary aspect, are we competent judges of the divine conduct? Does it follow, that they have no connection with our happiness, because we are unable to discern it? Let us remember that the ways of God are far above the reach of our finite understandings, and that he has an infinite variety of means by which he can accomplish his designs, of which we cannot form the least idea; and let this consideration produce in us a firm reliance on his gracious promise, that all shall have an happy issue.-----In the whole catalogue of Christian virtues, there is none more suited to our present state, as we are weak, imperfect, and dependent creatures, than resignation to the divine will. As the blessed God has on every occasion expressed the most tender concern for our welfare, and has the absolute disposal of all things in his hands, nothing can be more reasonable than that we should commit ourselves and all our interests to the care of his providence, in a cheerful dependence on his faithfulness and goodness.

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We ought to esteem ourselves happy that every event in which we are concerned is under his direction ; and, secure of this, we should indulge no uneasiness or discontent at any of the allotments of providence, nor an excessive solicitude about futurity. But let the language of our blessed Saviour be habitually ours, *Father, not my will, but thine be done.* Such a settled disposition will have a natural tendency to spread a sweet composure and sacred tranquillity over the mind, will do an honour to our holy religion, and eminently fit us for that happier world, where no murmurs or complaints are ever heard, but where the most entire complacency in the divine will prevails through all the blessed inhabitants.

5. and lastly, Let us look forwards with pleasure to that day, when those difficulties which now obscure the wisdom and goodness of the divine administration shall be removed. Whatever reason there may be for a silent submission to the appointments of providence, and how fully soever we may be convinced in general of the equity of the divine proceedings, many perplexing difficulties will still remain, which our utmost penetration cannot clear up : and though these ought by no means to shake our faith in the moral government of God, which is established on so sure a foundation, yet they will be apt to distress and embarrass the mind, when it attends to them. What a satisfaction then is it to be assured, that *what we know not now, we shall know hereafter* ; that the time is coming when we shall no longer *look as through a glass darkly, but with open face shall behold the glory of God* : yea, when *we shall see even as we are seen, and know as we are known.* These sublime expressions, though perhaps we cannot at present fully comprehend their meaning, must imply, that when this veil of flesh is taken away, we shall see in a much clearer and stronger light the reasons those dispensations of providence which now seem most unaccountable and mysterious. We shall then discover the happy consequences of those trials and afflictions

tions with which we were exercised, and trace the wisdom and goodness of God even in the darkest scenes through which we have ever passed.

We shall learn that what we here below call adversity and prosperity were only different states appointed for the display of their peculiar graces and virtues. The secret steps by which the most important events have been conducted will then be revealed, and the glory of the divine perfections will probably shine brightest in those parts of his conduct, which once appeared most intricate and obscure. But it is at the *great day*, that the justice and righteousness of the divine government will be displayed in its full lustre. At that awful period, the Supreme Judge will unfold those mysteries of his counsels which had lain hid from the foundation of the world; and, in the presence of men and angels vindicate the honour of his government from all the imputations which the weakness and folly of his creatures had cast upon it. It will then appear, that, however clouds and darkness might surround his throne, it was founded in judgment and equity, and that mercy and truth ever went before his face. No objections shall then remain from the prosperity of the wicked and the oppressor, or the calamities and distresses of the righteous: the wisdom of that distribution, (how unequal soever it might seem) will be universally acknowledged and adored, and the state of all mankind will be fixed according to their real character.—Thus will the scheme of providence towards this world of ours be completed; and then will all the multitude of the redeemed join together in that sacred song of *Moses* and the *lamb*, crying out with one accord, *great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are all thy ways, thou King of Saints! who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name, for thou only art holy? All nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest* *.

* Rev. xv. 3, 4.

DISCOURSE XXII.

On the General Judgment.

[GRIGG.]

Acts xvii. 31.

He has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained.

THIS passage, which asserts that God has appointed a day when he will pass a righteous sentence upon all mankind, by Jesus Christ whom he has ordained to be their judge, is a summary of what the scriptures of the New Testament reveal concerning a judgment-day.----I enter with awe upon this truly awful subject; and before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who is to judge the quick and the dead, charge it upon myself and you, often to recollect, as we proceed, that we are to bear a part in the scene before us!

According to the scriptures then, all human beings live under laws which their Creator has enacted, by which he will certainly judge and sentence them hereafter, in the person of his son Jesus. In order to which every human body that dies is to be restored by the power that restored Jesus, who rose in earnest of the general resurrection, and who, to speak in a strong figure, is the resurrection. The body, which
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at death drops into the earth, rises increased and improved, as a grain of corn springs up into a plentiful ear in the time of harvest. As all men are to be judged according to characters formed while soul and body were together in human life, at the resurrection every man, body and soul, shall be the very person he was before death; and at the tribunal of Jesus, receive a righteous sentence of acquittal or condemnation, and accordingly go away into everlasting punishment, or enter upon a blessed life eternal.

In the first chapter of the *Acts*, you see Jesus leading his disciples to *Bethany*; and, while he talks with them, received up in a bright cloud, or chariot of fire, into heaven. Astonishment even turned them into statues; but, while they were gazing after him, they were informed that the same Jesus should one day be seen to return, and to return in the same manner. And while he was yet in the form of a servant, he gave the world a lively picture of his descent upon a throne of glory, with all the angels of God, to judge the assembled world; the race of mankind is no longer to increase; the earth itself to exist no longer; the heavens are to pass away with a great noise; the elements are to melt with fervent heat, and universal dissolution ensues; except of mankind, who are to rise immortal, to judgment.

This scene is represented as coming suddenly, like a thief in the night, surprising the inhabitants of the world, who shall be thinking of far other scenes. The dead are to be raised, the living to be changed in the twinkling of an eye; and the earth itself flies instantly away, at the presence of the descending Judge. Laws that held the earth in its place, and rendered it habitable, ceasing in a moment, the whole globe rushes to ruin, leaving behind in the air, beings who want *terrestrial* habitation no longer.

Angels, who are to be ministering attendants upon the judge, prepare and introduce the solemnity. Behold an angel of illustrious order, issuing down from
heaven,

heaven, cloathed with a cloud, a rainbow on his head, and his face as the sun. He sets his right foot on the sea, his left upon the earth, and his legs are as pillars of fire, to denote, it may be, the general conflagration. Seven thunders, or all the thunders of heaven, utter their voices, for the last time. Then the angel, lifting up his hand to heaven, swears by him that lives for ever and ever, who created heaven, earth, and sea, and all that is therein, that there shall be time (a) no longer.

Let us suppose this part of the scene to be beheld only by the angels; for behold mankind marrying and giving in marriage, planning for long and happy life still! Now behold heaven's immeasurable doors thrown open by the two mighty angels that have guarded the threshold ever since the grand apostacy! Doors that have never been opened, since the rebel hosts with their leader, the sun of the morning, were cast down into those chains of darkness, in which they have been reserved to the judgment of this rising day!

Lo the judge, and all the orders of angels in motion to attend him! What a shout was there! It was the united voice of every angel. All being to proceed in the Father's name, the trumpet of God is sounded by the archangel whose high office it is to sound that trumpet! What an alarm! It was instant! It is universal! The four corners of the earth hear it! All that live hear it! Even the dead have heard it, and live! The center hears, and forces its fires to every part of the surface! The stars fall! The sun is midnight! On a bright throne he comes, behold with all heaven in his retinue, he comes! Behold—but ah! Nothing can behold, nothing bear his presence! The heavens depart like a scrowl rolling itself together! Every

(a) *Rev. x. 5. Sc. Lowman* translates $\chiρον \ominus \delta\upsilon\kappa \epsilon\sigma\tau\iota \epsilon\tau\iota$, *the time shall not be yet.* But is the period to which he refers altogether worthy of the astonishing solemnity with which the angel swears, and introduces his oath? $\chiρον \ominus$ also is without an article.

mountain and every island is moved! The bond, the free, the rich, the great, captains and kings, to avoid the face of him that sitteth on the throne, the wrath of the lamb, rush beneath tumbling mountains, and plunge in flaming rivers; but neither mountain nor flame will devour them, for they are raised immortal; and are as little able to fall as to stand before the indignation of the day! Behold him then, for all must behold! Even his eye whose unthinking hand drove the nails at *Calvary*! Nor heavens nor earth exist! Stars and sun are vanished, lest they should darken the procession! Once the crucifixion of Jesus, and now his glory extinguishes the sun! Lo hell, with what reluctance, comes forth for sentence! Lo two worlds to be judged, and the third an assistant spectator! The tribunal stands still! The books are opened! Silence is proclaimed!—The judgment begins!—Thus we have introduced our discourse upon the judgment-day, with a shadow of those illustrious events which shall open that day.

The text, in concurrence with other parts of the sacred writings, teaches us the *certainty* of a future judgment. It is set down in the book of God's decrees. The judgment day shall as surely rise as this morning rose; and in obedience to laws which can no more fail to bring it forth than the sun could this morning refuse to rise at the command of its Creator.

We are also assured that but *one* day is ordained for this final retribution. It is appointed for all men once to die, once to be judged, and but once. Every man's cause shall then be heard; but no cause shall obtain a second hearing. The issue will be swift and final. That single, that truly great day shall determine for ever, the lot of every human being, of every fallen angel. Consequently the judgment will be general and publick. So general, that, as our text affirms, it includes the whole world; every nation, every individual, from him of *Eden* to his last descendant; and we must add, every infernal. So publick,

that every individual of mankind, and of evil spirits, will be judged in the presence of all the intelligent beings we ever heard of. What an assembly! To call it innumerable is to say all that we can, but it is comparatively, saying nothing.

Having made these observations, our farther discourse on this subject will fall under the two following heads. 1st, We shall endeavour to illustrate the rectitude of this judgment; and, 2dly, enquire into the reasons for which it may have been appointed.

1. We shall begin with some remarks that may tend to illustrate the rectitude of this judgment. The judge of the earth will do that which is right, and that alone. And indeed nothing less can be expected, if we consider *who* is ordained to be judge, and by *whom* he is ordained. The judge ordained his *Jesus*, the head of *angelic* principalities, and therefore likely to prove an upright judge of *devils*. It is the Creator, Governor, and Redeemer of *men*, and therefore as likely to judge *our* world with justice and rectitude. Indeed he has given us proof sufficient of his qualification in point of knowledge, by the intimate acquaintance which he discovered with the human heart in the days of his humanity; and one might pronounce the most charitable man breathing the most injurious, infinitely sooner than suspect, that he who became poor to make us rich, should prove an unjust judge. Nor can it without blasphemy be imagined that the Father should ordain a person for executing righteous judgment, who could possibly defeat his purpose.

See then the Judge darting his intelligent eye through the myriads of mankind, and in an instant distinguishing the evil and the good, whom therefore, in his righteous capacity, he presently commands into two classes: and so accurately just is the division, that not a single sheep remains amongst the herd of goats.

But

But besides this general division, good and bad characters of every kind and degree, will be considered and sorted by the rule of their respective differences. Not that the chief business of the day will be to throw beings into their proper classes, which omniscience may do in a moment, but to try characters, and prove what they are: now in this process, the truth, and that alone shall appear; so that whatever the trial finds characters to be, that they are. Consequently human life must be examined, and traced to all its motives. What it was, what it should, and what it might have been, must be asked and answered.

If one may allude to earthly matters, in this great court of equity, the subjects of the King eternal shall be tried by the excellent laws which he published for their observance. Indeed, in the course of the day, these laws will necessarily fall under consideration, and it will appear that they were made sufficiently public, and that their excellence was beyond all reasonable suspicion. So that indeed, reverently speaking, the Deity will submit his own dispensations to the animadversions of truth and equity; dispensations, which however adorable, had their share of calumny; but they shall cast it off upon the judgment-day.

The judgment will be just to the righteous. That day shall discover even the shadow of every good thing, and substantially reward it. The judgment also must be just to the wicked. It shall invent no charge, and in fact truth, there will be little room for invention. But justice will then demand—what, alas! they cannot presently pay, and will imprison them till they can! What a thought! Undoubtedly however, even in this awful article, the judgment-day will reveal itself to be just, for a *revelation* of the righteous judgment of God is to be expected on that day.

Different advantages for knowledge and practice will have proportionable consideration. Where but a few seeds were scattered, the sower will not expect

th most plentiful harvest ; the vineyard upon which all possible pains were bestowed, and which yet proved unfruitful, will be severely treated. The improvement of ten talents shall never be required of the man who received but five ; yet two talents must produce more than one ; and the single talent something.

It is not unlikely that opposite characters will be confronted ; as the reviled and reviler ; the cruelty of power, and the patience of the injured. Methinks one sees *Shimei* and *David* confronted ; *Shimei* cursing *David*, and *David* crying it may be the Lord hath bid *Shimei* curse *David*. See him now opposed to *Saul*. *Saul* is shewn as a roaring lion, pursuing him from mountain to mountain ; anon the sleeping lion is spared by the gentle worthy. Lo, there stands the mighty extortioner, the devourer of widow's houses ; and over-against him, the multitude which he plundered. Take particular notice, for you perceive the judge does, of that widow whom he reduced to two mites, which yet she conveyed into the sacred treasury. See those, who, quitting every earthly possession, with with a cross on their shoulders, followed Jesus ; and see the emperors that crucified them ; the latter now, have not where to hide their heads, and the former are this moment more than emperors. See that apostle and the governor before whom he reasoned upon the judgment which is now depending. See the hand that was once washed in vain, and lifted now—ah ! at what bar. O *Pilate* ! Why didst thou not hold fast with the question, what evil has he done ? See some of those who cried, *his blood be upon us, and our children*, and see him who prayed, *Father forgive them*.

But amidst all the awful severity that will attend this solemn process, no reasonable advantage will be denied the criminal. Through this infinite multitude is any one present who can speak a word in his behalf ? Nor shall self-defence be refused. Will he presume to deny the facts with which he stands charged ? Let him.

him. Behold he attempts---No, he cannot attempt it. Conscience is witness and sentence. Condemnation therefore is properly *conviction*. That the arraigned will be permitted to speak for themselves, appears in our saviour's image of this judgment, where he examines the plea of the wicked, and proves its invalidity. Nay, if a man shall have forgotten any favourable circumstance in his case, the judge shall mention it for him, and oblige him to receive what humility would not suffer him to hope. When, say say the righteous with surprise, saw we thee in distress, and relieved thee? Inasmuch, replies the judge, as ye relieved the least of my brethren, ye relieved their elder brother.

After having taken this general view of the righteous judgment of God, let us enter into some particulars by which it may be farther illustrated. 1st. Justice will be administered with the utmost impartiality. Respect of nations will be entirely out of the question. *Niniveh*, that repented at the instance of *Jonah*, shall put to shame a people that boasted of their father *Abraham*, and resisted greater preachers than *Jonah*. How will the queen of *Sheba* reproach a city to which she travelled to learn wisdom from a mortal man, for forcing through its gates and crucifying the wisdom of God! And if *Sodom* shall then condemn *Capernaum*, may not dark *India* looking out for the morning, put to the blush *Britain* groping at noon-day!

Nor will there be any respects of persons with the judge. The hard-hearted *master* shall be remembered, and *Lazarus* at the gate shall not be forgotten. Lords of the earth shall then see revived, rules which with them were quite obsolete. To talk of having swayed scepters, and obtained triumphs, will hardly gain the hearing. No sacred profession will in that day be found of any avail. The professing Christian, who in heart and life had proved a *savage*, shall never see his name in the *lamb's book of life*; but, instead of it, there

shall stand the name of some *gentle Barbarian*. To have set at table with Jesus, cast out devils in his name, and even to have been his earthly parent, will at that bar stand for nothing. If papal *Rome* expects favour for nominal holiness, infallibility shall find its mistake. Whoever call persecution zeal, zeal godliness—but let me remember that the book of life is not open to me.

2. The final judgment may, and it is likely that it will, be very circumstantial and minute; for which reason it will prove a discovering judgment. The scriptures maintain that not only the *actions* of mankind, but every *idle word*, and *the secrets of men's hearts*, shall be brought into judgment; that there is *nothing hid* which shall not be known. It seems therefore probable that every human scene shall come under examination. Nor is it offering any material objection, to say, that upon this supposition, the world will be longer in judging than from the creation to that day; for as that which is sown a single grain, produces a hundred fold, a moment may then be able to recollect the ideas of an age. Indeed it should seem almost as necessary for the whole, as for any part to be brought into judgment; for frequently a circumstance, in itself ever so inconsiderable, in its connections is of the utmost moment. And how can it be determined whether this be, or be not, the case in every instance, but by knowing the whole? If all shall appear just what they are, few circumstances can well be omitted; for towards all good and bad characters, almost every circumstance contributes something: especially if there be some secret thing which characterises the man, it may depend upon investigation, and the most critical animadversion.

3. It will be a merciful judgment. A day of wrath, it must be confessed, but not of wrath only. Amidst all the proceedings of this judgment, Jesus will remember, what he of all beings can never forget,
mercy

mercy. Not only will imperfections be overlooked, but some of the most enormous crimes forgiven; forgiven, because repented of, while there was place for repentance, and succeeded by a life of holiness. The mercy of the day will be no other than rectitude; the justice of God to his promises, or to the hopes which his promises, however made, inkindled in the soul of virtue. Strictly speaking, the cup of the wicked shall not have in it every bitter drop that might be there, tho' one cannot be sure that they will taste the mercy. If it were necessary yet farther to confirm the truth of what has been observed under this head, I might observe that the judge will appear as a *man*, to encourage every reasonable hope of mercy, and to forbid all unnecessary terror. But I must content myself with having just hinted a thought which deserves ample consideration.

Having thus pointed out those particulars in which the equity of this judgment will appear, let us now, in order to impress our minds more deeply with so interesting a subject, select a few of those innumerable characters which will then be exhibited. Imagine then that you hear the judge expressing himself in some such manner as this. "Yonder is the being that was once stiled a monarch. The greatest and kindest wish he ever formed, was to conquer the world, and sacrifice it at a single blow; but dreading a world which he had made his enemy, the wretch escaped by suicide. Behold his character in his countenance, which has proclaimed to the whole assembly, *I am the man.* Observe now a person whose wealth would have purchased a kingdom, but who expected to perish a beggar; in apprehension of which, he plucked from me my last garment, and imprisoned me for life, because incapable of paying him the utmost farthing." O when, when! exclaims the accused. To answer thee, replies the judge, behold the man whom you thus treated, one of my brethren, whose interests I consider as my own." Can we none of

us discern ourselves in the person whom the judge next addresses? “Were not your parents pious? Did they not plead with you? Pray and weep over you? Did you not harden your hearts till you even broke theirs? Did you never read my warning, my inviting gospel? Is this the first time you ever heard my voice? Behold my hands and my feet! Did you not crucify me again, by refusing the salvation I died to procure? Did you not believe things would come to this issue? But was evidence wanting? Did you hope, because sentence against you was not *immediately* pronounced? Can *such* gratitude hope now? Can you this day solicit mercy, which so long solicited you in vain? If you could, the ears of mercy, like yours of old, are sealed and will not open. And once be honest to your feelings, must I not condemn you? Shall I tempt all heaven to revolt, and hope to be forgiven? Can I be cruel? Is not the sentence which I am to pass, now passing within you?”—Does not one perceive the unhappy creature intreating to hear no more? Almost asking to be condemned? Let me repeat the question; does no one here see himself in the criminal?

Attend to this royal character. Lo, it appears that he loved, and was the servant of his people, exerting all his ability in removing and preventing oppression, and multiplying occasions of felicity, through all his dominions! With what eagerness his subjects witness for him! Lo, whole kingdoms applaud him, for crushing their tyrants! And lo, instances enough to demonstrate that the glory of doing good was his only motive! “And bear witness, cries the Judge, bear witness all who behold, this is the prince whom I honour, whom my father honours!” And now, as *never* before, does the prince feel his glory. Now the man *is* a king.—The next is one, whose possessions were such as no luxury could have exhausted, but who resisted the solicitations of luxury. A debauched nobility, by every stratagem, strove to win him: he
resolved

resolved not to be won, and resolution was victory. His hand was true to his heart, always open; and his substance increased, not because it was hoarded, but because it was scattered. Behold what crowds of widows, orphans, prisoners, and sorrowers of all sorts surround, and call him their father! What says the Judge? "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."

See now the man of competence, procured by honest industry. It is proved that he might often have wronged his neighbour, without discovery; but he would not, because he loved mankind, venerated his conscience, and feared his God. Some of the profits of that labour by which he lived, he bestowed among such as could not live by their labour. His heart was contented, his gratitude was devout, and of his two talents he made the utmost. Observe that poor man: who shall speak for him? Why scarce any body knew him. But not Satan yonder can speak against him. He did, it seems, upon some occasions, suffer from the stronger than himself, but ever committed his cause to the Judge, before whom he stands, and patiently waited for the decision of this tribunal. And where are his oppressors? Where he never wished them. Will none speak for him? The Judge shall do it. Hark! "I know thee well. I saw thee often, when seen by no other eye. I heard thy prayers, and presented them where they were accepted. Thy life was a labour of love, but it is not, it shall never be forgotten. Before these assembled worlds, mingle among my friends, thou blessed of my Father." Poor man! Let me be as rich in that day, and from henceforth no poverty shall hurt me. "And here, resumes the Judge, with infinite complacence in his countenance, this is the man who wiped the last tear from the eye of all mankind." The humble soul would disclaim the praise, but cannot. "You did, continues Jesus, you *wished* to wipe off every
tear;

“tear; and to wish with sincerity and fervour, and “to perform, are with the Father the same thing.” One might instance in many other characters, and particularly mark with illustrious distinction; Israelites indeed, rejoicing sufferers, the fervently benevolent, conquerors of temptation, lovers of enemies, patriots and martyrs. As to characters the reverse of these—I need not intimate where they shall stand.

Having now enquired into the rectitude of this judgment, we proceed, in the second place, to enquire into the reasons for which it may have been appointed.--It was ordained by God, and consequently for some weighty reasons. It cannot have been ordained for his own intelligence, for who shall inform omniscience? It cannot have been ordained to give a triumph to the Deity. To shew a small handful of captive rebels, loyal and forgiven subjects, can little affect such a King as the eternal. And not for his own sake has God appointed a judgment-day, to throw the beam of truth upon his own government. The sun illuminates objects not for itself, but for the eye of mankind. And the clouds of our hemisphere offend not that luminary. An archangel will but little regard the censure of a peasant. Now, suppose every being of every system applauding the divine conduct: suppose then the reverse; and according to human apprehension, you have supposed two things; they are but one with a being, whose sole felicity is self-approbation. Yet,

1. The judgment may have been appointed, to put an honour upon the Son of God. See Jesus, invested with the authority of the Supreme, sitting in judgment upon all sinners, of human or angelic order, determining their everlasting lot, in proportion to the merits of their characters, with which he appears as intimately acquainted as themselves. With one voice, and that the voice of truth, every saint, and holy angel applauds, and not Satan invents a calumny for the

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the day. Even *Jehovah* holds himself honoured by the decisions of the Judge upon his own ways and works; and before all worlds, repeats what once was heard only by a few ears, *this is my beloved Son*. See indeed the knee of heaven, of earth, of hell in some sort, bowing before him, and then doubt, if you can, whether the Father decreed this day to put honour upon his Son. The King eternal, foreseeing a combination of principalities and powers, themselves but captives, against the measures which his nature determined him to pursue for the felicity of his creatures, with an army of heavenly potentates and other holy warriors, such as patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs, sent forth a chosen captain, even the Prince his son, in a campaign of perhaps six thousand years, should frequently foil the confederates; at length, by a total overthrow, put an end to the war, and exhibit a triumph, leading captivity captive. Or supposing Jesus to have governed the world from the creation to that day, the day was appointed to illustrate his administration, by putting a period to it: to shew the last act of the mighty drama.

2. A judgment may have been appointed for the honour and satisfaction of holy beings. With the captain of salvation shall every man triumph, who lifted hand or heart in the holy war. We honestly burn for a good name, from those whose approbation is true glory, and to be above the censure of meaner beings. What then will it be to stand in that day, honoured with the acknowledged friendship of every good man, of every angel of God? To receive from Jesus the salutation of a brother, and a blessing sent from the bosom of his Father! While, not a tongue of the innumerable wicked beholders shall be able to move against us. To be celebrated by the Judge, whom to celebrate were more than sufficient! To receive so publick a notification of the Father's favour---one almost faints at the glorious idea; and this like-
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wife will be honouring Jesus, for he enjoys the honour of his brethren, more than his brethren enjoy his. Nor will angels reckon it among their meanest honours, to behold the transactions of the day, and be thanked by the great Redeemer, for their benevolence to his brethren.

3. The judgment day was appointed---I was going to say, for the satisfaction of hell. Satan might possibly endeavour to persuade human beings, to blaspheme a power that obliged them to lie down in everlasting burnings, without an open equitable trial; but while they exist, will they never be able to forget a day when, if the whole creation of God could have offered a syllable in their favour, it would have been heard. This indeed may prove but a sad satisfaction; for, if any thing could let fall a drop of water upon the flaming tongues of the wicked, it would, perhaps, be the imagination of being wronged by the Deity.

4. The judgment which we have described must let us intirely into one another's characters, by presenting every secret circumstance, and may have been appointed to produce a reciprocal frankness among the acquitted. People who know not one another, we term strangers, and without even a perfect acquaintance, a finished friendship is impossible. Such an acquaintance the judgment will produce among all good men, of which the immediate consequence will be such a friendship.

The being associated upon the same occasion, and the observed similarity of case to case, will wonderfully unite the happy. Characters which, while seen through the shade of prejudice, or through some other shade, were censured or suspected, when beheld by the light of truth, will appear so much like ourselves, that even self-love will determine us to care for them. Nor will the grace of that day, whomsoever it shall bless, be thought too extensive by beings themselves happy through abounding grace. That all *were* sinners, and
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are forgiven and holy, will produce such a glow of mutual benevolence as will form the blessed into one body, and of that body be the very soul. An assembly, of which every being may judge what every other wishes him, by examining his own wishes for every other, nay, by examining his own wishes for himself. A confidence to which no language, no idea can be just---But how to describe it! An assembly worthy to enter heaven, and waiting with rapture the sentence that shall dismiss them thither.---But let them first attend to a different sentence: by the face of the Judge, and that rising left hand, yet rising with reluctance, the awful moment approaches! Observe the commotion of that multitude! For what are their apprehensions! But lo, one like a deputed suppliant! A deputed suppliant it is! What can be his suit? One may conjecture! "O, in the name of all my unhappy brethren, let us, O let us drop into nothing!" It cannot be, returns the Judge. "O move it to thy Father!" For the first time I refuse such a petition. The wretch returns. The sentence comes! *Depart ye cursed.*----Not waiting for the conclusion, they rapidly depart, as if the face of the Judge were to them more than hell! The sentence is finished, and the last of the multitude is within the door of the prison! The door is shut! and, dreadful thought, is shut for ever!

Turn now to the right. One imagines even these beings almost beginning to shudder, though confident that *death* and *hell* are fled away. But lo, terror is no more, and the last tear has been shed by that assembly! Their countenances, true to their souls, are all felicity. What a signal appearance is made by that host of martyrs! soldiers, whom not even *he* could seduce from the post of difficulty, at whose instigation angels and archangels revolted! Behold their robes are white! White from the blood they shed for the Lamb! from the blood he shed for them! Lo, every head is crowned! Importing that all are to reign for ever and ever! Behold of every nation some! And some whom,
 shame

shame to my charity, I little expected! Nay some of those cruel Jews who cried, crucify. But let the divine sufferer teach me to forget that they were cruel! And all together, what myriads! Is any one angry that I speak of myriads? And will he needs have it that few only shall be saved? Whoever thou art, strive, I charge thee, to enter in at the strait gate. Behold then, myriads and myriads and myriads! And in what rapture of expectation! The sentence is already in the Judge's countenance! It breaks from his lips *come ye blessed of my Father.*----O hear it every ear that hears me this day! My brethren, return the benevolence; say in your souls, let the preacher hear it! And may all our guardian angels say amen!

Thus have I touched, and only touched that dreadful, that glorious fiction, a judgment-day. Fiction! Yes undoubtedly, for who believes it! Ask an honest witness that cannot lie, the conduct of mankind. Nay let me appeal to your hearts. Deal frankly. I have you the least notion, do you even suppose it possible that scenes as interesting as those which we have been contemplating should ever really take place? At least, do you in good earnest believe that they will? That the whole human race shall rise to the tribunal of a Judge impartial, omniscient, and tho' merciful, not merciful beyond the bounds of rectitude? Will this little handful as surely be there as it is here? It will, or the book in my hand is a lying legend. Is any one asleep not hearing this? Or does he hear it and sleep? Why then sleep on thou dead soul, and sleep---if thou canst, on the judgment-day. But, on the other hand, let not any think it sufficient to have felt these truths while they were delivered, though they may have felt them ever so strongly: it is the *feeling life* only that shall avail us on that day. Let me then suppose that you believe, verily believe, the whole matter; that there shall sit the eternal Judge; there shudder the wicked; there triumph the righteous. Why then, my brethren, *what manner of persons ought we to be!*

DISCOURSE XXIII.

Piety the best Principle of Virtue.

[NEWMAN.]

2 Cor. vii. 1.

----*Perfecting Holiness in the Fear of God.*

THE perfection of the Christian rule hath frequently been made an objection against it. Some have from hence taken occasion to represent it to themselves and others as a measure of duty entirely suitable to mankind in their present impaired circumstances, and carrying such a severity in it, accompanied with its sanctions, as can never be reconciled with the wisdom and love of God. This makes them look upon a life governed thereby only as a fine speculation, but from the impracticableness of the thing, no matter of obligation. But upon due reflection probably this objection, with the conclusions drawn from it, will appear resolvable into pure ignorance of Christianity, or into a disaffection to the practice it enjoins. For, the perfection of the rule is *in itself* a good argument of its divine original; and as it is calculated for the perfection of our nature, it is also an evidence of the love and kindness of God to men; since it is demonstrable, that by how much the nearer we approach to the rectitude of the first Being, so much the more must we share in his blessedness. The objected impracticableness of coming up to the
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Christian rule is a poor evasion. If it means, that human nature under its present disadvantages will certainly fall short of that *degree* of holiness which the precepts carry in them; *this is true*: but then it is no just impeachment of the gospel as a rule of life, since, the perfection of the rule hath naturally a considerable influence on the perfection of the copy; and, because our final acceptance with God and happiness in him may be obtained by a lower degree, provided there be no *indulgence* to any thing forbidden, but on the contrary, a sincere endeavour to come as near to the rule as we can. Nor is there any more reason in the objection of *severity*: this is partly obviated already; and will, we apprehend, be fully so if it be considered, that with the rectitude required as the end of the precept, there are also most apt means provided for the attainment of it. Amongst others, we have the most forcible motives and arguments to influence our minds, leading us to the due use of our thoughts as to the reasonableness, the importance, and advantages of the duties prescribed; and animating to us an ambition both of approving ourselves therein to God, and reflecting, in the best manner we are able, perfections which have the most apparent influence upon our own happiness. Such objections then are plainly resolvable into our not taking things in the connection wherein they stand, and our not considering Christianity as our Saviour hath left it: they proceed from our not joining the precept with its motives; from our not taking the grace and mercy of the gospel along with its strictness; and finally, from our not reflecting, that the several branches of duty, both in their nature and design, are greatly subservient to and influential upon each other.

It is this *latter* point I have my eye upon at present, led to it, as I think, by the text. We will not be persuaded to take the several branches of duty together, and unite them in our practical regards: in consequence of which we must not only be grossly defect-

tive in our religion, but find it much more difficult and uncomfortable than otherwise we should do. In what sense I understand the words, and whether I have taken their real meaning, will best be seen after I have a little explained the terms. In order to which let it be observed---Though there was a christian church at *Corinth*, there were many who still retained their heathenish practices of idolatry and sensuality. The *Corinthians* seem to have been infamous for two things; for luxury and lasciviousness: both of which greatly endangered their return to idolatry who had embraced the christian faith. Their luxurious appetites inclined them too much to partake of the idol feasts; and their addictedness to lewdness, which usually accompanied those feasts, exposed them not a little to the direct worship of idols. The apostle hereupon found it necessary to warn those who professed the christian faith against all communication in such feasts and rites; backing his advice with this argument, that it was upon their separation from such persons, and their freedom from such vices, that they stood in the relation of children to God, and might expect his presence and blessing as a father: nay, that there was an *indispensable* necessity of such a separation, in order to entitle and qualify for such privileges. The *silliness of the flesh*, which the apostle mentions, most certainly relates to those sensualities, defilements, and abuses of the body that were wont to accompany idolatry; probably here more particularly meant by the *silliness of the spirit*. The *holiness* then which stands opposed thereto must at least include what we usually mean by a *virtuous mind and behaviour*. It will not then be foreign to the apostle's general design, to consider it as standing for *virtue in general*, or *those duties that respect ourselves and others*. For the acquisition of this virtuous disposition and behaviour the means proposed by the apostle is, the fear of God, or a pious disposition and life. From whence we may draw this proposition, *that piety is the best principle of virtue.*

Where the mind stands the most strongly and duly disposed *towards God*, there will be the greatest eminency in those duties which respect ourselves and others too.

For the proof of this I would,

I. Give a brief and general account of a pious disposition, here and elsewhere intended by the expression, *the fear of God*.

II. Consider it in its influences upon the duties that respect ourselves and others.

I. I would endeavour to give a brief account of a pious disposition, here spoken of under the term, *the fear of God*. This expression then *strictly* taken hath a more immediate respect to justice in God; as it signifies the determination of his all-perfect will for the maintaining the rights of his government in the punishment of delinquents and offenders. The displeasure of a Divine Being, as it is accompanied with an irresistible almighty power, is certainly as proper an object of our fear, as his love is of our hope: the former is equally founded upon the reason of things with the latter: and though it may not be the *noblest principle* of obedience, it is doubtless a very *reasonable motive* to it; answering as truly to the frame of our natures, both as sensitive and rational, as any other motive can do, upon the supposition that vice is the object of the divine abhorrence, and that the wisdom of the Supreme Governor may lead him to *express* his abhorrence of it: which I think none would deny. Upon the same supposition Christianity is doubtless not only defensible, but testifies the wisdom of its author; in that our fear is addressed to by threatnings, and the terrors of the Lord are made use of to persuade men by influencing *that* affection; thereby bringing them to consideration, and the use of their
rational

rational powers for the avoiding the misery which those terrors suggest.

But the expression of *the fear of God*, as it stands here, and is prescribed by the apostle, is more comprehensive; it seems to me to imply, *a mind deeply and habitually affected with the sense of a duty we owe to God, and disposed to pay him those regards which are suitable to his excellencies, and the relations in which we stand towards him.* This hath all in it that the fear of God *strictly taken* hath; but it takes in more as its *object*, even the several attributes of the deity; and as to its *exercise* too, even the practical payment of all proper regards to him as God, at all times, and upon all occasions. If we attend to our own make, we shall find that our affections are not at the command of our wills: we cannot fear or love any thing *at pleasure*; but our minds must discern some qualities and perfections in the object, something we at least account a perfection, before those affections of the mind can be excited. Agreeably to this, God hath given us an account of his own excellencies, all adorable and lovely: he hath given us an account of the relations in which he stands to us, and we to him; the nearest, the fullest of obligation that can possibly be. These are set before us to form our minds to that temper and those regards towards him, which he hath made the matter of an express command: plainly designing hereby, that our religion should not be merely mechanical or accidental, but that we should be able to give *ourselves a reason* for our regards of himself; even such reasons as *always holding*, may render our religion a *principle*, and our regards to him a *temper, a business, a life*. And such reasons are we furnished with for *that* fear of God here prescribed, in order to our purification from vice, and perfection in virtue, viz. *An habitual esteem and regard of him, answering to the excellencies of his nature, and the relations subsisting unchangeably between him and us.* This we stile a *pious disposition*; this the apostle proposes as a most effectual means to-

wards an eminency in virtue, or in personal and social duties. Which brings us,

II. To consider the influence that this piety hath upon the duties that respect ourselves and others. And,

1. Piety hath a *natural* influence upon virtue. Such is the perfection of the christian rule, that there is no branch of virtue but is the matter of a precept. It is a scheme of the purest and most exalted morality that was ever put together : it insists upon virtuous intentions and affections, as well as external actions, and extends to what is hidden in the heart, as well as to what is obvious to the world. So that it is not sufficient to establish a virtuous character, according to the gospel standard, *merely* to abstain from those things which a vitious mind would suggest and prompt to, but the *mind itself* should in some good degree be freed from its vitious turn and disposition. The precept extends to *that* : and whilst a person carries about him his envy, malice, revenge, or any other corrupt affection *in any considerable power*, he is an offender ; he doth not come up to the precept, though the affections themselves should not always appear to the world. Now since so perfect a virtue is enjoined us as the will of God, and is the matter of a precept, a pious disposition must greatly subserve it ; since that is in its very nature, an inward regard to the divine authority and approbation. From hence virtue must naturally spring from *true* piety : I say *true* piety ; for there is a piety falsely so called. There may be acts carrying the appearance of homage and worship to God, without any temper of mind to answer them ; that is, without piety : as we are assured there may be giving all our goods to feed the poor, where there is no charity. And by the way, this without breach of charity may be deemed the case, when those acts are accompanied with *habitual unrighteousness* of any kind : they are then plainly resolvable into nothing better than

than a commutation with Almighty God, or a fine gloss for the deception of the world: a sense of God hath no concern therein as a principle, motive, or end: so far from it, that would the omission of those acts of homage, or their contrary, serve the same purposes, they would be neglected or reversed. On the other hand, where true piety hath formed the temper, we say virtue will naturally result from thence: wherever there is a due disposition towards God, and in proportion to it, sobriety, righteousness, charity, meekness, with every other moral virtue, of course becomes an object of regard, as *they* have the stamp of divine authority upon them, and are the terms of the divine approbation. Again: piety hath a *natural* influence upon virtue, or upon a right behaviour towards ourselves and others, as it suggests the most powerful reasons and motives too for such a behaviour. These are the divine perfections and relations to us. No one can be unwillingly ignorant how considerable a branch of the christian system virtue makes, how considerable a part of the divine will. Now piety not only composes the mind to a thoughtfulness concerning duty, but furnishes with constant reasons for it, and disposes the mind to attend them. If we are habitually disposed to pay all proper regards to God, and have suitable affections *towards him*, he will be habitually present to the mind in his perfections and relations, and thereby enforce every duty of the second table, as occasion and opportunity offers. The soul of this pious turn is accustomed to converse with him as the author of its being, the proprietor of its faculties and powers, and the object of its absolute dependance: as its rightful sovereign, omniscient witness, and arbitrator of its state both here and hereafter, from whom there is no appeal: as its kind benefactor from whom all it possesses, in the vast variety of it, hath proceeded; of whom it holds all; and from whom the happiness, ultimate and compleat, which it expects, must be derived to it, or it is undone for ever.

This keeps awake its natural sense of *justice*, which leads it to employ all its faculties and talents under a divine direction: it sets a perfect and universal observance of God's will in the light of *gratitude*; and prompts to the pleasing and honouring this its Maker and Benefactor, as the very best sacrifice it can offer. Such reasons may not always be drawn out *in form* and *actual thought* for the service of virtue, but this *habitual* influence is stately found. They give a general turn and tendency to the behaviour, and are ready for use under any fall of inclination, or proposed temptation to an instance of vice.

2. Piety hath not only a natural, but, compared with some other motives, a *peculiar* influence upon the duties respecting ourselves and others. Some have talked, and more by their practice declare their sentiments are, that morality might be well enough secured without that disposition respecting God, which piety includes. Piety and virtue are so separable with them, that the latter may be sufficiently maintained without the former. I think this is not true; nay, that it is a *very pernicious* mistake. It seems very contrary to the *natural* sentiments of mankind, where they have been *thinking* persons. One Heathen of considerable note * declares, *that piety is the head of every virtue*. Another †, who, with most in that sentiment, is a greater authority than Jesus Christ, saith, *that if piety towards God were taken away, fidelity and justice amongst men would not long survive*. When *Abimelech* the king of *Gerar* expostulated with *Abraham* for concealing from him that *Sarah* was his wife, whereby he laid a very great snare in his way; *Abraham* gives him this reason for it ‡, *Because I thought the fear of God is not in this place, and they will slay me for my wife's sake*. His reasoning was plainly this; that where there was no regard to God, it was very unlikely there should be any restraint from acts of cruelty and injustice,

* Hierocles.

† Cicero.

‡ Gen. xx. 11.

when prompted to them by a strong inclination, and when opportunity favoured a present gratification: with this reasoning *Abimelech* himself seems satisfied. We don't say but some, from good natural dispositions, may do some virtuous acts: but we must also know, if we are acquainted as we ought with our rule, that persons are denominated *virtuous* from the *prevalency* of a behaviour and practice; for which we apprehend a pious disposition is absolutely necessary. But it may be asked, are there not some other things that will equally subserve and maintain virtue, and prove as sufficient principles as piety? Such as a principle of honour; a love of virtue itself; a regard to our own present interest, which virtue undeniably befriends. Will not these be as effectual to the supporting a steady course of virtue? I answer, no. Let us a little consider the strength and power of these things as influential upon a virtuous *life*.

Some may think that *a sense of honour*, without any thing else, is sufficient to produce and support a truly virtuous *life*.-----Without all doubt, virtue is truly honourable: it is so from its own intrinsic excellency; as also in a relative view, as it is most agreeable to the dignity of the human nature. It gives a person a most just title to an universal respect, so far as he is known: insomuch that temperance, chastity, justice, liberality, gratitude, are applauded even by those who won't copy them. But, how few amongst mankind have any sense of honour at all? How many who are acquainted with, who can feel, no higher sense, than *that of agreeable or disagreeable to inclination!* Such undoubtedly cannot be influenced by this sense of honour. As for those who have it, and are in any measure influenced by it----they find it a very *precarious* principle. Every one knows how great an influence *fashion and common vogue* have upon our sentiments of things as *honourable or mean*; and what powerful seducers they are. Our senses sufficiently inform us, that many things, which even upon a slender examination are

evidently base and dishonourable, are disguised and recommended to the generality from a gallantry and bravery, which custom or fashion only hath stamp'd upon them. Though this doth not alter the nature of things, yet it greatly influences our apprehensions of them. It may and doth corrupt insensibly our sense of honour, and thereby may as well lead us *from* virtue, as *to* it. Nay further, though we allow that some, who have little or no regard to God, may at present act a virtuous part for the *very honour of being virtuous*, yet what *security* doth this principle contain? That *very honour* thus strongly affected, and which is in this case the same with *reputation*, may very easily and suddenly come to be preferred to virtue itself: it is but for honour and virtue to be divided; and this may be by the next set of acquaintance that their civil interests, or some particular taste may throw them amongst. *Then* probably this fine epithet of honourable, is translated to a very foul thing, and the bias to virtue becomes a bias to vice. *Honour* as accompanying virtue is likely to influence *only* when virtue is generally reputable, that is, fashionable: it is much too feeble a thing to enable a person to withstand the reproaches, sneers, contempt, and all the other marks of dishonour, which, when unfashionable, it bears. In short, honour, as a principle of a virtuous *life*, may serve for a topick to harangue upon; but when persons are virtuous only for the honour of being so, it will be found to fall as short of piety in its effects, as the honour that comes from men is inferior in its influence to the honour that comes from God.

Others propose the *love of virtue* as a sufficient principle of a *life* of virtue; thus setting aside piety as necessary thereto. But *this* also we believe upon examination will be found a delusive phrase, or else very insufficient to answer the end proposed.---We have already allowed an intrinsic excellency in virtue: it hath an *essential beauty*, and may captivate any one as far as admiration goes, who will but steadily be-
hold

hold it. But; if by a *love* of virtue be meant no more than *an admiration of it as a lovely thing in itself*---this is equally the acknowledgment of the *worst* with the *best*. When *they* are calm enough for thought, and free enough to declare their real sentiments, they are constrained in spite of themselves to bear a testimony to this truth*. So that this sentiment of virtue is what many have, who yet think not fit to embrace it. Further; if by a *love* of virtue be meant *a pleasure in the acts of it*, we acknowledge this is much more than the former: and doubtless, where the virtuous principle hath so far gained the heart, that a *delight* is taken in virtuous actions, much may be expected towards a virtuous *life*. But this naturally brings on a question; *how is this delight in virtue to be obtained?* I fear it is the case of very few. Those who are strangers or enemies to virtue, or those who are just entered upon a virtuous course, can know but very little of the matter. What principle are *they* to act upon, to whom this delight in virtue cannot be a principle? Or how shall *they* attain to this *delight* in virtuous acts? If it be said, *by the practice of it*; the question still returns, *how shall they be engaged to this practice which is to secure this love?* For my own part, I can discern no solid answer hereto, but, *a regard to God*. If this be so, piety must still be acknowledged the best principle of virtue.----But, to allow as much as can well be supposed, that there is an actual delight found by some in virtuous acts, even where there is little or no regard to God: yet let it be enquired, whether this pleasure and love is not confined to some *particular* virtues to which natural constitution may lead†, or which a prudent and good education may

* Cic. de Off. L. 1.

† As for virtues distinguished ordinarily by their being constitutional, they seem more allied to the animal than the rational part of our natures: and though they render the possessors in some degree more happy in themselves, more agreeable or useful to others than otherwise they sometimes would be, yet in themselves they constitute not a virtuous character, tho' they may befriend it: they are rather amiable *insinētis* than virtues, whilst reason and reflection have no concern in their operation or direction.

have rendered habitual. I dare to say, *it is not a love to virtue in general.* If so, this partial virtue is not sufficient for the divine approbation, or to secure a character with God, whatever it may do towards a name and character amongst men. We cannot think that any person is constitutionally disposed towards *every* virtue; nay most certainly, every one hath his constitutional *vices* as well as virtues. The question then still remains to be answered; how shall we attain the love of *those* virtues which are opposite to *those* vices? Or how can a person be denominated *virtuous* from the delight in *some* virtues, whilst he abhors and lives in opposition to others? This love then cannot be *general* but by means of some principle; and this principle must *equally* affect and influence every branch of virtue: and what hath sufficient power, or is thus *extensively* influencing, besides a regard to God? Give me leave to add, if there be a love of virtue in any, separate from piety, there is also a love of other things inwrought and natural, which are counter-affections, which consequently will combat this love of virtue. Now, supposing virtue hath no other security than merely the pleasure we take in some acts of it, how likely is it that we shall embrace favourable opportunities for the gratifying of a counter-affection, when attended with soliciting circumstances? since in this case it will appear to be only preferring one pleasure to another, a greater to a less, which a person who hath no religious view or principle will too readily think himself at liberty to do. If we are virtuous *only because we like to be so*, I am sure in our present circumstances we are in great danger of being virtuous *no farther than we like to be so*. For, in truth, *inclination* is here the principle. To add no more: upon every such prevalency, of a vitious affection, the virtuous one considerably abates: it is impaired as to influence and government, and in the way to be none at all.

Others propose *the present advantages naturally resulting* from virtue, as a sufficient principle of a virtuous

tuous *life*, without the aid of piety or a regard to God. But upon serious enquiry I believe *this* will be found no better than the former expedients.---Man is a sensitive being, as well as rational: and our Great Former hath so ordered our nature with respect to *moral* good and evil as well as *natural*, that we should *feel* the present advantages and benefits of virtue, as an engagement to our prosecution of it: inasmuch that we have undeniable experience, that upon the whole a virtuous course is vastly preferable to a vicious one, with respect to the interests of the present life. Virtue is so much the health of the mind and body, it is so much at the foundation of the enjoyment and comfort of the present state, that if we looked no farther, there is enough to ascertain its pre-eminence to vice; and, so far as reason governs, to determine our preference. But, if this be the *whole* of that principle which is to secure a virtuous life, I doubt it will soon be found unequal to the task. The reasons are these----Though virtue is indisputably subservient in its nature to our present happiness, yet we know it is far from prevailing universally: hereupon, the vices of others may in many cases deprive those who are virtuous of some at least of the *natural* advantages of their virtue, and take occasion from their virtue to prejudice their temporal interests. In this case, which is a common one, the principle of *present advantage* greatly fails: virtue doth not secure and befriend as it was expected to do. What then is most likely to follow? Surely this: that the *actual* and *sensible* evils, to which through the vices of others virtue hath exposed and subjected them, prove their deserting of virtue, rather than that the *mere notion* of its natural advantages, contradicted too by their experience, should maintain the practice of it.----If it be said, let what advantages soever be taken of virtue by the vicious, that yet the virtuous have still *a consciousness of having acted a virtuous part*, which weighs down all their disappointments---Not to say, that such a
satisfaction

satisfaction from an inward consciousness seems peculiar to those who have attained to an *habit* of virtuous action, whose number it is to be feared is not very considerable; but what can it do for those *who feel nothing* of this grateful consciousness? — Not to insist upon this, we would ask; what satisfaction can be found from *this consciousness*, to support under great disappointments, *but* as it is connected with a regard to the divine approbation, and a pledge thereof? Can the *meer judgment* that the mind passes upon the action as right and good, *without taking in any thing more*, secure a perseverance in a course of virtue under considerable losses and disappointments, sustained by an adherence to it? We must be other creatures than we are, I think, before this can be. On the other hand, let us but call piety in to our aid here, a regard to the authority and approbation of God, as our governor, inspector, and rewarder, *then* we can easily see how such a consciousness of acting right should yield a satisfaction for the maintenance of virtue, however some of its natural advantages may be intercepted. I beg leave to add farther, the natural advantages of virtue are not *of themselves* a sufficient principle of a virtuous life; because persons whose behaviour is resolvable wholly into *secular advantages*, may by direction so manage, as to preserve their estates, their bodily constitution, their good name, tolerably well, whilst they are in the gospel account, and in the judgment of reason too, really vitious. This principle, or the knowledge they have of *virtue's subserving our present interest and happiness*, may of itself be sufficient to preserve them from those vices which more immediately disturb *that* happiness, and prejudice *that* interest; but it will also, I fear, admit of many that are inconsistent with the *future* happiness the gospel proposes. If there is no better principle than this, what should preserve from those vices, which by management they can prevent damaging their health, estate, or reputation, or which by discretion they can follow consistently

ently with their present ease and peace? Of this sort there are several. It is undeniable; *this* is a principle of worldly wisdom: the virtue that is practised from its influence is wholly measured by it, and is likely to go no farther than what appears necessary for *secular* ends; which can never establish a virtuous character. For, it leaves persons free to many vices, at least of the mind, which will destroy their virtue in the divine account. We might also add, that when virtue hath no better a principle than its own *present advantages*, it must be very uncertain, whether such a one shall act virtuously or vitiously: For, adhering to virtue *purely* from its influence on our *temporal* happiness, we are most likely to follow its contrary, where that *appears more* subservient thereto; as in many particular cases it is known to do. To sum up all: tho' virtue undeniably befriends a present happiness, yet where persons are influenced by no higher principle than that of its *natural advantages*, they will certainly be very defective in virtue. For, as to the obligation to follow it, there is properly none in this principle: it appearing to me evidently to carry this in it, that if such were willing to forego their own present interest, they would be accountable to none but themselves. This very principle is consistent with much filthiness of the spirit, or with many vices of the mind, and may lead *from* virtue, as well as *to* it. Since in many instances, according to the state of the world, profit, pleasure, safety, reputation, *appear more* effectually secured by vice than virtue. A regard to God, upon the whole, seems absolutely requisite for the producing and maintaining of a virtuous life, in order to secure and aid every other principle that may befriend it.

I have not said any thing with a design to depretiate any of these principles, since they may in their measure befriend virtue, and strengthen its interest: let them avail thereto so far as they can, and so far let them be esteemed. Our aim hath been to represent that as the *first* principle of virtue which we believe is first, which

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hath the chief power and efficacy towards a virtuous life and character. I hope it appears evident, that let us take what principles we will for that end, they will be found insufficient; that is, virtue would be very imperfect as to any, it would languish and expire as to the most, without that of piety or the fear of God. If a regard to our Maker is not as it were the first impulse, some mean and fordid principle is like to leaven our actions, or some vile one pervert them. Whilst there is a sufficient *worth* in virtue to *deserve* our choice, it hath not a sufficient *power* in itself to engage our choice. I shall now briefly shew what *peculiar* and *special* influence piety, or an inward regard to God, hath upon virtue, or upon a right behaviour towards ourselves and others.

1. This and this *only* will have an universal influence. We have already hinted how perfect and compleat the christian system of virtue is: there is every thing that is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, and of good report included in it, and inculcated by it. Other principles may sway in some particular instances, but this only we apprehend will lead us to account *all* the precepts of virtue to be right, and extend its obligation *to all*. That regard to the divine authority and approbation it includes, that regard to the divine eye which it supposes, will not admit of an exception to any known branch of virtue; but is the strongest engagement that can be thought of to all, and equally so to each. Where this prevails, the vices that are *consistent* with our worldly interest, reputation, or health, will be startled at, as well as those that *threaten* them all: such differences between one and another, will be no encouragement to practice; they will have no influence upon such a mind; because it hath one standing over-ruling argument equally levelled against all, *viz.* That they who contract guilt, are offensive to God, and risque his favour. By this also all virtues have equally one powerful sanction; since they are enjoined by the same authority, and this very authority the pious soul is governed by. Take any

any other principle, as far as I can see into the matter, and a person must be at great uncertainties with himself, whether he shall do well or ill. Regards to virtue must be partial and accidental, except they are founded upon a principle, whose influence is as extensive as itself. Such a principle is the fear of God, where it is in reality : it is a source of universal goodness. As the divine precept takes in every instance of right behaviour toward ourselves and others, so the divine sanction reaches to *all*, and consequently contains more of argument or dissuasive than any other that can be suggested.

2. This and this principle only can equal and answer the temptations that lie in the way of virtue. The temporal interests of men very frequently clash; and so prevalent is a base selfishness, that many think themselves real losers by what others enjoy. Whenever therefore power and opportunity are united, it is a very trying inducement to injure and oppress; at least to revenge injuries; especially when a person knows he is screened from all impeachments, can gratify his malice under a specious pretext, or so as to avoid discovery and censure. We have an instance of the peculiar influence of piety under the greatest provocation to, and the most favourable circumstances for, the executing revenge, in the case of *Joseph* and his brethren. He had been treated barbarously by them thro' envy: he had now no superior in *Egypt*, where they were, but the king himself, and was as high in his favour, as in advancement: he knew his brethren, and they did not know him; he remembered their cruel treatment of him; and under these circumstances could have gratified any resentments in the world, under the pretence of their being spies, and by dint of that power he was invested with. What was their security against the evils they apprehended *not*, but the same he gives them against those they *did* apprehend, *viz.* his fear of God *? This suppressed his revenge, and

* Gen. xlii. 18.

was their security for receiving good for evil. What principle besides this can balance the trial of *secrecy*, when on the side of strong inclination? When a person may gratify an unclean or an unjust passion, and it may ever remain concealed from the world? 'Tis reasonable to suppose every other principle but piety, would have soon yielded to a temptation so circumstanced as *Joseph's* was; wherein there were repeated solicitations, a prospect of interest upon the easy terms of indulging inclination, the danger of feeling very warm resentments in case of refusal; and all this enforced by the circumstance of all the secrecy that could be wished. But, an habitual regard to an invisible God, enabled him to act a most heroic part*. From thence none of those powerful things moved him, Might we not also instance in those particular virtues that are unfashionable, that have prevailing custom, and consequently prevailing scorn and reproach against them; or those which, if not dispensed with in time and place, would prove the losing a most favourable opportunity for the raising ourselves and families?—In these cases, I doubt there is nothing but the fear of God that would keep us steady to virtue; or enable us to adhere to it under our cooling discouragements, or the more ensnaring bribes for our relinquishing it, which abound in the world. But, *this* is calculated for every case, for every trial, for every circumstance; secrecy itself not excepted; and thereupon may every where, and at all times, be the guard and support of virtue. It respects an All-seeing eye and a Judgment-bar, where secret things shall be brought to light, brought to account, and the most perfect righteousness administered: from hence it supplies with a constant reason for action and behaviour, a reason most becoming a reasonable creature to be influenced by, and furnishes a reply to every temptation, to every circumstance in it. Further,

* Gen. xxxix. 9.

3. This and this principle only is likely to influence the dispositions and affections of the mind, from whence we are principally denominated, and our lives are prevailingly virtuous or vicious. Our blessed Lord intending nothing less than an universal goodness of manners, hath given laws to the thoughts of the heart, hath levelled his commands at the temper and disposition of the mind : this I say he hath done in order to secure a truly virtuous behaviour. And indeed a *thorough* and *steady* virtue cannot be secured without attending to, and guarding the thoughts and affections of the heart*. We know they who *indulge* to *vicious affections* are, in the language of the gospel, *vicious persons*. A malicious, revengeful, unjust, or unclean *disposition*, when it prevails, denominates in the sight of God †, and will probably sooner or later betray itself to the world by actions of the same kind. If there then be a due regard to God, it will extend to these : it will purify the heart ; it will subdue and mortify the vicious affections ; it will correct the inward faults, so far as we are conscious of them, and renew us in the spirit of our minds, and thus cleanse us from the filthiness of the spirit, as well as of the flesh. On the other hand, what besides itself can go so far ? What besides is adapted to reach what is hidden and concealed from the world ? This doth not only *stifle* or *suppress* inordinate inclinations, or vicious dispositions for the present, but gives us the *government of them*, and is adapted to *cure* them by inspiring better. In a word, whilst other things go but little beyond complection, out-side, and appearances of virtue ; a regard to a God that searches the heart, and hath laid his laws upon the mind, will engage to look to the heart, to purify the mind, to secure truth and holiness in the inward part : hereby not only the actions in themselves may be virtuous, but the persons virtuous that do them ; and this way we may make heaven of our virtue. — I would now assist the reader in the

* Prov. iv. 23.

† Mat. v. 22, 28.

making some reflections upon what hath been offered, that it may more effectually answer its *practical* design and end. And

1. We may from hence learn what *true* piety is. Sure it must be owing to some very gross misapprehensions of the thing, that it should be spoke of, as it too often is, in a contemptuous manner. I am far from pleading for every thing that hath gone under the title of piety. The account that hath been given of it is this; *Such a sense of the existence and perfections of a divine Being, as disposes us to pay him those regards which are suitable to his excellencies, and the relation in which he stands to us.* I cannot see any thing in his account of piety that should disgust the most reasonable mind, or any that *TRULY think freely*; a character I wish could be *justly* claimed by all the world. Such a piety is so agreeable to the highest reason of mankind, that were it not under some corrupt biases, and the mind but duly informed, it would naturally result from a due consideration of things. Since all knowledge is the effect of some attention, persons may, by a neglect of their faculties, overlook the most obvious things: the best things also may be abused and brought into contempt, by being employed to give a sanction to trifles, and to shelter absurdities under their more honourable names: but this ignorance or abuse is wholly inexcusable, when, by means of the gospel, things are so notorious and plain to all who make use of their understandings. Let it be observed then, that let our sense or apprehensions of a divine Being be what they will, if they are not discovered by proper and suitable acts, it will never constitute a pious character. *Abraham* was called out to offer his son; which when *in intention* he did, he received that attestation to his piety, *Now I know that thou fearest and regardest me**: plainly intimating, his disregard of the divine order had been an incontestable impeachment of his piety or fear of God.—Again, true piety consists not in a

* Gen. xxii. 12.

regard of any single perfection or relation, to a disregard of the rest. It is indeed expressed by a fear of God in the text, which strictly taken, answers to nothing but the divine power and justice. But this phrase is more particularly used in scripture from the leading influence it hath towards an universal regard, and as most comprehensive of such a one as is due from us. It is grounded immediately upon his supreme excellencies and absolute dominion; upon those relations which bespeak authority and right of claim from us; and therefore is at the foundation of all obedience. But then it should be remembered, it never implies any amazing confounding terror; such as we have in a storm, or when a sudden calamity seizes us; not a consternation, dread or astonishment. It is a calm composed temper; a veneration for him as most excellent, a reasonable deprecation of his displeasure: this is perfectly consistent with the animating hope of his mercy, with a confidence in his goodness and benevolence. And indeed did not the required fear of God include, or at least *admit* of hope and trust in him, and a love of him, there could be no *true* piety; since there could be no acts expressive of those relations to us, under which his son hath particularly recommended them to us, even those of a father, friend, and benefactor. So far is a slavish dread from being a religious fear. Nor further, is it a pious *humour* only that we have been recommending, the effect of a mechanical or accidental cause, which must be as mutable as its cause: not *fits* of devotion appearing at certain seasons of the year, and then disappearing: no, but a *state of mind*; a *fixed steady* disposition to please a supreme Being, and to gain his approbation, as the supreme reason of our actions, running thro' our whole conversation, and taking place of all other considerations in what we do or forbear, desire or dread. This, I think, is so worthy an intention, so just a principle of action for reasonable creatures, that

it must always be found in the highest degree where reason is in the greatest perfection amongst them.

2. We may learn the importance of a pious disposition. If we were to judge by the practice and conversation of many who profess Christianity, the *whole* of religion, or of what is incumbent upon us in order to the divine acceptance, seems confined to the duties respecting our fellow-creatures. Benevolence, gratitude to benefactors, justice in dealing, a gentle and peaceable disposition towards all, truth in words, faithfulness to engagements and promises, &c. These are all they concern themselves with, and lay a stress upon.—To such our Lord's words are very applicable, tho' in somewhat a different case; *These ought ye to have done, but not to leave other things undone**. These ought not to be slighted or neglected; but then there is something else which, in a sense, claims our principal and first regard; *a due fear of God*—This is *eternally unexchangeably* right and fit *in itself*. If there be a God, there are certain dispositions of mind absolutely necessary to be found in us towards him, answering to the perfections of his nature, and the indissoluble relations between him and us. His greatness and supreme excellencies demand our veneration; his all-sufficiency and faithfulness our trust; his wisdom our resignation and submission; his goodness our fear † as well as hope; his bounty our gratitude; and his rightful supremacy and dominion our solicitude to go-

* Mat. xxiii. 23. † It may probably appear strange to some, that fear should be mentioned as answering to goodness, which seems to result from a very different attribute: but the propriety I apprehend would soon be discerned if we considered goodness in God as a moral perfection exercised under the direction of wisdom; and not merely as an instinct, or what we term amongst ourselves, good-nature. For, such a moral perfection hath evidently its bounds and limits with respect to its exercise; it hath a regard to fitness, and consequently to the qualifications of its object; and hereupon its acts may be suspended, yea, it may require punishment: and when the will of God in communicating blessings is governed by his wisdom, suffering is more certain to the despisers of his goodness, than if a more variable passion conducted the divine acts.

vern ourselves by his will and pleasure in all things. Upon the supposition God possesses these perfections and prerogatives, that he has discovered them to us, and we are capable of answering them in this manner, such dispositions towards him are primarily incumbent upon us; since *his* are the first relations, the first claims: and it appears to me an absurdity equal to any, to suppose that such perfections, accompanied with the divine relations, may be innocently or safely disregarded by us. I beg leave to repeat it: *Piety towards God is of unexchangeable obligation*: and it is astonishing that any should not see it who profess a veneration for reason, and to be determined absolutely by the nature of things——Add to this, That the gospel makes godliness, or a suitable disposition of mind towards the blessed God in particular, an absolute necessary ingredient in the character of a christian. To this Christianity calls us directly as one essential branch of its design*; of its constitutive form: it is given as a periphrasis of Christianity, *that it is a doctrine according to godliness* †, or a doctrine calculated and intended to promote piety: and whatever moralist a person may be, his character as a christian is imperfect if piety do not accompany his virtues ‡. Agreeable to this as rational a writer as ever the world allowed the character to, thus expresses himself: “A
“ state of temperance, sobriety, and justice, without
“ devotion, is a cold, lifeless, insipid condition of vir-
“ tue, and is rather to be stiled philosophy than reli-
“ gion.” What hath been suggested, I think, hath in a good measure pleaded the necessity and importance of piety, as we have shewn the peculiar influence it hath upon virtue in general: if we would perfect holiness or virtue, it must be through the fear of God. *This* leads a person to every branch of virtue, which no other principle will do: it will lead us *only* to virtue; whereas other principles may, under circumstances which are very common, lead to vice as well as

|| Titus ii. 11. 12. † Tim. i. 6. 3. ‡ 2 Pet. i. 5, 12.

virtue. Where there is this prevailing sense of God, and internal regard to him, there is naturally a fixed persuasion of a witness and spectator in the greatest solitude, whose eye under such a disposition carries more influence than that of a world. God's will is before such, bespeaking the necessity of *every* virtue, and requiring its exercise on all proper occasions. From a consciousness of a divine presence and regard to the divine approbation, the soul is kept steady under temptations to vice, is animated to act a virtuous part, tho' no other eye behold it, yea, tho' it be reproached for it: it can set aside its fear of man by its regard to God, and its supream ambition to prove its fidelity to him. To go still further, from its very principle it can turn the greatness of a temptation to vice into an argument for withstanding it, as such a circumstance is fully beheld by its omniscient witness, and renders it lovely and precious in his sight, whose judgment is the standard of merit, and whose favour is an everlasting attestation and reward. Scripture plainly points to a *pious* disposition as distinguishing *Enoch* and *Noah* from others as to the vices that then prevailed in the world: they, it is said, *walked with God*, i. e. had a constant regard to him in the course of their lives: their singular piety was the ground and reason of their singular virtue: and it is as strongly intimated, that the want of piety was the cause of that total depravation of manners, that inundation of vice, in the old world. And why should not experience be allowed its testimony in this case, whilst there are so many vouchers ready to prove, that where persons have lost their regard to God, they presently make shipwreck of virtue, or retain but little regard to themselves or their neighbours. Whatever *single* virtues remain, they run into *many* vices, and together with their piety lose their morality. When once the awe and reverence of God is gone, there is nothing that I know of sufficient *statally* to restrain the violence and natural inclination. Methinks therefore those who profess themselves

themselves such admirers of virtue, and are so liberal in its praises, would act but a consistent part to bestow a share upon piety, which is so peculiar a security to it, and which would contribute to its perfection beyond any thing else. If they are in earnest in their encomiums on virtue, and in their professed esteem of it, sure this should raise their estimation of piety; and the importance they allow to the one, should plead the necessity of the other. It must doubtless be so, if persons would consider and be *determined* by the nature and reason of things: either the nature of piety or virtue, the circumstances of human nature, or what reason declares necessary to establish a virtuous character. I am far from depreting *virtue* by all this; but only would argue with its professed admirers upon their own principles in favour of what I think is unreasonably slighted, tho' intrinsically excellent, inducing the strongest obligation, and most eminently serviceable to the uniformity and perfection of virtue. And that it may be more fully seen, whilst I am an advocate for piety, I am no less so for virtue, let us consider,

3. We should judge of our piety or our regard to God, by our virtue, or our regard to those duties which respect our selves and others. This, I think, is a natural instruction and conclusion from what hath been offered. If the fear of God is prescribed as the principle and security of holiness, then surely the reality and degree of the principle should be judged of by the reality and degree of its effects. The apostle in the text declares, that where there is a true fear of God, it will advance holiness even to a considerable perfection. We have then all the reason in the world to suspect the sincerity of that piety, let the pretensions be what they will, which is accompanied with any stated and habitual vices. Attend a little to a solemn declaration and decision of heaven in this matter. ——— The sacrifices amongst the Jews, tho' they received their value *purely from the divine* institution, yet the observing them

when instituted was an immediate expression of piety or a regard to God; because it proceeded from a respect to the divine command. But in what a variety and pungency of language do we find these very sacrifices detested. * *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me? saith the Lord: who hath required or sought this from your hands, to tread my courts? Cease to offer me your mock, your lying gifts; your incense is an abomination; your solemn assemblies are an iniquity; I cannot bear or endure your stated festivals.* What could be the reason of all this? Were not these oblations, incense, and solemn convocations, of God's own appointing, as expressions of a regard to him? Yes, but there was no piety or regard of God accompanying these acts. How did this appear? Why, *their hands were full of blood; they were chargeable with cruelty, unrighteousness, and oppression: their forms of piety were accompanied with great immoralities, and from thence were not only regarded, but rendered detestable.* Accordingly, they are commanded to reform in those instances, and to practise the contrary virtues, if they would have their piety allowed, or their devotional services accepted. Doth not this undeniably assure us, that let our *expressions* of regard to God be what they will, stated allowed immoralities are in the divine estimate a contradiction thereto, and a defeating their end both as to character and benefit from God. Such particular acts of devotion are imputable to any mean or sorry principle, rather than to a regard of God, when they are accompanied with any indulged immoralities respecting either ourselves or others. There cannot well be a greater sneer, or a more palpable contradiction as to character, than to say of any, *they are very devout but vicious.* If we do then make conscience of acquitting ourselves in our duty to God, to which surely we are indispensably obliged, let us, I beg, judge of the reality of those dispositions, and the goodness of those acts by the influence

they have upon personal and relative duties. For instance: let us judge of our love to God, whom we have not seen, by our love to our brother whom we have seen * : let us estimate our reverential regard for God by our being just and honest, temperate and chaste under the temptation of secrecy, and when we are secure from the reflections of the world † ; let it be shewn by the influence it hath upon all our actions *as done in his presence*: let us judge of the sincerity of our homage to him, and transactions with him, by our regard to truth and sincerity amongst men: let us judge of our gratitude to him for favours innumerable, since we can make *him* no requital, by our beneficence and kindness to our fellow-creatures, as we have ability and opportunity ‡ ; and of our regards to his mercy and favour, by our forbearing and forgiving those who have injured us §. To sum up all: a truly pious disposition can never be evidenced to the satisfaction of a well-instructed mind, but by the practice of those virtues towards others, which correspond to the perfections we profess to regard and admire in God, as far as we are capable of an imitation, or the exemplifying it by that morality it is adapted to produce. Let our pretensions to, or expressions of piety be what they will, if they promote not our holiness or virtue, they are but a solemn shew: it is a religion without piety; a devotion without veneration or love; it is a godliness without goodness. What its acceptance is like then to be with an all-wise God—we may leave with common sense to determine.

4. We may also learn the necessity and advantage of cultivating a pious disposition. If it hath this influence upon virtue, its influence must be in proportion to its power. The more deeply riveted this fear of God is, the more steady and universal will our holiness be. This certainly is improveable: if any should

* 1 John iv. 20. † Neh. v. 16. ‡ Heb. xiii. 15, 16.
§ Mat. vi. 14.

ask by what means ; I would reply, by these two ways more especially :

1. By frequent meditations and reflections on a divine Being. The impressions the mind of man receives, mainly result from the exercises and employments of it : this holds good in respect of the highest matters it hath to converse with : and indeed what is not the object of our senses, can *only* influence as it is presented by thought. There is nothing more visible than a *God* in his works and operations to a mind disposed to reflection ; there is nothing less disputable than that our degree of intelligence was designed for our contemplation of his works, and of himself by them. Oh ! whence is it, that the effects should terminate the eye, and even conceal the cause ! that minds capable of penetrating into much of the wisdom and goodness exhibited in the divine works, should yet *step* short of the glorious subject in which they reside, and when confessedly they can be only his ! one would think, it was much more difficult here to do wrong than right ; more difficult to rest in the effects than to rise to the great Author. Christianity also hath this excellency, that it gives us the most august and amiable idea of the Deity ; whereby, whilst it from thence plainly obliges to contemplation, it is quite *indulgent* to the human mind ; since the most grateful affections of mind are naturally excited upon such a contemplation. But even amidst this additional advantage, how many rest in the general belief hereof, without feeling any disposition answering to the great truth, or corresponding to a Being of such excellencies, and standing in such relations ! What is so likely to be the cause, as our not conversing with this Being by fixed thought, and designed contemplation ? as his not being more frequently before the eye of the mind, and thereby becoming more sensibly present : for in point of influence, he no further exists than as he is the subject of our minds. We are not indeed usually so strongly affected with any thing as what our senses inform

inform us of ; yet since our reason can as fully *satisfy* us of the reality of the divine presence, and exhibit God's perfections and relations to the view of the mind, we are as capable of conversing with him as with our fellow-creatures by the exercise of our minds ; and of experiencing those affections that agree to his perfections, as we are of being influenced by the shadows of those excellencies in a fellow-creature. However perfect our idea of God be, however readily allowed, yet if it is not frequently under view, and brought home to ourselves ; the impression is likely to be very little more than in a state of ignorance or infidelity : its attraction, its obligation cannot be felt : the heart will run loose to every thing the imagination will send it after, without the least regard to the God above. On the other hand, such perfections and relations filling the mind would insensibly produce answerable dispositions, and, like the seal pressed on the wax, leave an agreeing impression behind him : they are so commanding, so concerning, so affecting in themselves and their consequences, that it is scarce supposable the soul should rise from any serious contemplation thereof, without finding itself disposed to every instance of practical regard, as a self-gratification.

2. A due attendance on, and performance of the instrumental duties of religion : this is a means to promote a pious disposition. We shall enlarge a little upon two : they are prayer and the Lord's supper.---- Prayer is a branch of natural religion, and is a natural means of piety : in that we immediately converse with God in his several perfections and relations ; and if it be performed as it ought with a fixed mind, and with a God in view, it will produce a suitable disposition. It will have an awe, not servile but filial ; kindle a love ; and introduce such a sense of God into the soul, as to give a general turn and tendency to its thoughts and reflections : the steady practice of it renders this sense most natural and familiar. Prayer is in itself an expression

expression of piety, and also a means of improving it : nor can I see how any *governing* sense of a God should be kept up, such a one I mean as is sufficient *statedly* to influence the mind and life, but by this manner of converse ; since there is so much in the world to overlay first principles, to cool and damp our most natural affections, and since second causes so sadly conceal the first. But by such approaches to God, the natural sense and apprehension of a divine Being is enlivened ; it is as it were a-fresh engraven : when in this way, like *Moses* we ascend into the mount with God, we can scarcely descend without deep impressions from the sight, without an improved disposition of soul to regard and venerate the most glorious object : and I will beg leave to add, that whatever our present sense of God may be, it will languish as to all practical influences in proportion to the neglecting this branch of devotion. It is not for his own sake, that God hath appointed prayer ; we can't sure be so stupid as to imagine it ; but for ours : nor for ours *meerly* as a means of supplying lower wants ; but in order to promote those dispositions of mind, as are at the foundation of all obedience to himself, and all enjoyment of him. Consequently, tho' it be *in itself* a duty resulting from our relation to God and dependance upon him, its chief excellency lies in its instrumentality to promote the goodness of the mind and heart ; and no farther doth it constitute a character for devotion or godliness with him, than it subserves this its ultimate end.-----

We would also recommend a due regard to that sacrament of the Lord's supper. I know well that some, *out of a professed concern for virtue*, have much decried all *positive* institutions, of which this is one. When we consider their abilities for reasoning in general, I think it is not inconsistent with *christian charity*, which, by the way, is the most perfect that can be exercised, to impute their decrying of *all positive rites* more to a malignant enmity to Christianity, than any concern for virtue. Wherein can it be unreasonable to suppose that

God

God should enjoin such rites ; or how can mortality be prejudiced by such a one as we are speaking of, which carries in its very nature the most direct tendency to promote our regards to it ; and most eminently strengthens moral obligation ? Surely did men really *think freely* they would not argue against the wisdom or goodness of any thing from *possible abuses* ; nor against the reasonableness or propriety of God's requiring some external rites, because mankind are prone to superstition. The institution we are speaking of is admirably calculated to promote moral duties : it is a direct *means* for the promoting *piety*, which I hope is a moral duty, in contradiction to what is positive, tho' ordinarily distinguished from morality ; and by promoting *that*, as hath been proved, it subserves peculiarly every other duty of a moral nature. This institution directly leads us to converse with God and the Redeemer, and with the love and regard of both *to us* : what then can more fully impress the mind, or be a stronger engagement to love and regard *from us* ? The purity of the divine nature, the regards God hath to his own laws and rights, are abundantly exhibited in the represented expiation made for sin ; and his compassion to sinners is no less held forth in his admitting the sacrifice, and giving assurance of forgiveness thereupon. Now can we converse with the most awful and amiable representations of the Deity, exhibited in some measure by *sensible* signs, and not find our selves more disposed to pay the blessed God his proper regards : those which his perfections and relations to us demand ? I wish we were constant to these duties, as we might have opportunity, and that there was but a fixed mind with a view to an improving our inward devotion by them ; then, I am persuaded we should find their efficacy considerable. An *habitual piety* is very peculiarly promoted by a frequent and thorough engagement of mind in duties so immediately respecting God : wherein we manifestly trifle and do nothing, if his transforming perfections and his most affecting

acts are not before the mind. Such is the nature of these duties, that they are not reasonable services, or performed agreeably to intelligent beings, if they are not found influential upon our habitual sense of God and regard to him.

5. We hence see one great reason of the difficulty of religion, and whom persons may thank for it. The reason is, persons will separate what God hath joined together. If the several branches of duty were *equally* consulted, we should find they were in their nature subservient to each other; the practice of each would be facilitated thereby. In a very particular manner would true piety facilitate the practice of virtue in all its branches. If we are wholly careless what the temper of our minds is towards God, we must not wonder if we find temptations to intemperance, to injustice, or to the gratifying of any master-passion too strong to withstand; or if we find beneficence, charity, meekness, righteousness or forgiveness, very hard to exercise, any further than they are constitutional: for the truth is, they really want a principle sufficient to influence equally and at all times. I speak it with concern, we are perpetually running into extreams: as some have been and are still extolling faith, others devotion; at the same time depreiating justice, benevolence, charity, temperance, and other personal and relative virtues, which nothing but downright stupidity can excuse: on the contrary, others no less unreasonably confine their regards to those virtues; limiting *the all* that the Lord our God hath required of us, to them. This mangling of religion hath been of the greatest disservice to the world, and will be so: religion will never prevail, nor appear indeed *itself*, till things are taken as God hath settled them. It is a maxim with me, that God hath not less consulted human nature than his own supremacy, nor is his wisdom and goodness more conspicuous in any thing, than *in this connection of things*.

My sincere aim hath been to recommend and revive *true Christianity*.—I would fain *recommend* it to such as have not yet thought fit to embrace it, if this should fall into any such hands. They have been often told, and they cannot but know as well as any, that Christianity is a perfect system of morality: I will venture to say *so perfect*, as to save them all the trouble of invention to render it *more* compleat. It will not, I hope, be alledged by any as a charge against it, that it is *too perfect*; for *this*, whether it be confessed or not, is such an objection that no honest or virtuous mind can allow to themselves, nor any wise person think fit to answer when proposed. But as I would look upon them great friends to virtue, so it cannot methinks but give them a great pleasure to find such a security to virtue as piety, so indispensably required and so strongly pressed by Christianity. This is all in *their way*, and surely merits a *very civil* treatment of it, if it demands not their being greater apologists for it than they usually are. They fully see, if I mistake not, from what hath been said, that virtue is infinitely obliged to Christianity, that hath recommended so useful a principle, free of every thing superstitious and enslaving, and so peculiarly adapted to remove those general impediments that have kept virtue at so low an ebb. But if, after this endearing recommendation of Christianity, they should be no nearer the becoming profelytes to it, I hope, as an instance of that justice they so much admire, they will exercise it towards the christian rule and its divine author; I mean, that when they see the professors of it depart from their religion, that they won't charge their inconsistencies *upon* their religion. Some good will result from this discourse, if in this respect Christianity may have more justice done it, than it hath had.

I would desire also to revive true Christianity amongst those who profess it. They might cut off occasion from those who seek occasion against their religion, by representing it what it is. The most uniform, consistent,

sistent, amiable thing in the world : but this can never be done but by taking things in the connection the gospel hath set them in, and allowing them that degree of importance which that hath settled. Don't we know what God the Lord hath required of us, namely, *to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with himself* *. Is not the *loving the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind the first and great commandment ; and is not the next like to it, the loving our neighbour as our selves ; and do not these united contain the whole of religion and righteousness* † ? Why should these then ever be separated ? Since the fearing of God and working righteousness is unchangeably connected, let us not pretend to piety amidst staid and indulged vices : in so doing we reflect upon the blessed God, as if he could not see thro' our hypocrisy, or were not holy enough to hate it ; we reflect upon our blessed Saviour, and stile him the patron of iniquity : on the other hand, let us not boast of our virtues, whilst none of our acts are resolvable into a regard of God, nor accompanied with any sense of our relations and obligations to him. I think we are yet to learn the truth as it is in Jesus, if we know not that it requires an impartial virtue, founded on a sense of duty to God ; and such a sense of our duty and obligations to God as is productive of such a virtue.

Let this then put us upon the enquiry, whether we have any principle, or what it is which staidly influences and governs us. Alas ! we stand in need of some principle ! the mind of man, like a defenceless impotent thing amidst adverse powers will be run away with, unless there be something residing to strengthen and establish it. If it be not under the influence of a good principle, it will be under the power of some useless or bad one. This should prompt to a more serious enquiry ; have we lived and acted just as it happened, and as opportunity and circumstances presented themselves ? Much better were it for us to be governed

* Mic. vi. 8.

† Matt. xxii. 37, 38, 39, 40.

by policy and worldly interest than wholly by inclination, or to act the foolish wanton libertine : for that would render us less vitious in point of action, tho' it would not render us really more virtuous in respect of disposition. But, let us ask again ; have we been under the influence of a divine fear, or regard of God ? Sure this ought to take place amongst reasonable creatures, who are under his government, and are accountable to him ! there is nothing that will enable us to act, to bear, to deny or forego, to advance or persevere, like this. Let us not then be indifferent about this matter ; either foolishly living by chance or custom, whereby our slender goodness, if we have any, can never last, or turn to any account hereafter ; or taking up with any thing as principle, that will just secure an appearance of goodness. Temptations are at hand ; inclinations are working ; appetites and passions yet remain. An *occasional* religion should not serve, for it will not save us. We have need of something then that will be equal to all our circumstances, duties, and trials : this the fear of God is, and, I think, nothing else. That will cleanse us from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and perfect our holiness ; not only to that degree as to render us happy in this world, but to qualify us for the rewards and enjoyments of a better ; where this fear will be so far from being superseded, that it will be perfected as a source of pleasure, and as a qualification most congenial to perfect love, and perfect bliss.

Agreeably to the preceding discourse, I shall beg leave to close with a form of devotion.

Most great and glorious God ! the supream parental mind ! the father of spirits ! who hast given a spirit to man, and by thine inspiration hast conferred an understanding upon him. In that rank of being thro' thy goodness I stand : from whence I behold thee conspicuous and amiable in thy works around me, am capacitated for a converse with thee, and find thee meeting my first thoughts in thy perfections and relations. Towards

thee I find my spirit tending ; as body doth naturally to its centre: Oh! were it but as steady and with equal strength! I am capable of discerning and acknowledging thee, in some measure suitable to thy nature, and the claims thou art rightfully making: I would gratefully confess it the privilege of my nature, and esteem it a standing pledge of thy intending me for a peculiar conduct and felicity. Suffer me not to defeat thy just expectations, or to lose the advantages thou hast designed me thereby: but dispose my mind still more to contemplate thee; impress it with the most fixed sentiments of veneration and love; and inspire me with an habitual sense of thee; that by the united influence of excellency and obligation, I may find myself in a growing regard of thee and conformity to thee, may derive a rectitude in my own mind from thine, and may from thence experience every virtue prevailing in an useful and holy life, and every exercise thereof my delight and element. May my apprehensions of thee be most agreeable to thy nature; my devotions towards thee be accompanied with fervency and affection; and my sense of thee be testified by an impartial regard to the whole of my duty: that according to thy free and unmerited promise thro' Jesus, I may be qualified and entitled to that future, happy, state of existence, where perfect piety, purity, and charity reign for ever.

DISCOURSE XXIV.

The Absurdity and Iniquity of Persecution for Conscience-sake.

[DODDRIDGE.]

2 Cor. vii. 1.

But he turned, and rebuked them; and said, ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the son of man is not come to destroy mens lives, but to save them.

IF popery be consider'd in a religious view, it must appear the just object of our contempt, as well as our abhorrence; but if we regard it as a political contrivance, to gratify the avarice and ambition of the clergy, it will appear very artfully adapted to answer that end. The *wisdom of the serpent* eminently prevailed, when the *innocence of the dove* had long been lost. Cunning ecclesiastics, who were by their office obliged frequently to converse with persons under awakenings of conscience, and serious impressions, laid hold on that opportunity of improving themselves in an acquaintance with human nature; and on that foundation, they gradually formed and compleated a scheme, dexterously adapted to make the minds of their people easy, by the same notions and forms by which the clergy enriched themselves, and secured that temporal dominion and grandeur, for which they

were contented to exchange true Christianity, and to make merchandise of the souls committed to their care.

Some of these principles were so evidently absurd, that the common sense of mankind, however bribed in their favour, must often have risen up in open opposition to them, had freedom of inquiry been allowed, and the scriptures been left in the hands of the people. It was therefore one of their most important artifices to take away that *key of knowledge*, and to put out that light which would have exposed the folly and wickedness of their conduct. And farther to support that *Babel* which otherwise must have sunk under its own weight, the powers of this world were brought in, and its rulers taught to think it their highest honour to employ their sword against those obstinate miscreants who were disobedient to the faith, as the priests thought fit to explain it. To injure the weaker part of their subjects in their religious rights, was represented as an ample atonement for violating the civil liberties of them all; and thus the mouths of gainfayers were most easily and effectually stopp'd. From some countries the reformation was utterly excluded, in others it was stifled in its very infancy, and in some rooted out, after it had for a while been happily advanced.

This is undoubtedly the grand bulwark of popery, even to this very day; and were it removed, the anathema's of the church would become as incapable of giving terror, as they are of doing any real mischief. And therefore one of the most effectual methods which can be taken to secure and promote the reformation, is to convince men, if possible, *of the absurdity and iniquity of persecution for conscience-sake, in all its kinds and in all its designs.*

This is what, by the Divine assistance, I purpose to attempt this day; nor could we at any time more properly examine the subject*; since it is to the re-

* N. B. This Sermon was preached, 5th Nov. 1739.

peated deliverances of this day, that we owe our exemption from those usurpations and inhumanities, which would have deprived us of the liberty of arguing or even of complaining. How justly the church of *Rome* is charged with persecuting principles and practices, you have heard : and blessed be God that you have only heard it *. How absurd those principles, and how criminal those practices are, I am now to shew you. And amongst a variety of scriptures, which might have been prefixed to such a discourse, I could think of none more proper than this, which I have now been reading.

Our Lord was now going up to *Jerusalem*, at one of the great feasts ; probably that of tabernacles : and as he then came from *Gallilee*, he thought it proper to pass through *Samaria*. This was the directest road, which it was then perhaps necessary for him to take, in order to his being at *Jerusalem* in due time. You well know that in this country, *i. e.* on mount *Gerizim*, there was a temple built as a rival to that on mount *Zion*, to which the *Samaritans*, who, after their way, kept the three great annual feasts appointed by *Moses*, were probably at this time preparing to resort. But as our Lord appeared to be passing by this temple, and setting his face towards that where the *Jews* worshipped, these bigotted *Samaritans* denied him the common rites of hospitality, and would not suffer him and his attendants so much as to refresh themselves at any of their inns ; which seems to be all the favour they now asked. This was indeed very outrageous and inhuman treatment, and the apostles *James* and *John*, who were now present, resented it with a great deal of warmth. Full of zeal, and as they imagined of

* *N. B.* This particularly refers to a sermon on the persecuting principles and practices of the church of *Rome*, with which the author had concluded his course of lectures against Popery last year. What is most important in that discourse may be seen, with much greater advantage, in *Dr. Grosvenor's* sermon at *Salter's-hall*, on the same subject ; which is full of that easy, but penetrating and convincing eloquence, of which he is so eminent a master.

piety and of faith, too, they only ask leave of our Lord, to command fire from heaven upon these unreasonable and wicked men, assuring themselves that if an affront offered to the prophet *Elijah*, even by the express command of the king of *Israel*, were once and again thus severely avenged, the artillery of heaven would be yet more ready to plead the cause of the son of God, when thus affronted, perhaps by some of the meanest of the people.

How far they would have extended the execution, if our Lord had favoured their motion, we cannot certainly say : perhaps it had reached farther than the persons from whom the offence directly came, and might have laid the whole city in ashes. 'Tis certain, that a judgment, inflicted in such a miraculous way, would have been less liable to objection, than if secular power had been armed on the occasion. Yet our gentle and compassionate Redeemer, far from indulging their request, very faithfully reproves it, and expressly says, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of*; i. e. “ You neither consider the difference which
 “ there is between the genius of the *Mosaic* and the
 “ *Christian* dispensation; nor do you sufficiently
 “ weigh the secret motives, which influence you on
 “ this occasion : for, if you did, you would see there
 “ is something of pride, and personal revenge, ming-
 “ ling itself with your zeal for God, your affection to
 “ me, and my kingdom. Your proposal is, on the
 “ whole, most unsuitable; and, as such, I absolute-
 “ ly reject it. *For the son of man is not come to destroy*
 “ *mens lives, but to save them.* The general design
 “ of my appearance is most benevolent and gracious,
 “ and I am determined still to act agreeably to it,
 “ and to exert my miraculous power in works of kind-
 “ nefs, rather than of terror; for the preservation of
 “ mankind, and not for their destruction.”

Now, surely, if our Lord thus severely rebuked his disciples for the proposal they here made, he would have censured them, with much greater displeasure,
 if

if they had talked of using his interest amongst the *Jews*, to raise an army to ravage *Samaria*, by fire and sword; and, on the same principle, to spread desolation over the face of the whole earth, wherever they and their doctrine had not met with a favourable reception. The argument urged in the text would have concluded against this with equal or superior force: *The Son of Man came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them.*

You see then, how properly these words may be used, to introduce a discourse against persecution on any religious account: I shall therefore, without any farther preface, go on.

I. To state what I apprehend to be the christian doctrine on this head; as opposed both to the tenets and practices of the *Romish* church, with regard to it.

II. To shew, by some plain arguments, the absurdity and iniquity of persecution for conscience-sake.

III. To answer some of the most plausible considerations which have been urged in defence of it. After which I shall,

IV. Conclude with some practical improvements of the whole.

I should abundantly exceed the limits of a single discourse, if I were not to content myself with a few short hints on each of these heads, which have furnished out copious matter for several large volumes. And I hope, those who have had an opportunity of enquiring most accurately into the subject, and of perusing what has been written upon it, by some of the most celebrated persons of our age and nation, will not be displeas'd with such a short survey of what seems most material on both sides the question. And it may be highly necessary for others, who have not such leisure or abilities, and who, for want of having the matter fairly and clearly stated, may fall into senti-

ments very injurious to the honour of their profession, and the peace of their minds.

I. I am to propose what I take to be the *Christian* doctrine on this head; and to offer some previous remarks toward stating the question aright, and preventing mistakes which often embarrass it.

I say, the *Christian* doctrine, lest, if I call it the *Protestant*, any should question the propriety of the expression. It is indeed too plain, that our first reformers, when they separated from other corruptions of the *Romish* church, retained this unhappy principle: “That error and heresy are to be extirpated by violence: and that the conduct of some pious princes amongst the *Jews*, in destroying idolaters, is to be a model for christian magistrates.” This was not the opinion of the pious *Calvin* alone, whatever pleasure some may now take in heaping distinguished infamy on him; but ’tis much easier to make a large catalogue of those in *England*, as well as abroad, who maintained this tenet, than of those who opposed it. Nor indeed can we justly wonder, that the whole system of truth did not break in upon them at once. We have great reason to be thankful, that they were enabled to lay such a foundation; and that others, in succeeding ages, have, in any measure, raised and improved the superstructure: Yet I will not presume to say, that all Protestants are now agreed in what I take to be the truth here; it would be much for the credit, and much for the interest of their cause, if they were: and we ought earnestly to pray, that God, by his spirit of goodness and love, would purge out the remainder of that old leaven, which still sours the hearts of some. But, I persuade my self, I am about to represent sentiments, in which multitudes of worthy and excellent men, of all parties amongst us, concur; and they seem to be breaking in on mens minds with a growing light: May it shine more and more, until the perfect day! The Protestant doctrine on this head, so far as Protestants

testants are consistent with themselves, seems plainly to be this: " That none are to be subjected to any
" kind or degrees of civil penalties, merely on account
" of their religious opinions, or for any practices arising
" from them, if those practices be not detrimental
" to the peace of society, which the magistrate, by
" his office, stands engaged to preserve."

We readily allow that if any man's religious principles carry him on to any actions injurious to others, in their persons or properties, he is to be restrained and punished, as any other offender might be. Should a man for instance offer his son as a sacrifice to *Molech*, he would justly be treated as a murderer, notwithstanding any plea of conscience which he might pretend to make. For the magistrate has no business with conscience, which is intirely under the jurisdiction of God, but must never be allowed as an excuse for an action injurious to others; for this very obvious reason, that if it should be so allowed, there would be no room for any penal laws at all, and consequently all civil government would be overthrown. For a bold and impudent malefactor would never fail to have recourse to this easy and unanswerable apology, if his judges were so weak as to admit it. Nor can we indeed imagine any blacker villanies, than those which some have pretended to commit for conscience-sake.

We likewise grant, on the same principle as before, that if any man's religion necessarily subject him to the obedience of a foreign prince, the government under which he is born and protected, has a right, by the grand law of self-preservation, to insist on some more than ordinary security for his good behaviour in such circumstances. And this is evidently the case of the papists amongst us. They are under such obligations in conscience to obey the pope, and to submit themselves to whatsoever prince he shall see fit to establish here, that they are at best but very precarious subjects to that royal family, which the gracious providence

vidence of the Almighty has been pleased to fix on the throne of these nations; especially while there is a pretender to that throne, devoted to the see of *Rome*, and espoused by it. Justly therefore may the present government insist on such security from them, as it does not demand from other subjects. And if in consequence of this, some hardships should fall on a few peaceable and well-disposed persons, who are too wise and honest to act to the utmost of what their own principles would warrant, it must be born as an inconvenience inseparable from present circumstances. And perhaps 'tis an inconvenience less than those very persons might suffer, from the establishment of a religion so oppressive and tyrannical, as popery always appears, when it comes to be arrayed with the robe of the magistrate, and armed with his sword. However, it is a pleasure to every good-natured protestant, to think, that what they can suffer by the laws put in execution against them, is not very extreme; and that they suffer this, not for believing transubstantiation, or purgatory, nor for praying to saints, or bowing down before images; but merely for acknowledging the supremacy of the pope, a doctrine so hurtful to all other supreme authority, that 'tis amazing all the princes in *Europe* have not long ago renounced it with the utmost disdain.

Allowing for such cases as these, which are not properly exceptions, we still maintain our proposition in its utmost extent; and assert, that unless God, the searcher of hearts, is pleased to interpose by a special revelation, (which there is now no reason to believe he will ever do,) taking the matter on the principle of human reason, or of the christian religion, no man is to suffer the least degree of punishment, either in his person or property, on account of his religious opinions, or of any practice consequent upon them, which is not an overt act, plainly inconsistent with the public peace, and punishable in any other subject. They who are for a toleration limited, as good Mr. *Baxter* used

used unhappily to express it, “to errors which are “not quite intolerable;” and would have such punished at least with fines and imprisonments, if not with greater severities; seem not to be aware of the consequences of their own scheme: and, as *Dr. Owen* very forcibly speaks, in his excellent treatise of toleration, “They had need to examine their light; for their “tenet must lead down to the chambers of blood.” We do not indeed pretend to say, that the magistrate is obliged to make such provision for maintaining and accommodating those whom he apprehends to be teachers of error, as he may for those who are of his own sentiments, and consequently, whom he believes on the side of truth. This would be carrying matters to an excess; but surely, he has no right to inflict any penalties upon them, nor, in any degree, to abridge them in those liberties which peaceable subjects are entitled to. And if he may exclude any from such places of civil trust, as their capacity, experience and fidelity might otherwise qualify them for, meerly because their religious persuasions, and their modes of worship, differ from his own, it is upon principles which I am yet to learn; nor can I perceive at present how they are to be reconciled with those of a christian, and a protestant.

You will easily imagine, what reason I had to be thus particular in stating, and in guarding my proposition. I proceed,

II. To offer some obvious, but important considerations, for the proof of it.

And here I shall particularly shew, that persecution, for conscience-sake, in all its kinds and degrees, is built on the absurd supposition, that one man has a right to judge for another, in matters of religion;— That it contradicts the grand principle of doing to others, as we would think it reasonable they should do to us;—That 'tis by no means calculated to answer the end pretended to be aimed at by it;—
but,

but, on the other hand, tends to introduce a great deal of mischief and confusion, and to overthrow truth and religion in the world.—On these accounts, 'tis inconsistent with natural religion;—and it appears from the whole tenor of the christian revelation, that it is most contrary to that.

1. Persecution for conscience-sake, *i. e.* inflicting penalties on men, merely for their religious principles or worship, is plainly founded on an absurd supposition, that one man has a right to judge for another, in matters of religion.

How absurd this supposition is, has been fully proved at large, by many excellent writers in this controversy; and you have, no doubt, often heard, how contemptibly weak those arguments are, by which the *Romish* church would appropriate this right to itself. Nevertheless, absurd as their pretence to infallibility is, I confess there is much more consistency in the persecutions of those who claim such a privilege, than of those who acknowledge they are destitute of it. Can any man, with the least colour of reason, pretend that I have a right to judge for myself, and yet punish me for using it? that is, for doing that which he acknowledges I have a right to do. To plead for it, would be a direct contradiction in terms. And if it should be said, as some have most weakly asserted, that the erroneous are to be punished, not for their opinions, but for their actions in consequence of those opinions, I would then enquire, for what actions? And how are these actions condemned? Not on account of their tendency to disturb and annoy the public; for that case has already been excluded from the charge of persecution: And, when that is excluded, I repeat the question, How are those actions condemned? Why, the prosecutor must say, "I know them to be contrary to the divine law." But, how do you prove, that you are not mistaken? If you allow of argument on the

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the head, you give up the cause of persecution so far. If you wave argument, you only, in effect, say, "The actions are wrong, because I condemn them; *i. e.* in other words, I am infallible, I am to judge for myself and you; and, by a parity of reason, for all the world besides." And who might not make that pretence? or, how should it ever be decided but by the sword, in the present circumstances?

2. Persecution is most evidently inconsistent with that obvious and fundamental principle of morality, That we should do to others, as we could reasonably desire they should do to us.

This is a rule which carries its own demonstration along with it; and it was intended on purpose to take off that bias of self-love, which would draw us aside from the strait line of equity, and lead us to be partial judges between our neighbours and ourselves. Now, I would ask the advocate of wholesome severities, How he would relish his own arguments, if they were turned upon himself? What if he were to go abroad into the world, amongst papists, if he be a protestant; amongst *Mahometans* if he be a christian? Supposing he was to behave like an honest man, like a good neighbour, like a peaceable subject; avoiding whatever would injure or provoke, and taking all opportunities to serve and oblige those about him: Would he think that, merely because he refused to follow his neighbours to their altars, or their mosques, he should be seized and imprisoned, his goods confiscated, and his person condemned to tortures, or death? Undoubtedly, he would complain of this as a very great hardship. And what if one, who heard him plead for religious severities at home, were to remind him of it, would he not be wounded with his own arrows? What could he answer? "I am in the right and these people are in the wrong." Nay, would the inquisitor, or the *Turk*, cry full as loudly as he, "But
 ' we

“ we are in the right :” And they might justly add, “ With what face can you complain of us, for treating you in such a manner, as, you must confess, you should think your self bound in conscience to treat us, if we were in your power, as you are in our’s ?” Surely, a man would see the absurdity and injustice of such a treatment, when it fell upon himself; when, with such *measures* as he had *meted* to others, *it was measured* to him *again*. And accordingly, I must observe, as many have done, that the effect of this argument is so cogent, that those who, when they have had the power in their own hands, have been least willing to tolerate others, have immediately found new light breaking in upon them, as soon as they have needed toleration themselves.

3. Persecution is evidently absurd, as it is by no means calculated to answer the end which its patrons profess to intend by it.

I say, which they profess to intend: for if the priests do really intend to make the laity slaves, that they may exalt their own empire, and encrease their possessions, it may indeed very probably answer that end; and these holy men may make themselves fat with the sin and plunder of the people, and purchase church-lands with the price of their blood. But, to save appearances at least, they profess to intend the glory of God, and the salvation of men; for so you know the forms of the inquisition run, “ To answer to sundry questions relating to their souls health, as well as the correction of their manners and excesses.” Now, I beseech you, let it be seriously considered, how persecution can be like to do good to mens souls.

To be sure, if it does them good at all, it must be, by making them truly religious. But, what is true religion? Is it to repeat a creed, or subscribe a confession, to wear a name, or perform a ceremony? If it be, I am sure religion is much changed from what it was,

was, when the scriptures were writ; and the nature of God must be entirely changed too, before such a religion can be acceptable to him, or before it can have the least value in his sight.

True religion must be founded in the inward conviction of the mind, or, it is impossible it should be what yet it must be, *a reasonable service* *. And pray let it be considered what violence and persecution can do, towards producing such an inward conviction. It cannot to be sure do it immediately by its own power; because it is a demonstration that will at the same moment suit both the parts of a contradiction. And, it is certain, a man might as reasonably expect to bind an immaterial spirit with a cord, or to beat down a wall by an argument, as to convince the understanding by threats or by tortures. They may indeed make a man mad, but, it is the hardest thing in the world to imagine how they should ever make him wise.

Not immediately, you will say: we grant that. But mediately they may; as by these severities his mind may be awakened to attend to arguments: thus a rational conviction may be introduced: and *the rod and reproof may give wisdom* †. But I confess, I cannot see how a man is the more likely to judge of an argument because he hears it on the rack, or because he sees the lash, or perhaps the sword over his head, and trembles lest he should not believe it. Far from opening the mind to fair conviction, methinks it should rather prejudice a man against it; as it would give him some aversion even to a draught otherwise agreeable, to have it forced down by such methods as a drench is given to a horse. There is, if you will pardon the expression, a kind of an elasticity in the human mind; and the more violently it is pressed down and bent, the more forcibly does it endeavour to expand itself again. But if this were to be put out of the question, we may depend upon it that none will ever have the better opinion of any religion, because it makes its professors

* Rom. xii. 1.

† Prov. xxix. 15.

very bad men; and so they will undoubtedly think their prosecutors to be.

Nay, indeed I should rather think, that if they were pretty well satisfied in the religion of their country before, the very thought of its being defended and obtruded on others in this brutish and unnatural way, would be enough to raise some secret suspicions to its disadvantage*: suspicions which perhaps might prevail, and impress the mind more strongly, where men were not allowed to give any vent to them; or even to propose their doubts, lest it should be looked upon as a crafty way of insinuating their heresies, and should be a word spoken against their estates, or perhaps against their lives. On the whole, as you have often been told, persecution is much more likely to make men hypocrites than sincere converts. They may perhaps, if they have not a firm integrity, and heroic courage, change their profession, while they retain their sentiments; and, supposing them before to have been unwarily in the wrong, may learn, I will not say to barter away honesty for truth, (tho' that were a traffic which no wise man would covet) but rather to add falsehood and villainy to error. How glorious a prize after all! especially, when we consider at what an expence it is gained. Which leads me to add,

4. That persecution evidently tends to produce a great deal of mischief and confusion in the world.

It may truly be said, where persecution is, and that *zeal* and *rage* which is inseparable from it, *there is confusion, and every evil work* †. It is mischievous to those on whom it falls, and in its consequences mischievous to others too; so mischievous, that one would

* If there be on earth a way to render the most sacred truth suspected, it is supporting it with threats, and pretending to terrify men into the belief of it. *Shaft. Char.* Vol. III. p. 107.

† James iii. 16.

wonder, that any wise princes should ever have admitted it into their dominions; or that they should not immediately banish it thence. This follows, in part, from what I said under the former head of my discourse; even where it succeeds so far, as to produce a change in mens forms of worship, it generally makes them no more than hypocritical professors of what they do not believe; and this must undoubtedly debauch their characters: so that having been villains in one respect, it is very probable they will be so in another; and having brought deceit and falshood into their religion, they will easily bring it into their conversation and commerce.

This effect persecution will have, where it is yielded to. In other respects it will be yet more immediately and apparently mischievous where it is opposed. And, it is probable, it will be often opposed, by those who have certainly a title to the greatest protection and favour of the government; I mean upright and conscientious men. An honest mind, zealous for what it apprehends to be the cause of truth, and animated by the thoughts of the divine presence and protection, will learn to say of *bonds and imprisonments*, and even of tortures as St. Paul did, *none of these things move me*, in such a cause, *neither count I my life dear unto me* *. As Mr. Boyle very justly and finely expresses it †: “Personal sufferings, which a well-meaning man
“undergoes for his conscience, are but such a kind
“of burthen to his mind, as feathers to an eagle or a
“faulcon; which tho’ in themselves considered they
“have a weight, in the situation in which they are
“placed about him, enable him to soar towards
“heaven, and to reach a height which makes him
“praised and wondered at by beholders.” Nay, perhaps where there is no true religion, a native sense of honour in a generous mind, may encourage it to endure some hardships for the cause of truth; not to

* Acts xx. 24.

† Occas Medit. p. 147.

say that sometimes on the principles we hinted above,
 “Obstinacy may rise as the understanding is oppressed;
 “and continue its opposition for a while, merely to
 “avenge the cause of its injured liberty*.”

And it is farther to be remembered, that where the persecution is not very extreme, and sometimes even where it is, spectators are brought to judge more favourably of the cause thus violently opposed, when they observe the fortitude with which the patrons of it endure hardships and severities, from which they might otherwise deliver themselves at so easy a rate. Thus *Tertullian* boasts to *Scapula*, under all the butcheries he exercised at *Carthage*; “Our sect, says he, is
 “built up by your endeavours to destroy it. The
 “very sight of our patience in sufferings awakens mens
 “consciences to enquire into the cause of it; and that
 “inquiry leads them to discover the truth, and em-
 “brace it, even tho’ it expose them to the same suffer-
 “ings †.” This made the *blood of the martyrs*, what it was so often called, the *seed of the church*. And something of the same spirit has appeared in succeeding ages. Now in proportion to the degree in which a prohibited religion spreads, persecution must spread and propagate itself, and its desolations. And at this rate, if the persecution be severe, (as it must be in order to a victory) how many persons, how many families, must be undone by it? for it is apparent, that in many instances what one suffers for the sake of his conscience, draws ruin on a family, perhaps on many families dependent on him, wherein some may hardly know their right hand from their left. I might also mention the encouragement hereby given to informers, who generally in such cases are the vilest and most infamous of mankind: and might discourse copiously on the animosities hereby raised amongst neighbours, on the discouragement of honest industry,

* Ludolph’s *Ethiop.* p. 358.

† *Tert. ad Scap. ad fin.*

and the injury done to trade and commerce *. But I rather chuse to refer these and many more calamities, which stream forth from this bitter fountain, to your own reflection, which may easily enlarge on the melancholy subject.

Now when so much must be sacrificed to public orthodoxy and uniformity, who can wonder if such a degree of *oppression make a wise man mad*, and force multitudes into desperate measures, most destructive to the community? Who can wonder if an injured and persecuted people rise up, I will not say in rebellion, for it deserves not that infamous name, but in a just and generous vindication of their liberties; and even when the event is most hazardous, chuse rather to die warm with their swords in their hands, than to perish perhaps by the artificial cruelties of a lingering execution, or to starve in the darkness and solitude of a dungeon?

How many wars, and how great confusions have by this means arisen in *Great Britain, Ireland, France, Germany, the Low Countries*, and various other places, even since the opening of the reformation, it is not for a few moments, or indeed a few hours, to recount. But I take it for granted, that few of you are intirely unacquainted with these things, which make up one of the most instructive, tho' at the same time the most melancholy parts of history. As the consequence of all, it has generally been found both at home and abroad, that ecclesiastical and civil tyranny has been either established or expelled together; and that wherever this dragon has kept its seat, it has devoured the glory of the land around it, and heaped infamy and

* I doubt not but on this occasion, many of my readers will recollect that the *Dutch* were some of the first protestant states which allowed a universal toleration; to which, as Sir *William Temple* most justly observes, "they owe the continued and undisturbed peace of their government, and the mighty increase of their people; wherein will appear to consist chiefly the vast growth of their trade, and riches; and consequently the strength and greatness of their state."

Temple's Netherl. c. v. p. 208.

misery on its inhabitants. It has marked its way by desolations; so that one may well apply to the bands of persecutors, what *Joel* says of the armies of locusts and caterpillars, when the country is *like the garden of Eden before them, it is behind them a desolate wilderness* *. And surely were not the remainder of their wrath to be restrained, religion and truth would be buried in the ruins. Which leads me to add,

5. The christian religion, which we here suppose to be the cause of truth, must humanly speaking be not only obstructed but destroyed, should persecuting principles universally prevail.

Let us, for argument's sake suppose, what I am sure we have no reason to believe, that in some particular countries it might be a means of promoting and establishing the purity of the gospel, yet, it must surely be a great impediment to its progress. What wise prince, who was a heathen or a mahometan, would ever admit christian preachers, if he knew that it was a principle of their religion, that as soon as the majority of the people were converted by arguments, the rest, and himself amongst them, if he continued obstinate, must be proselyted or extirpated by fire and sword? Surely if this were known to be the case, the secular power would at once seize on such missionaries as public enemies, and condemn the whole sect on this single tenet, whatever their other doctrines or precepts might be.

Nay farther, if it be, as the advocates for persecution generally suppose, a dictate of the law of nature, that the true religion is to be propagated by the sword, then, it is certain, that a mahometan or an idolater with the same notion, supposing himself to have truth on his side (as no doubt many of them do suppose, and also admitting the principle we contest) must think himself obliged in conscience, if he have an opportunity

* *Joel* ii. 3.

to do it, to arm his powers for the extirpation of Christianity. Thus a holy war must commence over the face of the whole earth, in which nothing but a miracle could render christians successful against so vast a disproportion in number. Now I think it hard to believe that to be a truth, which would naturally lead to the extirpation of truth in the world; or that a divine religion should carry in its bowels the principle of its own destruction.

If these reasonings be admitted, then persecution will by the light of nature appear so absurd, so unjust, and so mischievous a thing, that it ought to be rejected with abhorrence; unless it should be warranted and required by a divine revelation, which had such degrees of evidence, as should be sufficient to overbalance that strong objection against it, which would arise from the consideration we have now been urging. But on this head we need have no apprehension, for I am to shew you,

6. That persecution is so far from being required, or encouraged by the gospel, that it is most directly contrary to many of its precepts, and indeed to the whole genius of it.

A mahometan may perhaps prove from his *Alcoran**, that the true faith is to be propagated by the sword, and that heretics and unbelievers are to be cut off or made tributary; but if a christian plead in favour of persecution, while he has his new testament in his hand, in an intelligible language, he must be condemned out of his own mouth. It is condemned by the example of Christ, *who went about doing good* †, *who came not to destroy mens lives but to save them*; who waved the exercise of his miraculous power against his enemies, not only in this instance in the text, but even when they most unjustly and cruelly assaulted him ‡; and

* Alcoran. cap. 2, 4, 5. & pass.

† Acts x. 38.

‡ John xviii. 6.

never exerted it in one single instance that we read of, to inflict death or any corporal punishment even on those who had most justly deserved it: his doctrine also, as well as his example, has taught us *to be harmless as doves, to love our enemies, to do good to them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us*(a)? And will a maxim like that allow us to persecute others? When *Peter* desired leave to smite with the sword, tho' drawn in so just a cause, *Christ* commanded him to *put it up in its sheath again*(b); and he declared before *Pilate*, that *his kingdom was not of this world*(c); which he expressly mentions as a reason why he did not arm secular power to plant or to defend it.

As for the Apostles they declared, agreeably to the example and precepts of their master, that the power they had received, was *for edification and not for destruction*(d), that *the weapons of their warfare were not carnal*(e), and that *the servant of the Lord, the christian minister, was not to strive, but in meekness to instruct those who opposed themselves*(f). They inculcated it as of the highest importance, that religion must be *a reasonable service*(g), and that *bodily exercise, which is the utmost persecution can extort, profited but little*(h), and was a thing of a most different nature from true godliness. *That the strong ought to bear with the infirmities of the weak*(i). And in a word, that christians must in the whole of their conversation be *harmless, as well as holy and undefiled, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, shining amongst them, by these amiable examples, as lights in the world, and so holding forth the word of life*(k).

You well know, that these passages are but a little specimen of those which might be produced on such an occasion. Most prudently therefore do the popish

(a) Mat. v. 45.

(d) 2 Cor. x. 8.

(g) Rom. xii. 1.

(k) Phil. ii. 13, 16.

(b) John xviii. 11.

(e) 2 Cor. x. 4.

(h) 1 Tim. iv. 8.

(c) John xix. 9.

(f) 2 Tim. ii. 25.

(i) Rom. xiv. 1.

clergy wrest the new testament out of the hands of their people, before they venture to arm them with a sword, to destroy others for their religious opinions.

These are the principal arguments against persecution which have occurred to my mind. You easily see they are chiefly pointed at high severities; but if you consider them attentively, you will find that they proportionably conclude against every degree of it, not excepting the lightest pecuniary fines, or civil incapacities. I am,

- III. To touch on the chief arguments which are urged in defence of penal laws, enacted for the pretended security and advancement of religion.

Persecution is so harsh and so infamous a word, that few will defend it. But under this milder name they maintain the thing, by pleading the glory of God and the good of mankind, (sacred prostituted names) the penal laws of the *Jewish* constitution, and a few tortured passages of the new testament; which one would think mentioned to expose the cause, rather than seriously to serve it.

1. The glory of God is generally pleaded as an apology for persecution.

The time is come, when those that slay his servants are supposing they offer him an acceptable service. “ God, say they, is the God of truth; and therefore the cause of truth is his cause; and the magistrate, who is in his sphere the *minister of God* *, is to be a *nursing father* to his church †, and to point the sword he has received from him against those impious persons, who will no otherwise be restrained from *perverting the right ways of the Lord*.”

Now it is most evident, this is taking for granted the innocence and morality of the thing in the general,

* Rom. xiii. 4.

† Isa. xlix. 23.

as well as the infallibility of the magistrate, or of the priest, whose executioner he must be. But, if, as we have endeavoured to prove above, persecution in general is contrary to the light of nature, and to the christian revelation, it must be great impiety to pretend to consecrate it to the divine glory. And a man might on the same principle lye and plunder, or even murder his neighbour, could he but persuade himself that God would be honoured, as the truth might be promoted by it, and take it for granted that the goodness of the end must sanctify the badness of the means. *Paul* evidently determines the matter otherwise, when he introduces a man as excusing his own lye, by its tendency to promote the truth of God; and over-rules that plea by observing, that if it were allowed, we *might do evil that good may come*. Which he accounted so abominable a maxim, that he says *the damnation of such is just* *.

Yet, after all, if the preceding arguments were to be waved, and we were to begin our enquiry with examining what would be most for the glory of God, and the advancement of truth, I am fully persuaded, that persecution, instead of being established, must, on this foundation, be exploded and condemned. For, not to repeat what I have said above, of the improbability of fixing any rational conviction by this means; it is plainly a dishonour to truth, and therefore to God, to suppose, that it needs the supports of secular terrors, and that its enemies must be suppressed by violence. We then *sanctify the Lord our God in our hearts*, when we are ready to give an answer to those that inquire into the foundations of our religion, and our hope, with *meekness and fear* †; and when we use those methods with others, which are likely most effectually to engage them to render him a rational service. But when we drag men to his altars, as unwilling victims, and attempt to bind them otherwise than with the *cords of a man, and the bonds of love* ‡, he may surely reject

* Rom. iii. 8.

† 1 Peter iii. 15.

‡ Hof. xi. 4.

our forward and officious zeal, as an affront ; and say, *who has required those things at your hands* * ? The same answer will, in a great measure, serve for the second plea in favour of persecution : which is,

2. That it may tend to promote the happiness of mankind.

If we will believe those, who have sometimes a crocodile's tear to shed over those whom they are devouring, all the severity they use to mens bodies, is in mere mercy to their souls. But, it is hard to say, how this can be an argument for putting them to death, in what they call a damnable error ; as an ill-natured man may call any error, and an inquisitor must, of course, call that which he makes capital. I know they will answer, it is for the good of others, that they may be deterred from the like pestilent heresy. But I endeavoured to shew before, that such a course was much more likely to prejudice, and to exasperate, and to debauch mens minds, than to recover or secure them. And here their most plausible answer is, that tho' it should be granted, that the first converts of violence are insincere, yet at least succeeding generations, being educated in the bosom of the church, and the forms of true religion, may cordially imbibe it, even to their everlasting salvation. A rich equivalent, as some may think, for present inconveniencies to others ! But, I see not, that we can be obliged to introduce so much confusion and misery in our own days, out of regard to posterity, any more than to burn up the produce of our own fields and plantations, that the ashes may meliorate the soil, and render it more fruitful to those that come after us. If such an expedient were not likely to answer, even that end, it illustrates the subject so much the more. For we may naturally expect to find, in the hearts of children, a deep resentment of the wrong done to their parents, and even to their remoter

* Isa. i. 12.

ancestors : nor is it any uncommon case at all, for an aversion or attachment to particular notions and forms, to prove hereditary ; especially, when young persons, so exceedingly jealous of their liberty, as at their age, they are, apprehend a religion to be forced upon them, contrary to that which their ancestors bravely defended, at the expence of their estates and their lives ; or which they unwillingly seemed to renounce, for the preservation of them. It is exceeding probable, that the penal laws, by which idolatry was imposed on the *Jews*, in some years of the *Babylonish* captivity, might contribute greatly to give them that aversion to it, which has been transmitted thro' so many following ages. And the contempt, which both the *Spaniards* and *Portuguese* put on those whom they call new christians, (that is, whose ancestors, most of them above two hundred years ago *, were obliged, by violence, to profess Christianity) seems plainly to intimate, that they secretly suspect them to be *Jews* or *Mahometans* in their hearts, as many of themselves declare themselves to be, when they escape into a land of liberty †.

Yet perhaps, many of more pious dispositions, and more tender tempers than those of whom I have been

* The *Moriscos* were expelled Spain A. D. 1492, and the inquisition erected about four years after.

† It is very remarkable to this purpose, that *Orobio* the *Jew*, in his conference with *Limborch*, freely acknowledges, that, in *Spain* and *Portugal*, all the monasteries and nunneries are full of *Jews* ; that many canons, inquisitors, and bishops, being descended from *Jewish* parents, are still *Jews* in their hearts ; tho', for temporal advantages, they profess to be christians. Some of these, he says repent, and, if they can, escape into other countries : of which he himself was one : who confesses, he had often complied with the idolatries of the place.—*Ego qui toties miser genua Baali flexi, peccatum meum ego recorder, &c.* Jud. Script. test. No. 4. p. 102. And *Limborch* afterwards declares, that *Orobio* had himself owned, that the *Jews* in *Spain* are taught by their parents, that, in order to escape the inquisition, it is lawful to profess Christianity, while they deny it in their hearts, and to confirm that profession by swearing on the cross, and by eating swine's flesh, &c. *Limb. Resp. ad Scrip.* III. Cap. v. p. 178.

now speaking, may be ready to plead, that unlimited toleration will leave room for writing and publishing the most pernicious books; whereby the principles of young and unexperienced minds, may easily be corrupted, and heresy and profaneness introduced into the rising generation; and, with it, that licentiousness of practice, which generally attends such an apostacy from the truth.

I acknowledge, that the plea seems to have a considerable weight: but I desire it may be seriously examined, whether the mischief of such a restraint be not yet greater than the advantages of it? Might not the most excellent and useful writings of the best of men, be suppressed on this principle? Nay, is it not on this principle, that the bible itself is prohibited in popish countries? Some inconveniencies arise from every imaginable constitution: it is the part of wisdom, to chuse that which is attended by the fewest and the least, and to apply the most proper remedies to *them*. If toleration be abused, as the means of sowing tares amongst the wheat, let it teach all, and especially those who have the care of young persons, to be so much the more watchful over their charge, to keep them out of the way of infection, or to furnish them with proper antidotes against it. But let not those, who would approve themselves the patrons of truth, act as if they thought religion such a scandalous cause, that it must suffer by the freedom of enquiry, and could only be safe under the covert of darkness.

On the whole, let the friends of the truth fairly propose its evidences, and shew its influence too, by the candor of their temper, and the benevolence and usefulness of their lives; and if its enemies raise objections, as against what cause may not objections be raised? let us give them a fair consideration, and endeavour to expose the sophistry and weakness of them, in a plain, rational and convincing manner, in the spirit of meekness and serenity. We may then hope, thro' the concurrent influences of divine grace, that
the

the souls of men will be established, even by the attempts made to pervert them; and that, in another sense than the apostle originally intended the phrase, *the trial of that faith, which is far more precious than the purest gold, (which, in succeeding ages, perishes and wears out, tho' it have been tried in the fire) will be found to praise and glory**. And if, (which may very probably be the case) some who will eagerly listen to every objection against the truth, will not have the patience to hear or examine its defence, we must leave them to the final judgment of *him, who searches the hearts, and tries the reins of the children of men* †. With so dishonest a temper, a name, or a form, whatever it had been, could have done them but very little good. It is impossible for us to save men against their own wills; and I cannot see, that it will be any part of christian charity, to put out their eyes, or tie up their hands, lest they should use them to the injury of themselves or others.

If any should pretend, that we are to punish heretics and infidels, that we may not make ourselves partakers of other mens sins, and draw down the judgments of God on the nation in which we live: I answer, that this argument so evidently takes it for granted, that persecution is for the glory of God, and will be a proper expedient for promoting the true religion, that what I have said, under the former heads, is an abundant answer to it. I shall not therefore enlarge on this as a distinct topic, but proceed to another of much greater importance.

3. The most plausible argument, in favour of the doctrine we oppose, is taken from the penal laws, which made a part of the *Jewish* constitution.

It is urged here, that God did, in the strongest terms, expressly appoint, that all who taught or practised

* 1 Peter i. 2.

† Jer. xi. 20.

idolatry among the *Jews*, should be punished with death*; and that many severe executions were accordingly done, on this statute: not only by the prophet *Elijah* †, an extraordinary divine messenger, but likewise by *Jehu* ‡, and *Josiah* ||, and other princes amongst them ††; who, far from being censured, were applauded and rewarded on this account.

If we answer here, as we most easily and naturally do, that the merciful genius of the christian dispensation, is so different from the rigour and severity of the *Mosaic* law, that no argument can be drawn from the one to the other; it is pleaded, that this will at least serve to overthrow the greater part of our discourse, which was intended to prove the natural absurdity and immorality of persecution; unless we will allow, what surely no christian can, that a natural immorality was made an essential part of a divine institution.

It will be proper therefore, to examine this matter a little more largely; which I shall the rather do, because, I think, it has seldom been handled with the accuracy which it requires. Now, I apprehend, the solution of this difficulty will depend on considering, on the one hand, the limitations attending these penal laws; and, on the other, the peculiar circumstances of the *Jews*, to whom they were given.

1. Let us consider the limitations which attended these penal laws.

They affected only the inhabitants of the land of *Canaan*; and animadverted only on some overt act, whereby they publicly declared a revolt from God to idols.

There was no commission given to the *Jews*, to arm themselves for the propagation of their faith, amongst their heathen neighbours; nor was there any express law, to pursue any *Israelite* with the sword, who settling among idolaters in foreign countries, should conform

* Deut. xiii. 6, 18.

† 1 Kings xviii. 40.

‡ 2 Kings x. 25.

|| 2 Kings xxiii. 20.

†† 2 Kings 11. 18.

to the religion of them. Tho', for reasons afterwards to be mentioned, his part in the land of *Israel* would undoubtedly have been forfeited. And, it is farther to be remembered, that even with regard to the inhabitants themselves, the law only took cognizance of some overt act of revolt. Had God given a large confession of faith to the *Jews*, to every article of which he had required them, on some high penalties, to subscribe their assent, a much stronger objection against what I have advanced, would have arisen from such a constitution. But, this was so far from being the case, that the *Sadducees*, erroneous as they were in some of the most important articles of natural as well as revealed religion, were not only tolerated, but, without any direct violation of the *Mosaic* law, were frequently promoted to offices of high dignity and authority. Now there is a most evident difference between a law thus limited, and an universal allowance of religious severities, to *Jews* or others, in any such circumstance as they should think fit. And, were the particular reasons ever so unknown, the former might be allowed, as consistent with the divine perfections, without laying a foundation to infer that the latter might be so. As there was an apparent difference between God's requiring *Abraham* to sacrifice *Isaac*, and his publishing a general declaration, allowing any parents whatsoever to sacrifice their children, whenever they should suppose that the glory of God, and the interest of religion would be advanced by it. Thus the limitation of these penal laws destroys the argument which might be drawn from them, in favour of persecution in general. And, if it still appear a difficulty, that even with these limitations, they should be enacted, I hope the point may be yet more fully cleared up, by considering,

2. The peculiar circumstances whereby the *Jews* were distinguished from all other people.

Now here, the *extraordinary discoveries* which God made of himself amongst them, and the *peculiar manner in which he stood related* to them, as their King, concur, both to vindicate the equity of the laws in question, and to prove that no reasonable consequence can be drawn from them, in favour of persecution, in any other nation upon earth.

It is surely of some importance, to recollect the *extraordinary discoveries* which God had made of himself to them, tho' the whole stress of the point does not lie here. The miracles which he had wrought amongst them, in order to prove his deity, and the vanity of idols, were of the most awakening and convincing nature; and these were not only delivered to them by credible report, as they are now delivered to us; but God was, from age to age, raising up prophets, with a power of renewing these wonders before their eyes. Nay, he had interwoven into their constitution certain periodical, and most extensive and obvious miracles, not only in the extraordinary fruitfulness of every sixth year, (when, after the ground had been exhausted in the five preceding years, the poorest harvest must naturally have been expected;) but also in the safety of their borders, tho' surrounded with enemies, when all the males were gone up to worship, even in the very heart of their country; as they were obliged to do three times in the year, between the beginning of *March* and the end of *September*, which is the most proper time for armies to be abroad.

Now God, the searcher of all hearts, might know, that nothing but obstinate and incorrigible wickedness could make a man an idolater, in such circumstances as these. And consequently, he might righteously condemn him to death, and appoint his fellow-creatures to execute the sentence. But no argument can be drawn from thence for inflicting the like punishment on another person, who is not as expressly sentenced by the divine law, and whose opportunities of better knowledge are not, and cannot be entirely the same.

But,

But, it is farther to be considered, as of the utmost weight in the present argument, that God also stood in a *peculiar relation* to the people of *Israel*, as he was their temporal king, as well as their God. Their government, as you well know, was different from that of all other nations : it was indeed a *Theocracy*, as *Josephus* very justly calls it ; their whole system of civil laws being enacted by God, and their magistrates appointed by him. And when they came to have kings, as other nations had, yet even these kings were to be considered, but as the viceroys of God : as appears by their being obliged to transcribe his law, when they begun their reign ; to consult his oracle on all extraordinary exigencies ; and, from his interposing in various cases both in *Judah* and *Israel*, to transfer the crown from one person and family to another.

Now, in consequence of this peculiar system of government, God thought it proper, as it apparently was, to annex certain temporal privileges to their obedience to him ; and they held their estates, and possessions in the fine country they inhabited, not by one absolute donation to them, and their heirs for ever ; but thro' succeeding generations, as tenants to the crown, upon an express condition of certain homages to be paid to God, as the great proprietor, renouncing all dependance upon, and all subjection to any of his competitors. Now it was plainly equitable, that, as the counter-part of these advantages, they should be subjected to some peculiar temporal punishments ; if, while they claimed these privileges, they falsified that allegiance which was the condition of them : in which case they suffered, not merely as idolaters, but as traitors.

I will further add, that as God was determined, in the course of his providence, to send national judgments upon them, in case of a national revolt to idolatry, which he accordingly always did, it was a merciful as well as just severity, thus to animadvert, upon the first appearances of this aggravated crime, to which they were

were strongly inclined; and by which, if it prevailed amongst them, they must be universally undone.

But, as all these circumstances were peculiar to the *Jews*, I hope you are, by this time fully convinced, that it is most absurd to draw an argument in favour of religious severities in general, from the penal laws of the *Mosaic* institution*. I have been so large on this head, that I must only hint at those weak and contemptible arguments which are brought,

4. From some abused passages in the new testament.

And, indeed, I should hardly mention them, but to expose them; and to shew, to what wretched straits ingenious and interested men must be brought, when they will condescend to make use of such arguments: for after all, to their shame I must say, the chief texts which I find produced for their purpose, by *papist* writers, are two; which I am persuaded, a wise and honest man might have read a thousand times before he had ever dreamt of such a consequence from them. Christ gave *Peter* a commission to *feed his sheep* †; and that must, say some, imply a power in the church, and especially in the pope, as the head of it, to kill wolves, that is, heretics. As if an argument, from this figurative expression, to so distant a circumstance, could be allowed against such strong evidence, both of scripture and reason. But I must do them the

* I have not mentioned the argument which some have brought from *Job's* saying, that idolatry is a *wickedness to be punished by the judge*, *Job xxxi. 28.* because, it is so evident, that *Job* spake unadvisedly with his lips, in some instances, as he himself owns, *Job xl. 3---8. xlii. 3---6.* And I think, if we grant there were in his days such a law in *Arabia*, as made idolatry capital, it can never be proved of divine institution from these words, any more than it can be argued from *Judah's* sentence against *Tamar*, (*Gen. xxxviii. 24.*) that there was then a divine law for executing women while they were big with child.

† *John xxi. 15,* &c.

justice to say, their grand argument is behind ; and it is couched in those words, *compel them to come in**. But, what compulsion and violence must be offered to these words, before they will be of any service in the cause of persecution! How often have they been told, that this relates only to friendly importunity, like that which the disciples used to engage Christ to spend the evening with them at *Emaus*, when, as the evangelist expresses it, *they constrained him* †? And how absurd would it be, to suppose servants sent out with sword in hand, to force in guests to an entertainment, I think you will easily apprehend ‡. Another argument a little more specious than either of these might be brought from the corporal punishments inflicted on blasphemers in the apostle's times ||, but, it is to be considered, that these were the effects of a miraculous power, and consequently had a proper tendency to convince the understanding of the sufferers and spectators, of the divine mission of those with whom the hand of the Lord thus remarkably was. It is therefore most absurd to talk of substituting the power of the magistrate instead of these extraordinary penalties, unless the magistrate can inflict them the same way ; and then we will acknowledge they merit not the name of persecution, but come under that singular exception which we admitted in the beginning of the discourse.

I have the pleasure to assure you, that these wretched arguments, or rather empty shadows of argument, are the most material which I have seen produced from the new testament in favour of religious severities. It is the glory of that sacred book, that it affords no

* Luke xiv. 32.

† Luke xxiv. 29.

‡ I think the word *ανάγκασω* occurs but nine times in the new testament. Mat. xiv. 22. Mark vi. 45. Luke xiv. 23. Acts xxvi. 2. xxviii. 19. 2 Cor. xii. 11. Gal. ii. 3, 14. vi. 12. It is only in the 4th and 5th of these places that it can refer to the use of secular power. *παράβιαζομαι* is used twice Luke xxiv. 29. Acts xvi. 15. and in both these places can signify no more than friendly importunity.

|| Acts v. 5, 10. xiii. 11. 1 Cor. v. 15. 1 Tim. i. 20.

better arguments in so infamous a cause. And I cannot forbear observing, that the silence of the new testament on this head is a strong argument against persecution, and would have been so, had the apostles omitted the many passages before quoted in which they seem directly to oppose it.

I know it may be said, the sacred writers did not advise the primitive christians to use violence, because religion was then in its infancy, and they had no power in their hands. Yet one would imagine, that if the apostles would have approved themselves honest men on the scheme we oppose, they should have laid in some directions for future times, and have instructed christians in the use of their secular power when it was obtained; as the *Jews* were particularly directed in the management of theirs. Especially since this is a case in which *the wrath of man, which worketh not the righteousness of God*, is foready to *throw about firebrands, arrows and death*.

Nor will it here be improper to remind you, that there was at least one prince converted to Christianity in the apostles time; I mean *Sergius Paulus* proconsul of *Cyprus*: yet, we don't find *St. Paul* exhorting him to profelyte his subjects by violence, or even to inflict any penalties on *Elymas* the forcerer, tho' he had been convicted of error in so miraculous a way, and tho' an inspired apostle had called him in his presence, *a child of the devil and an enemy of all righteousness* *.

I must also add here, that it is well known masters amongst the *Greeks* and *Romans* had an unlimited power over the persons and lives of their slaves. Now if corporal severities were ordinarily to have been used to promote the gospel, we might have expected that the apostles writing, as they so often do, of the duty of masters, should have added some exhortations to them to compel their slaves to embrace it. Yet nothing of that kind occurs, which, I think, makes the negative argu-

* Acts xiii. 10

ments as strong as one can well suppose a negative argument to be.

IV. I must conclude my discourse with touching on those reflections which I have left myself but little time to enlarge upon.

1. Let us bless God that we are free from the guilt of persecuting others, and the misery of being persecuted ourselves.

Had we been born in *Spain* or *Portugal*, education and example might have corrupted our judgment so much, that without farther inquiry we might have taken it for granted, as a first principle (as many of them seem to do) that heretics are to be punished with death. And on this foundation we might have practised or applauded the greatest inhumanities, perhaps towards the best of men. We might have been presenting to God what is much worse than robbery, even murder *for a burnt-offering* : and trusting in that for the expiation of our other offences, which is itself in the number of the greatest enormities which human nature can commit. In such a case, I fear the blindness and ignorance of our zeal would not have been allowed as an excuse for its pernicious consequences. *St. Paul* calls himself the *chief of sinners*, for those severities which he exercised on christians *ignorantly**, and while he *verily thought* that it was his duty to *do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth* †. And indeed, as *Mr. Baxter* well expresses it, in his masculine and lively manner ‡, “ If charity be a grace most necessary
 “ to salvation, then certainly it will not keep any man
 “ from damnation, that he had malice and unchari-
 “ tableness enough to persuade him, that the members

* 1 Tim. i. 13----15.

† Acts xxvi. 9.

‡ *Baxt. Pract. works*, vol. I. p. 612.

“ of Christ were children of the devil, tho’ he persecuted them under that notion.”

Let us be thankful that we are preserved from that guilt, and, let us also acknowledge it as an instance of the divine goodness to us, that we are not suffering by persecution; that we are not plundered and banished, or perhaps imprisoned and tortured for conscience-sake, and so brought under a formidable temptation to make shipwreck of that as well as of faith. Let this day remind us of the frequent dangers of this kind to which we have been exposed: and let us gratefully own God’s watchful care over us, and that powerful hand exerted in our favour, to which we owe it, that *our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers, which was once and again spread for our lives, the snare is broken and we are escaped* *. Let the memory of those who were the glorious instruments of our deliverance be ever dear to us, and the persons of those who under God are the great guardians of our civil and religious liberties, be regarded with becoming reverence, affection and obedience.

2. Let us envy none that liberty of conscience which they enjoy, on such equitable principles.

While we rejoice in a toleration ourselves, we were inexcusable if we were grieved that many who most widely differ from us share in the same common benefit. A variety of opinions must be expected, and debates will unavoidably arise from it; but when we are pressed by the arguments of our opponents, or, it may be, provoked by what we think their obstinacy; let us not indulge even to a secret wish, that there were a sword in our hand to slay them, or a chain to bind them. Far from complaining of it as an evil, let us rather rejoice in it as the peculiar glory and happiness of our age and country, perhaps beyond any other, that our neighbours, as well as we, enjoy a freedom of choosing their

* Psalm cxxiv. 7.

religion for themselves, and amidst all the diversity of that choice *fit every one under his own vine and fig-tree*, and have none on that account to *make them afraid* *.

And I will add, let not private malice and uncharitableness assume the place of public severities. Let those who are in the superior relations of life lay aside a rigorous and imposing temper, towards those who are under their care. In matters of conscience let not the husband pretend to determine for the wife, nor the parent for the child, nor the master for the servant, but, if fair argument and love will not fix a conviction on their mind in favour of what we apprehend to be right, let us leave them to worship God in their own way, without absolutely insisting upon it that they should do it in ours.

Once more, let not neighbours and equals be severe on one another upon account of religious differences, but make the most candid allowances which the case will bear for the errors and weaknesses of each other. Far from injuring and reviling each other, and refusing the mutual offices of humanity and friendship, let us study to abound in them more and more. Let us pray, that *if any are otherwise minded*, than truth, reason and scripture would teach, God would in his own method and time, reveal unto them whatever it may be of importance for them to know; and, in the mean time, let us endeavour to act on the great principles of virtue and benevolence, which, blessed be God, are not peculiar to any distinguishing forms of religious profession amongst us. And I heartily pray, that domestic persecution may never be the guilt or the misery of any, who by the laws of our country are protected from public violence.

Lastly, Let us be very cautious that we do not abuse that religious liberty which, by the singular favour of providence, we enjoy.

† Mich. iv. 4.

Let us remember, that as the best blessings may be perverted, it is too possible, that even this may be turned into licentiousness. It is true, that our consciences are under no human jurisdiction, but let it be considered they are not *without law, but under law, to God*. He who searches mens hearts knows how to judge of the sincerity and impartiality of our inquiries into truth, tho' none else can do it. Let us therefore be wary in our determinations in matters of importance, and let us earnestly pray for the inlightning influences of God's holy spirit, to preserve us from erroneous principles, and superstitious worship.

And, once more, let us be very careful that we don't abuse our religious liberties by trifling with opportunities for spiritual improvement, either absenting ourselves from them, or attending them in a careless and unprofitable manner. Let us remember, *the servant who knows his master's will, and prepares not himself to act according to it, will be beaten with many stripes* *. The freest possession of the purest religion on earth will signify nothing, if it be no more than a profession; and all that zeal for liberty which is consistent with being the slave of sin, is only a natural haughtiness of spirit, which will aggravate a man's guilt rather than extenuate it. The Lord grant that none of us may reject the truth, and that none may *hold it in unrighteousness* : lest the time come, when we wish for that excuse which they will have, who have known the restraints and discouragements of persecutions ; and another day reflect with horror, even on those repeated deliverances, for which we are this day returning our public acknowledgements.

† Luke xii. 47.

DISCOURSE XXV.

Instances of a fatal inconsideration.

[GROVE.]

Isaiah i. 3.

-----*My people doth not consider.*

THE title of this prophecy, contained in *ver. 1.* expresses the general design of it; *the vision of Isaiah, the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.* During the successive reigns of all which princes, the prophet was employed as the messenger of God to the people of the *Jews*, to exhort them to repentance, and, in failure of that, to denounce the judgments of God against them. And yet tho' the message be to them, he first turns himself to the creation around, and calls upon the heavens and the earth to judge, as it were, betwixt God and his people, whose ingratitude and stupidity were so amazingly great, that the prophet cannot forbear expressing himself, as if all nature must be affected with it, and declare against it; *Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.* Brute creatures are taught to act better

better by instinct, than they are by their reason. In vain is the superiority of their nature, which makes them capable of judging concerning their duty and their interest, of reflecting on things past, and looking forward on things to come; in vain all the privileges which they enjoy, not only above other creatures, but beyond the rest of mankind; all this is to no purpose, they have behaved as if they did not know me, and their obligations to me, and were not capable of this knowledge. And to what must this be ascribed? The answer is contained in these words, *my people doth not consider.* It was for want of consideration that the nation of the *Jews* so often brought themselves into the most calamitous circumstances, and at last drew upon themselves the most terrible, and a sort of final destruction. And the same cause has the like effect with regard to all who sin, and suffer for their sins, here or hereafter.

I shall treat of the charge here brought against the ancient *Jews* in a double view.

I. As it more especially concerns impenitent sinners. And,

II. As it in a lesser degree too frequently affects persons of sincere piety. As to the former, it is their very character, that they do not, and will not consider. As to the latter, it is what they are guilty of upon some occasions, and in lesser instances, and of which they accordingly feel the unhappy consequences in this life.

I. It is the proper character of all the impenitent, all who continue in a state of sin, that they do not and will not consider. This is the ground of their guilt, and the fatal cause of their ruin. Consideration is the same as attentively applying the mind to things, according to their respective nature and importance, in order to our having the clearer apprehension of them, and knowing how we ought to act in relation to them.

This

This is the general notion of consideration. And forasmuch as the things of religion are of the highest nature, and the utmost conceivable importance, our considering these things must imply our looking into them, and pondering them with the greatest care, and seriousness, and impartiality; and this with a view of our being able to form a truer and more distinct judgment concerning them, and concerning the manner in which they ought to influence our actions, to the end we may be effectually led and determined to act as we ought, and as the nature and importance of the things should persuade us to do. We must attend carefully, examine impartially, think and reflect seriously, that we may judge, and resolve, and act rightly. But can it be said of the generality of mankind, of all who are not prevailed upon to break off from their sins by a thorough repentance and reformation of life, and to devote themselves to the practice of universal piety and goodness; can it be said of these, that while they neglect other duties, they practise this of consideration? No certainly; it is evident from the whole manner of their conduct, evident to the whole world, who make any observation on persons and things, that they do not consider. Here I shall,

1. Among a great many things of the highest importance, instance in some particulars, which it is manifest the persons I am now speaking of, do not consider.

2. Set before you the deplorable consequence of this refusal or neglect to consider.

1. Among a great many things of the highest importance, I shall, for example sake, instance in some particulars, which it is manifest, all who continue in a state of unrepented sin, do not consider.

1. They do not consider what their own reason and the holy scriptures would instruct them in concerning God, his being and providence, his attributes and works *. *The wicked thro' the pride of his*

* Psal. x. 4.

countenance will not seek after God, God is not in all his thoughts. All his thoughts which he encourages and pursues are turned another way. He sees a world of creatures about him, he cannot but see and observe them in some manner; he knows he was not the author of his own being, as neither could they be the author of theirs, or one of the others, without a first cause, from whence they all proceeded, and yet he saith not seriously and deliberately *, “ *Where is God my maker,* “ and the maker of all other things? where and what “ is he? he who made all things, must he not be in “ all places? can he operate where he is not? he is “ indeed an invisible Being, but that is because he is a “ spiritual or incorporeal Being, without all body, or “ any such distinct and separable parts as body consists “ of. Were he not a spirit, he could not be omni- “ present †. *In him I, and all my fellow-creatures,* “ *live, and move, and have our being.* He is the father “ of my spirit ‡, my soul, my immortal part; he sup- “ ports my life; he gave and he continues my reason “ and all my other faculties; his providence extends “ to all my actions, his eye is upon all my ways. He “ is a most perfect Being, all-perfect, infinitely per- “ fect, possessed of every kind and every degree of “ perfection, moral as well as natural and intellectual; “ holy, just, merciful, and true, as well as immente, “ eternal, all-wise, and all-powerful **. *He is graci-* “ *ous and long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth,* “ *keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, trans-* “ *gression and sin, yet will by no means clear the guilty ††.* “ *Of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look* “ *on iniquity, so as ever to approve it, or those* “ *who practise it. No sinner †† shall stand in his* “ *sight; he cannot suffer presumptuous sin, not repented* “ *of, to go unpunished; he hateth all the workers of* “ *iniquity, and has || sworn, that no disobedient refrac-*

* Job xxxv. 10.

† Acts xvii. 28.

‡ Heb. xii 9.

* Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

†† Hab. i. 13.

†† Psal. v. 5.

|| Psal. xc. 11.

“ tory sinner *shall enter into his rest.* And he has
 “ sworn, and will he not perform it? his word cannot
 “ fall to the ground; his threatnings like his pro-
 “ mises are sure.”——Every man’s reason, did he
 consult it free from prejudice, as well as the sacred
 scripture, would inform him of this. But O how few
 appear to consider it! Or rather what multitudes
 appear not to consider it! how seldom have careless
 impenitent sinners a thought of the invisible God!
 how seldom do they make mention of him, unless in
 swearing profanely by his name! if at any time they
 make these things the subject of their inquiries, it is
 rather to gratify, or perhaps to find out objections
 against them, than with any serious and good purpose.
 They do not consider these truths in their practical
 consequences, and the use which should be made of
 them.

2. They do not consider the end for which they
 were made, and what is their true interest and highest
 happiness. This is a most important question, of
 absolute necessity to regulate human life; for as our
 end is, such will the course of our actions be in pursu-
 ance of it. Agreeably to the notions which we have
 of our principal interest, we shall frame our designs,
 and shape our conduct; but, alas, among those who
 lived regardless of God, and their duty to him, who
 are they that ask themselves this question, or who ask
 it with any real desire and view to satisfy themselves
 in the truth of it? if they think and talk upon this sub-
 ject, it is more for a trial of their wit, than for any
 thing else; and accordingly, as they very seldom
 meddle at all with it, so when they do, it is in too
 careless and indifferent a manner, (without applying
 their minds closely to the thing, or the thing to them-
 selves and their own condition) to deserve the name of
 consideration.——“ Did God make me for no higher
 “ end than the beasts of the field? is my happiness
 “ and theirs the same? if so, would he have given me
 “ such excellent faculties, faculties so greatly dif-
 “ proportioned

“ proportioned to so low an end? would not a less
“ degree of reason and understanding have done better,
“ as it would have been sufficient to direct me in the
“ pursuit of a sensual felicity, without reproaching me
“ at the same time with the meanness of my choice?
“ is not my soul, as it is rational, immortal too?
“ and can my principal concern then lie in this life?
“ does an immortal soul suit with things which are all
“ of them transient and dying? how absurd is this,
“ that my own duration should be everlasting, and
“ that of my happiness, my proper happiness, be but
“ for a moment!” Ah, how were it to be wished,
that men could be persuaded to think and reason after
this manner! then would they quickly perceive they
were designed for nobler purposes than those which
the greater part of mankind pursue with most heat and
eagerness. They would perceive, that being made in
the image of God, they could be made for no end in-
ferior to that of glorifying and enjoying him; they
would perceive and acknowledge it to be their wisdom
to please, and fear, and serve God; their interest
to gain his favour; their supreme happiness to have
admission into his immediate glorious presence, and
the most perfect intercourse with him. Would they
but reflect and consider, such observations as these
could not escape them; they could never imagine a
wise God would send them into the world, so amply
furnished, and so honourably distinguished, only to
follow their pleasures; or to act the part of the dog
or swine, the fox or the lion, the ant or the mole; to
resemble this or that animal, just as the passions they
happened to be led by resembled the passions and
instincts of those several creatures. Being men, they
would be sensible it was their business to shew them-
selves men, to live like men, to seek the happiness of
men. But what shall we say? tho’ they have reason,
they will not use it, tho’ they are able to consider, and
therein distinguish from inferior creatures, yet they do
not consider, and are therein far beneath them.

3. They do not consider the infinite obligations they are under to that God whose commands they disobey. This is the particular ground and instance of the allegation against the people of *Judah*; God had nourished and brought them up as children, but they did not consider it, which makes the prophet complain to the heavens and the earth as witnesses against them. The thing was the more inexcusable, because those shadows and imitations of thought and gratitude, which are to be found in creatures incapable of reasoning, did as it were reproach them with their insensibility. *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.* They had not the sense to perceive the hand which fed them, or did not consider it, as if they had been sunk below those of the creatures which are used as common emblems of dulness and stupidity. And the same is the case of all who refuse to lead a virtuous and religious life. They are ungrateful to God, because they do not consider as they ought their constant and necessary dependance upon him, and the numberless proofs and instances of his tender goodness and compassion towards them. "O my soul, stop and think a little against whom thou art so often offending, thy best friend, thy most unwearied benefactor; that every sin thou committest is an abuse of the richest grace and mercy! the mercy of God towards thee, O my soul, had no other beginning but that of thine existence, has flowed on with that, and supplied a succession of favours, as numerous and uninterrupted as the moments of which my life has been made up! while I have been sinning against God, what else has he been doing but heaping his benefits upon me, to awaken me if possible to a sense of my duty, and overcome my resistance of his gracious intentions towards me! how much has God done for me in my creation, in giving me so excellent a nature, such excellent and vast capacities! in my preservation, guarding and helping

" my

“ my weakness, relieving my indigence, maintaining
“ my health, or healing my diseases; multiplying my
“ joys, mitigating my sorrows, and sustaining me
“ under my burdens! in my redemption, vouchsafing
“ me the means and the aids of grace, and the hope
“ of eternal glory! couldst thou have considered this,
“ O my soul, and not have been excited to returns of
“ obedience and love to the bountiful benefactor; the
“ God who has fed thee all thy life long, and is wil-
“ ling to bestow everlasting blessings upon thee?
“ think of it now tho’ late, and be confounded at the
“ sight of thy monstrous ingratitude.”

4. They who are not reclaimed from their evil courses, do not consider the vast importance of salvation, and what the indispensable terms of it are. It is plain, it is undeniable they do not; for they could not then neglect so great salvation; they could not then prefer every trifle to this grand affair. To be saved, in the scripture-notion of that word, is to be delivered from the wrath to come, from eternal death and destruction. And did they ever seriously consider what this wrath means? what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God? what is it to be doomed to everlasting punishment? for ever excluded from the blissful presence of God? and, together with that, banished from all comfort, and from all hope? how wretched, how insupportable such a condition must be? how terrible without the addition of eternity, much more where that comes in like an infinite weight to press down all the rest? Eternity! Little does the careless sinner think, what is wrapt up in this single word; did he think of thee, his pleasures would immediately turn sour, as liquors which have no strength in them do in the midst of thunder and lightning, and his heart die within him. Yet, further, to be saved, is, instead of being miserable, to be made happy, perfectly and for ever happy; and what it is to be thus happy, it is equally impossible for us to form a clear and just conception; as having but a tolerable

tolerable conception of it, and revolving it often in our minds, it is to slight and disregard this happiness, and sacrifice it to the pleasures of sin. And what now are the gospel-terms of salvation? we cannot but acknowledge it reasonable, that he who bestows this salvation should appoint the terms of it; and certain, that the terms being settled by infinite wisdom and goodness, are the best and fittest that can be; nor can we without the greatest folly imagine, that after God had fixed certain terms, he will depart from them, and save men in another way than that which he hath revealed to them, only to gratify their sinful prejudices, and humours, and inclinations. Can it be supposed, that these persons ever seriously considered this, that the terms of salvation are indispensable, and never to be brought lower than they are already, who never troubled themselves to comply with them? The terms of salvation are low indeed in comparison of the greatness of the reward to be conferred, and in the judgment of every considerate person; but not so low as too many are apt to fancy. They are as low as any reasonable ingenuous mind can desire, but not so low as the sensualist and worldling would wish; they would be glad to have heaven when they can keep the earth no longer without seeking it; to be saved and made happy, if it might be, without parting with a single lust. But this cannot be, Repentance and faith are the conditions to which the promise of life and salvation is made; * *repentance towards God, and faith in Jesus Christ; repentance from dead works*, implying an abhorrence of all sin, as sin, and the practice of all virtue and godliness; such must our repentance be, to be a † *repentance unto life*; a *faith which overcomes the world* (‡ *for who is he, that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the son of God?*) and || *works by love to God and man*. Such a repentance,

* Acts iii. 19. xvi. 31. xx. 21. Heb. vi. 1.

† 2 Cor. vii. 10. ‡ 1 John v. 5. || Gal. v. 6.

and such a faith, are not very common; I doubt, I might have said, are exceeding rare; which seems to argue, that men do not always consider them as the necessary and unalterable terms of life and happiness; tho' it must be confess'd, when it serves the sinner's turn, he can plead the strictness of these terms as his excuse for not living up to them. So contradictory is he in his pleas. Sometimes his apology is, that the *law is spiritual, and he is carnal, and so he cannot do the things which he would*; he cannot, if he would never so fain, become a new creature, At other times the gospel is a law of grace; and * *because grace abounds*, nay, that it may abound, he may venture to continue in sin. And this, I doubt, is the rock on which the greatest numbers split, for want of soberly considering what they must do to be saved; the necessity of holiness being apparent to those who consider it, and the wisdom of it to those who consider its necessity.

5. The same persons do not consider the nature and tendency of their present course of life. They do not reflect upon their actions, and weigh and ponder their steps. They have not the caution of common travellers, to think whether they are right or wrong. "How came I into this road? Whither does it lead? Who directed me to take it? What company have I in it? Wise men or fools; men used to think soberly, or the contrary?" Too many do not love to enquire, and think; thinking is their aversion; they would not be set right, do not care to alter their method of living, and are therefore willing to suppose it such as it should be, if not in all respects, yet in all things essential. I say, they are willing to suppose this, but at the same time, conscious that the matter will not bear examination; that their cause is bad, their title to the peace they enjoy, false and deceitful; and this makes them shun the trial of sound reason. Therefore 'tis that conscience is not

* Rom. vi. 1.

suffered to speak out; † *they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reprov'd.* Man, is not this the truth? Is it not thus thou imposest upon thyself? Thou dar'st not appeal to thy own mind, thou dar'st not trust the matter to that issue; no, thou dar'st not; and what can be a plainer confession of a bad cause? What can be more pitiful and mean than for men to allow themselves to do what they have not the confidence to look back upon when done? What more reproachful, than to be afraid of our own thoughts? What more suspicious, than for reasonable creatures to decline the bar of reason? What more shameful, than for those who have understanding, not to be able or willing to give an account of their actions to themselves? Sinner, be plain with thyself, and give me leave to deal plainly with thee. If thou wer't not ashamed of thyself, why, in the name of the all-knowing God, shouldst thou shun conversing with thyself? If all were well at home, what should make thee so fond of rambling abroad, and, as it were, losing the remembrance of thyself in a crowd of vain amusements? Here, sinner, here is the true, the main cause of thy love of noise and hurry, of tiresome business, or of mean pleasures, and perpetual diversions; thy aim is, by this means, to make thy escape from thyself; to employ and divert thy mind, that it may not be forced upon the ungrateful consideration of thy way and manner of life from thy youth up, which thou must know not to be justifiable. How men can be satisfied with such a state of mind, and with such a distracted senseless way of spending life, is hard to imagine; 'tis a strange slavery they are under, a difficult task they have upon their hands, to be obliged to fly from themselves. If these men are happy, I must own myself to have no notion at all what happiness means.

6. They do not consider the uncertainty of life. They manage as if they were never to die; or as if

† John iii. 20.

death were at a very great distance from them, when they do not know but they may die to-morrow, or that * *this very night their souls may be required of them.* For what is life, but a little breath in our nostrils, the momentary pulsation of the heart. And how soon may this pulse be stopped, this breath be taken away, and then we return to our dust! O ye careless unconcerned sinners, who prodigally throw away your precious time, and, as it were, dance upon the brink of destruction, can you say you consider this, that you must shortly die, and may die suddenly? Alas, death is what of all things persons of your character put farthest, or would put farthest from their thoughts: and they may possibly drive it from their thoughts, but 'tis never the farther for that from themselves. Could we but once prevail with men to look to the ground they stand upon, to observe how it shakes under them, to reflect how precarious their abode is in this world, to consider that they are to-day warm in health, and when a few days more are past, may be cold and withering in the grave; could we persuade them to admit of such thoughts as these, and withal to add, with this life there's an end to all seasons and opportunities of grace, of all their designs and projects for time and eternity, certainly we should have no difficulty to persuade them further to take up resolutions of leading a new course of life, and turning their feet to the divine testimonies. And why will they not consider this? Can they protract life, by not thinking of death? Is their danger ever the less for their not attending to it? Consider, mortal, thy times are in the hands of another, not thine own; thou art not lord of thine own life, any more than the original author of it; he that gave thee life, does when he pleases, resume what he gave; and many are the provocations he daily receives from thee to put an end to a life, which thou makest very little use of but to his dishonour. And when he will do this, or in what

* Luke xii. 20.

manner he will do it, thou canst not tell; whether by some unforeseen accident, or by a bodily disease; and whether this disease shall be acute or lingering, tormenting or stupefying, all this is unknown to thee; there's a dark cloud between thee and futurity, which thou art not able to penetrate. And should not this teach thee to be wise? It would infallibly do it, didst thou consider thy latter end, that these things must all have an end, and that thou may'st be just arrived at that end. The consideration of this in thy cool and retired hours would alarm thee, and put thee upon thinking what sort of behaviour is most suitable to a creature who lives at such uncertainties.

7. They do not consider the certainty of a world to come. That world is unseen; they never had an acquaintance with it themselves, and never any returned from thence to give them an account of it, and therefore they would fain believe there is no such world, no such future state of being, or that possibly there may not. They please themselves with this peradventure, and with the help of it make a shift to lull themselves asleep in their sins. Whereas in case it were a mere peradventure, which is not, an uncertainty whether there was any life to come after death, no wise man would therefore think himself justified to act upon such uncertainty. If the negative, or that there is no world to come, were certain, then indeed there would be little or no absurdity in a loose uncontrolled course of life, in casting off the fear of an after-reckoning, and all the restraints of religion by which we are abridged in any of our pleasures; such a way of acting as this, would be much more accountable, were we sure that we should die as the beasts do, and never revive more. But upon the supposed uncertainty of the event, 'tis perfect madness, since wisdom directs us to take the safest course; and that is the safest course which provides for the worst. How then must the case stand, when it is not so much as uncertain, as the sceptical sinner would have it, whether there be
another

another state besides this, but clear and evident as a truth of this nature can be. Yes, 'tis certain, 'tis past doubt with all who have impartially weighed the proofs of a future state, with which reason and revelation supply us. Hardly any truth can show brighter evidences than this; not the existence of God, as an infinitely wise and holy Being; not his moral Providence and government over the world; for if there be a God who made us, there is a God who will judge us, having made us reasonable, free, accountable creatures. If there be a Providence which directs the affairs of the present world, there must be a world to come, when the dark parts of this Providence shall be cleared up, and all difficulties about it answered; which upon supposition of no other world besides this, would not be mere difficulties, but unsurmountable objections. Is God our maker and governor, and will he not call us to account how we have managed? I can hardly think that any one, who disbelieves a future state of rewards and punishments, can firmly believe the existence of an infinitely wise, and just, and good Being, the creator, preserver, and governor of the world. Whoever is inclined to deny one of these, is at the same time tempted to cast off the belief of both. Besides which it ought to be considered, what abundant evidence we have of the truth of the gospel; that a truth of this nature is not capable of more satisfactory proof than that which the gospel brings with it. Now 'tis not more certain that the gospel is true, than that it is that there is a future state of recompences*. *Life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel.* This doctrine is asserted or supposed in every page of the New Testament. There is no need now that one should arise from the dead, since our Saviour himself rose, and has given us assurance that there shall be a † *resurrection both of the just and the unjust.* So that he who will not believe Christ and his Apostles, neither would he repent, tho' one rose

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

† John v. 28. Acts xvii. 31. xxiv. 15.

from the dead. That this then is not man's only life, nor his final state, is undeniable. "But do I consider it as I ought? Have I by faith and meditation drawn aside the curtain, and looked into that invisible world? Have I thought seriously about it? The rewards and punishments of it, or the different treatment and abodes of good and bad men there? Have I considered how momentous these future things are in comparison of things present, these unseen things in comparison of things seen, these eternal things in comparison of things temporal? Perhaps I do not positively disbelieve or reject them; but then seldom or never thinking about them, I do not properly and explicitly believe them."

These then are some of those things, which persons engaged in a course of sin do not consider. They are matters of the highest importance, and would be so acknowledged by them, did they consider. But this they do not, and the effect is just such as might be expected. Which brings me,

2. To set before you the deplorable consequences of this neglect of serious consideration. These I shall represent in the next discourse.

DISCOURSE XXVI.

Fatal effects of inconsideration.

[GROVE.]

Isaiah i. 3.

-----*My people doth not consider.*

THE charge here brought again the ancient *Jews*, I proposed to treat in a double view.

I. As it more especially concerns impenitent finners.
And,

II. As in a lesser degree it too frequently affects persons of sincere piety.

In treating it as more especially the character of impenitent finners, I have,

1. Among a great many things of the highest importance, instanced some particulars, which it is manifest all who continue in a state of unrepented sin, do not consider. As the instructions of reason and scripture, in relation to God, his providence, his attributes, and his works; the great end for which they were made, and what is their true interest and highest happiness; the infinite obligations they are under to God, whose commands they disobey; the great importance of salvation, and what the indispensable terms are on which the gospel offers it; the nature and

tendency of their present course of life; the uncertainty of the life they waste; and the certainty of a life to come, and a future righteous judgment which all must undergo; these are some particulars of the greatest importance, which impenitent sinners neglect to consider. To prevent any of my hearers from continuing longer in this stupid and fatal negligence, I shall now,

2. Set before you the deplorable consequences of this neglect of serious consideration. And,

1. Men do not consider, and therefore do not know. This consequence is plainly intimated in the connection of the words with the immediately preceding. *Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.* They do not know, because they do not consider. Many times this refusal to consider, is the occasion of very gross ignorance of the things of God. People are as ignorant of these things, as if they had no means of coming acquainted with them. The reason of which is, that tho' they have means in plenty, they make no use of them; the means of knowledge being to no purpose where they are not applied by consideration. We must consider what the things are which God has made known to us, whether by our own reason, or in the sacred scripture; otherwise, all that God has done is only like opening a book before a blind man, or speaking words to one who is deaf; with this difference, that our blindness and deafness being voluntary, and in reality nothing else but our inconsideration, we are without excuse, and our case consequently without pity. This is the effect of a total want of consideration, the ignorance proceeding hence is likewise total, or next to it. And where there is some degree of consideration, but the thoughts are not applied with that closeness and sincerity, which the nature and importance of the subject demanded, tho' men may not appear so shamefully ignorant, nay, may have the reputation of persons of considerable knowledge, yet they are really deficient in that knowledge of God and of themselves,

themselves, of their duty and their interest, which a serious and thorough consideration of things would have given them. Now who, except the persons labouring under this ignorance, but must be sensible of its unhappy and too frequently fatal effects. The degree of this ignorance usually follows that of mens neglect to consider; and ignorance, according to the greater or lesser degree of it, does more or less blind the mind, deprive all the motives of the gospel of their natural efficacy, and make it impossible, in a moral way, for men to be wrought upon by all the methods the gospel makes use of for this end. And this minds me of another bad effect of inconsideration.

2. Men do not consider, and therefore are without all awakening apprehensions of the guilt and misery of a vicious course of life. Consideration is previous to a work of conviction, as a work of conviction is antecedent to the conversion of a sinner from his wicked ways. How can it be expected that they whom a custom in sin hath rendered secure and stupid, should be roused out of their lethargy, unless they are first brought to weigh and consider things? By what arts, what methods, shall we come at the consciences of such persons? By what springs shall we work upon their fears? There is, in this respect, a wide difference betwixt spiritual objects, and the objects of sense. Sensible objects often strike us unexpectedly, and raise our passions before we are aware of it; upon the first sight, or the first hearing, we turn pale and tremble, we are afraid whether we will or no, we cannot command the emotions of our own souls; and many times we are surprized into an immoderate fear by that which upon examination we find deserved rather to have been slighted. But it is not thus here: the object being remote from sense, must be present to the mind, either by an act of its own, or of some one else, who places it in full view before us. And, indeed, where this last is done, as it is sometimes in a sermon, the subject and manner of which are alike fitted

fitted to alarm the hearer ; when he perceives himself to be nearly concerned in what is delivered, the effect for the present, is like that of a serious consideration : but if this be not added thoroughly to rouse the mind, and make the conviction enter deep, the impression is exceeding transient, and he who appeared so much moved in hearing, is not at all changed afterwards ; being like a drowsy person, who, as soon as the cause which imperfectly awakened him is removed, or very soon after, drops asleep again. To convince the sinner of the evil of his ways, of the guilt he has contracted by his transgressions of the divine laws, and of the danger he incurs by his guilt ; to convince him effectually and lastingly of this, he had need first be persuaded to sit down and dwell upon the thought of those things, which show the dreadful nature and consequences of wilful habitual sin. That the sinner may tremble for fear of God's judgments, and by his fear be urged to flee from them, it is not enough that the minister sets these things before him, but he himself must be assiduous, and keep his mind for some time after attentive to these tremendous objects. For want of this he is fearless, he mocks at danger, he makes a jest of reproofs and admonitions, and laughs at those who pity him ; he apprehends not what occasion there is for so much outcry.

3. Persons engaged in a vicious course do not consider, and are therefore little solicitous to make their peace with God, and to secure an interest in the Saviour, and the salvation proposed to them in the gospel. They are not in haste to do those things, as long as they see not the necessity of them, the great urgency of the affair, and the manifold and unspeakably great advantages which would arise from hence. To be at peace with God ; to have this almighty Being our friend, whose favour is as desirable as his displeasure is dreadful, what condition can recommend itself more to one who thinks of it ; it is a condition in which heaven is begun ; there is a sacred rest and security of mind attends

attends it, and not only rest, but satisfaction and pleasure. A man has then a true enjoyment of himself, and of other things, and not till then. Being reconciled to God, conscience is reconciled to him, and conscience being reconciled, furnishes a continual feast, and speaks to him in a voice which exceeds the sweetest music. But then it is only to him who thinks and reflects, that the happiness of such a condition is so apparent, as to engage his warmest and best settled resolutions to be himself thus happy; if it may be, as nothing can hinder it, once a man sets heartily about it. “O my soul, I need a Saviour, and the mercy of
“ God has provided one, one able to save to the utter-
“ most, and thro’ him offers life and eternal salvation
“ to me; and shall this Saviour be provided, and
“ this salvation offered in vain? In vain it must be,
“ if I will not consider. Till then I shall not apply to
“ the redeemer, shall not trouble myself about the
“ blood of sprinkling, for the pardon of my sins, or
“ the spirit of grace, and holiness, and consolation for
“ the conquest of sin in my soul, and settling it in a
“ state of holy peace and tranquility*. *The whole*
“ *need not a physician, but the sick*; nor will the sick
“ go to him, how much soever they want it, if they
“ do not know themselves to be sick, or conceive the
“ disorder they are under to be no way dangerous.”
And tho’ the gospel-salvation be such, as no one can help preferring to all the most tempting objects by which he is solicited to renounce his part in it, on condition he attends to it, and meditates about it as he ought to do, yet in case this is not done, the scene is opened in vain, the prospect will not attract our desires, and raise our hopes. The soul will remain dead and insensible to the glories of that upper world, as if they were all imaginary. Hope there may be of being happy after death, where there is little consideration, and because there is but little; but not that hope which awakens, which fires, which invigorates,

* Matth. ix. 12.

all the powers of our nature, and engages us to set them all on work in pursuit of the promised and expected blessedness.

4. They do not consider, and therefore resign themselves to the conduct of appetite, and lust, and passion. They suffer these blind guides to lead them, because the man is as blind as his passions; for none so blind as they who will not see. This is their case, they have eyes and will not open them; they had rather follow their lusts blindfold unto destruction. Strange and unaccountable choice! which they could never make, did they duly consider the unparalleled folly of it. It is easy going down a hill; there is a pleasure in gratifying strong inclinations, and besides this, it has the appearance of liberty too; and all these together, ease, pleasure, and liberty hold them fast like a threefold cord, which cannot be broken without great labour and pain. But is ease to be preferred to safety? Whatever charms there may be in a bed of down, yet were a man's house on fire, and the soft couch which invited to sleep, like to be turned into a bed of flames, the most slothful person would not debate about the prudence of relinquishing it. There may be pleasure in the cup, but if there be poison too, no one who values his life will touch it. As to the boasted liberty of a life, led according to fancy and inclination, it is something not real, wholly founded in a mistake. Men enslaved to their vices, are the truest slaves, tho' they will not own it, and it may be are not sensible of it. They are led in chains, only these chains, some how or other, are not seen and felt. So the dog tied to a cart, if he follows willingly, may not perceive he is tied; but let him stand still, or attempt to go a contrary way, and he will quickly find the cord straiten, and pull him the way he would not go. Thus the sinner is a voluntary slave, but never the less a slave for that; only he is not sensible of his slavery, which makes it but so much the more deplorable—*laxo fune laborat*. The rope hangs loose, because he makes no resistance

resistance to his lusts which lead him. As soon as he does this, and opposes his inclinations, he is immediately convinced how great a slave he has been. The violence of a stream is no other way so well known as by swimming against it. Once we are resolved to break off from our old habits, our experience makes us sensible that fetters of iron are not such instruments of servitude as these. The shame too of following our vicious passions and inclinations, when we have reason given us to guide and controul them, would work upon us, if we used ourselves to serious reflection. I say, if we were used to reflect upon the shamefulness of such a conduct, it would do it; for this must be supposed, or else men may be guilty of the most shameful things, and yet not be ashamed of them, as the prophet observes of the people of the Jews* ; *Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush.* Nay, they may come to that pass as to † *glory in their shame*, like those of whom the apostle makes mention. The reason is, they do not consider things, and so are not apprehensive of that deformity, that baseness, that folly in them, which seen by them in a clear and full light, would overwhelm them with confusion. And thus these great principles of fear, and hope, and shame, which God has wisely and kindly planted in our nature, in order to keep us from the ways of sin; or, if unwarily got into them, to reclaim us again, and restore us to the right path, prove insignificant thro' the neglect of serious consideration.

5. Men do not consider, and for that reason it is the temptations to sin are so invincible. These temptations are taken from the world, which is perpetually solliciting our senses, and exciting our desires. The good and the evil things of the world, riches and poverty, pleasure and pain, honour and disgrace, its friendship and its enmity, its smiles and its frowns, have a great deal of temptation in them to the generality of mankind, whom they keep from harkening to

* Jerem. vi. 15.

† Philip. iii. 19.

the calls and invitations of the gospel, and devoting themselves to the duties of religion. But then it is only to the inconsiderate that they are thus irresistibly tempting; to those who do not consider what the world is, or what they themselves are; how narrow the world, how large and boundless their desires; how vain and worthless the world, how great and excellent the capacities which God has endowed them; how transient the world, and all things in it, while their souls are immortal. They do not compare earth with heaven, time with eternity, they could not then prefer shadows to realities, trifles to things of infinite and everlasting importance, nor find it so difficult to resist and overcome all the allurements they can meet with in the ways of sin, or opposition in the way of their duty. Did they frequently and seriously ballance things one against another, so as to have an habitual sense of the infinite disproportion between them, with what ease would they be able to baffle a temptation to mind earthly things, and neglect heavenly; to be thoughtful about the events of time, and thoughtless about eternity; to chuse their portion in this life, and give up all their title to another. Whatever the world could offer to part betwixt Christ and them, to induce them to violate a good conscience, to hazard the loss of the divine favour, and quit their design of being happy forever, would be rejected with the utmost scorn. They would resolve upon a life of strict holiness and obedience, and abide fixed in that resolution, in spite of all that the world, under the management of Satan, could do to draw them aside from God and their duty. “I am tempted with the prospect of a
 “ little gain, but do I consider how dear I must pay
 “ for it? What a dreadful risk I run by every sinful
 “ gratification, and much more by continued impeni-
 “ tency? That for superficial and vanishing delights,
 “ I sacrifice the repose of my mind, and the manly, or
 “ rather divine satisfactions of virtue and religion?”
 Were these and such like things considered as they
 ought,

ought, the temptations to sin would be disarmed of all their power; whereas now, for want of their being attended to, sin ensnares and deludes men to their everlasting ruin; they are persuaded by arguments which they could answer, and led captive in bands which they could break with the greatest ease, did they by consideration awaken their drowsy powers.

6. Men will not consider, and therefore support themselves with false and dangerous props, such as these, that God is merciful, that Christ died for sinners, and that it will be time enough to repent hereafter.

1. God is merciful, and therefore will not condemn his creatures to everlasting punishment. What, not tho' they are finally impenitent? Not tho' they despise his mercy, and will not be persuaded even by that, or by the terrors of the Lord, to perform their indispensable duty? Not tho' he has expressly threatned he will * *destroy the ungodly*? They who can flatter themselves with such foolish hopes as these, show themselves never to have considered what the name of God, as declared in scripture, imports; they show themselves to have a very imperfect notion of the great God; a notion very unworthy of him who is the first and most excellent of all Beings, the fountain of perfection, and the wise and righteous governor of the world. Mercy is not the only perfection of the divine nature, it is but one of many, from which if it were found separated, it would not be a perfection. Mercy without wisdom to guide, and holiness and justice to limit it, would be a sort of blind and undistinguishing affection. Tho' God be infinitely merciful, yet every one is not a proper object of mercy, and it belongs to wisdom and holiness to determine who are, and who are not fit objects of it. At the same time that, for encouragement of the penitent, God proclaims his name the † *Lord God, merciful and gracious*, he adds, by way of

* 2 Pet. iii. 7. 2 Thess. i. 8, 9, † Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

terror to the impenitent, that he will *by no means clear the guilty*. God is not only merciful in his own nature, but the creator of mankind, and may we not expect to find mercy from a kind and merciful Creator? The rebellious *Jews* seem to have laid a great stress upon this, but are told by the prophet, That * *because they were a people who had no understanding, i. e. behaved as if they had none, he that made them would not have mercy on them, and he that formed them would show them no favour*. Is it to no purpose, think you, that God has threatened his enemies *with everlasting destruction from his presence*? Are the terrors of the Almighty vain terrors? The thunders of his word only designed to frighten us? Will his lightnings never strike? Depend on it, if God threatens, he will execute; if he tell us, that *without † holiness, no man shall see his face*, he will never depart from his word.

2. ‡ *Christ died for sinners, and whosoever believeth in him shall not perish*. Now we believe in Christ as well as others, and rely upon him for salvation; we are willing to give him the glory of the whole work.—But, O remember, 'tis not every kind of faith which is saving; nor will Christ esteem it for his glory, to own persons of a vicious character for his, and to save them in their sins. || *The devils believe and tremble*. The same scriptures which speak of justification by faith, have likewise defined that faith, and that by such plain marks, that we cannot, unless wilfully, mistake it. The faith which will be *counted to us for righteousness*, must have real inherent righteousness § accompanying it, it must be joined with repentance, and followed with good works. These are the inseparable fruits of an evangelical faith. O think not the holy Jesus to be such a friend to sin, as to lay down his life for this end, that men might sin on unpunished! He died ** *to save us from our sins*, not

* *Isai. xxvii. 11.* † *Heb. xii. 14.* ‡ *Rom. v. 6.* *John iii. 15.*
 || *James ii. 19.* § *Rom. vi. 1.* *Mark i. 15.* *James ii. 17.*
 ** *Matt. i. 21.* *Rom. vi. 10.*

in them, from their reigning, as well as their damning power; from their pollution, as well as from their guilt; to sanctify, as well as to justify us. The death of Christ, when considered as it should be, is far from affording the least shelter to impenitency; for why did Christ die, but because the holiness of the divine nature, and the honour of the divine law, rendered it unfit for God to pardon sin without a sacrifice of atonement? And if the forgiveness of sin, without such a sacrifice, would not have been so much for the honour of God's perfections and government, how much less would the pardon of it be without repentance? Sin has not changed its nature by Christ's dying for sinners; 'tis the same evil and hateful thing as ever, yea, more hateful, as we have now more powerful motives, and in greater numbers, to forsake it; and unless we do forsake it, we shall not answer the design of our Saviour, in dying for us, and not answering the design of his death, we can have no good ground to expect any benefit by it.

3. Repentance may be necessary, but it will be time enough to repent hereafter. And who, I beseech you, told us so? Sure I am, that God never did; on the contrary, in the proclamation of mercy, he saith, * *To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.* To-day, is in some sense ours, for we may lay hold of the present time; to-morrow is not. Futurity is in the sole disposal and command of God, and known to him only, which is a very good reason why we should make the best use we can of the present time. This persuasion then cometh not from him who calleth us, but from another hand. 'Tis plain, our lusts, that is, our very worst enemies, are our advisers; we are *hardened thro' the deceitfulness of sin.* But are these our enemies no better known? Whatever our sinful passions, which are not willing to be given up, may suggest, we have no time to lose, can gain nothing but delays, but may lose more

* Tit. ii. 14.

than can be conceived. Of all those delusive hopes, with which sinners please themselves, this of repenting hereafter, is, perhaps, the most fatal, and the most common. Why do I talk of repenting hereafter, but because I do not love to think of repenting presently? And will not the same reason be likely to keep me from ever repenting? Because I can never repent, but the time when I do repent must then be present, and upon that account will be thought as improper as the instant now. Let us be persuaded to consider, that delays in this case are infinitely dangerous. We may not live to that hereafter, of which we fondly dream; some fatal accident, or mortal distemper, may come in betwixt us and that hereafter, and at once cut off all our thoughts and purposes for this world and the next. As to this world, the consequence of being taken away in the midst of designs, which we delayed to execute, comparatively speaking, is not great, but as to the next, 'tis most dreadful. Or supposing we should protract our days to the utmost length, if we go on sinning all that time, we shall only grow more hardened, and at the same time that we have more need of the spirit of God to excite and assist us, have the less reason to expect his operations. Can any thing then be a more evident sign of the most wretched inconsideration, than indulging to such delays? Would any but a careless inconsiderate prodigal waste his time, and run the most imminent danger, in a matter, which, if he pleased, he might put out of all hazard? This we might do, as to our everlasting salvation, by immediately applying ourselves to whatever our hand findeth to do; and consequently, if we do not, but are resolved to put it to the venture, we must give wiser persons leave to think, that we act like those who are void of all understanding. Nor will it extenuate our folly to plead, that at worst we shall have the opportunity of a death-bed repentance; say rather the chance, for we may die suddenly, or of a distemper, which will not al-

low the exercise of reason, or may flatter ourselves with thoughts of longer life, when we are very near our last hour; or having too long persisted in a course of presumptuous sin, may have our conscience stupified, or be awakened with despair; and, at best, cannot be sure, that such a forced business deserves the name of evangelical repentance, and will be accepted as such. Upon all which accounts, none will delay in a matter of such importance, but they who do not consider.

Let me now apply what has been offered.

1. How inexcusable must all those appear who perish in their sins. They perish because they will not consider, and must not then their destruction be of themselves? They are instructed in their duty towards God, towards their neighbour, and towards themselves, what they must do, and what they are to avoid; their duty is set before them in a variety of lights, that in one or other they might discern the reasonableness of it, and be allured to perform it, but they will not consider. They have their interest clearly represented to them, are shown wherein it consists, and how incompatible the continuance in any known sin is with it, but they will not consider. * *The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, in the scripture, against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; and they are frequently warned, and earnestly intreated, to flee from the wrath to come, are put in mind of the danger they incur by delays, and reasoned with concerning a judgment to come, as well as concerning righteousness and temperance; and one would imagine things of this nature should awaken men, and the thoughts of them be too strong for any temptations which could offer to induce them to neglect these; but, alas, they will not consider. They are applied to by the most engaging motives of the gospel, by the tender mercies*

* Rom. i. 18.

of God, by the love of a Saviour, his dying love, by those exceeding great and precious promises, in comparison with which, all the offers of the world may well appear contemptible. Sometimes we address to their hopes, sometimes to their fears, sometimes to self-love, sometimes to gratitude; we endeavour to draw them, and if that will not do, to drive them, as it were, to repentance and amendment of life, but all in vain, because they will not consider. And whose fault but their own is it that they will not consider? Must they not hereby be left without excuse? What more would they have the wise and merciful God do for them? All things are ready on God's part, if they can be persuaded to return to him, he is ready to receive them. He has, on his part, done all that can be expected from his goodness, all that is consistent with his wisdom. The matter sticks with you, Sirs; 'tis expected, and justly, that you should consider the offers which are made you, and not wait till you are compelled to do it. It must be a free act, otherwise what is there that you do yourselves? And to think of gaining of heaven, without taking any pains for it, is a vain thought indeed, and can be owing to nothing else but the want of serious consideration.

2. Here you see, in case you have any purposes of leading a holy life, where you must begin, what is the first thing you have to do, and preparatory to all the rest. You must sit down and consider. * *I thought on my ways*, says the psalmist, and *turned my feet unto thy testimonies*. Think, and the work is soon done, but without thinking will never be done. 'Tis by means of consideration that we come to know what we have to do, and the order of doing it, what is to be done first, and what last, and the steps we are to proceed by in our progress towards conversion, and from thence towards the higher degrees of christian perfection. We have a clearer notion of things, our way lies plain before us, and we are in little or no

* Psa. cxix. 59.

danger of going astray from it through ignorance and mistake. And then as consideration discovers what we have to do, and the method in which we are to proceed, so it quickens and persuades us to set about it. There's a natural tendency in serious consideration, to awaken the drowsy languid powers of the mind, to bring over the passions to the right side, and to make them vigorous in the defence of it; to fix the wavering resolutions of the soul, and to revive its fainting courage. 'Tis necessary then you should begin here; and that you may not, by a superficial performance of this first part of your work, defeat your hopes of success in the farther progress of it, you are to take care that your notion of consideration itself be not wrong. A few slight and transient thoughts of things relating to our everlasting peace, do not deserve to be called by this name. No, to consider, is to come up close to an object, to view it with all the care and exactness we can; if possible, to suffer nothing to escape us, which is of any weight and importance, and frequently to revolve the things in our minds, because what the first stroke did not do, repeated strokes may; the impression hereby made, may be at length so deep, as not to be easily effaced, while a single thought or two, however serious and vivid, can signify but little. Let me therefore,

3. Exhort you to practise a duty so necessary, and of such infinite advantage; and be so happy, as to prevail upon you.——But this exhortation, with the consideration of this charge, of not considering, as affecting even persons in the main good, I shall reserve for another discourse.

DISCOURSE XXVII.

Ill effects of inconsideration on good men.

[GROVE.]

Isaiah i. 3.

-----*My people doth not consider.*

IN treating these words, I have,

1. Distinctly shown you several things of the greatest importance, which all, who continue in a state of impenitence, do not consider; *viz.* the instructions of reason and scripture, in relation to God, his attributes, his providence, and his works; the great end for which they were made, and what is their true interest, and highest happiness; the infinite obligations they are under to God, whose commands they disobey; the great importance of salvation, and the indispensable terms on which the gospel offers it; the nature and tendency of their present course of life; the uncertainty of the life they waste, and the certainty of a life to come, and a future righteous judgment which all must undergo. And to prevent your continuing this fatal neglect of consideration, I

2. Set before you the deplorable consequences of this refusal or neglect to consider. It hinders men from

from knowing the things which belong to their eternal peace; it keeps them without any awakening apprehensions of the guilt and misery of their vicious course; and, as a consequence, renders them little solicitous to make their peace with God, and secure an interest in the favour and the salvation proposed in the gospel; it disposes men to abandon themselves to the conduct of appetite, and lust, and passion; it renders the temptations to sin, in a manner irresistible; and inclines them to rest themselves on false and dangerous props, such as these, that God is merciful, and that Christ died for sinners, and therefore they need not repent, or, at worst, may safely trust hereafter for repenting. I shall now, to prevent your suffering those infinitely mischievous effects of inconsideration,

3. Exhort you, who have hitherto neglected it, to practise a duty so necessary, and of such infinite advantage; and O that I might be so happy as to prevail upon you!

Nothing would rejoice your friends more, who most sincerely wish your happiness; nothing be more acceptable to God; nothing give your own minds more comfort and satisfaction, both while discharging your duty, and in the review, than sober retired consideration. I could offer many things, which have a great deal of force in themselves, and ought therefore to have a great deal of efficacy with you. I shall briefly name some.

1. Consideration is the proper character of reasonable beings; the faculty is the main distinction of the man from the beast, and the exercise of it, of the wise man from the fool*. *Remember this, and shew yourselves men: bring it again to mind, O ye transgressors! Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.* So we may say, consider and shew yourselves men. There is nothing by which we shew ourselves men,

† Isaiah xlvi. 8:9.

being endowed with understanding and reason, more than by this. This proves our superiority over other creatures, that we are not confined by the impressions made upon our senses, tied down to the present object, but can apprehend things which fall not under the notice of sense, and turn our thought to this thing or that; that our minds can arrest themselves in their motions, and when it is of use, dwell upon an object without being obliged to pass from one object to another, just as the scene happens to fleet before us. And are we not willing to maintain this distinction, and to act up to it? Is it not the honour of our nature, that we are possessed of such power as this? And will it not be our honour if we make a right use of it, and our everlasting reproach if we make a wrong use, or none at all?

2. We show that we can consider in the things of this life, and why not then in the things of religion? That we can, is evident, because we do, even more than we should; I speak not of all, but of those who mind the world in earnest, and miss no opportunity of advancing their secular interest; how thoughtful, how over-charged with care, are such persons? And so it must always be where the affections are vehemently engaged. It is true, even these persons are without consideration as to the things of the world, in the best sense of the word; they do not consider them in the manner they should, on the right side, and in a true light. Their vanity and emptiness, and their short and fleeting duration, is what they never reflect upon; they do not consider for what end these things were given them by providence, and how they may be made to yield the greatest profit in the final issue. But however, in another sense, they cannot be charged with want of consideration, being full of contrivances relating to their earthly affairs, how to manage them, and make the best of every thing; that is, in their own phrase, they are sure to mind the *main chance*. Now I would only ask, what there is in matters of a
higher

higher nature and concernment, those that regard your reconciliation with God, and your preparation for another world, that you should not be able to consider them, or have no heart to do it? It must be confessed, these things lie a little more out of the way; the interests of the body, and of the present life, are not so directly and apparently concerned in them; but then, on the other side, to compensate for these disadvantages, they are of much greater importance, more suitable to the spiritual part of our nature, more worthy the exercise of our reasonable powers about them. Of this every man must be convinced by the first glance of his mind, and therefore will not be able to answer it to his own reason and conscience, if when he is troubled about these meaner things, and continually taking thought what he shall eat and drink, and wherewithal he shall be clothed, and even about things less weighty than these, he will not employ any of his thoughts about his soul concerns, or of his time and pains in labouring for that bread which endureth to everlasting life.

3. Do your part, and * God will not withhold his grace, by which you shall be enabled to do all required of you. He will help the infirmities of your mind, give it a greater steadiness and constancy, direct it in the management of its thoughts, and help it to fix them on the proper objects. Without this internal assistance, it must be owned, there is such a difficulty in the exercise, of serious consideration, to a person who has been wholly diffused to it, and habituated to a careless and vicious course of life, abandoned to his passions, and who hardly ever did any thing but what his inclination led him to, that we might well despair of mens engaging in such a disagreeable work with any degree of heartiness, or going on in it with constancy: I say, without divine assistance, this might also be despaired of; but where this is afforded, the case has quite another appearance. That the father of spirits, who is ever present with his own offspring, who

knows the make of the human mind, and in what way to influence any of its powers; that he is able to invigorate the soul, to raise it above the sphere of sensible objects, to guide and assist it in the regular use of its faculties, cannot be doubted; and there is as little room to question his readiness to do it, where his help is humbly implored, and faithfully improved*. *Consider what I say*, saith the apostle, *and the Lord will give thee understanding in all things*. We are never sincere in our endeavours to discharge any duty incumbent upon us, but God is at hand to succour, and by his continual favourable aid to crown our endeavours with desired success. To this add,

4. By time and use this exercise, however ungrateful at first, will become more easy and pleasant. The way will grow smoother, and the thoughts wear themselves a sort of track, into which they will more naturally go, and move with more delight. There are few things to which we have not been accustomed, but we perform them awkwardly at first, but custom, as we are wont to say, is a second nature; and there is no reason to imagine but it will be so here, as well as in other cases, if we do not relax, and give off too soon. Let us not therefore be discouraged with the opposition we meet, either from without or from within. Besides the encouragement mentioned just before, that God is with us, it is a farther inducement to proceed, that the pain and trouble of our work will lessen upon our hands, we shall be able to recollect our thoughts without so much ado, and when we have recollected them, to employ them usefully and holily, and this by degrees with increasing pleasure. It will be a pleasure to us to think that we are so well employed, at once approved by God and our own minds, and to find that the work is like to have so happy an issue. The things too which are the objects of our consideration, being many of them of the most excellent kind,

* 2 Tim. ii. 7.

cannot but afford us pleasure in conversing with them, after we are more familiarly acquainted.

5. Consideration is further recommended by its most blessed effects. As to mention only two of a more general nature ; the first, our being converted from the error of our ways : the other, our constant perseverance in the practice of holiness.----Consider, and the consequence will be your breaking off from your sins by repentance. You will see the errors of your ways, and be converted from them. You will no longer be able to allow yourselves in acting the foolish and mad part you have done. Your judgment of things and regard to them will be quite altered. Sin will appear the most hateful, as well as the most dangerous thing in the world ; you will wonder what could reconcile you to it, much more what could make you in love with it ; the enchantment you were under will vanish, and you that had so fond a conceit of yourselves, as the only free and happy men, will find that you were poor, and blind, and naked, and miserable. And tho' this discovery may be attended with some uneasiness, yet it will be a reasonable ground of rejoicing in this respect, that by shewing you the wretchedness of your condition, it makes you resolved to change it. And how happy will you think yourselves when you shall have obtained your liberty, be freed from that deplorable servitude to sin, in which you had been held so long, and brought out of prison into the open light, and able to exert your powers according to their original intention * ! *The cripple, who was laid at the gate of the temple to ask alms of those who came thither to worship,* and being restored to perfect strength and soundness by the apostles *Peter and John,* entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God, hardly able to contain himself, or express his joy, will be but an imperfect emblem of you, when you perceive the fetters of sin knocked off, and the powers of your souls, which vicious habits had

* Acts iii. 1.

lamed and disabled, endowed with a new strength. Such a change as this will be esteemed the most joyful event which could possibly have happened to you; 'twill be like a resurrection from the dead to a higher and better life than you were ever before acquainted with.---For this is the other effect of serious and renewed consideration, that you will persevere with constancy in the practice of holiness; will not only *put off the old man with his affections and lusts, but put on the new*, with all his divine qualities; will not only leave the way of destruction, but be continually advancing in the way of life. And when matters are brought to this happy period, you will say that you live indeed, and never lived till now. To conclude,

6. Were there nothing else but this one motive to engage you to consider, this one should be irresistible, that it is absolutely necessary, it cannot be dispensed with, the consequence of neglecting it is fatal, and never to be retrieved, as I showed you before. Now there is no answer to an argument taken from necessity, no objection can weigh against it. Is consideration difficult? Is it disagreeable? Add, but it is necessary, I cannot be saved without it; for to be saved from the future punishment of sin, I must first be delivered from the power of it; and before I shall be set free from this, I must maturely, and again and again weigh and consider things, that my resolutions may be strong enough to break thro' all the opposition I shall meet. Often repeat this to yourself. " O my
 " soul, there is a necessity for consideration; thou hast
 " no other choice before thee, but to consider or be
 " undone; to suffer thyself to be carried away by thy
 " own passions, by the enticements and examples of
 " sinners, and by the temptations of the world into
 " the pit of destruction; or to make a resolute stand,
 " open thine eyes and look about thee, and examine
 " and compare things together; till first thy judg-
 " ment is fully enlightened, then thy will more
 " thoroughly determined, and at length thy affec-
 " tions

“ tions themselves listed in the cause of virtue and
“ religion. Consider this, O my soul; beg of God
“ to incline thine heart to this necessary work, and
“ to assist thee in it; and rest not, till by persever-
“ ance in this course, thou art made wise to salva-
“ tion.”

II. Let us now suppose this charge to be brought against persons of sincere piety, whom it too frequently affects in a lesser degree. They cannot indeed be justly accused of refusing to consider, in the same sense as they may whose sin remaineth on them*. *They have thought on their ways, and turned their feet to the way of God's commandments*; they have seriously considered the things of their souls; and, as the effect of that consideration, are convinced of the necessity of holiness, so convinced, that they have not ceased using all the means proper, till they are become holy in a prevailing degree, so as to have a title to the favour of God, and the blessedness of heaven, according to the terms of the gospel-covenant. But still, they are too often very deficient in the duty of consideration, and thro' their deficiency here, come behind in many other respects. All that consideration which is necessary to the essence of virtue and piety, they practise; but not always that which is requisite to a state of greater perfection. There are several things which too plainly prove their want of consideration.

I. The errors and failings of which they are too oftengUILTY. I do not mean those which are so incident to the human nature in the present state, that it is next to impossible to preserve ourselves entirely free from them, but those which, with due care and circumspection, we might easily enough avoid. Christians, whose sincerity, in the main, can hardly be questioned, shall yet sometimes take those liberties which are not to be justified; do things under the influence of their passions, which they are far from being satisfied in

* Psal. cxix. 59.

after they are done, when they come to reflect coolly upon them. And to what are these faulty indulgencies owing, those parts of their conversation which are so unsuitable to and unworthy of the rest? There is no other so likely cause of this, as their not accustoming themselves so much as they should to serious and retired consideration; for did they consider, as they ought, how dear every such indulgence of their passions and inclinations will cost them, how much they suffer by every doubtful action, every such action as they cannot heartily approve; the peace, and pleasure, and satisfaction, they sacrifice for a transient gratification of sense and fancy, it is not to be supposed but they would act a wiser part; their behaviour would be more regular and uniform, they would not be sometimes victorious over temptation, and at other times vanquished by it, but be more constantly prepared to resist and overcome the enemies of their salvation. Consideration is not a work once for all, at the entrance upon a religious life only, or to which we are to return after long intervals; no, but an exercise that we are frequently to repeat: and doubtless if we did so, revolving in our thoughts the evil of sin in all the kinds, and degrees, and appearances of it, and the equal folly of it upon the account of the sad consequences it draws after it in this life, where it does not damn men in the next, we should not make so bold with temptations to sin, we should be more afraid of the least compliance with our inclinations, or the examples of the world in what was wrong, and not venture a step out of the way of our duty, having beforehand weighed the danger of so doing, lest from gratifying our irregular passions in some lesser instances and degrees, we should be drawn to do it in greater, and thus experience the anxiety and disturbance of mind, which the pleasure of a moment may occasion for a long time after.

2. Sloth and inactivity in a virtuous and religious course of life, is another argument of a defect of consideration

sideration even in good men. Perhaps they are not chargeable with such wandrings from the path of strict duty, such vain excursions as some are; they do not visibly and directly turn out of the right way, but where is the progress they should make in it? If we can't say they do evil, can we say they do all the good they might? Do they abound in the fruits of holiness? Are they zealously affected in that which is good? Always well employed, allowance being made for what is necessary to unbend and refresh our feeble natures? Alas, the instances of the contrary are too frequent, of christians, who at time seems hardly to be in earnest, to have little or no notion of the excellence of virtue in every ascending degree of it, and the transcendent glory of the future reward, not to care whether they attain or fall short of it, so sluggish and indolent are they, so little careful to redeem their time, and make a right improvement of all their talents! And whence does this arise, but from their neglect to retire at proper seasons, and enter into close and serious consideration of the things of religion as they ought to do? Did they use themselves to the more frequent consideration of these things, which I mentioned at the entrance upon this subject, (such as the being, and providence, and attributes of God, the end for which they were made, and what is their true interest and happiness, the infinite obligations they are under to God, the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of a world to come, and the like) as by the consideration of these momentous subjects, they have been persuaded to lead a holy and good life; would not a more frequent and longer continued meditation of them, than it may be they allow themselves, excite them to live still better, to be more diligent in working out their salvation, and more active and unwearied in the course of the christian life? We have no reason to imagine but this would be the effect.

Akin to this is,

3. That indevotion in the exercises of religious worship, which christians are too apt to slide into, and which too visibly argues their disuse of that consideration, which would be of admirable service to fan the sacred fire, when it began to grow dull and languid *. *While I was musing*, saith the psalmist, *the fire burned*. Thus while we are meditating on some of these numberless objects, with which religion supplies us (as particularly the divine perfections and benefits, the reasons we have to love God, both for what he is in himself, and has done for us, the privilege of drawing nigh to God in the duties of divine worship, and the many advantages of accruing from it, the sweet composure and tranquillity, and perpetual pleasing entertainment of a devout temper; while we are meditating upon these and such like subjects) our souls are awakened into a new vigour, feel their best passions excited in them, and have more fervent desires after God, and a more sensible delight in him, than at other times. This shows the necessity of intermixing consideration in our retirements as we see occasion, in order to keep up the life and spirit of devotion. It is consideration which must present these objects to the mind, about which devotion is employed; set them in an agreeable light, and give them a power to impress the heart; and consequently it must ordinarily be from want of consideration, or so much of it as is necessary, that the soul of the true christian is so little raised and affected in the exercises of religion, and by the most engaging objects of a spiritual kind.

4. The love of the world, which has too much the ascendent over some pious minds, and their being so greatly moved, if not unhinged, by the shocks and changes of it, must often be ascribed to the same cause. The consideration of the vanity, and transitoriness of all worldly things; that the whole is no more than an empty fashion or appearance, which quickly passes away; that in a few days more the

* Psal. xxxix. 3.

world will be the same to us, as to those who departed out of it ages ago, nay, as to those who were never yet born in it, in respect of enjoyment, and upon all other accounts, but the good or evil actions we have done, or the good or evil habits we have contracted in the body, which will mightily influence our state of separation from it; the consideration of these and such like things, would help to give us the victory over the world, cure our minds of their earthliness, make us superior to its vain amusements and delights, and less sensible of its crosses and disappointments. When therefore we see men who do not perfectly idolize the world, and esteem it their chief good and highest portion, yet attribute abundantly too much to it, bowed down with its cares, and so fond of worldly riches, as to covet them eagerly, pursue them immoderately, and when they have got them, unwilling to apply them to their proper use of rendering their own lives, and those of others, more easy and comfortable; when we see men lifted up and cast down for very slight causes, dejected in adversity, and ready to sink under every burden and affliction; must we not say, that tho' not utter strangers to consideration, they are not so intimately acquainted with it as they should be; particularly with those considerations which relate to the worthlessness of earthly enjoyments in an abstracted view, or separate from the good use which is made of them, and the lightness and momentariness of its afflictions? It is true, upon some uncommon occasions, the passions may rise higher than usual, where they are ordinarily kept under good government, and a man be affected with some particular occurrence or disappointment more than reason or religion will allow; this, I say, may be the case sometimes with those whose minds, by the manly work of reflection and consideration, are generally well established? but then tho' reasoning and debating matters does not presently lay the storm, quiet their tumults, cure their sad and despairing, and ease

their anxious thoughts, tho' it does not effect all this immediately and sensibly, it is not without all effect, it prevents a bad matter from growing worse, intitles a man to divine assistance, and with that heavenly succour does, tho' by slow degrees, bring back the mind to its right state. The considerate thinking christian may be shaken for a while, and, as it were, moved from the firm basis he stands upon, but in time recovers his steadfastness again, and triumphs over his own passions, and the temptations of the world.

5. A misplaced and misconducted zeal, a zeal for opinions and practices we know not why, and this zeal under so little government, as to occasion bitter strife and animosity among christians, and raise those disturbances in the church of God as hinder its flourishing state; this likewise shews, that men do not consider. They do not consider the commonness of the thing, for men to have a zeal for God without knowledge, and the mischievous consequences of it both to themselves and others, to their own interest and that of religion. They would then proceed more warily and coolly, examine well before they espoused any side so thoroughly and warmly, and never suffer their zeal to hurry them beyond the bounds of prudence and charity. Once more,

6. It is many times because they do not consider, that they who are religious do not enjoy their religion. They don't sufficiently consider the nature of religion, which was not designed to make us miserable, but happy; or how great a share even false notions in religion, or a bad habit of body, attended with a gloomy imagination, and lowness of spirits, have in producing this effect. To this it must, in part at least, be attributed, that they are quite overwhelmed with melancholy thoughts, whereas would they consider the infinite goodness and mercifulness of the divine nature, the gracious allowances made by the gospel covenant for human infirmities, the sincerity of all the promises and declarations we meet with
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in scripture, that we are to divest ourselves of our passions as much as possibly we can, in judging of our state and character, and the proficiency we make in religion, of the sad and sullen as well as the flattering ones; would they consider this, and expostulate with themselves, *Why restless? Why cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.* Tho' they might not be able quite to dispel the cloud, and throw off the load which is on their spirits, their condition would be much more tolerable than it is; they would have less fear, less anguish and sorrow, less darkness, and more light mixed with their darkness, more joy with their sorrow, and more hope with their fear. Perhaps, in time, they might come to enjoy a free and lightsome state of soul, be no more liable, as formerly, to groundless scruples and unaccountable jealousies; but, by thinking frequently and impartially of things, be able to make a better judgment of them, see every object in its true shape and colours, and by that means discover the beauty of religion, and relish all the pleasures and satisfactions of genuine piety.

Let me now make a short application of this last part of my subject to true christians, and intreat them to resume the practice of a duty too much neglected, to spend a more conscientious allowance of their time in pondering things than is commonly done; that they may not be so apt to break bounds in their actions and passions, may be more regular in their conversation, more active in the discharge of their duty towards God and man, more constantly devout, more free from the love of the world, and the influence of the various changes of life, greater friends to the peace of the church, and the interest of practical religion, by rightly governing and tempering their zeal, and in a better capacity to enjoy all that delight and comfort, which religion is so well fitted to afford. Who does not see that the duty here recommended rewards itself? That in proportion as we think and meditate

564 *Ill effects of inconsideration on good men.*

more seriously, more unbiaſſedly, more conſtantly, we ſhall live better, and conſequently happier; be more calm in our temper, more compoſed and ſteady in our conduct, and more prudent in our behaviour, be a greater credit to religion, more uſeful in life, and more firmly fortified againſt the fears of death? I ſhall therefore cloſe all with this exhortation, that we never give occaſion, or as little occaſion as may be, for this charge to be brought againſt us, that we do not conſider.

DISCOURSE

DISCOURSE XXVIII.

The reasonableness and pleasure of the christian life.

[P R I O R.]

Preached, *January 1st* 1754.

Matth. xi. 30.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

NOTHING is more unfriendly to mankind than to picture religion in a form gloomy and terrifying. Nothing is a more injurious calumny against the gospel, than to represent its precepts, as rigorous impositions and unnecessary restraints. This is false representation. True religion is the perfection of human nature, and the foundation of uniform, exalted pleasure ; of public order and private happiness. Christianity is an excellent institution, and most useful, having *the promise of the life, that now is, and of that which is to come* *. It is the voice of reason ; it is also the language of scripture—*the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness* † ; in keeping the divine commands *there is great reward* ‡ ; and our blessed Saviour assureth us, that his *yoke is easy, and that his burden is light*.

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

† Prov. iii. 17.

‡ Psal. xix. 11.

From these words my design is, to plead the cause of religion,—to plead it with those, who alledge the severity of its rules, as an excuse for their neglect of them, and from a misapprehension of the difficulties of religion decline the *reasonable service*.

In treating the subject I propose,

First, to make one or two brief remarks, in order to clear the sense of this passage; and to limit the bounds of the truth which it contains.

Secondly, to represent the reasonableness, the ease and pleasure of the christian life.

These things considered, there will be room for some useful inferences.

First, I am to make one or two remarks, in order to clear the sense of this passage, and to limit the bounds of the truth which it contains. The needful remarks are these—the assertion in the text supposeth, that persons are in some degree inured to the practice of religion, and have a virtuous disposition of mind. To those, who have long engaged in a wicked life, the duties of religion are at first irksome and grievous, because they oppose strong prejudices and confirmed habits of vice: but when evil habits are removed, and good ones are acquired, religion is easy, and its duties become delightful.—Again; the natural advantages resulting from the practice of piety and virtue, may be obstructed in great measure by the oppressions of power, by the prevalence of a melancholy temper, or by wrong sentiments of religion: but where there are no violent persecutions; where there is nothing in the constitution inclining to gloom and despondency; where there is nothing in men's schemes of religion that is morose and severe; where religion is rightly understood and uniformly practised, the genuine fruits are inward composure and sublime satisfaction. 'This being' premised, we proceed,

Secondly, to represent the reasonableness, ease and pleasure of the christian life, or to shew under a few

propositions, that the religion of Jesus is an *easy yoke* and a *light burden*—We would observe,

In the first place, that the religion of Jesus is easier than the religion contained in the law of *Moses*. The Jews were a people of a low genius; so fond of pageantry, and so prone to superstition, that had they not been indulged with a ceremonious religion of their own, they would have renounced the worship of the true God altogether, and have fallen in with the stupid idolatry of the neighbouring nations. From a regard to their weakness, a pompous service, and a long train of innocent ceremonies were wisely enjoined by the Mosaic law. Besides the moral precepts, the ritual observances under that dispensation were very numerous; some of them very expensive, and others very grievous. All this together rendered that service so burthensome, that an apostle of Christ scruples not, to call it, a *yoke, which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear* *.

Is it thus with the christian institution? Quite otherwise. This hath *abolished the law of commandments, contained in ordinances* †; and in its stead requires of us a rational service, a worship in *spirit and in truth*; such as is worthy of the majesty of God to accept, and of the nature of man to pay. One of its important and essential branches is natural religion—restored, when the knowledge of it was in a manner erased from the minds of men, by vice and wild enthusiasm—reinforced by additional motives and new discoveries. Its positive rites are few, of plain, easy significance, manifestly adapted to establish a sense of moral obligations. The gospel placeth religion, not in abstruse speculation and metaphysical subtleties; not in outward shew and tedious ceremony; not in superstitious austerities and enthusiastic vision; but in purity of heart and holiness of life. The sum of our duty, in the opinion of our divine master, consisteth in the *love of God*, and of *our neighbour* ‡; according

* Acts xv. 10.

† Ephes. ii. 15.

‡ Matt. xxii. 37, &c.

to *St. Paul*, in *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*; and in *living soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world**; according to *St. James*, in *visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction*, and in *keeping ourselves unspotted from the world*†.—This is the constant strain and tenor of the gospel. This it inculcates most earnestly, and on this it lays the greatest stress.

But is the christian scheme only a republication of the law of nature, or merely a refined system of morality? Certainly, something more. It is an act of grace, a stupendous plan of providence, designed for the recovery of mankind from a state of degradation and ruin to the favour of God and to the hopes of an happy immortality through a mediator. Under this dispensation true religion expresseth itself in *a repentance towards God*, and in *faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*, as the person appointed by the supreme authority of heaven and earth to reconcile apostate men to their offended maker; as a sacrifice for sin; our vital head and our governing Lord.—This is religion as we are christians. And what hardship, what exaction is there in all this? It will help to illustrate and enforce this truth, if we consider,

Secondly, that consequently the practice of religion is much easier than the servitude of sin. Our rational powers, it will be acknowledged, are impaired, and the soul is much enfeebled by sin: the animal passions are strong and apt to oppose the dictates of reason: objects of sense make powerful impressions upon the mind. We are, in every situation, surrounded with many temptations and snares. In such a disordered state of things, to maintain a course of strict piety and uncorrupted virtue, is a work of great difficulty. However, as restraints from vice and incitements to virtue, there are closely woven into our make many tender propensions and generous instincts. The gracious author of nature has planted in the human mind, a quick sense of good and evil; a fa-

* Tit. ii. 12.

† James i. 27.

culty which strongly dictates right and wrong. And though by the strength of appetite and warmth of passion, men are often hurried into immoral practices; yet in the beginning, especially where there has been the advantage of a good education, it is usually with great reluctance and opposition of mind. What inward struggles precede, and what bitter pangs attend their sinful excesses! what guilty blushes and uneasy fears! what startling prospects and pale reviews! *Terrors are upon them, and a fire not blown consumeth them* *. To make a mock of sin, and to commit iniquity without remorse, is an attainment that requires length of time, and much painful labour;—more painful labour than is requisite to attain that habitual goodness, which is the glory of the man, the ornament of the christian, his preparation for heaven, and the chief spring of his happiness there. The soul can no more be reconciled to flagrant acts of wickedness, than the body to excess, but by passing through many painful fits and uneasy qualms.

The mouth of conscience may indeed be stopped for a while by false principles: its secret whispers may be drowned by the noise of company, and stifled by the entertainments of sense, but so deeply rooted is this principle of conscience in human nature, so clear and strong its voice, that all the sinner's arts will be unable to lull it into a lasting security. When the hour of calamity comes upon the sinner; when sickness seizes, and death approaches, conscience constrains him to attend to her accusations, and will not suffer the temples of his head to take any rest. *There is no peace to the wicked.* The foundations of peace are subverted, and they are at utter enmity with their reason, with their conscience, and with their God.

Not so in the case of true religion. Conscience is on her side: reason pleads for her, and interest joins in the recommendation.

* Job xx. 25, 26.

When religion, pure and genuine, forms the temper, and governs the life, conscience applauds, and there is inward peace. The soul is in its right state. There is an order and regularity in the faculties, as well as in the actions. Conscious of its own integrity, and secure of the divine approbation, it enjoys a calmness, not to be described. But why do I call this happy frame, calmness only? It is far beyond mere calmness. There may be a calmness in the air, though the day be overcast with thick mists and clouds. The pious, virtuous mind is like a serene day, enlightened and enlivened with the brightest sunshine. Though all without may be clouds and darkness, there is light in the heart of the good man. *He is satisfied from himself*; and is *filled with peace and joy in believing*. In the concluding scene all is peaceful and serene. The immortal part quits its tenement of clay with the well-grounded hope of ascending to happiness and glory. Besides,

The gospel enjoins no duty but what is fit and reasonable. It calls upon all its professors to practise reverence, submission, and gratitude to God; justice, truth, and universal benevolence towards men; and to maintain the government of their own minds. And what has any one to object against this? From the least of Christ's commandments to the greatest of them, there is not one which impartial reason can find fault with. *His law is perfect: his precepts are true, and righteous altogether*. Not even those excepted, which require us to *love our enemies*, to *deny ourselves*, and to *take up our cross*. To forgive an injury is more generous and manly than to revenge it; to controul licentious appetite than to indulge it; to suffer poverty, reproach, and even death itself, in the sacred cause of truth and integrity, is much wiser and better, than, by base compliances, to make *shipwreck of faith and a good conscience*. Thus in a storm at sea, or in a conflagration a-shore, a man with pleasure abandons his lumber to secure his jewels. Piety and

virtue are the wisest and most reasonable things in the world ; vice and wickedness are most irrational and absurd. To this we would add,

The all-wise Author of our being hath so framed our natures, and placed us in such relations, that there is nothing vicious but what is injurious, nothing virtuous but what is advantageous to our present interest, with respect both to body and mind. Meekness and humility, patience and universal charity, are graces, which give a joy, *unknown to transgressors*. The divine virtues of truth and equity are the only bands of friendship, and support of society. Sobriety and temperance are the best preservatives of health and strength ; whereas sin and debauch impair the body, consume the substance, reduce to poverty, and are the direct path to an immature and untimely death. Now this is the chief excellence of all laws, and what will ever keep them from being burdensome, when they enjoin nothing unbecoming, nothing injurious. But,

Thirdly, to render our duty easy, we have the example of Christ, as well as his commands. The great masters of morality among the heathens gave very good rules for the regulation of men's manners : but against all their harrangues there lay this exception, they wanted either the honesty or the courage to try their own arguments upon themselves. It was a strong presumption, that the yoke of the *Scribes and Pharisees* was grievous ; when they laid *heavy burdens upon men's shoulders*, which they themselves refused to *touch with one of their fingers* *. Not thus our great lawgiver, Christ Jesus. His behaviour was in all respects conformable to his doctrine. His devotion towards God, how sublime and ardent ! his benevolence towards men, how generous and diffusive ! He was in his life an exact pattern of innocence : for he *did no sin ; neither was guile found in his mouth* †. In his death, of patience ; for he *was brought, as a lamb*

* Matth. xxiii. 4.

† 1 Pet. ii 22.

to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb; so he opened not his mouth *. The most shining characters amongst mere men are shaded and blemished by many imperfections: but in the Son of God, incarnate, is exhibited to us the brightest and fairest resemblance of the father that earth or heaven ever beheld,—an example in itself finished, and most perfect;—an example, peculiarly persuasive, calculated to inspire resolution, and to animate the divine improvement: for it is the example of the *author and finisher of our faith*; of our great friend and benefactor; of him who *loved us, and gave himself for us*. Our profession and character, as christians, oblige us to make this example the model of our own lives. Every motive of decency, gratitude, and interest constrain us *so to walk, even as he walked*.—We would observe,

In the fourth place, that our duty is easy; because God, who *knoweth our frame*, is ever ready to assist. Of this assistance many of the heathen sages had some notions, guided merely by nature's light. But what they looked upon only as probable, the gospel clearly and strongly asserts. We there hear the apostle exhorting, *Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need* †. We there hear our Lord himself arguing in this convincing manner:—*If ye being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children; how much more shall your heavenly father give the holy spirit to them that ask him* ‡.

Certain it is, many things in scripture, relating to the operations of the spirit of God upon the mind, have a reference to those extraordinary gifts, which were peculiar to the apostolic age. But to confine the office of the spirit to the first dispensation of the gospel, and to his extraordinary work at that time, seems to us to rob Christianity of its glory, and its

* Mai. liii. 7.

† Heb. iv. 16.

‡ Luke xi. 13.

professors of some of their noblest supports and encouragements.

The scripture-doctrine of divine influences is not, as a late writer against revelation insinuates, a doctrine of fate and of licentiousness. We do not assert, that the agency of the spirit is irresistible, and lays a necessitating bias on all the faculties and affections. Were this the case, precepts and prohibitions, promises and threatnings, would signify nothing : and duty and obligation would be words without any meaning. The spirit assisteth in a way agreeable to the frame of human nature, not controlling the free use of reason, but, by help of the understanding, influencing the will, and moderating the affections. But though the mode of his operations we may not be able to explain, the scriptures warrant us to assert, that, when men are renewed and prepared for heaven, it is *through sanctification of the spirit, and belief of the truth* *. How enlivening the thought ! how encouraging the motive ! We are not left to struggle alone with the difficulties which attend the practice of virtue, in the present imperfect state. The merciful father of our spirits is ever near to help our infirmities, to enlighten the understanding, to strengthen good resolutions, and, in concurrence with our own endeavours, to make us conquerors over all opposition. *Faithful is he to his promises, and will not suffer the sincere and well-disposed to be tempted above what they are able to bear* †. What can be desired more than this ? To promote the virtue and happiness of his moral offspring, the supreme parent hath done all that is consistent with the holiness of his nature, and the agency of man. If then we are not virtuous and happy, we are utterly inexcusable.

Further : The great doctrine of the gospel, concerning the propitious mercy of God to all sincere penitents through Christ Jesus, contributes much to the ease and pleasure of a religious life.—Let it be granted,

* 2 Thess. ii. 13.

† 1 Cor. x. 13.

that the hope of pardon is essential to the religion of fallen creatures, and one of its first principles; yet considering the doubts and suspicions which are apt to arise in the mind, conscious of guilt, it is undoubtedly, a great, an inestimable favour, to be relieved in this respect by a messenger from God himself. This is our happiness. We are not left to depend upon uncertain hopes, or consequential reasonings, which the bulk of mankind are very little used to; but we are assured, that, upon our repentance, we shall, *through the mediation of Christ*, receive the full remission of *past sins*, and be restored to the same state of favour with our maker, as if we had never transgressed his laws. Here the gospel triumphs. With these assurances it abounds. Upon this head the declarations of our saviour and his apostles are so express and full, that every one who believes them, and knows himself to be a true penitent, must banish every doubt and fear, and *rejoice with joy unspeakable*. *Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* *. *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men* †. *Be it known to you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses* ‡. *The blood of Jesus cleanseth from all sin* ††. — What grace and favour is this! who can repeat the wonderful truth too often! who can dwell on the transporting theme too long! now our way is plain before us, and the burden we are to bear is made easy. No sins are unpardonable, if repented of and forsaken.

Consider this all you, if we may suppose any of that character in this assembly, who have never yet minded religion, but have pursued a course of vice and sensuality all your lives long. Though your conduct

* Matth. xi. 28.

† xii. 31.

‡ Acts xiii. 38, 39.

†† 1 John i. 7.

has been base to the last degree, your case is not desperate. Far from it. The God whom you have so highly offended commiserates your errors, is ever ready to extend his pardoning mercy to his most degenerate creatures upon their repentance and reformation, and *is in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto penitent sinners their trespasses* *. Let the wicked therefore *forefak*e his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, who will so liberally extend his mercy to him, and to our God, who will thus abundantly pardon †.

In the last place, the christian life is easy and delightful; because it leads to the perfect, eternal life of heaven. That there are from the light of nature, strong presumptions of a future state cannot be denied. The present existence does not look like an entire scene; but rather like the infancy of human nature, which is capable of rising to much greater maturity; but whatever solid foundation the doctrine of a future state may have in nature and reason, certain it is, that through the habitual neglect of reflection and the force of irregular passions, this doctrine was, before the coming of Christ, very much disfigured, and in great measure lost among men.

In the heathen world, a future state of rewards was a matter of mere speculation and uncertainty, sometimes hoped for, sometimes doubted of, and at other times absolutely denied. The law of *Moses*, though of divine original, is enforced chiefly by promises of temporal blessings; and even in the writings of the prophets, a future immortality is very sparingly mentioned, and obscurely represented. But the doctrine of our saviour hath *brought life and immortality to full light*. In the gospel we have a distinct account of another world, attended with many engaging circumstances; about which the decisions of reason were dark and confused. We have the testimony of the

* 2 Cor. v. 10.

† Isa. lv. 7.

author of our religion, who was raised from the dead, and afterwards, in the presence of his disciples, ascended into heaven. In the new testament it is expressly declared, that good men, *when absent from the body, are present with the Lord* *. Here we are assured of the resurrection of the body, of a glorious form, clothed with immortal vigour, suited to the active nature of the animating spirit, and assisting its most enlarged operations, and incessant progress towards perfection. Here we are assured, that *the righteous shall go into eternal life* †; that they shall enter into the heavenly kingdom, where no ignorance shall cloud the understanding, and no vice disturb the will;—where nothing but love shall possess the soul, and nothing but gratitude employ the tongue;—---where they shall be united to an *innumerable company of angels*, and to the *general assembly and church of the first-born* †;—---where they shall see the exalted redeemer at the right hand of the father, and *sit down with him in his throne*;—---where they shall be admitted into the immediate presence of the supreme fountain of life and blessedness, and, beholding his face, be *changed into the same image from glory to glory*.---Here language---here imagination, fails me---*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him*.---What is the *Elysium* of the heathen, compared with the heaven of the christian? The hope, the prospect of this is sufficient to reconcile us to all difficulties in the way, and to sweeten all our labours; to alleviate every grief, and to silence every murmur.

Thus we have shewn that the religion instituted by Christ Jesus is an *easy yoke* and a *light burden*.

But why, says the dissolute libertine in the gaiety of his heart, any yoke at all? God has made nothing in vain. The appetites he has planted in the human frame are to be gratified. To deny or to restrain them is ignominious bondage: but to give full scope

* 2 Cor. v. 3.

† Mat. xxv. 46.

‡ Heb. xii. 22, 23.

to every desire and passion of the heart without check or control, is true, manly freedom.

In opposition to this loose and careless way of talking, let it be considered---the liberty of a rational creature doth not consist in an entire exemption from all rule ; but in following the dictates of reason, as the governing principle, and in keeping the various passions in due subordination. To follow the regular movement of those affections, which the great creator for wise and useful purposes hath implanted within us, is our duty : but as our natural desires in this state of trial, are apt to be irregular, we are bound to restrain their excesses, and not to indulge them, but in a strict subserviency to the integrity and peace of our minds, and to the order and happiness of the world. They who allow to sense and brutal appetite the supreme command, may *promise themselves liberty*, but all the while they are the *servants of corruption*. To be vicious is to be enslaved. We look with pity upon such as are chained down to galleys, or confined to dark prisons and loathsome dungeons : but much more abject and vile is the slavery of the sinner. No slavery of the body is equal to the bondage of the mind : no chains press so closely, or gall so cruelly, as the fetters of sin, which corrode the very substance of the soul and fret every faculty.

It must be confessed, some profligates there are, who have so hardened themselves by custom, as to be *past feeling* ; and, because insensible of their bondage, they boast of this their insensibility, as a mark of their native freedom, and of their happiness. Vain men ! with equal propriety might they extol the peculiar happiness of an apoplexy, and the profound tranquility of a lethargy.

We now come to mention some useful reflexions, which will naturally arise upon the subject.

First, we learn hence the peculiar excellency and perfection of the christian religion. This hath cleared away idolatry and superstition, and brought immortal

life to light, when wrapt up in almost impenetrable darknets. This hath set the great truths of religion in a clear and strong view, and hath proposed new and powerful motives to influence our minds and to determine our conduct. Nothing is enjoined to be believed, but what is worthy of God; nothing to be practised, but what is friendly to man. Some important branches of this dispensation reason indeed could not discover, nor can reason justly arraign. With respect to other branches, it should be always remembered; *there is a great deal of difference between finding out truth ourselves, and discerning the evidence of it, when found.* All the doctrines of the gospel are rational and consistent: all its precepts are most wise, just and good. The gospel contains nothing grievous to an ingenuous mind: it debars us from nothing, but doing harm to ourselves or to our fellow-creatures; and permits us to range any where, but in the paths of danger and destruction. It only requires us to act up to the dignity of the rational nature, and to prefer to the vanishing pleasures of sin the smiles of a reconciled God and *an eternal weight of glory.* And is this rigorous exaction, a heavy burden, not to be endured? Unworthy thought! bale surmise!

Surely no man, who is a real friend to the cause of virtue and to the interest of mankind, can ever be an enemy to christianity, if he truly understands it, and reflects upon its most wise and useful tendency. It conducteth us to our journey's end by the plainest and securest path that can be, where *the steps are not straitened, and where he that runneth stumbleth not**. Let us, who live under this last and most gracious dispensation of God to mankind, *count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, our Lord*; and not suffer ourselves, by the slight cavils of unbelievers, to be *moved away from the hope of the gospel.* Let us shew that we believe the superior excellency of the gospel; by conforming to the rules of it. Let

* Prov. ix. 12.

us shew; that we are christians indeed and in truth; not by endless disputes about trifles, and the transports of a blind zeal, but by practising that universal, that exalted goodness, our holy religion recommends, and by abounding in those *fruits of righteousness, which are through Christ to the praise and glory of God.*

Secondly, This subject leads us to condemn those, who make christianity burthenfome by the addition of rituals of men's devising. The simplicity of the christian doctrine is its greatest glory. By mixing things of a foreign nature with it, its native beauty is defaced, and its excellent tendency much weakened. Yet what more common than to substitute the doctrines and inventions of men in the place of the doctrines and institutions of Christ!

The most guilty in this kind are the governors of the church of Rome. They have hid pure, original christianity under a thick veil of ceremonies, the silliest and most wretched that ever disgraced humanity, and have turned this divine religion into mere mummery, and raree-show. The superstitious rites of that corrupted church are multiplied almost beyond number, and have rendered what they call christianity more burthenfome than even the Jewish religion.

It becomes us to have a due sense of the blessings we enjoy by being instructed in the principles of the Protestant religion, whereby we are delivered from the most deplorable corruption, and the most cruel bondage. From a just consideration of these blessings, let us be zealous to secure them to ourselves, and to make others partakers of them.—Let us never presume to substitute a human ordinance in the place of one that is divine; nor mingle our own weaknesses with the plain doctrine of Christ: but let us take the christian religion, as it is delivered to us by its glorious author; and with regard to positive duties strictly adhere to

the primitive model, against all arbitrary encroachments *.

Thirdly, We may from what has been said clearly see, how groundless all those prejudices are, which some conceive against religion; as if it was a peevish, morose scheme, burthensome to human nature, and inconsistent with the true enjoyment of life. Such sentiments are apt especially to prevail in the heat of youth, when the spirits are brisk and lively, and the passions warm and impetuous.---But this is all mistake; and a mistake of the most dangerous tendency. The truth is, there is no pleasure like that of a good conscience; no real peace, but what results from the practice of virtue. This enobles the mind, and can alone support it under all the various unequal scenes of the present state. This lays the foundation of an easy, comfortable life; of a serene, peaceful death, and of eternal joy and blessedness hereafter. Whereas vice is ruinous to all our most valuable interests. This spoils the native beauty and subverts the order of the soul. This renders us the scorn of man, the rejected of God, and without timely repentance will rob us of a happy eternity. Religion is the health, the liberty, and happiness of the soul; sin is the disease, the servitude and destruction of it.

If I thought this not sufficient to convince you, I would lead you into the chamber of the habitual rioter and lewd debauchee, worn out in the cause of iniquity; *his bones full of the jins of his youth*, and from his own

* The celebrated historian of the council of Trent, after enumerating the decisions of that synod concerning justification, which they had refined upon with great labour, and cast entirely into the scholastic mould, adds this severe reflexion: "Of all these curious determinations, the greatest share of the merit incontestably belongs to Aristotle, who had in his Analytics, accurately distinguished the various kinds of causes; which, if that famous heathen philosopher had not settled, we christians, alas! had, at this day, remained ignorant of many important articles of faith." ---A bitter sarcasm indeed, but just: and it were to be wished, that this council had been the only one to which it could have been with propriety applied.--- Fra. Paol.

mouth, as he lies on his expiring bed, oppressed with guilt and remorse, you shall learn that *the way of transgressors is hard*, and that however sweet sin may be in the commission, *it stings like an serpent and bites like an adder*. Whatever the gay licentious may imagine, that to throw off all thoughts of religion, and by a course of intemperance, to stifle the dictates of conscience is a state of ease and pleasure, it will after all be found ineffectual. When outward objects lose their power to charm, and their thoughts are called inward, they are usually roused out of their lethargy, and entertained with none but dark and gloomy prospects. It must be owned, it sometimes happens, that men, who have led very wicked lives, have gone out of the world, as they lived in it, defying conscience and deriding a future judgment, as an idle fiction: but these instances are very rare, and only prove, that there are monsters in the moral, as well as in the natural world.

It will be said, that the sons of vice and riot have pleasure in sensual indulgences. Allowed: but it is altogether of the lower kind, empty, fleeting and transient: *like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the mirth of the wicked*. It makes a noise and a blaze for the present; but soon vanishes away into smoke and vapour. On the other hand the pleasure of religion is solid and lasting; which will attend us through all, even the last stages of life. When we have outlived the levity of youth, and have lost our relish for the gay entertainments of sense; when old age steals upon us, and stoops us towards the grave; this will cleave fast to us, and give us relief. It will be so far from ending at death, that then it commences perfect, and continually improves with new additions.

Let the younger part of this audience give a favourable attention to these things. The world you are entering upon lies in wait with variety of temptations. Unkind sentiments of religion will soon be suggested to you, and manifold snares spread in your way. But

be not deceived by the artifices of seducers, nor be discouraged by any ill reports, that may be brought against religion. Be determined for a life of sobriety and virtue in your younger years. *Taste and see* how good the Lord is, and you will never repent the experiment. Do but seriously set yourselves to serve God, if any of you have never yet done it, and you will soon confess, that religion is quite another thing than it appeared to you before you became acquainted with her. Instead of that forbidding aspect, in which you heretofore painted her to yourselves, with clouds and frowns upon her brow, you will discover nothing in her but what is most lovely and charming. You will confess that *the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold*. You will find such pleasures belonging to purity and goodness, as have no sorrows with them; as leave no stain upon the name, no guilt upon the soul; pleasures, far exceeding theirs, who *chant to the sound of the viol, and who are joyful in the strength of new wine*; pleasures as much superior to the false polluted joys of sensuality, as the soul is to the body, and the life of an angel to that of a brute. As you advance in holiness, you will improve in the consolations of the Holy Ghost; reap comfort in this world, and glory in the next.

We have seen the close of one year more, and are entered upon another. The grand clock of time has struck another hour. The span of life shortens continually. Our minutes are all on the wing, hastening to be gone. Many of us in the last year have carried out our dearest relatives to their funerals. We have, all of us, seen several of our friends laid up in their graves. It is more than probable that some in this assembly will be removed into another world, before the next year commenceth. Those who are now vigorous in health and blooming in youth have no more assurance of outliving this year than those whose checks are furrowed with age; and whose strength is wasted

wasted by a sickly constitution. Let youth learn the proper lesson from hence, not to be over-confident, but modest and considerate---not to be libertine, but to act with prudence and virtue---while engaged in the pursuit of pleasure, not to deprive themselves of the substantial pleasures of virtue; not to forget that they are the mortal creatures and subjects of the eternal God and accountable to his supreme tribunal. Then whatever year they are called out of this world, they will go off the stage with honour, with the applause of men, and with the approbation of God himself.

We would entreat those who have not lost their natural modesty; who yet blush at vice, to guard against the beginnings of it; without delay to retrieve a false step; to check a disorderly passion, before it gathers strength by indulgence and grows into a habit.

Happy they, who in any part of life become sensible of their errors, and with painful self-correction tread back the wrong steps they have taken: but happiest of men are they, who from the earliest stage of moral life have with chearful freedom trod in the ways of virtue, and have known no other path; who by an even course of right conduct from the first have at once avoided the miseries of sin, the sorrows of repentance, and the difficulties of virtue; who not only can think of their present state with composure, but reflect upon their past behaviour with conscious approbation; and look forward with unmixed joy to that important future hour, when they shall appear before God, and humbly offer to him a whole life spent in his service.

