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THE  
REDEEMER'S CHARGE

Against his declining

CHURCHES, &c.

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THE  
REDEEMER'S CHARGE

Against his Declining

CHURCHES,

Exemplified in the Case of the

CHURCH of *EPHESUS*;

And applied to the State of Religion in the present Time.

In which the Symptoms, Causes, and Consequences of Declensions in the Churches of CHRIST, are particularly consider'd.

First preached, and now published with some Enlargement at the Request of those who heard it.

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By *BENJAMIN WALLIN*.

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Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. *ISAIAH lviii. 1.*

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L O N D O N :

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T H E

# P R E F A C E.



*REAL for the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel is now become very unfashionable, and too generally esteemed a cloke of hypocrisy, or the fruit of ignorance and bigotry; insomuch that a person who is animated to plead for them, must expect to fall under reproach, while he that despises them, or is indifferent about his religious sentiments and practices, is applauded as a man of sense and candour. If we would escape the censure of many in this day, who make high pretensions to charity, we must be sure to avoid contending for the truth we love, whatever measures are taken by them, or others to undervalue, and sink it into contempt. Thus when errors diametrically*

A metrically

*metrically opposite to the faith once delivered to the Saints, are industriously spread amongst us, those who have embraced it, however affected with its importance, are by no means to stir for its vindication and honour. But 'tis unreasonable to expect such concessions from those who are friends to the Gospel; or that while many, under the character of Protestants, are taking pains to destroy the credit of those glorious doctrines that were rescued from Popery at the Reformation, and are of the last importance to the interest of true religion; those who are convinced of their excellency should keep silence.*

*IT is a great mercy the Bible is in our hands, and that notwithstanding the sad departure, there is among us, from the principles of our Reformers, the doctrines they preached arise with the fullest evidence from the sacred word to the consciences of many, who embrace them with no less satisfaction and joy; nor is it any small happiness there are still some left who are both able and willing to engage in the necessary work of defending this Gospel, both from the pulpit and the press.*

*BUT I apprehend the enemy has none of the least of his advantages against the truth, from  
the*

*the lukewarm and inactive state of those, who profess their adherence to it, and which therefore should not be overlook'd; for it is of great importance to maintain the ordinances in their primitive purity and use, and keep up to a becoming conversation, in order to preserve the simplicity and soundness of Christian doctrine. These must not be divided, if we would see the interest of true religion flourish. The present defection of professors, especially in their relative capacities as members of the Churches of Christ, has induced me to comply with a request for the publication of this small piece, in hopes it might be subservient, under the divine blessing, to provoke some who are greatly declined from their first principles of their profession, and their many obligations and vows, to repent and do their first works.*

*I am very sensible it is an unthankful office to attempt the awakening those who are betrayed into so drowsy a frame as to love to slumber; and I fear this is the condition of some in our day. In such a case, if a man is not happily instrumental of convincing the persons he disturbs of the necessity of the alarm, he is sure to draw on himself their displeasure, and must expect to meet with a severe rebuke, for what they will*

*call his impertinence and folly. But as I am persuaded there must be an alteration in our conduct before the candlesticks, yet continuing with us, will shine with that glory and brightness we are daily praying for; I am willing to venture the consequence, in humble expectation that at least one backsliding professor will so accept the word of exhortation, as to return to his former works; this will redound to the honour of Christ, and be an advantage to those with whom he is in fellowship.*

*ALL the labours of Ministers both in preaching and writing for the conviction of gainsayers, and for the warning or establishment of those who are under a profession, are like to prove ineffectual, if the latter remain sleepy and stupified. When such are not vigorous and diligent to fill up their character, by a holy and spiritual conversation, by a constant and reverent attendance upon the institutions of their Lord, and by bringing forth the fruits of love, it strengthens the prejudices of carnal men against the importance and influence of the truth, and administers to their infidelity. It is to little purpose to have a name in a Church, without discharging the duties or enjoying the privileges of such a relation; to hear sermons without pondering*

*dering them over in our hearts, or to subscribe for or purchase paraphrases, expositions, &c. without searching into them: yet there is ground to suspect this is the conduct of many, who are sunk into a supine and carnal frame: hence they are so soon abashed by those who despise the Gospel, and turned aside thro' their subtleties.*

*THE declensions lamented are the more affecting, as they discover how little practical godliness there is in the closets and families of Christians; for private neglects of duty are always previous to a visible abatement of publick zeal: True religion first displays itself in secret; and in our retired devotion, its decays are first to be discerned. When our Congregations bear the melancholy symptoms laid down in the sequel, there is room to be jealous of a too general omission of secret and family prayer, of reading and meditating on the Scriptures, and of every other branch of private duty. When I see a person make a practice of coming very late into publick service, without any apparent cause, I am fearful he has spent little or no time in his closet for obtaining a suitable frame for the sanctuary, or a blessing on the Word and Ordinances. For tho' in some instances it may be unavoidable, yet, considering the time of day appointed for our*  
*stated*

*stated assemblies, I believe upon examination it will be found in most cases to be utterly inexcusable.*

*THERE is another thing which I apprehend has had no small influence towards our public declensions, viz. the little care taken by some Professors of late years, to instil into the minds of their children the principles of religion, by causing them to read the Scriptures daily, encouraging them to learn some peculiar parts of it by heart, catechising them, and putting them upon, and instructing them in the performance of the necessary and reasonable duty of prayer. Our not being able to bestow special grace on the souls of our children, is no excuse for the neglect of these means; it is exceeding weak, and may be of dangerous consequence to argue against our endeavours after the spiritual profit of those under our care, because we are not able to give a saving efficacy to them. The force of the objection is the same against all instructions with respect to the ignorant and unconverted; and upon this principle, preaching the word itself, (the necessary means of salvation) must be laid aside as fruitless, with respect to unbelievers. I am inclined however to think, that the neglect of this duty is in most instances owing rather to a spiritual sloth, and declension of parents*

*rents from that fervent spiritual affection, which animated our immediate predecessors to a diligent discharge of it. But from what occasion soever the omission arises, it is attended with very bad effects on the minds of our youth; and to this I conceive is owing in a great measure that slight and contempt, which is so visibly cast by many of the present and rising generation on the profession of their fathers, without any justifiable reason, or decent excuse, together with other sad consequences, which for brevity sake I forbear to relate.*

*I AM far from thinking the Dissenters, or any part of them, whom I may be supposed principally to refer to, are alone in their declensions; there is a general scorn of religion too apparent almost every-where, and particularly to be discerned in publick Worship; a neglect of which has remarkably prevailed in proportion to the spread of these sentiments, which are subversive of the glory of divine grace in the salvation of sinners by the Blood of Christ, and other peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. I am credibly informed, in many of the Assemblies of those who are of the established persuasion, this neglect is notorious, to the grief of all serious persons among them. Lamentable case indeed! On what denomination soever*

*Soever we turn our eyes, we behold the contempt of divine Ordinances. We have need therefore all to unite in humbling ourselves before God, on account of this sure token of a growing infidelity in the nation, and of the dreadful hardness and impenitency of the people, who can thus impiously defy the Almighty, and despise his providence, by casting off the form of his fear, at a time when we are chastised by a desolating and expensive war, and a spreading pestilential disease among our cattle. Judgments which have often fore-run the destruction of a wicked nation, who have obstinately persisted in their rebellion against God.*

*MY request to the Reader is, that his candour in perusing these sheets, may be followed with his prayers for the blessing of God upon them, that they may be of some service towards the revival of vital and experimental Religion among us, to which I remain a most sincere and hearty well-wisher.*



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REV. ii. 4.

*Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

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### CHAP. I.

*The introduction, the accusation laid against the church of Ephesus explain'd, their having left their first love no prejudice to the saints final perseverance, the awfulness of the charge considering who brings it.*

**T**HE facts contained in the Epistles to the seven Churches in *Asia* were doubtless literally true concerning them, and all the threatenings and promises they comprehend were immediately directed to them; but yet they are justly esteemed prophetic and typical of the future condition of the Churches of Christ in different periods of time, and of his dispensations towards them. It is evident from experience that Christian societies in all ages are incident to the like circumstances; and as no scripture is of private interpretation, so these Epistles are recorded for the learning of the people of God to the end of the world. Christ and his word are un-

B changeably

changeably the same; with him there is no respect of persons; what he says to his Churches and those who make a profession of his name in any Age, and under any circumstances, he says to all his Churches in every Age under the like circumstances to the end of time; and therefore if we are found in the condition *our text describes the Ephesian Church* to be, what Christ says to them he says to us, and woe be to them who despise the words of the prophecy of this book. *Chap. i. ver. 3. and 22 verses 18 and 19 compared.*

THE passage before us contains, as you see, *an accusation laid against the Church of Ephesus*, in an Epistle wrote at the command of Jesus Christ, and sent by John to the Angel, or Minister who had the oversight of that Church. It is prefaced with a description of him who sends it, who is represented as *holding the seven stars in his right hand, and walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*: the signification of which figures is obvious from the last verse of the preceding chapter; and there are various instructions to be gather'd from this representation for the encouragement of the faithful disciples of Christ, which the brevity I intend will not permit me to mention.

THE Epistle goes on to take notice of the zeal and fruitfulness of this Church: [*ver. 2, 3.*] the sense of which seems to be as follows:  
 “ *I know thy works, and thy labour, &c. thy in-*  
 “ *dustry*

“ dustry, care, and pains in maintaining the  
“ purity of my doctrine, and my ordinances,  
“ and tho’ exercised with many trials, thou  
“ hast endured them with patience; yea, such an  
“ indignation hast thou continued to discover  
“ against sin and error, that *thou canst not bear*  
“ *them which are evil*, either in doctrine, or  
“ practice. Such a becoming diligence has  
“ been used in examining those that have been  
“ received into thy communion, that their spi-  
“ rits have been tried whether they be of God;  
“ and thou hast been still more exact and care-  
“ ful in examining those who have claimed the  
“ Apostolical Character without any Autho-  
“ rity from Christ, and hast *found them*  
“ *liars*. Thus thou hast detected many pre-  
“ tenders of this sort, bearing thy testimony  
“ against, and rejecting of them: This thy  
“ zeal has exposed thee to much reproach and  
“ persecution, not only from the prophane of  
“ the world, but also, and more especially,  
“ from these hypocritical professors and their  
“ adherents; *but thou hast born up with cou-*  
“ *rage and constancy*; and this thou hast done  
“ not out of ostentation, or for the sake of con-  
“ tention, or with any sinister view, but *for*  
“ *my name’s sake*, purely out of love to me,  
“ and with regard to my honour, thou *hast la-*  
“ *boured, and hast not fainted.*” Noble Cha-  
racter indeed! How beautiful is a Church of  
Christ thus exerting herself? And how honour-  
able doth this Church appear, when her Lord  
condescends to bear witness in this manner to  
her becoming conduct? B 2 BUT

BUT the Epistle does not run thus smooth and delightful to the End; had it stopp'd here, we should have finished the account with a pleasing admiration: but, alas, the note changes! and here is a melancholy antithesis in the text which calls for lamentation. *Nevertbeless,*  
 “ notwithstanding all this thy former zeal and  
 “ fruitfulness, O thou Church of *Ephesus*, once  
 “ so famous for thy watchfulness and diligence,  
 “ thy courage and constancy for my name's  
 “ sake, *I have a charge against thee, because*  
 “ thou are declined and fallen, *thou hast left*  
 “ *thy first love.*” Sad news indeed! what went before in this epistle was *highly in favour* of this Church, and much to their honour; but this is *against* her, and *greatly to her disgrace*, and carries in it an awful intimation of the displeasure of him that wrote it.

IN the words we may observe,

(1.) THE Charge; and

(2.) THE Person that lays it.

(1.) THE Charge, *viz. Thou hast left thy first love.*

CHRISTIAN love is a spiritual grace, which has God and Christ for its prime objects, and naturally displays itself upon every person, and every thing that bears their image and authority; and as it is that which no man, in his natural

tural and depraved state experiences; *for the carnal mind is enmity against God*, [Rom. viii. 7.] so it is what no true believer is destitute of, *for he that loveth not, knoweth not God; i. e.* is a stranger to the regenerating influences of the Divine Spirit, and fellowship with God; *for God is love*, [1 John iv. 8.] Indeed brotherly love, which is the fruit of this grace, seems intended in this passage; but the principle itself must needs be included: for if he that is cold and unprofitable to his Brother, lays himself under suspicion with regard to his relation to God, and wants the evidence of being his son, because he is destitute of the fruits of divine love in the heart; surely the man in whose heart this love dwells not, can have no justifiable claim to this Character. This love is wrought by the almighty energy of the Divine Spirit; he implants this principle in regeneration, by his illuminating and attracting influences, as a Spirit of life from Christ, and the Spirit of adoption from the Father; hence it is said, *the fruit of the Spirit is love.* [Gal. v. 22.]

Now when this divine principle is wrought, in the soul, it abides there, whosoever is born of God his seed remaineth in him, says the Apostle, [1 John iii. 9.] There is no extirpating this principle; it would be a work unworthy its glorious Agent, considering the professed end of his sanctifying influences, *viz.* the salvation of the subject, if any power in earth or hell could possibly destroy it: but we know  
from

from the word of the Lord, as well as the nature of the thing, it is an eternal principle; for *we are confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: [Philip. i. 6.]* And tho' what the Apostle takes notice of with so much pleasure and triumph, [*Romans viii. 39.*] is generally understood as referring to the love of God to his people, yet it is at least applicable to their love to him. *Not any creature shall be able to separate them.* And therefore the Believer may be persuaded neither Satan, nor his indwelling Corruptions, (from which the danger is naturally the greatest) I say the Believer may be fully assured that neither of these, much less *any other creature shall be able to separate him from the love of God, which his Spirit has kindled in his heart, and which is in Christ Jesus his Lord.* This divine principle exerted under the assistance of its blessed author, is the spring of all those spiritual exercises and duties, whereby the disciples of Christ distinguish themselves under a profession of his name, and in fellowship one with another.

IT must be acknowledged, that in this state of imperfection, this love is liable, from a variety of causes, to decline in its vigour, in proportion to which its precious fruits disappear, and this is verified in the Instance before us. There was formerly much of this love to God and Christ discovered in the temper and conduct of the members of the Church at *Ephesus,*

sus, but now they were declined, and charged with *leaving*, or relinquishing the vigorous exercise of it, tho' not with entirely *losing* it. As our translators render it *thou hast LEFT thy first love*; so any one that will examine the original will find \* the word by no means necessarily implies the final and total loss of that to which it is applied, but is clearly expressive of a remitting, or abating in the fervency of it: † I mention this because it is asserted, that this text destroys the *protestant* doctrine of the saints final perseverance; tho' I apprehend without the least foundation; for if it were admitted that the term might be translated *lost*, it is to be observed the words would not then read, they had lost *their love*, but *their first love*; which plainly intimates love still subsisted among them, and that the degree of this love, and those fervent actings by which it formerly discovered itself, was lost, and not the essence or existence of the principle itself.

BESIDES,

\* Ἀφίηκας from ἀφίημι, *relinquo, remitto, omitto*—not *amittere*, to lose his love; but *remittere*, to abate of the fervency thereof.—The same word is used in the *Septuagint*, 1 *Kings* xvii. 20. of *David's* leaving the sheep to a keeper, when he fought *Goliath*, to which he afterwards returned. *Vid. Leigh's Critica sacra*. The word agrees to the Hebrew וָעָזַב. *Vid. Tremmius*, Vol. I. p. 232.

† The Papists of the seminary at *Rheims*, who translated the New Testament out of the vulgar *Latin*, with great confidence assert, that this Text plainly refutes that which some hereticks hold, *That a man once in the grace of charity can never fall from it*. See *Dr. Fulk's* confutation of the false glosses of that set of men, printed *anno 1601*.

BESIDES, supposing it was said they had *lost their love*, it is spoken to a *collective* Body, and it is no just arguing here from a general to a particular. If it could be demonstrated that all the Churches in *England* were utterly destitute of love to God, it would fall short of proving that any one true Believer ever lost this principle of Divine Grace, which we are speaking of; since (tho' in charity we hope better of every visible body of saints incorporated in a Church state, how much soever declined, yet) it is not *impossible* but there might be the form of a Church without any one true Believer in it; and till this is proved *impossible*, I think it is unreasonable to argue from the defection of a Church, to the falling away of any true Believer: and therefore all objections against the important doctrine of perseverance, taken from such instances, are to be rejected, as having no foundation in the word of God, or the reason of things: and consequently the insinuations of its Adversaries from this text, in favour of that *uncomfortable, unscriptural, and Popish* doctrine of falling away from grace, are impertinent and groundless.

THE matter of the accusation against this Church of *Ephesus* was not their having *lost* their love; for love they had still, as appears from the testimony bore in the context: but *they are* charged with having fallen off, gone backward, and not keeping up to *their* former zeal, courage,



rage, and fruitfulness, which was greatly to their shame and reproach, as it is to every Community under the like declension. But I proceed,

2dly, To consider who it is that lays this Charge against the Church of *Ephesus*.

THIS is a Circumstance of great weight, and has no small influence on the importance and consequence of an accusation, as might easily be shewn. The professed disciples of Christ and his visible Churches composed of such, have many accusers. The Devil is not a little forward to this work; this adversary is unwearied in his accusations of the brethren, as appears from [*Rev. xii. 10.*] and doubtless lays his charges against them in a *collective* as well as an *individual* view. The men of the world, as they naturally despise and hate such who are separated from them by a profession of the name of Christ, and that in proportion to their zeal and spirituality of conversation, are ready to accuse them upon every false step, and every apparent deficiency, either as a body, or separately considered. And if they were at a loss for facts of this kind, (as would to God they always might be) yet they will rail against them unjustly, rather than fail of charging them with hypocrisy, and slanderously accusing even their good conversation. Sister Churches may accuse a Church of Christ, they may have just cause of complaint against her, or may accuse her thro' inadvertency

C

advertency and misunderstanding without foundation: for Churches are not infallible, and sometimes err in their complaints against each other. Now accusations from either of these Quarters are to be deprecated, they often fill the minds of good men with sorrow, throw a Community into much trouble and confusion, hurt its character, and terrify the minds of the members. Charges brought from these accusers are not to be disregarded, but all occasions for them, as much as possible, avoided. But of how much greater importance and more deserving serious attention, is a charge from Christ himself, who is the Person that lays the accusation in our text.

THE words stand in immediate connexion with the first verse: *These things says he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, i. e. Jesus Christ; I have somewhat against thee, &c.*

THERE are three things that aggravate this charge and render it awful, which are to be gathered from the consideration of him that lays it.

- (1.) THE truth of the fact.
- (2.) THE heinous nature of the crime, and,
- (3.) THE dreadful consequences of impenitency under it.

*First,*

*First*, THIS charge is awful from him who lays it, as it is, and must be undoubtedly fact: This is certain from the infinite knowledge and inviolable faithfulness of Jesus Christ, who is the *Amen, the true and faithful witness*, [Chap. i. 3.] The Epistle to the Church of *Laodicea* is ushered in with this consideration, [Chap. iii. 14.] Christ is no false accuser; others may bring wrong accusations, either thro' mistake, or by design; but this cannot be the case with *him* who lays the charge in our text; the perfections of his nature, and his Love to his Church and people, forbid our entertaining any such thoughts of him. He is the omniscient and faithful Jesus; and therefore charges brought by him will certainly be made good: and those he lays any accusation against will surely be found guilty. The Church of *Ephesus*, like other Churches who leave their first love, seemed insensible of her case. These declensions are for the most part gradual; conscience grows silent under the allowance of sin, and a people by this means become unaffected with their own condition. Now Christ's accusing them in person might justly awaken them; forasmuch as the least credit given to the report, must, without any further enquiry, upon the first reflection on his person and character, strike them with a deep conviction of their guilt.

*Secondly*, THIS charge is very awful if we consider from whence it comes, if we reflect on the relation subsisting between Christ and them,

the obligation they were under to him, and their constant dependance upon him; I say, if we consider all these circumstances the heinousness of the crime will abundantly appear. This accusation was not laid by a stranger, or an enemy, one that had no affection for, or stood in no relation to the Church of *Ephesus*; but by him, who was her Friend and Redeemer, her Lord, Head, and Husband; for this is the relation Christ stands in to every visible Church, and indeed to every individual believer as well as to the Catholick Church, or body of the elect in general. It was laid by him, who had done great things for her, and laid her under the highest obligations; and, in a word, by him on whom she absolutely depended for all supply as a Church, for her protection, for her furniture, and for her continuance. These considerations shew the rebellion, ingratitude, and folly of all such back-slidings, and how threatening an aspect the displeasure of Christ must carry within, which is a great addition to the awfulness of the charge, especially if we subjoin,

*Thirdly*, THE power and authority Christ has, as God and Mediator, to take vengeance on those who, being found guilty, are impenitent. These things taken together render the accusation very solemn and important; and it is as if he had said, “ I the true and faithful witness, I your sovereign Lord and gracious Redeemer, who gave you being, who have from time to time supplied you with every  
“ needful

“ needful thing, and done great wonders for,  
“ and in the midst of you; I, on whom you  
“ depend for your continuance and prosperity,  
“ and am able to save or destroy; I, who have  
“ all authority to recompense vengeance on  
“ them that despise me, and slight my cause;  
“ *I have somewhat against thee, because thou*  
“ *hast left thy first love.*” This was the case of  
the Church of *Ephesus*; she was greatly fallen  
off from her zeal and affection for Christ and  
his cause, and had abated much in that fervency  
and fruitfulness she had formerly been famous  
for. This the Lord Jesus Christ himself charges  
her with, which might justly awaken her to a  
sense of her aggravated crime, and of his dis-  
pleasure, and ought to have deeply humbled  
every particular member before him, lest he  
shou’d come forth in a way of judgment against  
them.

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## C H A P. II.

*Some general observations from the charge brought  
against the Ephesian Church for having left  
her first love, applicable to the Churches of  
Christ in all Ages, &c.*

**H**AVING, in the former chapter, ex-  
plained the case of the Church of *Ephesus*, and, I hope, set it in a true light, I proceed to lay down the following observations,  
*viz.*

(I.) THAT

(I.) THAT it is usual for the Churches of Christ to be very zealous and active, upon their first establishment.

(II.) IT has been found by sad experience, that Churches, once famous for their love and fruitfulness, have declined and abated in their zeal for the name and cause of Christ, and vital Religion. And,

(III.) THAT all such declensions are taken notice of by Jesus Christ, are highly displeasing to him, and are such, against which he will surely, sooner or later, testify his resentments.

THESE truths are obvious to every observing Christian, and are so evidently founded, partly on the sacred Word, and partly on the experience of all Ages, that it would be needless to take up time in the proof of them.

IF we consider the materials of a Church, when first gathered, we shall not wonder at the activity and zeal discovered in the midst of it. Whenever *such* a Community is raised, especially where darkness and ignorance have formerly reigned, as was the case at *Ephesus*, whose Inhabitants were very remarkable for their Idolatry, it is always owing to the mighty power of the Divine Spirit working with the word of faith, enlightening, convincing, and converting such who were afar off from God, and dead in trespasses in sins. Now 'tis reasonable  
to

to suppose, that altho', where the word of the Gospel has thus prevailed, before a competent number are sufficiently disciplined into the order of Christ's house, some hypocritical person, or persons, may creep in among them, (as seem'd to be the case in the earliest times) yet, I say, it is reasonable, and in charity we ought to conclude, that the greatest number of those who constitute a Church, on its first settlement, are indeed true disciples, whose hearts are glowing with sincere and ardent affection to Christ. These persons, in the love of their espousals, and the kindness of their youth, are studying how to testify their affection to Christ, being willing to deny themselves, or, as far as they can judge, even to lay down their lives for his sake. Young converts, who have been lately delivered from the terrors of an awaken'd conscience, in the views of death and damnation for sin, by a manifestation of the all-sufficient Saviour, and appropriating faith in his blood, they are filled with peace and joy; they see such an excellency in the Person, offices, sacrifice, and grace of the Redeemer, and are so sensible of their infinite obligations to him, for dying in their room and stead, that his love constrains them to make the most lively and affectionate returns. Such persons unfeignedly delight in his word, his ordinances, and his people; and every person, instamp't with his image, and bearing his authority, is highly esteem'd and readily embraced by them. Now a body corporate, compos'd chiefly of such members  
whose

## 16 *The Redeemer's Charge*

whose hearts burn with love to Christ, must needs be very active and zealous, according to their light in those things which their Lord has appointed, and which make for the advancement of his honour in the world, and their mutual edification.

CHURCHES are indeed establish'd through other occasions, sometimes through divisions that happen among those who are in communion together, which may arise either from the ill spirits of some, who promote contention, and cause a separation; or from the corruptions that may have crept into a Church, to the offence of many, whereby they were obliged to set up a separate community, to satisfy their consciences. These sad occasions are to be avoided if possible, yet sometimes are permitted and over-ruled for the raising honourable and useful Communities in the world: but in these instances I apprehend the observation will also hold, especially in the latter, which most frequently happens. I believe it will appear upon examination, that if for the sake of any despised or neglected Doctrine or Ordinance of the Gospel, after proper endeavours to convince the Body of their guilt, any number of Members separate and embody themselves, a peculiar zeal for the glory of Christ, and love to each other, will commonly be found to prevail upon this their first establishment: witness the temper and conduct of the Protestant Churches at the glorious Reformation from Popery, and the behaviour



haviour of the Protestant Dissenters in this land at their first separation from the Establishment upon the same principles: On the mentioning of which, one can scarce forbear at least to wish that the like zeal had continued to this day.

BUT, lively and vigorous as the Churches of Christ are upon their first setting out, 'tis evident that, thro' one temptation or another, they are liable to decay, and to *leave* this their *first love*. Such was the Instance of the Church of *Ephesus*, and every Age has produced too many examples of this sad truth: Our land abounds with instances of the same kind, to be lamented over. What numbers of Churches, once famous for their zeal and fruitfulness, bear the tokens of this melancholy alteration? Are there not, in all the denominations of Protestant Dissenters, many Communities, where formerly the honour of Christ, and the mutual welfare of the members were prosecuted with that unanimity and vigour, that it was evident to all about them, which now, if we may judge by outward appearance, tho' they may not openly disavow the doctrines of the Gospel, and change the ordinances of Christ, yet they are sadly declined from their first love? How are the members of many Churches seized, in these days, as with a dead palsy? Are they not as cold and as inactive in spiritual things, and what concerns the body they belong to, as a natural limb when stagnated and wither'd with that frightful disease? Such is the stupidity and

unprofitableness of too many, who continue in the relation of Church-membership in our day ; there appears no warmth of Christian love, no motion towards works of edification ; these members have the same unhappy influence on the spiritual body, as the natural members have on the body of a man, when under the circumstance before-mentioned : they sink the spirits, they fill the lively members with discouraging apprehensions, they chill the whole constitution, and occasion their fellow-members to move heavily, so that the love of the best circulates but slowly ; and when this is the case, very little is done by that Church either for the glory of the Redeemer, or the advantage of precious and immortal souls. Thus we see it is often found, after the sad example of the *Ephesians*, that Churches, once famous for their vigour and fruitfulness, decline from their zeal, or, as in the words of the text, *leave their first love*.

Now, when Churches decline in this manner, the Lord Jesus Christ takes notice of it, and is greatly offended with it ; his eyes are upon those who engage in fellowship under a profession of his name : he walks among the golden candlesticks, and however insensible a cold and lifeless people may be themselves of their defection, Christ marks every degree of apostacy, and remembers how short they come of their former zeal. These abatements and shameful backslidings are highly displeasing to the Redeemer, who is very jealous of his glory ;  
and

and nothing is more provoking to him, than to behold his institutions despised and abused by those to whom they are committed: A cold and formal people, who make light of the provisions of his infinite wisdom and love, are very obnoxious in his sight. It is no better than flying in the face of Christ, insulting his dignity, and trampling upon his grace, to treat the sacred privileges of his house with indifference; and tho' he may wait long, and manifest great patience towards Churches in this lifeless condition, yet after many warnings, if they repent not, they must expect he will testify his resentment against them, in a manner suitable to the righteousness and dignity of his Character.

THIS being the state of the case, and the declining condition of the Churches being so visible in our lukewarm day, I shall, for our further improvement of this awful Complaint, consider it in the following method.

*First*, I SHALL attempt to shew by what symptoms it will appear, that a Church of Christ has *left her first love*.

*Secondly*, POINT out some of the principal causes of these declensions;

*Thirdly*, CONSIDER how Christ expresses his displeasure, at all such *defections from a lively zeal for his Interest and Glory*.

BUT before I proceed, I would premise, that

THE charge given in the text by our Lord against this Church is applicable, not only to all other Churches, but also to every individual disciple of Christ, and more especially should every Church-member apply it for his own warning; tho' I have chosen to follow the case the text relates to, and with a view to the present melancholy situation of Churches, lamented by all serious Persons in the midst of us, to consider it as referring to profess'd Saints in a collective capacity; yet each particular Christian should examine himself, and look back on his former experience and conduct, and upon conviction of backsliding receive these awful words, as spoken to his own soul: I shall therefore take leave to make one reflection applicable to particular Persons, *viz.*

THIS should alarm slothful Professors, who, notwithstanding visible and great declensions from their former love, are satisfying themselves at least, if they can keep up their character in the Church to which they belong, and are under no censure by the Community with whom they have fellowship. It must be owned with grief, many are so hardened and scornful in the present day, that they despise the censures of a Church, tho' founded on the plainest scriptural authority; it is sometimes seen that reproofs, ministred by a Church of Christ according to the divine rule, are treated with contempt or anger, and set the delin-

delinquents a reviling instead of repenting: such Despisers are far gone in impenitence and unbelief indeed! But there are many Professors who, though they have not thus trampled on all the power invested in a Church by the Lord for edification, nor so despised their privilege, as to make it an indifferent thing whether they are in fellowship or not; yet they remain unconcerned, in a supine and negligent state, and seem to think, if their station in the Church is unimpeached, and if they are in full Communion, all is well: this is the case with some who have notoriously left their first love, and who do by no means maintain their former zeal for the glory of Christ, and the prosperity of that body, of which they, by their own consent and desire, are constituent members. There are some Professors who are thus at ease in *Zion*, and look upon themselves as honourable Christians, if they are clear of any charge in the records of the Church to whom they are joined. But the egregious folly of this will appear, if we consider the accusations laid by our Lord himself, as in the passage before us, against all his people who abate in their fervency under a profession of his Name. Know, O backsliding Christian, Christ has somewhat against you, tho' his Church has not: If you have left your first love, it will be of little comfort or advantage to you hereafter, that you have escaped the censure of the Church, under your unprofitable conduct, since it evidently appears the Lord himself, whose judgment is in truth and righteousness,

teouness, will surely censure you. Perhaps it will appear hereafter, that Christ has a charge against the Church to which you stand related, among other things, because they have not duly exhibited and prosecuted a charge against you : this may be an instance of their declension and disobedience, which if it does not add to your guilt, can never be supposed to diminish it. 'Tis a great mercy to have the watchfulness of a Church over us ; or, if we go astray, to have its discipline properly exercised upon us. These are some of the privileges of Christian fellowship ; but if the Community to which we relate has so abated in its zeal, as to let us alone under our manifest departure from our first love, either for want of care or courage, there is nevertheless an accusation in Christ's Book against us ; he notes all our unfaithfulness, ingratitude, and disobedience. There is not a neglect we are guilty of, or an evil practice we allow ourselves in, under a profession of his name, and as members of a particular Church, but he will reckon with us for. Let every Christian therefore, who values the comfortable presence of his Lord, and the tokens of his love, search his own heart and ways, and under all his declensions, remember *from whence he is fallen, and repent, and do his first works* ; for otherwise he must not expect to escape some severe token of his displeasure. I now come to the prosecution of the particulars proposed. And,

*First,*

First, I AM to shew by what symptoms it will appear, that a Church of Christ has left her first love.

IN general, the relinquishment of this love is to be observed by a decay of its fruits. The example before us shews, that such declensions are discernible in the temper and conduct of a people, who are negligent and slothful in the discharge of those duties incumbent upon them. In the verse following the text, the Church of *Ephesus* is charged with not doing her *first works*: *i. e.* there was a ceasing from the performance of those things she was heretofore in the practice of, which tended to the glory of her Lord, the advantage of his interest in general, and the edification of her own particular body: so when any Church has left its first love, it will discover itself in an indifferency and backwardness to, if not a total neglect of many necessary duties and works, which when fervent in spirit were diligently performed.

To enter into a minute consideration of the many duties incumbent on, and exercised in a Community of Christians while in their pristine zeal; and to shew how these are neglected when they are fallen into the sad circumstances mention'd in the text, would take up too much room; let it therefore suffice, that I touch on some common, known instances, whereby a Community thus declined will appear to be so. And,

(1.) THIS

(1.) THIS abatement of love will be visible in their publick assemblies. A Church of Christ properly speaking, has no personal appearance, but as its several Members are collected together for those exercises appointed for her edification; such are prayer, and singing the praises of God together, hearing the word, attending the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of discipline. Thus far a Christian Church agrees with all other Societies, *viz.* it is a *collective* Body; and I think it must be allowed, that the gatherings together of the individual Members at stated, convenient seasons, for the particular ends of its incorporation, are necessary to its edification, and indeed to its existence. Now a concern for maintaining these assemblies is what Churches, when first settled, are noted for, or when upon any remarkable revival their love is fervent; but when a people grow cold, these meetings together are soon neglected. There are two considerations indeed, which one would think should be effectual against this destructive practice of forsaking these Assemblies, even tho' the affections of a People should in a great measure abate, *viz.* (1.) The voice of reason, with respect to the absolute necessity, as I just now observed, of maintaining such Assemblies, in order to prevent their dissolution. And, (2.) The voice of conscience, with respect to the obligations Church-members have solemnly laid themselves under, to use their utmost endeavours for the support of the Body to which they join: but  
 experience



experience sadly verifies, that when persons decline in their spiritual love under a profession of Christ's name, they are deaf to the united cry of these Monitors, and being deadened in their affections to the things of Christ, are left to act inconsistent with both.

WE have a lively specimen of this forwardness to Church-assemblies, when love is fervent, in the usual behaviour of young Converts upon their first entring into fellowship: tho' it must be acknowledged, in these cold times, the goodness of such too frequently goes off as *the early dew*, their love is of short continuance, and in many instances, 'tis to be feared, the zeal of these newly enlighten'd persons is quenched by the conversation of those, who, by their standing in the Church, ought to be as nursing Fathers and Mothers in *Israel*. However, for a time usually this zeal for the Assemblies is discernible; all opportunities of this kind are desired, delighted in, and attended upon, as seasons in which the soul hopes to find communion with Christ, and her fellow-members, and whereby she may attain further degrees of light, and be instrumentally useful to promote the increase and prosperity of the Body.

LET such who have felt the power of God's grace, and who have enter'd into the fellowship of the Saints under the constraints of divine love, reflect on their past experience. I need not tell those who can remember the love of their Espou-

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sals,

fals, how glad they were then to come up to the house of the Lord. “ How different was  
 “ your frame and conduct, O revolting Be-  
 “ liever, at that time to what it is now? What  
 “ a privilege did you think it to have a place in  
 “ the Church? What an affliction was it to  
 “ you to be disappointed of coming to her Af-  
 “ semblies, even such as were of a more com-  
 “ mon and publick kind; but especially when  
 “ there was any thing to be performed peculiar  
 “ to the Church, such as consulting the affairs  
 “ of God’s house, hearing the experiences of  
 “ those who were brought home to a Redeem-  
 “ er, &c.? In the prospect of such opportuni-  
 “ ties, how did you rise early, sit up late, and  
 “ contrive, if possible, consistent with the dis-  
 “ charge of your civil duty, to be present? ”

THIS, I am persuaded, many must own was their disposition and behaviour at first conversion. When the love of Christ thus constrains the Members of a Church, her Assemblies are frequent, early, and full, in proportion to the number and circumstances of those who constitute it; all her publick appearances are beautiful and encouraging. But when love abates, the face of things is sadly altered, these gatherings together are neglected, Members are not careful to maintain their places, they will be at little pains or expence to be present when ordinances are to be administred, Church-meetings are despised, and ’tis difficult to uphold any special seasons for prayer in the Church. Thus these  
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these declensions are visible in all their Assemblies, whether private or publick; instead of being frequent, readily and universally attended to, they are seldom, late, and thin; there is a general backwardness to them, and a shameful neglect of them. Now, that the omission of these Assemblies is owing to a declension in love, appears from [*Hebr. x. 24, 25.*] where the inspir'd author exhorts *us to provoke one another to love, to prevent the forsaking the assembling OURSELVES together, as the manner of some is.* This symptom I have more largely insisted upon, because here begins the apostasy which often ends in the ruin of Churches.

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### C H A P. III.

*Divers symptoms of the declensions of Churches; selfishness of spirit, and a forgetfulness of divine mercy, the frequent occasions of them.*

**H**AVING spoken somewhat particularly to the appearances the declensions of the Churches of Christ make in their Assemblies, which fail in proportion to a want of love, and by a neglect of which many flourishing Communities have been finally dissolved; I proceed to consider some other symptoms of the like melancholy and threatening defection; and,

(2.) Where a Church falls into this unhappy condition, of leaving *her first love*, it is further

discernible in the conduct of the several Members towards each other. The first love of the primitive Christians was apparent in a kind affectionate carriage towards one another, and their great concern for each other's welfare. Thus it always will be, where love to Christ, and a zeal for his interest operates with any degree of fervency; this effect of love will display itself in a variety of fruits, each Member endeavouring to *prefer* the other [Rom. xii. 10. Philip. ii. 3.] *forbearing with one another* [Ephes. iv. 2—32. Colos. iii. 13.] *and by love serving one another* [Gal. v. 13.]

INFLUENCED by a spirit of religion, Christians will not only take delight to meet together on proper occasions, but in all their meetings will be courteous, pitiful, carefully avoiding all occasions of offence, seeking every method to be helpful, and to render each other as comfortable and as extensively useful as possible. Thus they act when under the constraints of divine love; but when this love abates, these good fruits disappear, and this lovely carriage ceases in proportion; members walk at a distance from, and are shy of each other. If we may judge by the conduct of some they have no care in their hearts, lest they should offend and grieve those they are in fellowship with, no compassion for them when in distress; they scarce know one another *in* the Church, much less can it be hoped that they should take notice of one another when *out* of it: they are unacquainted

quainted with each others afflictions and temptations (the natural consequence of forsaking their assembling themselves together) and if the sorrows with which any are exercised providentially turn up to the view of the rest, they express little or no sympathy, or discover any fear lest the temptation should occasion them to fall; and there is reason to be jealous, that under such circumstances very few, if any private intercessions are put up in the behalf of those that are in distress. Thus there is a general backwardness to that mutual endeavour after the honour, comfort, safety, and usefulness of each other, which is evident in the Churches of Christ, where an ardent spiritual affection prevails; and this discovers their declension from their first love.

WHERE this becoming temper and conduct prevails in a Church, it will discover itself in the conversation of its Members with relation to those that are absent: if the person spoken of be under affliction, or have been overtaken with a fault, something shall be dropt to express the sympathy and desire of seeing him restored: if he be in prosperity, and is enabled to walk with honour and usefulness in the Church, such will testify their joy and thankfulness, for *charity envieth not*. Thus their discourse of one another will tend to raise the compassion or esteem of those they converse with towards their Fellow-Christian, according to the circumstances he is in; but when a people *leave their first love*, slander and envy takes place, and

and the Members of Churches are too apt to rail against, and backbite one another. But,

(3.) THIS is further evident when *erroneous* or *ungodly* persons, and such who despise the Church by their continual allowed neglects, are permitted to go on without censure or rebuke. One thing in which the Church of *Ephesus* discovered her zeal was in a due administration of discipline, *thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not; and hast found them liars.* [ver. 2.] It is a melancholy symptom of the defect on we are speaking of, when a people become indifferent as to the Doctrine or *behaviour* of those employ'd to preach among them, when they are unconcerned about the sentiments or conversation of those who are in fellowship with them, when thro' cowardice, carelessness, or partiality, there is not a watchfulness to avoid, and a faithfulness in detecting and bearing testimony against sin and error in whomsoever it be found; and yet to this sad pass do Churches, when decayed in their love to Christ, gradually decline: And indeed it naturally follows upon their forsaking of their assemblies, and falling into that indifferency towards each other before-mentioned; for hereby they leave the proper motive and means of exercising the discipline of God's house, and then it must cease of course.

(4.) SUCH declensions from love will be discernable in their conversation with one another.

ther. This symptom is of a private nature, and is peculiar, as its appearance is in a great measure confined within themselves, and not so visible to them that are without, like those already mentioned: but the subjects their discourse turns upon when together, is a natural and good rule, by which Professors may form a judgment of the warmth and spirituality of each others hearts. While there is a fervency of spirit towards the things of God, there will be a frequent speaking of them with pleasure. The conversation of such who are in a spiritual and lively frame will be much employed on the Sermons they have heard, the opportunities they have enjoyed, the relish and experience they have had on these occasions, and the heavenly city where they expect to dwell with Christ and one another for ever. When in a right spirit, believers in fellowship will be glad to meet together to confer about these things; and when they are assembled either occasionally or otherwise, the love of Christ, the fulness of Christ, the affairs of the Church of Christ, and their spiritual concerns will be the chief subjects of their discourse. Where love prevails in the heart Christians delight to think of these things, and therefore will be ready to speak of them; how backward soever they may be when in a carnal frame to such conversation. This is the true state of the case: 'Tis preposterous and absurd to suppose any thing short of this will be the effect of a zeal for Christ and the gospel; *for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh*, [Matt. xii. 34.] This

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is natural to man in every state, both in respect to civil and religious matters.

BUT when a Community declines, the conversation of its members when together upon any occasion degenerates, ('tis to be hoped) not into filthy talking, such as those who are entirely under the dominion of sensual lusts delight in, yet too often into foolish jesting, condemned by the Apostle [*Ephes. v. 4.*] and at best their discourse turns upon trifles, such as are far beneath, and quite foreign to the purpose of their Christian character and association. I am sensible the people of God have occasion to enter into discourse both with the men of the world and one another, about worldly concerns, and that when unavoidably incumber'd with the company of ignorant persons for a season, it may be convenient to refrain from that religious conversation otherwise so desirable; and I am far from condemning every subject of a civil nature among professing Christians when by themselves; discourse of this sort may be many ways subservient to their edification: but I say when professors of religion, whether members of one and the same particular Church, or of different Communities meet together from time to time, without any particular view to temporal concerns, and when they have no interruption from worldly men, and yet say little or nothing of these heavenly things, 'tis a sad sign they have *left their first love.*

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UNDER this head we might observe the too general neglect of professors, as to conversation with the Minister of the Church to which they belong. 'Tis no small discouragement, in the present day, to many Pastors of Churches, who long after the spirituality of their People in the bowels of Jesus Christ, to hear no more from those under their care about their spiritual affairs. In this respect how mournful are the stated seasons (for it is customary and reasonable to fix on such seasons) wherein those who have any thing to communicate, especially in relation to their souls, are invited to come? how many weeks and months are spent without answering the spiritual end of such appointments? If the backsliding professors of our times were to find themselves neglected in their civil stations by those they expect to be concerned with, as they slight their ministers; I believe it would sadden their spirits much, if not wholly discourage them. These neglects oblige the Ministers of the Gospel either to lay aside such appointments, or at least to put up with now and then a few visits that are but carnal at best. 'Tis a trying case for a Pastor to discharge his duty with faithfulness and earnestness to a people year after year, and perhaps for many years together, and to be able to obtain but very seldom a free acknowledgment of the influence of his administrations. But as this is cruel to a faithful laborious minister, so it is a token that the people are declined from that love which is the source of all true religion. And,

(5.) To these particulars I would subjoin another symptom of a Church leaving her first love, *viz.* when animosities and divisions prevail. *Charity is the bond of perfectness*, [Colos. iii. 14.] but carnality brings contention and schism in the body. Thus it was in the *Corinthian* Church [1 Cor. i.] All separations and confusions in communities are owing to this defection for the effects of love to Christ and one another are unity and order. When this symptom appears it is a very threatening case, and there is danger of a dissolution; if not immediately, as when the natural body is burnt up in a few days by a malignant fever, yet more gradually, as when, from the dregs of some bad disorder, or some other cause, a person falls into a consumption, and wastes away. This dangerous symptom is naturally produced thro' the declensions we have been treating of: for when once the members of a particular Church become negligent of gathering together, grow shy, and are unconcerned about each others spiritual welfare, when once they come to be indifferent about the doctrine, the sentiments or conversation of their ministers, and such who are in fellowship with them; when once they leave off quickening one another in private conversation, the enemy soon finds matter for contention and division; roots of bitterness quickly spring up thro' those corruptions indulged, and the many vain persons which are permitted to creep in while the body continues in this carnal state. This naturally leads me to the next general head proposed, *viz.*

*Secondly,*

*Secondly,* To point out the principal causes of such declensions in the Churches of Christ.

AND it is easy to see that the immediate and direct cause of this defection in a Church arises from the degeneracy of those individual persons whereof 'tis composed, who for the most part are all in general culpable, more or less, and who, (awful consideration!) stand accused by Jesus Christ himself, in proportion to their guilt for every such melancholy alteration. But I shall attempt in a few particulars very briefly to give some idea of the rise and progress of such declensions; and I think it will appear in some measure from the following known occasions of degeneracy in these communities.

(1.) IT originally springs from the indulgence of carnality and selfishness in many of its members.

As the corrupt heart of man is the fountain from whence proceed all the adulteries, impieties, and cruelties seen on the face of the earth; so the beginnings of these sorrowful declensions, visible at any time on the Churches of Christ, are to be traced to the individual persons who constitute them, and are owing to the deceitful *lusts* that *war in their members*. Some lust sallies forth at an unguarded hour with success, and betrays the professor into its hands; this demands obedience, and is permitted to captivate the soul to its will, and thus brings forth

the bitter fruit; indulgence of sin lays the foundation of declension in the person overtaken, from whence the Church he is related to is infected, in proportion to his influence in the body. Here we may date the partial apostacy of a Church, which if grace prevent not will issue in its utter destruction.

WHEN persons first set out in a profession of the name of Christ, warmed with a sense of divine love, and rejoicing in the blessing of redemption thro' the blood of Christ, they are humble, spiritual, and generously disposed to lay themselves out for the Redeemer's cause; then they are vigorous and active, careful to fill up every duty and exert themselves in their several stations; but after they have run well for a season, Satan, vigilant and subtle, is often permitted to set his trap and hinder them. This is more frequently the case, where persons are call'd in their minority before they are entangled with the cares and concerns of public life; these professors unexperienced in the world, together with the deceitfulness of their hearts and the devices of Satan (an unskilfulness common to persons first enlightened) are very liable to be ensnared, and indeed are for the most part drawn aside more or less from their *first love* in this way. The God of this world presents some bait: there is perhaps an advantageous marriage, or settlement, or opportunity for mending his outward and temporal circumstances that offers itself to the professor, but so plainly inconsistent with his continuing in the zealous discharge

discharge of his duty in the Church of Christ, that the danger cannot be overlook'd; this throws him into great distress of mind, for tho' some may be so void of shame as to make no scruple under such a circumstance to seize the earthly treasure, yet where the love of God is in the heart, and even, in most cases, where only strong conviction may have affected the mind of a person and brought him under a profession, conscience will startle, and the professor hesitate what step he had best to take. Now while this net is at his feet, and he is parlying with the temptation, the great Seducer steps in, he stirs up carnal reasonings, and all the lusts of the flesh and the mind, as far as he is permitted. Well, says Satan, this may be done without casting off your profession or forfeiting your character in the Church; see how such and such a Church-member lives and acts: you may do it with as much safety to your eternal welfare as he, for this does not depend on a number of duties and ordinances. Thus the Devil knows how to misapply the *greatest* truths to pervert the souls of men into misery. Yea, further says the Tempter, thou art poor, and mayst never have such another opportunity of rising in the world, and tho' the proposal before you may oblige you to slacken your diligence and zeal for the present, yet hereafter when you have got into possession of abundance, you will be better able to serve the Church of Christ. O horrid deceiver! alas ignorant professor! how like a silly bird does this Fowler catch thee in his snare?

snare? not considering the unsatisfying nature of the creature-portion, the unhappy influence of worldly enjoyments to take away the heart from God, if special grace prevent not, the unwary professor flies to the net, and coveting after this world destroys his credit and usefulness as a Christian, and *pierces himself thro' with many sorrows*. Multitudes are drawn aside after this manner, 'till the things of time and sense imperceptibly gain on their affections, then they grow proud, carnal, and selfish, and instead of being as heretofore, provokers of love, are like cold water to the affections of others.

THOSE who attain the riches of this world at the expence of their duty in the Church of Christ, are usually by their sad example under the influence of these sensual enjoyments the greatest instruments of her declension and ruin. But whatever cause it arises from, where self-love creeps in, and sensuality prevails, a fervent affection to Christ and spiritual things goes out, and when the members of a Church are carnal and selfish, it tends to the evil lamented. We are told that in these *last days* among other exercises, the Church is to be tried with such who are *lovers of their own selves*; [2 Tim. iii. 2.] and so remarkable did this spirit prevail even in the Apostolick age, that there is a complaint, [Phil. ii. 21.] *That all sought their own, and not the things of Jesus Christ*. I have been the more particular on this head, it being the main source of every other temptation, *which takes place to the prejudice*

prejudice of zeal and all spiritual prosperity in the Churches of the living God. But,

(2.) ANOTHER occasion of declension among professors is a forgetfulness of the mercy and kindness of God, both to their own souls, and to the Church to which they belong.

THIS was the case of *Israel* of old [*Jer. ii. 2.*] *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, &c.* The Lord charges her [*ver. 6.*] with not saying, *where is the Lord that brought us out of the land of Egypt, that led us thro' the wilderness, thro' a land of deserts and pits, &c.* They had forgot his wonderful works, he reminds them therefore, how he brought them into a fruitful country to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof [*ver. 7.*] So when persons are captivated by their lusts, and entangled with the pleasures and profits of this world, it lulls them into a forgetfulness of the love and grace of God, that was manifested to them at their conversion, and when he brought them out of spiritual *Egypt*; how kindly and seasonably light, and a view of pardon broke in upon them, when they were filled with terror, and under the apprehensions of the divine wrath; they forget the condescension of the Lord in hearing their prayers in such times of distress, and the vows they made upon it. And thus when a Church declines thro' the defection of its members, there is a forgetfulness of their past  
experience,

experience; the providences that settled them at first, and how kind the great Shepherd had been from time to time, in protecting and furnishing the Church to which they relate with gifts, raising up one and another to support his cause among them, and preserving the candlestick in its place. When a people lose a sense of God's past goodness, and forget the many wonderful favours he has wrought for, and in the midst of them, no wonder they decline in their zeal for his glory.

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#### C H A P. IV.

*A further account of what promotes declensions in Churches, together with the manner in which Christ expresses his displeasure against the communities on whom they are found.*

**F**ROM the consideration of the indulgence of a carnal selfish spirit, and a forgetfulness of divine mercy thro' various temptations, as the frequent occasions of a Church leaving her *first love*; I pass on to shew,

(3.) **T**HESSE declensions are not a little promoted thro' the increase of formal professors. Hypocrites usually multiply upon the abatement of zeal in the true disciples of Christ; when such who fear God are betrayed thro' carelessness into a carnal frame, and slacken in their diligence, with respect to those they admit  
among



among them; there are persons who take occasion to enter into their fellowship, desiring for some sinister ends the form of godliness. Therefore when a Church is in a cold lukewarm state, it becomes each member to examine himself; for there is room to be jealous there are not a few who deceive their own souls in the midst of them: These carnal professors can by no means comply with the pains and patience, the self-denial and watchfulness necessary to the Churches prosperity, and which when fervent in spirit she is careful to exercise; they are not for that purity in doctrine, that strictness in discipline, that holy and spiritual conversation, which those who are animated with zeal for Christ aim at; 'tis burthensome to their minds, yea, 'tis dangerous; for as they like not to conform hereunto, so if this godly zeal should too much prevail, their contrary conversation will soon expose them to censure, and hereby they will either lose their places in the Church, or at least lose their end in maintaining them, which is to be esteemed righteous and holy persons. Carnally minded professors will always, in proportion to their influence in a Church, render abortive the endeavours of the spiritually minded believer, to promote a fervency for the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel; especially those which, thro' the degeneracy of the times, are despised. They are for the most popular notions, for having the greatest reputation, but for meeting with no opposition in their profession; hence they will secretly

or openly discountenance all those measures taken for the revival of true godliness, when decayed. Such men are very soothing, and usually have some specious pretence for the opposition they make to the proposals and attempts of others, for the restoring meetings of prayer, for keeping up watchfulness over the members of the Church, for calling such to an account who walk disorderly, and for reviving spiritual discourse, all which may have long lain neglected; I say, this opposition of formal professors is for the most part carried on under some specious pretence; a cry of liberty and charity shall gloss over their conduct, and thereby deceive many. Thus they become the occasion of a Church *leaving* her *first love* more and more; and thro' their obtaining a majority in number or power, hath many a lively and reputable Community of saints been disgraced and destroyed.

(4.) SOMETIMES the coldness of other Churches, situated in the neighbourhood, administers to this evil.

APOSTACY, in what subject soever it resides, in all shapes and degrees is infectious like the plague; as one member in a community connived at in the indulgence of sin leavens another, and thereby, if the appointed means is neglected, the whole body will be gradually corrupted: so one community of professors declining in their zeal, is often the occasion of  
an others

another going off from their former love. The iniquities indulged, and the duties neglected in one Church, like *roots of bitterness spring up* and *defile* others; the infection spreads insensibly, and sometimes conveys its poison to a great distance; but, however, where several Churches lie contiguous, 'tis seldom seen that one decays alone. It is true, the constitution of particular Churches, which are independant bodies, makes it possible, that where divers border upon each other, one may drop and the rest stand; but sad and abundant experience shews us that this is scarcely to be expected. It is observable, that where one has declined, unless a remarkable spirit of reformation has been given, the rest have soon followed. All the Churches in *Asia* were infected, more or less, pretty near together, and decayed within a little of each other.

WE are prone to be content with a comparative righteousness and goodness; there still lurks in the hearts of true Christians something of this vanity, and it often very much affects their conduct, not only in a private but a collective capacity; and 'tis evident how greatly this unhappy propensity must needs expose them to injury, from bad example. The best of us are too apt to square our conduct by this false rule of comparison, a rule that deceives many souls into a groundless hope, and most fatal security, to their utter destruction; and that betrays Christians in fellowship into a neglect of

their relative duties, and an indifferency of spirit towards the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel, before they are aware. The best answer many professors can give upon enquiry, why they are so seldom, so late, so inactive in their places in the Churches to which they belong, is that they come up to, or it may be in some little degree exceed, what some back-sliding members of neighbouring Churches do: Surprising stupidity! but such is the sad trifling of some in a carnal frame; they boast themselves in a comparative way, by the conduct of formal and disorderly persons, under a like profession with themselves; tho' they might justly be ashamed to compare their present behaviour even with their own former conduct, much less with the rule of Christ's word, and with the sacred vows that are upon them.

WE see then, that the defection of a Church arises from the degeneracy of its members, it originally springs from their being betrayed thro' the remainders of sin by the subtlety of the Tempter into a sensual and private spirit, which occasioning a forgetfulness of the mercies of God heretofore manifested in their favour; in this indifferent state formal professors multiply, who use all their interest to prevent the revival of spirituality and religious zeal, and these declensions are not a little promoted thro' the ill example of other Churches who are fallen from their steadfastness. Which brings me to the last thing proposed, *viz.*

*Thirdly,*

*Thirdly*, To consider, how Christ expresses his displeasure at all such defections from a lively zeal for his interest and glory.

THIS is clearly illustrated in the case of the Church of *Ephesus*, and plainly related in the context; therefore any considerable enlargement is unnecessary. The subjects on which the effects of his anger will terminate, are doubtless the people under a profession of his name, who may expect to feel his resentment, as private persons, and as a publick body. It is not suitable to my design to enter into an enquiry after the tokens of his displeasure against particular persons, who are the instruments of these declensions in a Church state, such will have their reward in this life, or that which is to come; but Christ expresses his displeasure against his Churches,

(1.) BY *charging* them with their declensions. Thus, in the text, he accuses the *Ephesian* Church, *I have somewhat against thee, thou hast left thy first love.*

IN the times of the Prophets, under the former dispensation, the Lord charges the backslidings of his revolting people *Israel* upon her; and by such charges they might see how displeased he was with their forsaking his ordinances and despising his word. So the *Lord Jesus* by charging his Churches with their declensions, testifies his displeasure against them.

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It is not to be expected there should be a fresh revelation from heaven, as in the instance before us; he has by this very passage issued out a standing charge against all his Churches, who like this at *Ephesus*, leave their *first love*. Christ is here (as observed in the introduction) speaking in his word to his Churches, and when any Church is under the like appearance with that to whom the words were first directed, the Minister ought to apply the accusation faithfully, and woe be to those who contemn the charge on account of the messenger that brings it in the name of the Lord. It is remarkable that this accusation was not ministred by the *Angel* that assisted in the Revelation, nor by *John* to whom the revelation was made, but by the Minister or Overseer of the Church to whom it was sent for that purpose; so that the Churches in the present day, if back-sliding, have the word administred in the same way the Church of *Ephesus* had. But,

(2.) CHRIST expresses his displeasure by warning his backsliding Churches to repentance, which warning is accompanied with a threatening in case of obstinacy.

THIS also stands recorded in the eternal, sacred Word to be ministred out by his faithful Ambassadors. When a people are visibly upon the decline indeed, there is a mixture of kindness in these warnings. 'Tis a mercy and an undeserved favour, when a people forsake their  
zeal,

zeal, that he does not suddenly, and immediately pour out his vengeance on them for their ingratitude, treachery, and disobedience: But he is a merciful God, slow to anger, and of great compassion. These warnings however bespeak his resentment against their proceedings, and involve in them the awful intimations of his displeasure. Sometimes to his word he adds other warnings by the Dispensations of his Providence; as when he withdraws the light and success they formerly were indulged with; when he removes a laborious Minister, and many other valuable persons by death, or otherwise; when he suffers great trials to the body, thro' the disorderly conduct of its members: these and such like intimations call upon a people to *remember whence they are fallen*, and should be received as tokens of Christ's controversy with, and displeasure against a declining Church. But then,

3. IT is certain, if a people persist, and all the instruction of his Word and Providence do not awaken them to repentance, he will at length execute his anger in their dissolution. This was the threatening against the Church of *Ephesus*: and what was the consequence? Christ removed the candlestick out of its place [*ver. 5.*] This the Lord will do, if a Church continues to revolt, under all the charges laid against them in his word, ministered by his faithful servants, and after many rebukes and warnings. And this Christ can do, consistent

## 48 *The Redeemer's Charge*

sistent with the purposes of his heart, and the unchangeable covenant of grace. The promises that infallibly secure the salvation of every true Believer, and the stability of the Church of God, are no security against the utter ruin of particular Churches, if they degenerate into a contempt of his institutions. The Lord can strip a nation, full of formal Churches, of all the means of grace, and remove every appearance of the Gospel from them, consistent with all that he has purposed or declared; and he is able to testify his anger by these fatal means. All the dependance of a Church is upon him; gifts necessary for edification are in his possession, and must be given forth from him; yea, the Spirit itself comes from him.

CHRIST has a sovereign jurisdiction in the universal Church, and all particular Churches are at his disposal: he is the only true Head of the universal Church, the chief Shepherd of the flock, and will let no Church continue longer than may conduce to his own glory, and the good of his true disciples: He can take them down at his pleasure. I apprehend indeed a Church (especially in times of outward ease) never dissolves but thro' her own default; and many particular professors provoke the Lord to anger, and may be called to his bar before the expiration of the Church they have been the occasion of destroying; but Christ is able, when the iniquity of a backsliding people is full, soon to dissolve them, by withdrawing his presence,  
by



by calling home faithful Ministers, and permitting disqualified persons to succeed for a while; by withholding the Spirit of truth, on whose operations all success depend. In a word, by leaving them to their own spirits; then, alas! their sloth, pride, hypocrisy, and covetousness presently introduce contention, by which they often bite and devour one another, till the Body is consumed. When carnal professors by this means come to have their full swing of power and influence, the useful zealous members, if a few remain alive, are obliged to leave the Church, and betake themselves to some other Communion; or if they are at too great a distance from such a relief, they are obliged to mourn in silence at the view they have of the approaching ruin of the Community, which they cannot prevent. By these and such like sorrowful methods Christ takes down a Church-state, and will testify his resentment against a body of people, who, under that character, impenitently trifle with his Institutions.

THUS I have endeavoured to give some account of the symptoms that appear upon a Church that has left her first love, the sources of these declensions, and the way in which the Lord Jesus Christ will express his displeasure against such departers from him.

## C H A P. V.

*An application of the foregoing truths to the temper and conduct of the professors of religion in our day, and the pernicious tendency of all notions which lead believers to an indifferency to the duties of their station in the particular Churches to which they severally belong.*

**T**HE application of the things laid down in the preceding Chapters, is easy to every observing Christian; and I think there is too great a likeness in the present temper and conduct of many professors amongst us, to be overlook'd by considerate and knowing persons. Who that reflects on the present state of Religion amongst us can deny, that in general, and especially on many particular Churches in our day and land, these melancholy symptoms too visibly appear? If an abatement in zeal for assembling together is any proof of having forsaken our *first love*, surely the charge stands good against us. How sadly is the house of God neglected! The more publick stated seasons for worship, are so shamefully treated, that (unless arrived to a great degree of insensibility) one cannot take a serious review without blushing. We agree to meet God and one another at *one* hour, and generally come together near upon the borders of the *next*! What a strange disturbance do the few that come early meet with near half the time of their devotion, from the rushing in of those who come late, and are by far the greater number

number in many places? The Minister, and they who make conscience of being in the assembly to begin with him, could never proceed with any composure in the divine service, for the rustling of cloaths, and the clattering of doors, were it not that custom has at length render'd it somewhat tolerable: And, in short, were we to wait for a decent silence before we begin, we should have scarce any time for either of the branches of publick worship. And after so much time is elapsed with little or no religious service performed, is it not grievous to see how many fall asleep under the word, while others give too much suspicion of a wandering heart, by the roving of their eyes? Many symptoms of a restlessness, during the short space, are apparent in some, who seem more watchful of the clock, lest the preacher should exceed the time, than of the word spoken, lest at any time they should let it slip: Nor will some spare their reflections if they are detained a few minutes longer than common. I acknowledge it is necessary for the most part to keep to the time appointed, and am far from pleading for a continuance in publick service to the disorder of families; but when people are offended upon every little excursion of this kind, however the subject may call for it, (as is the case of some) it is a sad sign of carnality, and want of affection for the things of Christ. This is the manner in which even Protestant Dissenters are too generally found to attend their religious assemblies.

Now let any serious person reflect on these things; is not this the true state of the case? and is this right? Is this becoming the courts of the Lord's house, or answerable to the great design of such meetings? If a *Jew* or *Mahometan*, who never heard the just complaints of our declensions, was, upon enquiry after the time and places of our worship, to attend as a spectator, would he not be surprized, think you, to see the house empty near half the time appointed for devotion? would not a stranger be tempted to think, that after all our profession, we had no such sense of our obligations to Christ, no such reverence for our Saviour and his word, no such apprehensions of the authority and importance of his institutions, no such delight in his service; in a word, no such expectation of his spiritual presence, or of a blessing from his hands, as we talk of? Men who are in good earnest about their temporal honour and interests, will not thus attend the Exchange, or other places of publick resort for the negotiating of business, according to their several professions; nor if they have acknowledgments to make to their earthly Prince, or any favour to ask of him, will they attend his presence-chamber, in this manner, if they have any regard for acceptance with him. And why then should they think it sufficient, or decent thus to attend the worship of the great God? How thoughtless soever we may be, the Lord is displeas'd with such services, and will not accept them; what he says by his Prophet is applicable

applicable to the case in hand. [*Malach. i. 8.*] *Offer it now to thy governor, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts.* Strange, that men, and good men too, should be sunk into so carnal a frame, or be so stupified, as to conceive, that what would be justly resented by an earthly Prince, should be acceptable to the glorious Jehovah, who is declared in his Word to be a jealous God.— It is not at all to be wondered at, that we have so little of the divine presence in those assemblies, in which his Majesty and grace are thus affronted.

It may be thought that in this representation I have deviated from my subject, seeing this negligence and indecency is chargeable upon the hearers of the word in general, and not peculiar to Church-members. I admit it, but I thought it not unnatural to introduce the account here, and indeed it was almost necessary in respect to the first symptom laid down of a declining state; and I appeal to all who make any observation on our publick assemblies, if many Church-members by their late attendance, and in some instances by their behaviour, are not ill examples to others; and whether when persons under such a profession generally conduct themselves in this manner, it is not highly criminal in itself, and an undeniable token of their having *left their first love.*

BUT if we look into meetings of prayer of a more private nature, how are they attended? in how many Churches are they entirely laid aside? — Church-meetings, for hearing the experiences of such who propose for Communion, enquiring into the conversation of the several members, purging out evil persons, and other necessary duties for the admonition and comfort of every one in fellowship, and the preservation of the body; are they better attended, than the more publick assemblies? If any judgment can be formed by what is seen and heard, many under a profession of the name of Christ have much to answer for, for their neglect of his cause, and their own souls in the omissions of such necessary meetings. It is complained that in some Communities there is scarce any appearance of such assemblies, which the nature of their constitution, and the command of Christ so earnestly demands: and the few who, under the discouragements of the present lukewarm time, attend the exercises, are witnesses in almost every Church, that many never appear in these her weekly or monthly assemblies, or discover any concern for the welfare of the body. The like is to be observed with regard to sympathy with fellow members in distress, and spiritual conversation among them: Some professors never give any proper evidence of the one, or are found engaging in the other, from year to year; but are mere nominal members of the Church to which they relate, excepting now and then hearing a Sermon in publick, or receiving

ceiving the Sacrament, and even these are too frequently omitted, by some, and that upon very slight occasions.

WHILE I am speaking of these sorrowful backslidings, I would observe, it is however to be acknowledged that many professors are very generous with their substance, especially in and about the City of *London*; besides other occasional and liberal exhibitions, there are many noble charities supported by yearly contributions in the Churches, and even by those, on whom too many of the sad symptoms I have been describing are to be found. This disposition indeed is truly worthy of the Christian Character; may the Lord continue and increase it. But such charities can never be thought to excuse the declensions we lament. Our bounty will not atone for our formality, nor our generous donations to pious designs save us from the displeasure of Christ, if in other respects we slight his Gospel, and pour contempt on his Ordinances. And indeed if irreligion increases upon us in this manner, there is reason to fear that this charitable disposition will soon decline, or the charities themselves be misapplied.

THIS is the sad situation of the Churches; these the tokens of declension upon us; yea, I might subjoin, that, so ignorant, or so much indisposed are some members of Churches, that they seem astonished and are even offended if their Ministers tell them of these things, and stir them  
up

up to a more vigorous discharge of their duty. Melancholy alteration indeed from those times, when through affliction and persecutions the Churches I am speaking of, were first established in our land! Then the fellowship of the Saints was esteemed honourable; then it was the mutual endeavour of Christians to build up each other in their holy faith, and to encourage one another in the ways of the Lord; then few were missing at the times appointed for assemblies of every sort necessary to edification, and then there was a general forwardness to every good word and work. O that it were with us as in years past, as in the days when the love of God was shed abroad in the hearts of his people, and the zeal of his house was ready to eat them up!

I come now to make some reflections upon the whole; and, shall close this chapter with observing,

*First*, How prejudicial to the Churches of Christ are all notions and practices, that slacken the zeal and diligence of believers in the duties of their profession?

I shall enlarge somewhat particularly on this reflection, because I think it highly necessary, considering the temper and conduct of many professors at this time, who are, I apprehend, unwarily, employing themselves in this unthankful office; and instead of building up (as  
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I believe most of them intend) are pulling down the Churches of Christ \*. If the negligence and declensions of a particular Church are so displeasing to the Redeemer, and what he will resent in the awful manner we have seen; it must needs be very injurious to the Churches, and the visible interest of Christ in the world, to propagate any sentiment, or give into any conduct, that has a tendency to abate the concern of a professing believer, to fill up his station in the house of God. It appears from the constitution of a Church, she can only be zealous and fruitful in proportion to the activity and vigour of her several members; who by a frequent and ready assembling together, discharge the duties of their respective stations in the body.

EVERY thing therefore that lessens the obligation upon a believer's conscience, or alienates his

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desires

\* It is clear to me from Scripture, that the catholick visible Church on earth is divided into many particular Churches, at the appointment of our Lord, who by his inspired Apostles instructed us into their formal constitution. Such particular Churches, I apprehend, with many of my Christian Brethren, to be distinct independant bodies from each other, and are to be considered as different parts of the one Catholick Church, which Church appears with beauty and lustre in the world, in proportion to the number and brightness of these particular communities, styl'd in in Scripture *golden candlesticks*: Now the continuance and glory of these particular communities are maintained thro' the activity and zeal of their constituent members; who under the constraints of divine love, thro' the assistance of the blessed Spirit, are diligent in the exercise of every grace and discharge of every duty. If this be a just representation, 'tis easy to see the dreadful tendency of breaking in upon the orderly and lively discharge of these duties incumbent upon Christians as members of particular visible Churches.

desires to be found active, according to his ability in the body whereof he is a member, tends to the declension of that body, occasions the displeasure of Christ against it, and strikes at the very being thereof; and indeed as far as the influences of such bad examples reach, it is levelled at the existence of all other Churches.

WE are not without delusions and temptations of this kind in the present day. It has even been insinuated there is no particular rule in Scripture for the order of a Church-state \*, this is making

\* THIS at once takes off all authority from the discipline of a Church, the necessary and appointed means of preserving the body from being corrupted and ruined, by erroneous, immoral, and disorderly members; and is in effect what is called *Erastianism*, from one *Thomas Erasmus* a *Swiss* physician, who arose during the time of the Civil Wars in *England*: his distinguishing tenet was that the Church had no right to discipline. The difference indeed is, that *Erasmus* seems to acknowledge a Church, but disowns her power to excommunicate, absolve, &c. but this notion I have mentioned, virtually destroys the very being of a Church, by denying there is any such Corporation, *i. e.* any society whose formal constitution is according to the express direction of the Lord Jesus; for this is impossible if there is no particular rule in Scripture for it. They come much to the same; for a Church without discipline will soon dissolve, or at least be so defiled as to be no fit habitation for a heavenly-minded person; yet the latter seems the more bold and presumptuous assertion. Christians indeed have differed in their opinions concerning the mind of Christ in this important article, thro' the different degrees of light they have in this imperfect state; and this is consistent with an universal acknowledgment of the authority of our Lord in his word. But when persons come to question there being any command or express rule for Church order, this overturns all things in the house of God, and opens a wide door to all the inventions of men. Christianity itself, in my opinion, in this case is in great danger; for when the Churches

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making short work with ordinances indeed: upon this principle a voluntary society of Christians cemented by a few bye-laws and inventions of their own, and destitute of the special ordinances of Christ, has equal authority with a Church which has no other essential band of union, than what is prescribed in the divine word, and where there is a sacred regard to all the wise and gracious institutions of the Redeemer; but such vain imaginations are to be protested against as derogating from the Kingly office of Christ, and as a means of introducing anarchy into his Churches, which, where it takes place; if not timely remedied, must naturally issue in their dissolution.

'Tis much to be lamented that many private Christians, and even some of a more publick character in the Churches have countenanced practices that favour of a notion so destructive to the honour of Christ in the world. Far be it from me to suppose, that all who give into such a conduct, have any selfish view, nor would I allow myself to judge any one individual Ring-leader of these pernicious sentiments; 'tis the prerogative of the great searcher of hearts to

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judge

are demolished religion is in a defenceless state: the presence of Christ and his Spirit departs from a nation when the Candle-sticks are removed, and nothing but gross darkness can be expected, as it is now in *Asia*, once so famous for gospel-light, now over-run by the *Turk*, and subject to the blasphemy and superstition of that vile Impostor *Mahomet*: for tho' there is a toleration, this is the established and prevailing religion.

judge and condemn those who seek themselves, under a pretence of seeking the things of Christ. I would hope there are very few if any such among us. But what ends soever persons may have who espouse such unscriptural notions, it appears to me that these sentiments may be subservient to designing men, who lie in wait to captivate weak and unwary Christians, and that they are calculated to destroy religion from the face of the land, and bring in an inundation of enthusiasm, superstition, and error among us.

LET us remember our Lord is a God of order, and maintain a reverence for his institutions, according to the light of our consciences, if we would escape the snare of the Devil, for he always sets up his standard in confusion. It is not a general notion of the doctrines of the Gospel, or a flaming zeal for one or two particular truths, how important soever, that will atone for the contempt of the appointments of infinite wisdom for supporting the cause of Christ. When the enemy has led one part of a religious community into an apostacy from their sacred engagements with the Church of God, and rendered the rest indifferent about fellowship in the method prescribed in his word, his business is done; the breach is made; he will soon remove the remaining part of the treasure, and find means to pervert men from that doctrine, which for a season has been the bait to unguarded persons.

**THERE**

THERE have been divers attempts of late years on the members of Churches, in order to alienate them from the communities to which they belong. It has, with too much success in many instances, been insinuated, that such are really under no obligation to fill up their places, since it is as acceptable to Christ if we are but where any of his dear children are gathered together, as tho' we were present with those in particular with whom we are engaged to walk in fellowship: a sentiment so glaringly unjust, that it is wonderful it should ever captivate any honest serious mind. Much pains has been taken to draw off such whose names are in the Churches, by directly or indirectly accusing their minister or their fellow members to them, with want of spirituality and Christian love in general, or with want of affection to them in particular, or perhaps under a pretence of finding more of the presence of Christ and communion with him elsewhere. But who cannot see that the drawing aside of professors by these or any other base methods or specious pretences, is naturally levelled against, and injurious to the Churches of Christ in general; that it must necessarily incapacitate them for doing their former works which they performed, when the members acted a rational and faithful part in discharging their duties; and consequently, that, according to the example of the Church of *Ephesus* it must bring down the displeasure of Christ upon them. Can this be an acceptable service to the Lord? must not they  
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who are found in such practices be under great delusion?

THERE are others who practically prejudice the Churches and Institutions of Christ; among whom may be reckoned, such who through an indulgence of carnal pleasure are negligent of the Church they belong to. Also those who, in the judgment of charity, are true disciples, and who in private profess they believe in Christ, resting their salvation upon him, and yet submit not to his publick ordinances. And, if there are any persons more injurious to the Institutions of our Saviour than either of these, I apprehend they are such, who having met with some offence in the Church they belonged to, passionately withdraw, and go on year after year, and perhaps to the end of their days, out of Church-fellowship; as if because of the infirmities of those who, it may be, have given them just cause of offence, they are discharged from their obligations to obey the Lord Jesus, and from being found in the ways of his appointments. These Christians do not consider the ill effects their example has to bring the importance of Christian Ordinances into suspicion, if not contempt. I persuade myself they are not *designedly*, but I am certain they are *really*, in proportion to their influence, greatly prejudicial to the visible Church of Christ in the day in which they live.

C H A P. VI.

*Shewing how this charge condemns such, who never manifested any proper zeal for the name of Christ; with a call to self-examination; and the conclusion.*

**I**T is greatly to be lamented that there appears so much of the same spirit and behaviour, with which the Church at *Ephesus* is accused, among the Churches of Christ in the present time; and that there are so many vain and foolish notions prevailing, which tend to enervate the strength, and mar the beauty of such communities: This was the mournful subject of the preceding chapter. I shall esteem it a great happiness, if the representation given is instrumental of stirring up the zeal of any of Christ's people, who may be sunk into a lukewarm frame, to lay it to heart, and spread it before the Lord; and that any such should hereby be animated to an earnest endeavour after a different temper and conduct for the future. As a further means of conviction and revival, under the divine blessing, I proceed, by way of reflection, to observe,

*Secondly,* THIS charge against the Church of *Ephesus*, and by them to all Churches and their several Members who leave their first love, reproves those who never discovered any zeal for Christ and his ordinances at all. Of these there  
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are two sorts; *viz.* some who are under a profession, and others who never took upon them the name of the Redeemer in a publick manner.

SOME persons set out under a profession of the name of Christ, in these lukewarm days, in so cold and lifeless a spirit, that they never give any publick token of the fervency usually discovered by young converts. It becomes such to consider, wherefore they are destitute of fruits so natural to the love of the Believer in the day of his espousals, whence it comes to pass they have no *first love*. Spiritual affections are not alike strong in every one upon first conversion, nor have all an equal talent for the display of them; but some zeal is found with every convert; and the fruits of this love, at least in a desire and readiness to associate with the Church, is to be expected from them. Under what temptation then does the young Professor seem to come short of it?

BUT there are others, who tho' they privately declare their love for Christ, and dependance upon him for salvation, yet never joined themselves to his disciples, or bore a testimony of their obedience to him by a publick profession. These persons do well to beware, that the contempt ignorant and carnal men cast upon the Institutions of Christ is not the cause of their neglect; for our Lord has plainly declared, *Whosoever shall be ashamed of HIM and HIS words in an adulterous and sinful generation, of him*



*him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.* [Mark viii. 38.] I hope this is not the case with many.

BUT there are others who never shew any love to Christ by a publick profession, thro' slavish fear of their incapacity to grapple with the corruptions of their hearts, to withstand the temptations to which they are liable; and to discharge the duties that will be incumbent on them under that profession. These fears are too often indulged under a false notion of their propriety and fitness to a weak and sinful creature, but are to be condemned as what indeed savour of unbelief and self-confidence; all such should consider, that the grace of Christ is sufficient for them, who has enjoined this duty upon his people, and that disobedience to him, thro' a distrust of his promises, is a very provoking sin.

To these instances it may be added, that 'tis to be feared many keep at a distance from the Churches of Christ from the prospect of the indifferent behaviour of some persons who are under a profession of religion. It must be acknowledged with grief many walk unbecoming the Gospel they profess, and that this is a great stumbling-block: but let those who stumble at it remember, the unprofitableness of those who have taken upon them the name of Christ, and the slight such put upon the privileges of his house, can afford no just excuse for the omission

of their duty. The guilt of such professors is very deep, but it is so far from justifying any indifferency to the ordinances of Christ in them that love him, that it aggravates their neglect; for in proportion to the contempt that others cast on his authority, they ought, and if in a right frame would naturally be forward to testify their zeal for his glory.

THOSE who have altogether omitted a profession of Christ's name, or under a formal profession, never discovered any zeal for his honour, are not chargeable indeed with having *left* their *first love*. But Reader, if thou hast any well grounded hopes of an interest in Christ, and art among this number; consider, this charge brought by Christ against those who have declined in his ways, implicitly condemns thee. By it you may easily discern, the displeasure of your Saviour at your conduct; for if Christ is displeased with those who abate in their diligence in his Church, notwithstanding the many things they have done for his name's sake heretofore; he can never be well pleased with you that have not so much as set your hand to the plough. If such who profess his name are rebuked and threatened because of their formality and unfruitfulness, what must be expected from him towards those who are even destitute of the form?

*Thirdly*, LET each of us who are under a profession, on the present melancholy appearance

pearance of things in the Churches, examine ourselves, and see what we have done, what we have neglected; how far we have been accessory to the declensions of the particular Community we stand related to. Cold unaffected believer, that art inactive in thy station in the Church of Christ, consider *whence*, and *wherefore* thou art fallen; remember thy former zeal and repent: Consider it is not our past works and labour that will excuse our present sloth and barrenness; yea, rather our zeal in former times shall be brought in evidence against us, and reprove the lukewarmness of our present frame, if we continue to revolt. We are never to lay down our arms, or go off from our watch while in this state of sin and temptation; nor are we continued any one season in the vineyard here below, without an expectation of bringing forth fruit to the glory of him that has planted us. So long as we remain in the body, the Church, it should be our study to edify it in love. Satan sometimes betrays a person into the neglect of his duty, from the consideration of what he has already done; he takes occasion from his having been kept steadfast, and enabled to continue active under a profession for a considerable time, to stir up high thoughts and presumptuous conceits of his future standing; and thus old professors are sometimes captivated, who were too vigilant and wary for the Serpent, when first they sat out in religion. Be not ignorant of Satan's devices; what he cannot compass at one time, he will at another, if we are not on our

watch. Beware Christian of thinking you have done enough, you must *work while it is day, i. e.* so long as life lasts. In this respect we are to *forget the things that are behind and to press forward towards the mark for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*: Thus it becometh us 'till our race is finished, and our warfare fully accomplished.

To conclude; Consider, O Believer, who hast deviated from thy former zeal, and art indifferent about the things of Christ, whose cause thou art flighting, and trifling with; is it not the cause of thy Redeemer, who has bought thee with his precious blood? Is it not trifling with the most sacred institutions, and abusing that trust which thy Lord has put into thy hands, by granting thee a place in his visible Church, and must thou not shortly be accountable to him for it? O, Sirs, consider the obligations you are under to Christ, the obligations you have laid yourselves under to his Church, what vows are upon you, and what opportunities you miss of communion with your Lord, and a blessing from his hand, when you slight and neglect your duty among his people. Consider the offence and grief you are to your Minister and your Fellow-members, to whom you owe, in the Sight of God, and by all the ties of gratitude and fidelity, your utmost endeavours after their comfort and encouragement. If these things are not sufficient to move your bowels, and rouse your carnal, sluggish Spirits, remember

remember again, and more particularly, the strong love of Christ which persevered through all his dreadful sufferings for your guilty souls, even to the drinking up the cup of divine wrath, and thereby saved you from everlasting destruction, and made way for your eternal happiness. This is your hope, if you are true Believers in Christ; and is it possible to have this hope in you, and be unconcerned about the honour of this Redeemer? Is it possible to be daily exercising faith upon him, as having made reconciliation for you, and at the same time to make lighter of the privileges of his house, than of the common bounties of his providence, and treat his Church and Ordinances in a manner you would scorn to treat any thing you have the least esteem for?

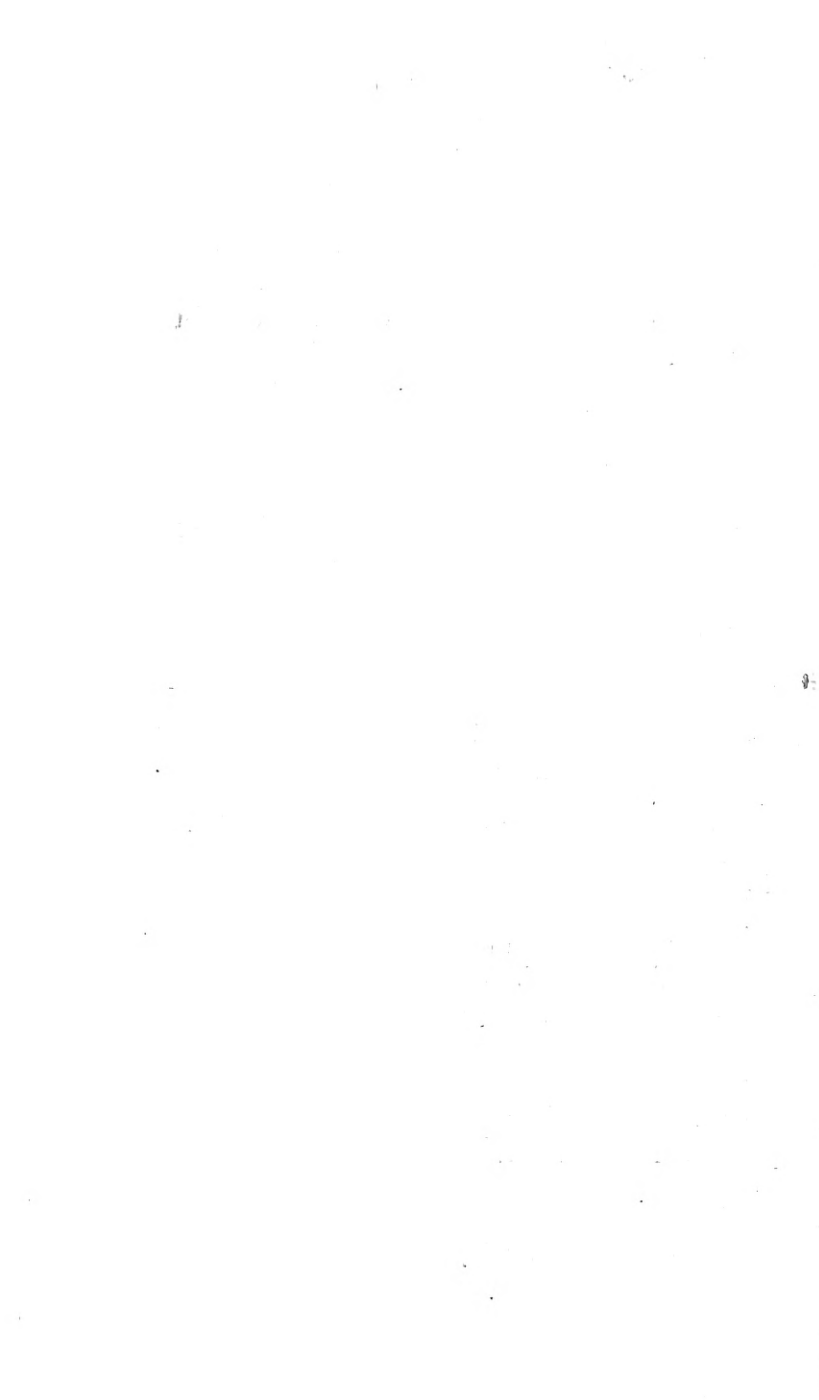
CONSIDER, O negligent and careless Believer, Christ has not *left* his *first love* to you; he is unchangeable in his affection; his love is still employed in your behalf in the court of heaven. *We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* [1 John ii. 1.] Great reason have we all who profess to hope he has loved us, and given himself for us an offering and sacrifice to God, and have joined ourselves to his people, to be ashamed of every wilful omission of duty in his house, and confounded at every instance in which we have been backward to glorify his name; for the ingratitude and unfaithfulness of such conduct is not to be expressed. However, blessed be his name, this  
is

is our unspeakable and undeserved mercy, that, if with grief of heart for these backslidings, we humble ourselves before him, his love will cover all this folly, his arms are open to embrace his repenting people; he is always saying with astonishing kindness in his word to every one who bemoans his departure, *I will heal your backslidings, I will love you freely.* [Hosea xiv. 4.]

IN a word, let us, under a conviction of the decays from our former love, invoke the Holy Spirit, whom we have grieved and provoked. A declined people are not without a charge of ingratitude and sin against God the Spirit. As men grow cold to the things of Christ, and are carnal in their frames, it will be found upon examination his glory has not been asserted, nor his influences so sincerely depended upon, or earnestly sought after, as they ought to have been. The best of us, in this lukewarm day, may perhaps on reflection see cause to acknowledge our indifferency towards him, and his honour. Infidelity abounds with respect to this glorious divine Person in our day and nation: I fear he has been too much neglected by us that profess a regard to him. The little concern we have shewn for his Person and Operations, while denied by some, and despised by others who have the form of godliness, is a humbling consideration, and renders us unworthy his notice: but he is a gracious and loving Spirit, and is ready, on our humiliation before the Lord, and suppli-

supplications for him, to return with his sweet and powerful influences. We should not therefore be discouraged from applying for his almighty aids. Through his efficacious operations we shall revive and flourish again. With contrite spirits then let us lift up our eyes to him from whence our help must come, and in the language of the Church, [*Solomon's Song*, chap. iv. 16.] fervently cry, *Awake, O north wind, and come thou south, blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out*: then will all these mists of vanity, raised by sensuality and delusions of one kind and another, that damp our spiritual affections, and under which we are wandering from the path of duty, be dispelled, our graces will renew their vigour, and be drawn forth into lively exercise. Thus we may expect the manifestation of Christ's spiritual presence, to our own joy and the glory of his Church, according to the request or hope express'd in the latter part of the same verse, *Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat of his pleasant fruits*.

MAY the Lord graciously heal the backslidings of his children in every Church of every denomination in the midst of us. O that he would, for his name's sake, descend as the dew upon our *Israel*, so shall our *branches spread*, our *beauty shall be as the olive-tree*, and our *smell as Lebanon!* Hosea xiv.





*An Exhortation against quenching the  
Spirit.*

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A

S E R M O N

Preached to a

SOCIETY of Young Men,

NOVEMBER the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1748.

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By BENJAMIN WALLIN.

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*Published at their Request.*

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But they rebelled and vexed his Holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them. ISAIAH lxiii. 10.

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T O T H E  
S O C I E T Y,

Assembling on a Lord's-Day Even-  
ing, at the Meeting-House near  
the *Maze-Pond, Southwark.*

*My dear Friends,*

**A**T your importunity I have con-  
fented to publish this plain dis-  
course, and it will yield me  
pleasure, if it should be the  
evident means of your improvement.

There are some alterations, and addi-  
tions which I thought necessary in tran-  
scribing what was composed without the  
least expectation of its appearing in the  
world; nothing however is inserted, but what  
the substance of was intended, and would  
have been expressed had time permitted.

In this day of growing infidelity, the  
Deity, Personality, and Operations of the  
blessed Spirit, are boldly denied and im-  
piously derided: Happy such who have a  
witness

witness in themselves of the reality and efficacy of his gracious influences; such trust I have concerning you, and therefore hope this exhortation will not be in vain.

The temptations I have warned you against, are frequently known to captivate young Professors, many are utterly ruined by them, and few escape some degree of injury from their unhappy influence; I would therefore advise you in the words of the Apostle, *Seeing you know these things before, beware, lest ye also being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.* Remember, that he only who endureth to the end, shall be saved.

That the holy Spirit may descend upon you with his heavenly gifts and graces, enable you to flee youthful lusts, and follow after righteousness, and keep you by his mighty power thro' faith unto salvation, is the unfeigned desire, and fervent prayer, of

*Your sincere Friend, and*

*Servant in the Lord,*

BENJAMIN WALLIN.

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 2 THESSALONIANS V. 19.

*Quench not the Spirit.*

IT has been the sorrowful experience of every age, that many persons have been excited in their younger days to make some promising shew of religion, whose goodness has been as the morning cloud, and as the early dew : Among these, some like the stony-ground hearers, having no root in themselves are turned aside ; they set themselves openly against the truth, and after all their profession become scoffers walking according to their own ungodly lusts : It happens *unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is* 2 Pet. ii. *turned to his own vomit again ; and the sow that* 20. 22. *was washed, to her wallowing in the mire.* And the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. But there are others concerning whom we may charitably hope better things, nevertheless being too little acquainted with the deceitfulness of their own hearts and the devices of Satan, are soon captivated thro' the subtlety of this Tempter, and led away with divers lusts into such shameful backslidings, as greatly prejudice their future comfort and usefulness.

## *An Exhortation against*

Forasmuch as I have engaged to address some of you this evening under the character of a religious Society, I thought it might be seasonable to warn you of the temptations to which you are exposed, lest the Adversary get an advantage of you and break in upon your mutual endeavours for spiritual edification, or destroy the credit and comfort of any one amongst you.

The passage read is short but comprehensive ; it contains an exhortation to what is of great importance to our perseverance in faith and holiness, and it implies a watchfulness against that which is the original source of all declensions that appear among professors, and which to some prove the forerunner of their final apostacy and eternal destruction. I would hope better things of you, many of whom I trust are the seals of my own ministry in the Lord, as the rest are the property of anothers. O that neither of you, after the example of some, may thro' carelessness become the occasion of shame to those who have rejoiced over you as the instances of special grace through their labours. With a view under the divine blessing, to prevent this with respect to those of you who have made a profession, together with the edification of all who are companions with you in this Society, and our general profit, I have at this time chose to explain, and attempt the improvement of these words.

The

The evident design of the apostle was to promote the perseverance of the *Thessalonians*, earnestly desiring their compleat sanctification in order to their future joy : It is plain from the context he has in prospect, that blessed hope and glorious appearance of our Lord Jesus, when all the chosen seed having obtained a part in the first resurrection, and put on their shining bodies, will bear a lustre round their glorified Lord and head. Agreeable to this we find the apostle prays, *ver.* 23. that these disciples might be preserved blameless to this joyful season ; and if my present discourse should in any measure contribute as a means to our meetness for joining the redeemed in that day we shall then rejoice together at the opportunity now put into our hands.

In treating on these words I propose ;

I. A brief description of the person spoken of in the Text.

II. To explain the caution given us concerning him.

III. Offer some reasons to excite our regard to this exhortation.

IV. To set before you various methods by which many who enjoy the means of grace, become guilty of quenching the Spirit. And,

V. Shew the melancholy consequence of so doing.

I. I am to give some description of the person spoken of in our text. *The Spirit.*

By the Spirit we are not to understand the spirit of man, or light of reason and voice of conscience; this is natural and common to every one; and what profane, immoral persons sin against, and as it were, quench the light of, by their abominable practices: Some persons who bear the name of Christians talk much of the Spirit, and seem by their discourse as if they desired to be guided by the Spirit, and were led by the Spirit, when, alas! upon examination it is found they mean nothing more than reason, and natural conscience, or their own spirits; they know nothing, nor do they own any thing properly speaking of the divine Spirit, or his gracious influences. Sad delusion indeed! May the Lord the Spirit open their understandings, and shew such their dangerous conceit. The inward light of nature, or light of reason, is not here intended; in being guilty of the evil dehorted, persons do indeed act irrationally, and conscience is abused, as we may see hereafter. But this is not intended by the Spirit in the text.

Nor are we to understand by the Spirit any of the angelic host, those chosen spirits that reside in the heavenly courts above. Our text speaks not of one of that innumerable and glorious company; these are all spirits,



rits, holy, wise, powerful and obedient to the will of Jehovah, and by the ministration of whom the Lord has frequently instructed his people into his mind. A disobedience to, or disbelief of one of these heavenly messengers, has been followed with the tokens of God's displeasure. \* However, Angels are visibly employed only on special occasions. It is not the common experience of the sons of men to be sensible of an Angel's ministration; but this exhortation is given to all the faints, or professors at *Theffalonica*, and the person intended must be one whose influences they are all supposed to have been sensible of.

The subject of the text, is that uncreated divine Spirit who bears record in heaven, even Jehovah the Spirit, who is a real distinct divine person, equal in perfection and glory with the Father and the Son. This Spirit is the holy Ghost. Thus our Lord promises his disciples the Father should give them another comforter, *John xiv.* 16, 17. even the Spirit of truth; the same person is styled the holy Ghost, ver. 26. and indeed the original word is the same. This is that Spirit to whom

\* Thus *Zacharias* was struck deaf and dumb because he believed not the angels words, concerning the birth of *John*, *Luke i.* 22. The term translated dumb, signifies both deaf and dumb, because those which naturally are deaf, are in consequence dumb, and that *Zacharias* was deaf is plain from *ver.* 62. Now this temporary deprivation of these natural senses, was indeed a sufficient sign for the confirmation of the angels tidings, but at the same time, a manifest token of the divine displeasure at the unbelief of *Zacharias*.

whom every divine perfection is most truly and properly ascribed; he is omniscient, for he  
*i Cor. ii.* *searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God.*  
 10. His personalty and deity are both strongly implied in that passage, for such knowledge is incommunicable to a Creature; none but he that is God can know all the secrets of the divine mind. This Spirit is also omnipresent; thus the Psalmist says, *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?* And this is evident from his inhabitation in the hearts of believers in every age all over the world; it is the self-same Spirit which resides in each person that is called by the grace of God in every place, and who is promised to abide with them for ever, and consequently he must be omnipresent. Moreover, omnipotence is ascribed to this Person; he is said to be the power of the Highest; not as a property, or perfection in the divine nature, for that is inconsistent with many things revealed concerning him, which shews him to be a distinct and true Person; but he is so called as he is no less than the most high God; and that he is so, appears from his creating the world; for as  
*Pf. xxxiii.* *by the word of the Lord the heavens were*  
 6. *made, so were the host of them by the breath of his mouth.* Elibu ascribes the formation of his nature to him. *The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.*  
*Job xxxiii.*  
 4. Jehovah the Spirit, who had an equal concern with the other divine Persons in the works of creation, is here intended. This

## *quenching the Spirit.*

7

This is that glorious divine Person, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, and who in love to the chosen seed has condescended to operate in subserviency to the wonderful and gracious design of their salvation. Accordingly this divine Spirit wrought in the Prophets from the foundation of the world; for as salvation thro' the blood of Christ was their united testimony, they all bore their witness under his inspiration; these holy Men of God spake, not according to their own will, but as *they were* <sup>2</sup> *Pet. i. moved by the holy Ghost.* And he that inspired <sup>21.</sup> these instruments of revelation, is God, *all scripture is given by inspiration of God.* This <sup>2</sup> *Tim. iii. Spirit formed the human nature of Christ, and* <sup>16.</sup> forms Christ in every Believers heart. He is the Author, or Agent of all that light, sanctification and grace, whereby any of the lost race of apostate *Adam* are brought to the saving knowledge of the Redeemer. He is styled a holy Spirit, and is justly so called both in respect of the perfect holiness essential to his divine nature, and also as he is the immediate efficient cause of all holiness in the souls of God's children; for it is not mere moral swasion, or the exertion of any human gifts in the preaching, even of the true Gospel, that can effectually convince, humble, and turn sinners to God, as experience abundantly testifies; but it is owing to this Spirit of wisdom and revelation that any are changed and renewed. This  
is

is the Spirit that convinces of sin, righteousness and judgment to come. He begins, carries on, and compleats the work of conversion, and his operations and influences are absolutely necessary: He also is the Author of all spiritual gifts, which he dispenses in a sovereign way, *dividing to every man severally as he will.* This is the person of whom our text speaks, even that divine person whose perfections are adorable, and whose love to the saints is conspicuous in the office he executes in order to their salvation, *to whom, as well as for whom, Believers are to pray; thus the Apostle, And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.* \* In a word, he is that Spirit, without whose aids neither particular persons, nor societies, nor churches, can flourish, or even subsist with any spiritual advantage; for he is the life and soul of all true  
powerful

1 Cor. xii.  
11.

2 Theff. iii.  
5.

\* Nothing can be clearer than that the divine Spirit is the person address'd in this passage, who is evidently distinguished from the Father, into whose love the hearts of the saints were to be directed, and from Jesus Christ whom they were also to be directed into a patient waiting for; and this agrees with the work ascribed to him in other places, where he is promised to guide, and is prayed for, and said to lead the children of God, and shed abroad the love of God in the heart, &c. *Psal. cxliiii. 10. Rom. viii. 14. John xvi. 13. Rom. v. 5.*

Now this address proves the Spirit to be a person, a distinct person from the Father and the Son, and no less than the true God, both as the object of prayer, and as capable of performing what is requested of him; for 'tis God alone that searches and bears an uncontrollable sway in the hearts of men, or is able to answer such a request.

powerful godliness, who worketh in and among the faints according to his own good pleasure. Which leads me, as proposed,

II. To explain the caution given us concerning this glorious divine person. Here is a caution concerning this Spirit and his operations, *viz.* not to quench him; *quench not the Spirit.* The Spirit who is the inditer of all revelation, has thought fit to represent himself to us under a variety of metaphors in the sacred writings, each of which is adapted to our instruction and comfort. Sometimes he is compared to water, *Except a man be born of water* *John* iii. 5. *and of the Spirit, i. e.* I apprehend, born of the Spirit as with water; for I conceive his regenerating and sanctifying influences are intended, and not water baptism, because regeneration is the profess'd subject of our Lord's discourse; these his influences are fitly compared to water; for as water cleanseth that which is foul, so the operations of the divine Spirit enlightening and changing a sinner's heart, purifies it from all that spiritual defilement in which it lay while under the dominion of lust. And this allusion answers to the promise given thro' the mouth of the prophet *Ezekiel*, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean, &c.* *Ezek.* xxxvi. 25. His gifts are likewise compared to the same element; *He that believeth on me, as the scripture* *John* vii. *saith, out of his belly shall flow rivers of liv-* 38, 39.

*ing water.* \* *This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive, &c.* Thus the Spirit is compared to water both in his gifts and graces.

Again, sometimes the Spirit is compared to wind; under which allusion is convey'd an idea of the sovereignty, and imperceptible nature of his influences, together with their quick  
*John iii. 8.* and powerful effects. Thus, *the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, &c.* † *So is every one that is born of the Spirit; q. d.* thus are the Spirit's operations on the soul he regenerates.

But at other times this holy Ghost is compared to fire, thus (says *John* the baptist, speaking of *Christ*) *He shall baptize you with the holy Ghost and with fire.* The gifts and graces of the divine Spirit are comparable to this element also for their illuminating and purifying effects; and, agreeable to this metaphor, we find the Spirit's visible appearance was, cloven tongues like as of fire, when *it sat upon*  
*Acts ii. 2.* *each of the apostles in the day of Pentecost.* To this miraculous appearance most have thought the

\* See *Isaiab*, xliv. 3. *Joel*. ii. 28. where the gift of the Spirit is termed a *pouring out*, answerable to the element of water.

† The Spirit seems address'd under this character, *Solomon's Song*, chap. iv. 16. *Awake O north wind, and come thou south;* agreeable to this, we read the Spirit came down in the day of Pentecost with a *sound from heaven as of a mighty rushing wind*, *Acts ii. 2.*

the Baptist refers. The Spirit, however, is represented by fire; and this aptly sets forth his influence on the hearts of men, enlightening, warming, and melting them down as it were, thereby purging out the dross of pride, ignorance, sensuality, and unbelief. Under his efficacious operations the word of God burns like fire, either in a way of conviction, or consolation: It sometimes burns by way of conviction: *Is not my word like fire?* Thus when the prophet thought to speak no more in the name of the Lord to a scornful generation, he found the word of the Lord was *in his heart as a burning fire shut up in his bones*. Sometimes the hearts of God's children burn with joy, when the Spirit works upon them under the ministration of the word: Thus the disciples found it when their risen Lord taught them as they were going to *Emmaus*; hence on his disappearing, *they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us while he talked to us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures.*

Now the Spirit is implicitly represented to us under this figure in the text, for the term *quench*, used in the caution, evidently alludes to fire, being proper alone to that element. Thus the Psalmist using the same figure in reference to his Enemies and their utter destruction, says, *They are quenched as the fire of thorns.* To quench fire we know is to put it out, or, at least, to abate its force and influence by throw-

ing water upon it, or by some other means. Now every degree of damp which by any method is put upon a fire, whereby its heat and influence is lessened, may be justly stiled quenching, as well as a total extinguishing the same. In this light I take the phrase by which our Lord sets forth the torments of hell, when he says there *the fire is not quenched*. It seems to imply, there shall be no abatement \* of that wrath which shall be poured out on the impenitent in the state of punishment. As fire expresses the torment to be exquisite, so its not being quenched intimates there shall be no alloy, but that it shall be perpetual, and even increasing. Fire is an active principle, and by its constant motion is ever changing its degree of heat to greater or less, if it does not decrease it will increase; therefore when it is said it is not quenched, it points out the increasing torment of the damned, and that this fire shall be blown up stronger and stronger; all which is suitable to the account we have in the Scriptures.

I believe the Spirit will have his concern, and be the principal efficient cause of the misery of the wicked; as the communications of divine love are thro' his agency, so I apprehend this divine Person will be the more immediate convey-

*Mark ix.*  
44.

*Luke xvi.*  
24.

\* Thus the rich man in the parable being in hell lift up his eyes and makes application to *Abraham*, but is refused one drop of water to cool his tongue which was tormented in the flame.



conveyancer of the wrath of God ; this I think is suggested to us in Scripture. The wicked, it is said, *shall be punished with everlasting destruction* <sup>2 Theff. i.</sup> *from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory* <sup>9.</sup> *of his power* \*. Who is the glory of his power ? but him who is called the power of the highest ; which we have already seen is one of the characters of the holy Ghost, and he seems intended, where we have an awful description of *Tophet*, which closes thus ; *the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it* ; <sup>Isai. xxxi. 33.</sup> even that breath of the Lord by which the host of the heavens were made, as before observed.

However (to return from this digression ;) as quenching consists in abating, cooling, or extinguishing a fire, so it stands opposed to quickening, or maintaining the same, and therefore a caution against the former naturally involves an exhortation to the latter, and it necessarily follows, that when we are forbid to quench the Spirit, we are commanded to do every thing required towards preserving, and increasing his work, and the gift he has bestowed upon us.

But

\* The *presence of the Lord*, and *the glory of his power* are phrases and characters particularly applied to the divine Spirit ; and I apprehend the particle, *from*, is casual, as some eminent Writers have observed, and it seems to imply that from, or by the Spirit, as the immediate efficient cause, the punishment of the wicked will arise.

But in the application of this figure to the divine Spirit, we must carefully avoid any notion that is unworthy his perfections, or the declarations of the gospel. In order thereto, let it be premised ;

*First*, We are not to conceive by this caution, that the strength of lust in the heart of man, whereby he perversly opposes and resists the Spirit, prevails against the will and power of this divine Agent : The influences of the Spirit are efficacious and irresistible ; indeed such is the state of the human soul by nature, and under the dominion of sin, that were it possible for the baseness and stoutness of men, so to resist the Spirit as to frustrate his work, none would ever be converted ; for man is naturally, through pride, ignorance and vile affections, not only indisposed, but even averse to a change, and consequently will naturally oppose it to the utmost of his power ; but the Spirit is uncontrollable in his operations ; with respect to him it may be said, Who hath resisted his will ? When he works none can let ; hence it is that any are made willing in the day of his power.

Figures taken from inanimate beings, and applied to intelligent ones, are not to be strained to the destruction of their nature, who are represented by them, this would be highly unreasonable ; but this would be the case if it were to be inferr'd from the caution in the

text,

text, that the perverseness of man could pervert the Spirit's designs, or oblige him to cease from his work. It is unworthy the perfections of the holy Ghost to conceive that a created power, in any state or condition, is capable of obstructing his almighty arm, or rendring abortive his gracious designs; to suppose the creatures obstinacy and wickedness can frustrate the will, or overcome the power of the divine Spirit is absurd and impious, a notion that contradicts the sovereignty and omnipotence of this glorious person, and deprives him of the honours due to his divine nature. Moreover, this would render the regeneration and compleat sanctification of every one precarious; the everlasting abode of the Spirit in the heart he has taken possession of would then be uncertain, and therefore his inhabitation no infallible evidence of being savingly wrought upon. If this were the case, he could not be the earnest of the inheritance which Christians are called to the hope of, as *Ephesians* <sup>i. 14.</sup> the scriptures shew; so that such a conceit derogates from the glory of the Spirit, and destroys the comfort of the Believer.

*Secondly*, Nor are we to imagine from this exhortation, that where the Spirit has wrought effectually, his work can be destroyed; it is not in the power of sin or Satan to do this. True light, saving faith, and divine love, which are the fruit of his operations, as a Spirit of life from Christ, shall never be totally eclipsed, or  
utterly

utterly and finally extinguished. This is inconsistent with the engagements of the Father in the covenant of grace, wherein he has promised his Spirit shall not depart from his people. Wherever the Spirit takes up his abode as the Comforter, from the Father and the Son, he abides for ever, pursuant to this gracious promise; and we are confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in us, *will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.* The holy Ghost will never forsake the work of his hands, nor shall the habits of grace and holiness once implanted be ever rooted up. Thus should we beware of entertaining any notions from this caution, inconsistent with the irresistible and efficacious influence of the divine Spirit on the hearts of sinners, or the certain continuance and completion of the work of grace where it is really begun; for all such conceptions are unworthy the perfections of this glorious Agent, and contrary to the assurances given in the everlasting covenant. What then are we to understand by quenching the Spirit? To quench the Spirit is the same as to<sup>a</sup> resist, <sup>b</sup>vex, grieve, rebel against, or do despite unto him; all which are applied to the conduct of men with respect to the blessed Spirit, and are expressive of a greater or lesser degree of opposition to, or provocation of him; and, I conceive in general

*Isaiab* lix.  
21.

*Philip* i.  
6.

<sup>a</sup> *Acts* vii. 51.    <sup>b</sup> *Isaiab* lxiii. 10.    *Ephesians* iv. 30.  
*Hebrews* x. 29.

neral it signifies a neglecting, or despising the tokens of his power and grace, and thereby offending his holiness, so as to occasion his voluntary departure in a way of chastisement, or Judgment. When persons are found in the practice of those things which naturally tend, and which by experience has appeared to extinguish the light, and abate the warmth produced at any time by the divine Spirit in and among them, and when they also omit what is adapted and appointed for the continuance and increase thereof, they may be said to quench the Spirit; for by thus prejudicing his work, and acting contrary to him, they greatly offend him, and cause him to withdraw.

That the Spirit of grace has met with such treatment is evident from the sacred writings; many with whom he has contended by the external ministry of his word, by the mouth of the Prophets, yea by stirring in them convictions, by gifts, and common illuminations, I say, many such, thro' the hardness and impenitency of their hearts, have rebelled against him, and he has left them in judgment to fill up the measure of their iniquity. Thus their sin has been the procuring cause of his departure from them, and their damnation has followed. The sinners of the old world are a fearful example of this, who were swept away with the flood, and whose spirits are in prison. 1 Peter iii. 19.  
Many of literal *Israel*, not only in the wilder-  
D nefs,

ness, where their carcasses fell because of unbelief, but afterward, and especially at the time of our Saviour's appearance on earth, erred in their hearts, and resisted the holy Ghost to their destruction. Time would fail to recite the Persons and Communities, yea Societies that have been in the form of a gospel Church, who are upon record, sacred and profane, as monuments of this sad truth, that men have been left to quench the Spirit to their utter ruin. By this means many, who have been partakers of the holy Ghost in divers of his gifts and operations, have apostatized, and done despite to this Spirit of grace. Thus persons may enjoy many favours of an external nature, and be followed with convictions, and yet be void of saving grace; their unmortified lusts may return and quench the light, and these resistings aggravate their future condemnation.

*Heb. vi. 4.  
x. 29.  
compared.*

Moreover, there are sweet and peculiar influences of the divine Spirit on the hearts of the regenerate, whereby they are indulged with that degree of light and capacity, which ministers to their joy and usefulness; these may, through their own folly, be suspended and withdrawn; for tho' (blessed be God) the habit of grace cannot be destroy'd, yet the vigour of our graces may decline, and their lively exercise abate; the Spirit may so withdraw from his own people as to leave them low and dead

dead in their frames ; their hearts may be sorrowful and distressed in consequence of his departure, and this usually follows upon their spiritual sloth and neglect of his work : Hence the apostle exhorts, *Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.* *Ephes. iv. 30.*

This is what these *Thessalonians* are commanded, *viz.* that they would do nothing to offend the divine Spirit ; beware of neglecting his kindness and grace in the midst of them, lest he should withdraw and suspend those influences and manifestations of his power, with which they had hitherto been indulged ; but on the contrary, that they would cherish his motions upon their hearts, and seek to promote his honour and work amongst them.

Now this is a lesson to all persons who have felt any thing of the divine work upon their souls, or that are indulged with any degree of spiritual light and comfort, whether in fellowship with the Churches of Christ or not. It is no less adapted for the warning of all religious Societies, whether incorporated in the order of a Church-state or otherwise.

The instruction of the passage thus explain'd may be comprized in the following observation, *viz.* It should be the great concern of all who profess the fear of God, and are favoured with the divine presence and blessing, whether in a private, or publick capacity,

city, to take heed they quench not the Spirit. Which brings me to the next thing proposed, viz.

III. To offering some reasons for exciting our regard to this exhortation.

The reasonableness and importance of attending to the caution is so obvious upon what has been said, I shall not multiply or enlarge on this head, but content myself with little more than mentioning two or three arguments, that I may have the greater opportunity for treating on the next head of discourse, which I have principally in view for our farther improvement.

*First*, Then, in order to quicken our attention, let us consider, to the Spirit we are indebted for all that degree of light and those heavenly gifts we enjoy: If we have any true knowledge in the gospel, any saving faith in Christ, any degree of the love of God in our hearts, he is the efficient cause: It is owing to the manifestations and operations of the blessed Spirit, that a person is endowed with any valuable gift, or the least measure of grace: If religious Societies, or gospel Churches exist, are furnish'd and edify, it must be ascribed to his love and power; to quench the Spirit therefore, and thereby offend his holiness, is to abuse the richest grace, and be guilty of the highest ingratitude.

*Secondly*, The continuance of his presence and gracious operations are absolutely necessary



to our future comfort and edification. Duties are perform'd, and privileges enjoy'd, without any sensible pleasure and advantage in the hearts or Societies of Christians, when the Spirit departs and ceases to exert his mighty power; for under this alone, the best of means becomes effectual to salvation; the suspension of his heavenly influences is attended with darknes, and declension, if not destruction.

*Thirdly,* The Spirit has withdrawn from many persons and Societies, who rebelling against him have quenched his work in and among them; he will not always strive; we have already mention'd divers instances of this kind. These have been overthrown and destroy'd thro' their perverseness and unbelief; we should therefore be warned lest we fall after the same example. These things may justly awaken our diligence, to avoid every thing that has the least tendency to quench the Spirit: To him we are indebted for all the spiritual gifts and graces we enjoy, his presence and influence are necessary to our comfort and advantage, and there are awful instances of his leaving those who have rebelled against him, and vexed him. I pass on \*,

IV. To set before you some methods by which many who enjoy the means of grace become guilty of quenching the Spirit.

Now

\* If this sermon be thought too long to read at once, here is a proper period.

## *An Exhortation against*

Now as persons may be considered enjoying the Spirit in his special presence, and sensible operations, under a twofold capacity, *viz.* private, and publick, I shall attempt some instruction by ranging my thoughts under this head into two general divisions, the particular branches of which I shall endeavour to adapt to each of these capacities distinctly ; by this means I may the more advantageously detect and guard against those temptations peculiar to the one and the other, and so under the divine blessing, profitably address each person on this important subject as he may be respectively circumstanced.

*First*, I would expose to view and caution against some occasions, or methods of quenching the Spirit in regard to private experience, and with respect to the Spirit's work on the souls of men separately considered. And,

I. This is done by stifling of conviction ; that there are many inward motions and convictions raised in the minds of men under the means of grace, which they thro' the power of sin and unbelief stifle, is generally allowed, and indeed few, if any, upon reflection, can acquit themselves from the guilt of this perverseness ; this is far from proving any thing against the irresistible nature of the Spirit's operations, as some would suggest, but it shews the wretched disposition of our depraved hearts, and the melancholy condition of such  
from

from whom the Spirit finally suspends his unfrustrable grace: The Spirit may have concern in raising those convictions in persons which they, being left to themselves, stifle and render abortive, in doing which they may be said to quench the Spirit.

I apprehend those who sit under the preaching of the word sooner, or later, fall under such convictions with respect to sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come, as in case of final impenitency will aggravate their condemnation, in that day when God shall judge the secrets of hearts by Jesus Christ: In that awful day of revelation, multitudes, yea I believe all who perish under the means of grace, will then be self-condemned, and will appear *wilfully*, tho' perhaps *secretly*, under the power of some lust, or temptation, to have rejected the council of God against themselves, and neglected the great salvation (God forbid it should be the lot of any present) but I am of opinion \* all who disobey the Gospel will be found quenchers of the Spirit.

The Persons addrest in our text are supposed to have received some sensible impressions, and that their hearts were enlightened and warmed by the divine Spirit, otherwise they could not be the proper subjects of this exhortation; to  
quench,

\* But those mine enemies which *would* not that I should reign over them, &c. *Luke* xix. 27. Thus the enemies of Christ will be charged with perverseness upon the execution of divine vengeance.

*An Exhortation against*

quench, implies fire or light, so that there must have been some kindlings and illuminations of the Spirit, either of an ordinary and common, or of an extraordinary and saving nature, to render the caution pertinent. Now when persons thus wrought upon resist these motions, and stifle these convictions that arise from such impressions, they are guilty of quenching the Spirit.

For instance, when the word enters the conscience under the influences of the Spirit so as to give a sense of sin in heart, or life, and thereby calls for humiliation and repentance, whether this respects our conduct in the house of God, or our own, if we endeavour to suppress the conviction and shake off the concern raised in our minds; or if we continue in that sin, we are then guilty of this evil. Again, when under hearing of the word, or by any other means we are reprov'd for a practice we cannot without self-denial forsake, or when we are convinced of a doctrine, or an ordinance of the gospel, an open and zealous avouchment of which will expose us to scorn and difficulty: I say, when under such circumstances, we do thro' the prevalency of some lust, from fear and cowardice, or for the sake of ease, stifle these convictions; in such instances, we quench the Spirit.

I believe it will appear upon examination, that sometimes even while persons are hearing, reading,

reading, or meditating on the word, they are betrayed into this evil, and at the very instant of illumination, betake themselves to carnal reasonings, by which they labour as much as possible, to reconcile themselves to a disregard of the voice of conscience: such are frequently the workings of our vain and hypocritical minds, even when engaged in an attendance on the means of grace; thus the flesh is lusting against the Spirit in solemn duties, inso-much that were our hearts dissected and laid open to view, we should have just cause of shame; but these convictions received under the ministration of the word, are oftner stifled by rushing into the cares of the world, or the pleasures of sense, after the opportunity is over; by what means soever it is effected, this is quenching the Spirit.

2. The Spirit is quenched when those duties are neglected, that are adapted and appointed to feed and cherish this fire in the soul. \* Agreeable to what has been observed in the explanation, when we are commanded not to quench the Spirit, it implies an exhortation to stir

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\* What the apostle exhorts *Timothy* respecting his extraordinary gift, *viz.* not to neglect, but to stir it up, 1 *Ephes.* iv. 14. 2 *Ephes.* i. 6. is applicable to all gifts, and graces of the Spirit; for by not stirring them up in the use of means, light grows dim, and love abates its fervency. Believers themselves shamefully leave, tho' they shall not utterly lose their first love.

him up, and by all appointed means, to maintain his work upon us ; now there are divers methods of attaining this, such as frequent supplication at the throne of grace, self-examination, and serious meditation on what we have felt of his operations upon us ; to the same tendency is diligent reading the scriptures, conversation upon spiritual things, making such our companions who fear God, and in a word, following the dictates of our consciences ; these and such like are the natural and proper methods to maintain and promote the Spirit's work on our hearts, and the omission of these duties bring a person under the charge of quenching the Spirit. A fire neglected goes out ; he whose interest, or duty it is to preserve it, if he does not use the means, is as *really*, tho' not so *heinously*, guilty, as he that pours water upon it, and thereby extinguishes it. Many are warmed under hearing the word, they are favoured with some spiritual light, and their affections are raised to divine things, so that their hearts have burned within them ; but for want of meditation, private prayer, and spiritual conversation, it has all been lost and gone off like a vapour. This is too generally the case in the present day ; there is no occasion to prove it by any particular instances, if we may judge by the temper and conduct of many, who seem to taste some sweetness in hearing, yet regard the word  
but

but as a lovely song; the little favour of divine things in their conversation, and want of zeal for the ordinances of Christ, so justly lamented, manifestly discover it. Altho' persons may not be so abandoned and hardened as to set himself against, and wilfully oppose the work of the Spirit, yet thro' negligence of this sort, they may give place to the devil and leave room for their lusts to quench it. Such are guilty of this evil, and have reason to humble themselves before God.

3. The Spirit is quenched when gifts are neglected or experience concealed; a fire often goes out when it is confined and kept too close, by this means it always deadens and loses much of its heat and vigour. This observation may seem a little foreign to the metaphor in the text, but it answers the instruction intended thereby; the design of the passages and the allusion in it, is to warn us against abating, or extinguishing the Spirit and his motions, as fire is extinguished or put out; now this is sometimes the consequence of not stirring it up, or opening it and giving it room to display itself, and diffuse its heat abroad; every thing that obstructs the operation and influence of the Spirit's work, is included in the exhortation.

There are diversities of gifts among professors which are distributed from the exalted

head of the Church for the work of the ministry and the edification of his mystical body ;  
 : *Cor.* xii. these are all wrought by the Spirit ; when his  
 21. gifts of wisdom and knowledge, utterance and prophecy are neglected, despised, or suppressed, either in ourselves, or others, the Spirit is quenched : persons are sometimes tempted to suppress the gifts bestowed upon others thro' pride and prejudice, or perhaps thro' an over-value of those human acquirements, which some such gifted persons may be destitute of, and which however to be esteemed in their place, are of small service for spiritual profit, unless the subject is endowed with some spiritual gift from above \*. There is room to fear we are very guilty in this point in our day, and by all appearance this negligence will soon be lamented, in the want of Instruments for the service of the sanctuary ; but this seems more properly belonging to the methods of quenching the Spirit in a social, or publick capacity.

It is no less certain many are tempted to hide their talents, and stifle the gifts they themselves have received for usefulness, thro' sloth and selfishness, thro' shame and fear, or  
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\* When gifts are not prayed for, not sought after, not cultivated, or when they are not encouraged and employed, it tends greatly to offend the divine Spirit and quench his work ; and whether by all symptoms, these desires and endeavours are not greatly wanting in the present time, I leave every observing Christian on reflection to judge.



it may be thro' a love to their pleasures and sensual enjoyments which the diligent and constant exercise of their talents would interrupt, thus they neglect the gift that is in them. Various are the causes that betray men into this evil; but all such negligence is criminal, 'tis quenching the Spirit; gifts are lost for want of exercise, and if they remain, the end of their being bestow'd is lost; for *the manifestation* 1 Cor. xii. *of the Spirit is given to every man to profit* 7. *withal*; let every one therefore beware of yielding to such temptations.

Moreover, when persons conceal their experience and are backward to make known the divine power they have felt, to acknowledge their convictions, and confess the manifestations of love and mercy vouchsafed unto them, they hereby quench the Spirit. The passage last quoted is applicable to an experience of the grace of God in conversion, and when after illuminations and comforts are received, as well as to gifts; for the design of all the dispensations of divine love and grace into our hearts by the holy Ghost is that his name may be praised, and his people encouraged; such who keep silence and are not ready to say with *David, Come, and hear all ye* Psal. 66. *that fear God, and I will declare what he has* 16. *done for my soul*, are chargeable with the evil dehorted in the text. But I proceed,

4. The indulgence of any known sin has a sure and unhappy influence to occasion the Spirit's departure, and put out the light, or abate the spiritual warmth begotten in our souls under his gracious influences. Many quench the Spirit by allowing themselves in the omission of known duties, which is a great affront to this holy One, who has revealed and convinced us of any institution of the Lord appointed for his honour and our spiritual edification; but the tendency this has to extinguish the Spirit we have seen under a former head.

More especially does the wilful gratification of any lust tend to quench the Spirit; when persons after being warmed with convictions, or entertained with delight in any ordinance publick, or private, go away and plunge themselves into any iniquities their consciencies testify against, it obdurates the heart, darkens the understanding, sensual affections gain the ascendant, and over-run the soul, so that all spiritual light and heat with which their minds were imprest must vanish and wear off in course. Thus the iron of the Smith when heated in the fire till 'tis almost melted down, glows and burns as the fire itself, but being hastily thrown into water instantly changes its complexion, and becomes cold and even harder than before it passed under the operation; the application is easy.

Fire is quenched by pouring upon it the opposite element, water: Now water is not more opposite to fire, than the lusts of the flesh are to the divine Spirit and his operations; the Spirit's work takes place upon and tends to the destruction of sin; there is a natural, necessary, and violent contest between the motion of the Spirit and the motion of sin in the members; *the flesh lusteth against Gal. v the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: 17. and these are contrary the one to the other, &c.* Nothing therefore has a more direct and dreadful influence towards extinguishing spiritual light and holy affections than the indulgence of pride, passion, sensuality, or any sinful appetite, soon after the enjoyment of the means of grace and some impressions upon the mind under it. To these criminal allowances Satan is continually waiting to captivate the minds, especially of young professors, whose youthful lusts greatly expose them to his snare.

Thus the Spirit is often quenched by persons in a private capacity, or with respect to his work on their own souls. They frequently, under one temptation and another, are doing this, by stifling their convictions, by neglecting those duties that are adapted and appointed to maintain and promote the Spirit's work upon them; by neglecting their gifts, and concealing their experience, and by allowing themselves in the practice of any known sin. These things tend

to prejudice, and are often permitted to hinder the influence of the Spirit's motions, they extinguish the light, and abate the spiritual warmth produced under ordinances, and grieve or offend the holy Spirit, who is often hereby provoked to withdraw: this is quenching the Spirit. Which brings me, as propos'd,

*Secondly*, To set before you some of those methods by which the Spirit is quenched by professors consider'd in a social, or publick capacity. And,

1. When the members of religious societies or churches neglect those stated assemblies by which the work of the Lord is to be carried on in the midst of them; persons who enter into sacred engagements with one another for the ends of spiritual edification, and are slothful and backward to assemble with the body at the appointed seasons for coming together are guilty of this evil. Union is necessary to warmth, the briskest fire will go out upon separating the coals and keeping them asunder; a zealous affection for Christ, his cause and one another is promoted in a christian society by frequent and universal associating of its several members; and this vigour abates in proportion to a negligence thereof. Yet such is the conduct of many who have entered into church-fellowship, or contracted with a religious society of a lower class, that they wander about till thro' the spread of such a vagrant inclination

nation, to use the words of the prophet, <sup>2</sup> *Isaiab*  
there is not a coal to warm, and the whole <sup>xlvii. 14.</sup>  
structure becomes lifeless and unprofitable :  
This unreasonable conduct in the members of  
any Society \*, as it tends to the destruction of the  
body, so it discourages the hearts of those with  
whom they are thus engaged ; therefore every  
such wilful omission of a member throws some  
quantity of cold water on the Society to which  
he belongs : If persons in fellowship, thro' love  
to their temporal profits and carnal pleasures, or  
from a wavering disposition, make a practice  
of absenting themselves when there is a gather-  
ing together for the ministration of the word  
and administration of the ordinances and dis-  
cipline of Christ's house, they are quenchers of  
the Spirit ; for hereby their own affections are  
more and more deadned to the body, hereby  
also the spirits of their fellow-members are  
faded, and thus the spiritual fervour, joy and  
zeal, which once prevailed and would otherwise  
be maintained, is extinguish'd and lost. Too  
many who are join'd to christian Societies, by  
their temper and behaviour seem to have crept in  
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\* The reasonableness and justice of avoiding this de-  
structive practice I lately took occasion to mention in  
*the Redeemer's charge against his declining Churches*,  
pag. 24. The same neglect which is owing to the abate-  
ment of love, if continued in, decreases it still more,  
and at length, as it has been experienc'd, in some  
melancholy instances, it has utterly extinguish'd the  
power and spirit of religion in a Society, and issued in  
their dissolution.

*An Exhortation against*

for no other purpose but to be the Engines for quenching the fire of divine love and that holy zeal which is the animating spring of action in every spiritual Corporation, whereby its several members are edified: Whatever their own designs may be, this is the evident use Satan makes of them under a profession; and however they may despise the entreaties, or exhortations of their ministers and fellow-christians, who are grieved for their conduct, if such persons are not humbled under a sense of their folly, it may be expected their end will be according to their works.

2. The Spirit is sometimes quenched by a misimprovement of the time when we are assembled together; a deficiency of this kind may be found in Churches, especially in those Assemblies that are appointed for the discipline of Christ's house; it becomes each member to behave himself with reverence and order in the house of God, to avoid every thing that is light and airy, and much more every thing that favours of arrogance and selfishness; such ought to study wisdom, humility and love in all they say or do, as they are call'd upon in the sight of the Lord: Sometimes members of Churches do not behave themselves after this manner on such solemn occasions; the consequence has been confusion and contention among them. This tends to prejudice the interest of Christ and the work of the Lord in  
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the midst of them, the holy Spirit usually withdraws from such a people, and they quickly become cold and formal.

But under this head I have a more immediate regard to Christian Societies of an inferior order. The old Serpent is generally too cunning for young converts. Man is a social Being in every state and condition; agreeable to which those who are beginning to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, naturally fall into society. Now when Satan cannot tempt them from accompanying together for their mutual edification, he attempts to pervert their design by ensnaring them into spending their time, at least so as to exclude, as much as possible, those exercises that are most likely to answer their end.

For instance, instead of being principally exercised in earnest supplications at the throne of grace, an exercise which is most conducive to promote humility and spiritual edification, an exercise by which young plants are, as it were, water'd by the Spirit to their growth in grace; I say instead of chiefly exercising themselves in this soul-nourishing duty, they are captivated to lay out much of their time in speaking from texts of scriptures, and in frequent and long singing, &c. instead of keeping close in their conversation, to points of experience, and filling up part of the opportunity in relating any fresh exercises they have

had with the corruptions of their hearts, with the temptations of Satan, or in rehearsing any fresh light, or renewed testimony of divine love whereby their knowledge and faith have been increased, or their hopes revived: I say, instead of employing themselves after this manner, and thus declaring in the simplicity of their minds the dealings of the Spirit with their souls, the crafty Tempter often deludes them into vain and impertinent questions which have a shew of wisdom, but are not for godly edifying.

I speak not against young Professors admonishing each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs when assembled together, but would rather promote that appointed and delightful means of grace; nor would I discountenance an humble communication of the light afforded to any, into any particular part of scripture, or debating some special points of doctrine, concerning which several may have doubts: These things are profitable when pursued with that modesty which becomes those who are newly enlighten'd; but when such things, under any pretence, intrude upon prayer, and godly conference about experimental things, it becomes a snare. It is usually found such conduct degenerates into strife about words, and administers to pride, by which cometh contention, and this excites those lusts which are contrary to the Spirit, and quenches him;



him ; beware therefore of these things, for such meetings together are not for the better but for the worse.

3. Another thing which quenches the Spirit in religious Societies is *partiality* ; the divine Spirit is no respecter of persons, and it offends him, and tends to destroy harmony and affection in a Society when partiality is indulged. Now this generally follows upon the aforementioned abuse of their solemn meetings ; when young Christians employ themselves in their assemblies after the manner described, the carnality of their minds is excited, and there soon appears a respect of persons ; when this is the case, some are exalted above measure, and others depreciated as low ; on the one hand, the Spirit himself, who is the author of all gifts, and under whose influence alone they can be beneficial to each other in the exercise of their spiritual talents, is neglected ; this divine Comforter, I say, is little thought of, or depended upon, and as seldom the subject of their prayers, or praises ; on the other hand weak believers, whose knowledge and gifts are but small, are despised and discouraged ; this often occasions the light and affection of a Society to go out, it quenches the spark in these little ones, and is highly provoking to that Spirit who created it in their souls ; for it is contrary to his mind who will not quench the smouldering flax, till he hath finished his work where he has begun

gun it, and hath brought forth judgment unto victory.

4. The Spirit is quenched when a Society retains those among them who hold errors subversive of the true gospel, or indulge themselves in practices that are unbecoming their holy profession; prophane and ungodly persons in a Community by their temper and conduct are quenchers of the Spirit; the example and influence of such make against the increase of spiritual fervour in the service of the Lord; these persons are continually endeavouring to discourage all self-denying measures proposed, or taken, by a Society for the manifestative glory of the Redeemer, or their mutual edification; the zeal of others is a reflection upon them, and therefore they object to it, and by secret, or open methods discountenance it as much as possible; it has often been found that connivance at such persons in a Community has been attended with the loss of their vigour, till thro' the departure of the holy Spirit, all their vital heat and spiritual light has been extinguished.

5. And lastly, It also quenches the Spirit when the meetings of Christians for godly edification are followed with vain and trifling conversation; this is a snare Christians are frequently entangled with, either in different company, or with one another; if the latter, the more dangerous; when members of churches  
have

have been together in the house of God, where their hearts have been affected with what they have seen and heard, and in some measure humbled, rejoiced and instructed, for any number of them to go away, and immediately fall into conversation about trifling matters is very prejudicial, for this effectually takes off the favour of divine things, and banishes that spiritual light and comfort they have received, and renders them carnal in their frames; what is this but quenching the Spirit?

Thus it is in respect to all other religious Societies, for this has been a fatal evil and destroyed the good effects of many a sweet opportunity; young professors after they have been together, and been made instrumental of exciting in each other some spiritual liveliness and joy, have frequently been deluded into foolish talking and jesting which is not convenient, whereby all the advantage of that season has been lost; all frothy conversation among such persons. at such a time more especially, frustrates the design of their fellowship, and pulls down every thing that has been built up in their attendance upon duty together. Beware therefore of this practice, for our vain minds are exceeding prone to this evil, and Satan is peculiarly vigilant to delude us into it, after having been exercised together in spiritual matters, knowing if he should prevail, (as he too frequently does) it effectually  
quenches

quenches and extinguishes the holiness and spirituality of our frames.

These are the methods by which persons quench the Spirit in a social, or publick capacity; *viz.* by neglecting the stated assemblies of the Society whereof they are members, by a misimprovement of the time when assembled together, when a partiality prevails amongst them, by retaining profane, or immoral persons in the Community, and thro' impertinent and frothy conversation together, especially after they have been engaged with one another in religious exercises; all these practices abate spirituality and zeal, hinder the advancement of light and holiness, and often occasion the Spirit of grace to depart in a way of judgment.

It remains only that I attend to the

V. and last thing proposed, *viz.* To shew the melancholy consequences of quenching the Spirit.

This has been in some measure anticipated, especially under the second general, upon which consideration, together with that of my having already detained you so long, I shall but just mention the particulars, and draw to a close.

*First,* By this means all true pleasure in religion is lost; such violence offered to an enlightened conscience destroys all delight in du-

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ty, the mind is hereby rendered incapable of spiritual joy ; the Spirit thus resisted and quenched withdraws his gracious influences, the deserted soul is deprest and sunk, and her appetite for heavenly food is gone. When this is the case, the Christian finds a leanness of Spirit, he is exceeding dull and heavy in his private frame, and every thing grows formal and lifeless in a social way.

*Secondly*, Infection increases both as to doctrine and practice ; when the Spirit is quenched, the flesh quickens, the hearts of particular persons are subject to deceitful lusts, and easily captivated to the law of sin in the members ; the Church, or Society, where this evil is continued in, being justly forsaken, is exposed to delusions, and becomes a prey to every Deceiver, and unless the Lord, in great mercy, returns to revive his work, a people grow worse and worse.

*Thirdly*, It brings great distress on the consciences of Believers when they are awakened to conviction ; sometimes it pleases God to convince such of their folly, and make them sensible of their ingratitude, so that after they have provoked the Spirit to withdraw, they are led to see the sorrowful alteration, and bewail the unhappy consequences of his departure from them. This is accompanied with bitterness, and especially as they are usually

*An Exhortation against*

left to seek and cry a long time before he returns with his cheering influences. But,

*Fourthly*, If in judgment, (which is sometimes the awful case) any are left to impenitency, the end is fore and heavy destruction. By this means, Societies without number have been ruined, many Churches have been dissolved, and a multitude of professors, who have had only the form of godliness, have sunk under the weight of aggravating guilt into endless misery. Such are the dreadful consequences of quenching the Spirit!

I close with a short reflection or two.

I. We see the bold impiety, and fatal folly of those who deny the personality, deity, and operations of the blessed Spirit. It is too common in the present day for persons who call themselves Christians, not only to oppose the doctrines that relate to the person and glory of Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation by him, and thereby give just offence to the Holy Ghost, by whom the prophets and apostles were inspired; but they also deny the reality, and much more the necessity of his divine agency in the hearts of God's children, yea, they ridicule all Christian experience; no wonder such are given up to blindness of heart, and a reprobate mind; we need not  
be

be surpris'd to find their consciences are sear'd as with an hot iron ; such persons resist the Holy Ghost, who alone can mollify, enlighten, and convert the soul, and if the quenching his work has the sorrowful effect on those who have not utterly despis'd him, as before-mentioned, how can it be expected these daring infidels should have any discernment, or sensation of spiritual things ?

II. Let us bewail the symptoms of quenching the Spirit, that are apparent in the present day. Whence is it there is so much complaint of the spread of error ? Why is there so little consolation in Christ, or edification in fellowship, so little stedfastness in the ways of the Lord, or delight in his ordinances ? Is it not because we have, and do daily quench the Spirit by our negligence and carnality ? Do we not stifle convictions, and omit those duties that are proper to the maintaining a liveliness in our hearts, and in the Societies to which we are related ? Are not gifts neglected ? Is not there too little communication of our experience, and too much indulgence of sin ? Do we improve our time together as becomes those who desire to see the Spirit's work flourish in and among us ? Is there that impartiality, and that faithfulness which is acceptable to the Holy Spirit ? I presume,

on examination, it will be allowed that the instances by which the Spirit is quenched are too frequently found upon us. O let us each examine ourselves, and be concern'd for the Communities to which we severally belong; let us watch against these things, and make it our daily and earnest supplication, that the holy Spirit may not be taken from us.

In fine, let me beseech you, at whose request I have now been speaking in publick, to think of these things; watch over your hearts, be circumspect in all your assemblies, endeavouring by supplications conjoined to all other graces and duties to build up one another in faith and holiness; and let such of you who are members of this, or any other Church of Christ, pursue this design consistent with your duties in the house of God. Remember your greatest honour and highest obligation is in the Church to which you belong, take heed therefore you are not deficient in your duties there, while you are employing your thoughts and time upon any other scheme for edification. In a conscientious regard to this, you may expect the Comforter will abide with you, and bless all your endeavours for encouraging others to taste and see the goodness of the Lord, with whom your fellowship shall be still increasing, till you are *made meet for* the full enjoyment of the inheritance among the saints in light.



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A H Y M N of Praise to the  
B L E S S E D S P I R I T.

## I.

**A** D O R E, ye faints, the heav'nly Dove,  
His grace and pow'r proclaim,  
Whose quick'ning rays of light and love,  
Revive your drooping frame.

## II.

He first awakens from the dead,  
Doth life from Christ impart,  
And love divine by him is shed  
Abroad in ev'ry heart.

## III.

As Fire refines the drossy Ore,  
Our souls he purifies,  
And banish'd comfort doth restore,  
Hence joys unknown arise.

## IV.

Thus doth his grace our minds prepare,  
To view our Saviour's face,  
And oft before we are aware,  
Enlivens ev'ry grace.

V. To

## V.

To light, from darknes he doth turn,  
And our affections raise,  
Our hearts within us then do burn,  
To sing Jehovah's praise.

## VI.

O may we never once offend,  
His glorious holiness,  
Lest he his influence suspend,  
And leave us in distress.

*F I N I S.*

*Publiſh'd by the ſame Author.*

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