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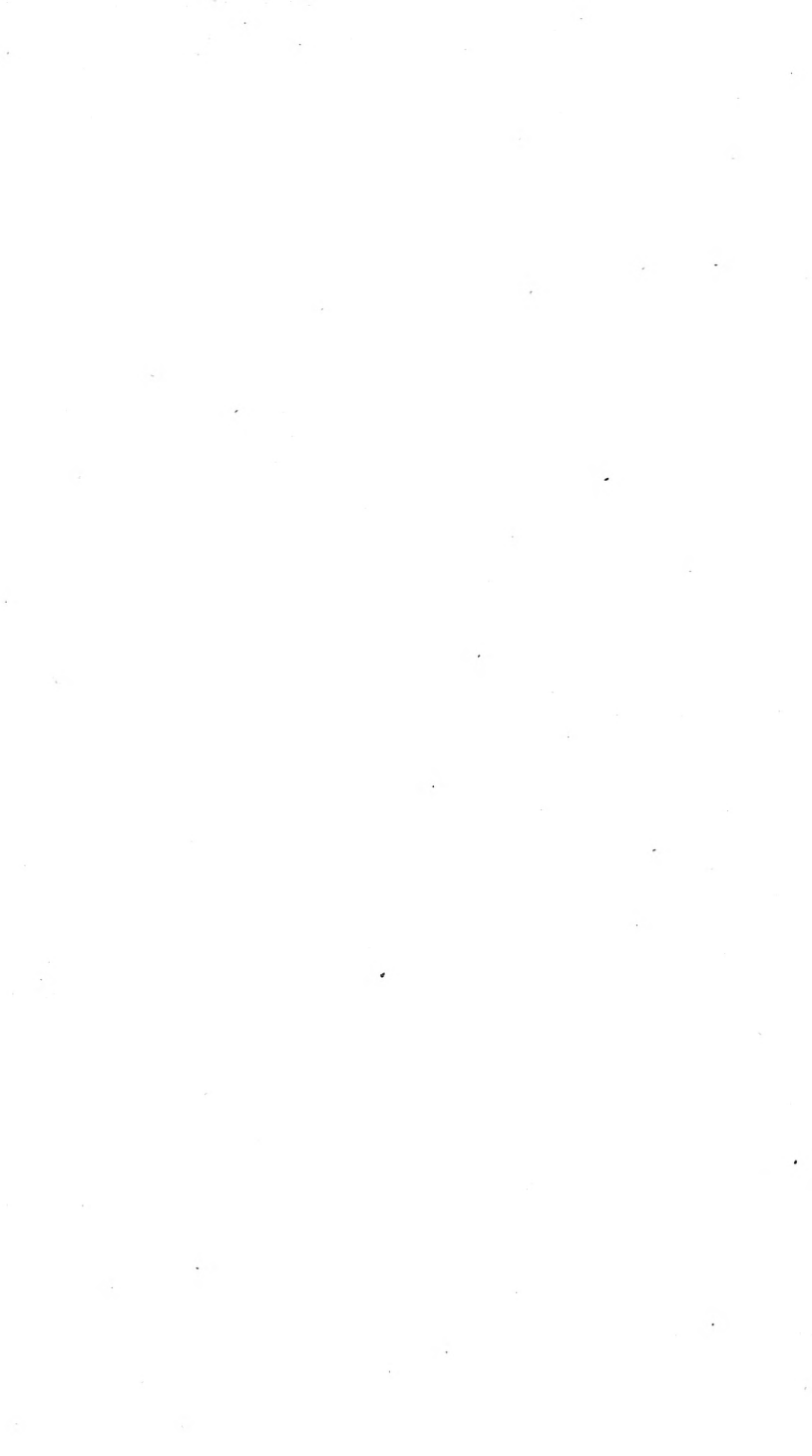
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# S E R M O N S

O N

## VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

Containing,

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|--|--|
| I. Religion and Virtue, considered under the Notion of Wisdom. | IX. Self-Government essential to Wisdom.   |
| II. The Excellency of Wisdom.                                  | X. The Proud and Scornful incapable of attaining to Wisdom.                      |
| III. The Ways of Wisdom, Ways of Pleasantry.                   | XI. Attending to public Instruction, and other Instrumental Duties, recommended. |
| IV. Wisdom the Strength of the Mind.                           | XII. Walking with Wise Men, a Means of attaining to Wisdom.                      |
| V. The Favour of God, obtained by Wisdom.                      | XIII. The Foundation of Confidence towards God explained.                        |
| VI. Long-Life, Riches, and Honour, the Fruits of Wisdom.       | XIV. On the same Subject.  |
| VII. The Love of Wisdom, necessary to the attaining of it.     | XV. Walking by Faith and not by Sight, explained and recommended.                |
| VIII. Diligence in seeking Wisdom always successful.           |  |

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By *JOHN ABERNETHY*, M. A.

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V O L. III.

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# C O N T E N T S.

## S E R M O N I.

Religion and Virtue considered under  
the Notion of Wisdom.

Prov. i. 1, 2, 3, 4.

*The Proverbs of Solomon the Son of David,  
king of Israel: To know wisdom and in-  
struction, to perceive words of understand-  
ing; to receive the instruction of wisdom,  
justice, and judgment, and equity; to give  
subtilty to the simple, to the young man  
knowledge and discretion. Page 1.*

## S E R M O N II.

The EXCELLENCY of WISDOM.

Prov. viii. 6, 7.

*Hear, for I will speak of excellent things, and  
the opening of my Lips shall be right things;  
for my mouth shall speak truth. P. 30*

# C O N T E N T S.

## S E R M O N III.

### The Ways of Wisdom, Ways of Pleasantness.

Prov. iii. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* p. 58

## S E R M O N IV.

### Wisdom the Strength of the Mind.

Prov. xxiv. 5.

*A wise man is strong, yea a man of knowledge increaseth strength.* p. 86

## S E R M O N V.

### The Favour of GOD obtained by Wisdom.

Prov. viii. 35.

*Whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.* p. 114

## S E R M O N VI.

### Long-life, Riches, and Honour, the Fruits of Wisdom.

Prov. iii. 16.

*Length of days is in her right-hand, and in her left-hand riches and honour.* p. 140

S E R-



# C O N T E N T S.

## S E R M O N VII.

The Love of Wisdom necessary to  
the attaining of it.

Prov. viii. 17.

*I love them that love me, and those that seek me  
early shall find me.* p. 166

## S E R M O N VIII.

Diligence in seeking Wisdom always  
successful.

Prov. viii. 17,

*Those that seek me early shall find me.* p. 190

## S E R M O N IX.

Self-government essential to Wisdom.

Prov. xxv. 28.

*He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is  
like a city broken down, and without walls.*

p. 214

## S E R M O N X.

The Proud and Scornful incapable  
of attaining to Wisdom.

Prov. xiv. 6.

*A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not.*

p. 240

S E R -

# C O N T E N T S.

## S E R M O N XI.

Attending to publick Instruction, and  
other instrumental Duties, recom-  
mended.

Prov. viii. 34.

*Blessed is the man that beareth me, watching  
daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of  
my doors.* p. 267

## S E R M O N XII.

Walking with Wise-men, a Means  
of attaining to Wisdom.

Prov. xiii. 20.

*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise:*  
P. 293

## S E R M O N XIII.

The Foundation of Confidence to-  
wards GOD explained.

1 John iii. 19, 20, 21.

*And hereby we know that we are of the truth,  
and shall assure our hearts before him. For  
if our hearts condemn us, God is greater  
than our hearts, and knoweth all things; be-  
loved, if our hearts condemn us not, then  
have we confidence towards God.* p. 317

# C O N T E N T S.

## S E R M O N XIV.

On the same Subject. 344

## S E R M O N XV.

Walking by Faith, not by Sight, explained and recommended.

2 Corinth. v. 7.

*For we walk by faith, not by sight.* p. 376



SER-



## S E R M O N I.

RELIGION and VIRTUE, considered  
under the Notion of WISDOM.

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PROVERBS I. 1, 2, 3, 4.

*The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.*

**A**NY one who readeth the proverbs S E R M. I.  
of Solomon attentively, will see that  
the principal scope of them is to  
teach men wisdom. His manner of writing  
is, indeed, such, that no one subject is me-  
thodically treated by him, the whole book  
being no more than a collection of wise  
moral sayings, without any coherence, some  
probably wrote down by himself, and some  
extracted afterwards out of other writings  
which are not now extant; of the former

SERM. fort seem to be the first twenty-four chap-

I. ters, and of the latter, the remaining part  
 of the book, under this title, chap. xxv. 1.  
*These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah copied out.* But though the writing is of this unconnected kind, yet one may plainly see a general design in it, which the author keepeth always in his view; that is, to reclaim the simple from their folly, by giving them a just notion, and a true taste of real wisdom; and to furnish men in general with such instructions, such excellent rules of life, as might be profitable to direct their whole behaviour. Thus he beginneth, setting forth the writer's chief aim, and by its excellence bespeaking the attention of the reader. *The proverbs of Solomon the son of David king of Israel; to know wisdom and instruction; to perceive words of understanding; to receive the instructions of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtilty to the simple; to the young man knowledge and discretion.* Besides a great many scattered hints, in almost every chapter, which set the counsels of the excellent moralist in the amiable light of wisdom, understanding, and discretion, he sometimes, as in the 3d,

the 8th, and 9th chapters, doth designedly, and even out of his professed method, that is, more largely than in the way of proverbs, insist on the beauty and excellence of wisdom, inviting men seriously and steadily to contemplate her charms, that they may admire her instructions, and give themselves up to her conduct.

S E R M.

I.

Wisdom is introduced in the dramatick way (which is an antient, and, when well managed, a very useful way of writing) as a divine person appearing in a very lovely form, displaying her native worth and beauty; and by the most powerful persuasives, and the most affectionate manner of address, soliciting the degenerate sons of men to hearken to her counsels for their good. The reasonableness and happy effects of our complying with her proposals are represented, and the vanity of all those things which rival wisdom for our affections, is fully shewn. The means, and the necessary dispositions on our part, in order to our attaining the true discretion here justly celebrated, are particularly mentioned, and those prejudices laid open, with the folly and unreasonableness of them, which shut mens minds, and harden their hearts against it.

SERM. With these things in our view as its main  
 I. design, let us carefully read the *Book of Proverbs*. Some perhaps neglect and disregard it as dry morality; but certainly it containeth *pure religion, and undefiled before God the Father*, excellent rules for the conduct of life; and it marketh out the way in which alone we can hope for the divine acceptance, and the solid peace which ariseth from the testimony of an approving conscience. That you may read it with the greater advantage, I will endeavour, in this discourse, to explain the nature, characters, and uses of the wisdom of which it treateth; and making that the standard, we may try some things which have the appearance of wisdom, and, perhaps, correct some wrong notions we have entertained in a matter of so great importance: and by that amiable character, which must be high in the esteem of every considerate person, if it appeareth to be justly applied, we may be induced to consent to, and practise the rules *Solomon* prescribeth.

In general, it is very plain that what this author meaneth by wisdom, is true religion and virtue; whether it be worthy of that name, especially in the peculiar and distinguishing



*considered under the Notion of Wisdom.*

S

SERM.

I.

guishing manner he giveth it, in opposition to every thing else that pretends to it, I shall afterwards consider; at present, I observe, that what he meaneth by wisdom, is religion and virtue; and you will see it to be so, if you look into the following passages in the 7th verse of this chapter; *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*; which was a principle *Solomon* learned from his pious father, to whose instructions he often refers in this book, and acknowledgeth his great obligations to them. This was *David's* doctrine, *Psal.* cxi. 10. and indeed it was a maxim received by wise men in ages long before theirs, as you may see in *Job* xxviii. 28. where it is represented to be the sum of what God taught men, as the substance of their duty, and their most important concern. The fear of the Lord, in the stile of the sacred writers, signifieth universal religion, because it is an eminent part of it, proper enough therefore, by an usual way of speaking, to describe the whole; and because it is a principle which, when the mind is duly possessed with, and brought thoroughly under its power, cannot fail of producing obedience to all the commandments of God. As every branch of virtue

SERM. is enjoined by the divine precepts, which  
 I. shew us all that is morally good with respect to ourselves and our fellow-creatures, as well as to God, so true religion is nothing else but the practice of virtue, from a regard to the Deity. The fear of the Lord, if we understand it in the strictest sense, of a pious reverence for the supreme Being, with a disposition to do his will, is called *the beginning of wisdom*, as being a very eminent part of our duty, or rather a principle naturally productive of that righteousness and goodness in which true wisdom consisteth: If we take it in a greater latitude, as including with the principle all its genuine fruits, in an universal conformity to the will of God, then it is the whole duty of man, as *Solomon* says, *Eccles. xii. 13.* and comprehendeth all which the sacred writers call wisdom. So *Job* delivereth the doctrine in the place already referr'd to, *Unto man be said, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, is understanding.*

Again; the wisdom which *Solomon* commendeth is called *the knowledge of the Holy*, chap. ix. 10. where the principle already mentioned, is repeated in the same words, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning*

ginning of wisdom; and it is explained thus, *SERM. I.*  
*the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.*

They are religious things about which it is conversant; the deepest penetration in other matters, the highest attainments in human sciences and arts, and the exactest judgment in the affairs of this world, will not intitle any one to the character of wise, according to the doctrine of this excellent author; but an acquaintance with divine objects, and with the duty we owe to God, is, according to him, the truest understanding. Neither is it meer speculative knowledge even of religion he meaneth; the instructions of wisdom do all tend to practice; and the conformity of our lives to its rules is that only which will denominate us wise men in *Solomon's* account, *Prov. xxviii. 7. Whoso keepeth the law, is a wise son.*

Besides these general declarations, which are very comprehensive, taking in every part of our duty, and which plainly shew the design of the *Proverbs* is to represent the wisdom of universal righteousness; the character of wisdom is applied to particular virtues, and it is said to consist in them, as in the text, ver. 3. *To receive the instructions of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity.*

SERM.  
I.

Justice is a very important branch of our duty, a virtue which we have frequent occasion for the exercise of in life ; it directeth a great part of our behaviour towards mankind, injoineth us to preserve the rights of men inviolable, and to render to all their due, to do as we would be done by, without being warped by a regard to any selfish or private interest. Perhaps there is not any thing in religion itself more disagreeable to the wisdom of the world ; for, generally, men make their own interest the chief end of their policy, and form their schemes for private advantage, without caring to distinguish nicely between right and wrong ; and however they may esteem inflexible righteousness, as virtue and religion, yet it is far from being accounted wisdom. But not to enter upon an inquiry into the truth of the case, whether justice be only a kind of religious simplicity, or real wisdom, founded on the best maxims, and worthiest of an intelligent nature, and conducive to all the ends it ought to pursue ; or if that cunning which deviateth from integrity, useth fraud and indirect arts to promote selfish ends, be true discretion, and becoming the understanding of a man ; without inquiring

ring into this, I say, it is sufficient to my present purpose, that justice, judgment, and equity, are the wisdom which *Solomon* inculcateth. SERM.  
I.

Another virtue, which he recommendeth under the same character, is chastity. This he very often insisteth upon, particularly in the 2d, the 5th, and 7th chapters, proving at large the simplicity and thoughtfulness of the adulterer, who, with the insensibility of a beast, is caught in the toil, and stupidly falls into the snare which is laid for him. The men who abandon themselves to the pursuit of dishonourable and irregular pleasures, fondly imagine there is a great deal of art and contrivance in their management; they are the men, in their own conceit, of deep intrigue, and refined understanding, valuing themselves upon the little artifices, whereby they seduce the unhappy partners of their crimes, and impose upon those whom they injure. But all this, in the judgment of *Solomon*, is extreme folly; and the senseless wretch, deprived of all reason, is only hastening to his ruin, *as an ox goeth to the slaughter*, or, *as a fool to the correction of the stocks*. The intemperate will not, perhaps, pretend to the character of wise; they

SERM. they satisfy themselves with their sensual gratifications as the best enjoyments, having endeavoured to drown all sense of superior excellence; they decry wisdom, and treat it with contempt, as too rigid and solemn for that gaiety in which they chuse to spend their days. But if we will take our notions of things from this writer, voluptuousness and excesses in eating and drinking are directly contrary to wisdom, which guardeth her votaries against them as most pernicious, *Prov. xxiii. 19. Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way. Be not amongst wine-bibbers, amongst riotous eaters of flesh; for the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall cloath a man with rags.* Slothfulness, a lazy stupid inactivity and indolence, is a vice very incident to human Nature; and they who give themselves up to it vainly fancy they take the wisest course, avoiding many dangers, and a great deal of painful toil and labour; *the sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason:* But in this book he is charged with brutish folly, and even sent to the beasts, as wiser than he; to be instructed by them, *Prov. vi. 6. Go to the ant, thou sluggard,*

*gard, consider her ways, and be wise.* And, SERM.  
on the contrary, diligence is pressed as true I.  
wisdom. It is plain too, that the wisdom  
*Solomon* teacheth comprehends the right go-  
vernment of the tongue, which other inspi-  
red writers represent as an eminent branch  
of religion, directing us when to be silent,  
and when to speak; but especially he di-  
recteth us to keep the heart, restraining fu-  
rious passions, preserving equanimity and  
composure of spirit, and exercising humility  
and meekness.

But I need not insist on particulars; every  
one must be convinced that folly is, accord-  
ing to the judgment of *Solomon*, the cha-  
racter of every vice; and wisdom, of every  
virtue; and that his intention is to set moral  
good and evil in that light, that we may  
choose the one, and refuse the other. If any  
are inclined to become his disciples, and to  
form their lives by his instructions, there is  
nothing they must be so careful to preserve  
as their integrity, and with the utmost cau-  
tion they must avoid every sin; to accom-  
plish which ends is the invaluable benefit  
he proposeth by the wisdom he hath taught.  
When vice, of any sort, hath the greatest  
outward advantages on its side, when mul-  
titudes

SERM. titudes are combined to enrich themselves

I. by its unlawful gains; by their united counsels projects are form'd, and by their united force to be executed, so that there is the greatest probability of success; and honours, profit, and pleasure, are in prospect to be attained by unrighteous methods, it is the province of wisdom to preserve us from the snare, and to deliver us from all crooked and forbidden paths; chap. i. 10. *My son, when sinners entice thee, consent thou not.* And, chap. ii. 11, 12. *Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee, to deliver thee from the way of the evil man.* And whereas in all the affairs and circumstances of life we are surrounded with temptations, and our own frailty is apt to betray us into snares of one kind or other, the wisdom *Solomon* recommendeth is proposed as an universal defence and antidote against all evil, and that which will effectually preserve us from every destructive way. Chap. iii. 21. *My son, keep sound wisdom and discretion, so shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck; then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.*

This



This, I think, is sufficient to answer the SERM.  
design I at first propos'd, that is, to shew I.  
the nature, characters, and uses of the wis-  
dom *Solomon* recommendeth in the *Proverbs*.  
But there are two observations farther to be  
made, which both the nature of the subject,  
and the express declarations of the author  
direct us to. The first is, that virtue and  
integrity, to be preserved from the ways of  
sin and wickedness, that it may amount to  
true wisdom, must be the result of delibe-  
ration and choice. Wisdom is the quality  
of a free self-determining agent, whose  
springs of action are under the guidance of  
his own understanding; chance, or neces-  
sity, or outward impulse, have no part in  
it. If you suppose a person restrained from  
any vicious course by force, or that he esca-  
peth it by a natural incapacity, or by acci-  
dent, without any design of his own, with-  
out any exercise of understanding, or confi-  
deration of the grounds he goeth upon; the  
innocence of his life, if it may be called so,  
hath nothing in it of wisdom, and therefore  
nothing of virtue. Discretion consisteth in  
weighing maturely the motives of action,  
in comparing them together, and being de-  
termined freely by that which, upon the  
whole,

SERM. whole, appeareth to be the justest and the  
 I. best. From which it is a plain consequence;  
 that the more calm and sedate, the more  
 deliberate and free our minds are in acting;  
 our conduct is the wiser and the better.  
 For a man to stumble into the right road;  
 or be hurried with vehemence, without con-  
 sidering whether he goeth, or what he is  
 doing, is not worthy to be called either  
 wise or good. A contrary accident or im-  
 pulse, for any thing in him to prevent it,  
 might as well have driven him the opposite  
 way. And in this consisteth the folly of a  
 wicked course of life, that the unhappy  
 sinner, as the prophet speaketh, *Isaiab xlvi.*  
*8. doth not shew himself a man; he doth*  
*not act, according to the privilege of his*  
*nature, as the result of a calm inquiry into*  
*the motives of action, but rather is acted*  
*upon by external objects, driven by his ap-*  
*petites and passions, the weight which*  
*moves the brutal kind, or as if human na-*  
*ture were meerly a piece of mechanism.*  
*Solomon's account is this, chap. xiv. 8. That*  
*it is the wisdom of the prudent to understand*  
*his way; and ver. 15. The simple believeth*  
*every word, but the prudent man looketh well*  
*to his goings. Therefore he giveth this di-*  
 rection

rection, chap. iv. 20. *My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear to my sayings.* A rash, inconsiderate, thoughtless conduct, must come short of religion, because it is unworthy of wisdom; for it is plain, by all the notions which our reason suggesteth to us of the Deity, he will most approve his reasonable creatures when they act the most deliberately, and have impartially considered all things which ought to determine them, in order to their making the best choice they can. It followeth then, that the more precipitately we act, still the less religiously, if religion be indeed wisdom; and always when we find ourselves vehemently pressed to any designs or measures, so as to exclude consideration, which is often the unhappiness of men, we have the more reason to suspect that our minds are under an undue influence, and in a tempted state; for consideration leadeth to virtue and religion, but the views of sin and folly shun it as a mortal enemy.

The second observation from the account which this book giveth us of religious virtue, and the light in which it places it as wisdom, is, that a good man useth foresight, and looketh to the last issue of things, that

SERM. *ſo* he may direct his behaviour. Wisdom

I. conſiſteth in forming deſigns ſuited to the dignity of our nature, and purſuing them by the beſt means in our power. Religion, then, could never juſtly be called wiſdom, if it had not a view to the future confequences of our preſent conduct, ſecuring the greateſt perfection and felicity that can be hoped for. No man can be eſteemed wiſe, who is inſenſible to his own true intereſt; for it is an inclination inſeparable from human nature, and juſtified by the ſtricteſt reaſon, to ſeek after happineſs; it is a maxim which no one will deny, *Job xxii. 2. He that is wiſe, is profitable to himſelf;* which *Solomon* applies to his wiſe man, that is, the virtuous, who in the beſt manner provideth for his own ſafety and happineſs; *Prov. ix. 12. If thou be wiſe, thou ſhalt be wiſe for thyſelf; but if thou ſcorneſt, thou alone ſhalt bear it.* Though virtue doth ſtand on another foot, and there is really ſuch a thing as moral excellence, neceſſarily acknowledged and approved by our minds, abſtracting from all conſideration of intereſt, yet is it very much ſtrengthened, and intelligent creatures reaſonably eſtabliſhed in their choice of it, and their reſolution to adhere

to it against all temptations, by this assurance, that it shall not hurt, but rather secure their happiness, which hath been acknowledged to be the tendency of virtue, wherever any just notions of it have obtained in the world. If men believe there is a God, wise, just, and good, they must conclude that righteousness is pleasing to him; and if the soul is immortal, and shall subsist in another state, they who have done good in this life, have the best hope of being distinguished by the favour of the Deity in the next. These are matters about which the sacred rule of our religion hath not left us in the dark, as the heathens were; but taught us, with the greatest clearness and certainty, the wisdom of obedience to God's laws, and the folly of disobedience; because *he hath appointed a day in which he will judge men by Jesus Christ, according to their works.* And thus pursuing his main scope, and delivering his instructions agreeably to his grand principle, that virtue is wisdom, and that vice and wickedness is extreme folly: *Solomon says, chap. xxii. 3. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.* Again; the religious govern themselves by

SERM. a cautious foresight of the unhappy consequences of a sinful course, and by views truly sublime, and far above this world. Chap. xv. 24. *The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath.*

Having proceeded so far, and endeavoured to shew you what the wisdom is which *Solomon* so much celebrateth in this book, persuading us to study it, and conform ourselves to its rules, it would be, in the next place, very proper to consider the truth of his doctrine; to inquire whether religion, universal righteousness, goodness, temperance, meekness, chastity, and all the other virtues in which he placeth wisdom, be really worthy of that character. If it be so, then certainly the fear of the Lord, with the whole system of virtues which it includeth, or which depend upon it, must be high in our esteem; for we cannot help valuing wisdom as the proper improvement of our reason; to think meanly and contemptuously of it, would be to forget ourselves, and to disparage what must be acknowledged to be the excellence of our nature. But the pretences to wisdom, it is supposed, every man must have leave to examine,

and to judge for himself; obedience may be demanded by mere authority; the subject is not at liberty to enquire into the reasons of what is enjoined by his superior; but counsel is addressed to the understanding; and whatever is proposed under the character of wisdom must necessarily be submitted to our own consideration, that we may receive it so far as there appeareth sufficient cause to our own reason and judgment. Now, certainly this is a doctrine which will abide the strictest and most impartial trial, that true religion, and every branch of it, is wisdom, and *the knowledge of the Holy is understanding*. Perhaps the best and most satisfying way for illustrating this, would be to enter into particulars, to consider the duties of piety, of justice, of meekness, of charity, and the rest; and to shew that every one of them is indeed wisdom, most becoming men, exactly suited to the state and relations of the human nature, and conducive to the highest and most important ends which such a Being ought to pursue; but that would be too large for the present design. If we take the whole system together, it will not be difficult to judge whether it deserveth to be called wisdom, and

SERM.  
I.  
~~~~~

SERM. whether they are not the wisest men, who  
 I. form the dispositions of their minds and  
 their practice by its rules.

One notion of wisdom is, that it consisteth in a right judgment of things, of their nature, so far as that falls within our knowledge, of their properties, relations, differences, and of their ends and uses. The difference between the wisest man, and the weakest, in understanding, doth not lie in the materials of their knowledge, if I may speak so; they have the same ideas, the same representations of objects in their mind conveyed by their senses: But whether it be for want of equal capacity, opportunity, or diligence, the one hath not so thoroughly examined, and doth not so well discern their agreement or disagreement, their relations, distinctions, and uses, as the other. A defect here must have a very unhappy influence on our conduct, which must be formed according to our sentiments and opinions of things. A man who is not able to distinguish, cannot know how to determine his choice, what to do, or forbear; what to chuse, or refuse; like a blind man placed among a great variety of things, some good and some bad, who hath nothing



to direct his choice, because he cannot discern the difference, and may be as ready to catch at a pebble as a jewel, nay, as ready to lay hold on what is destructive, as on what may be good and profitable to him; so in the proper sphere of the rational powers, as there is an essential difference between objects, it is absolutely necessary we should discern it, in order to our being rightly determined. If this be a just notion of wisdom, let us apply it to the subject before us, and any one may easily judge, whether universal religion, the fear of God, justice, patience, temperance, goodness, be not more agreeable to the true nature and essential differences of things, and sheweth an exacter judgment concerning them than the contrary. Let any man who hath even the slenderest acquaintance with the system of these virtues, determine, whether he who heartily embraceth and acteth according to it, appeareth to have a truer discernment, than he who maketh the opposite choice. I do not doubt but every one, who reflecteth seriously, will be convinced, that to fear God, to be just, and charitable to men, and to moderate our own appetites and passions, is to judge rightly, to treat things as they

SERM.

I.

SERM. are, according to truth, and to their real  
 I. nature and importance; in other words,  
 that it is wisdom; and that to abandon our  
 selves to impiety, unrighteousness, and sen-  
 sual pleasures, is to confound things, to neg-  
 lect their differences, to treat them quite  
 otherwise than, at least if we considered,  
 we should judge them to be; or that it is  
 folly.

Another notion of wisdom is, an ability  
 to improve our reason to the best purposes.  
 All men boast alike of this high prerogative  
 of their nature, that they are rational; but  
 they have not all the same dexterity in the  
 use of reason, nor an equal capacity to em-  
 ploy it for the same valuable ends. The  
 constitution of the human nature seems to  
 be uniform; we have the same original de-  
 terminations, the same senses, or ways of  
 perceiving things, and the same propensities  
 or affections which constitute the ends we  
 pursue; but they are various and unequal in  
 their excellency and importance, according  
 to the different parts of our nature to which  
 they relate, and the uses which the wise  
 author of our being designed them for.  
 There is, for example, in man, a desire to  
 meat and drink, and other gratifications of  
 the

the external senses; there is also a desire of moral excellence, an affection to beings of the most perfect characters. Every one must see there is a great difference in point of excellency and importance, between these affections or desires, and the pursuits to which they determine us. It is the province of wisdom to judge concerning the worth and dignity of our ends, that we may pursue them with suitable zeal and application, as well as to find out the best and properest means for obtaining them. Now, among all the ends which we are determined to pursue by any instinct, appetite, or inclination of nature, it will be no difficulty to judge which are the worthiest, the most excellent in themselves, and the most becoming such creatures as we are to pursue, and consequently, which ends true wisdom directeth us to chuse, as the chief and constantly to be aimed at, in preference to all others; whether that moral perfection, which is the glory of intelligent beings, or the enjoyments of the animal life, which are common to us with the brutal kinds.

One necessary determination in our nature is, to seek our own happiness; and it will be acknowledged true wisdom which

SERM. directeth us to the best and most effectual way for securing that end. Now, not to enter on any large explication of this point, the question concerning the wisdom of religion may be brought to a short issue. Let any man seriously consider, and upon mature reflection answer to himself, whether he really thinks it would be better for him, upon the whole, to be religious or wicked; whether he would find himself easier, and be better satisfied in his own mind, and have better hope concerning his state hereafter; by fearing God, or not fearing him; by a course of regular strict virtue, or licentious immorality? If there be any difficulty at all in answering the question, it ariseth from the vehemence of corrupt inclinations, and the present uneasiness which accompanieth them; whereby men are urged to comply, without considering the certain, though at present distant, consequences of such compliance. But, not to insist on any other arguments, this is a difficulty unworthy of wisdom, because it ariseth from the weak part of our constitution, originally intended to be guided and directed by reason, which in man ought still to hold the reins; and we turn into folly, whenever

whenever we decline a subjection to its empire, or act otherwise than it directeth. SERM.  
I.

Doth not wisdom require us to act with a regard to the future, as well as the present time? Is it not true discretion to have a greater regard to a more important than to a less important interest, and to have a greater regard to an eternal state, than to that which is momentary and perishing? And if this be taken into the account, the wisdom of religion will fully appear.

It is certain that multitudes of mankind conduct themselves quite otherwise; they take up with the pleasures of the external senses, or the gratification of low desires; and they imagine themselves wise in doing so, devising subtle methods for obtaining their ends. But this fatal mistake ariseth from a partial consideration of the human nature, and a narrow view of our existence. If we deliberately consider the whole of our frame, and with discretion extend our prospects to a future state, of which we have the strongest assurances, we shall be convinced that sensible objects cannot afford us the truest felicity; and that it becometh such creatures as we are, to provide for a longer duration than the present life; that  
the

SERM. the dominion of conscience over the lower  
 I. appetites and passions is absolutely necessary  
 to preserve the harmony of nature ; and  
 that the most solid and permanent peace  
 and joy, spring from the love and obser-  
 vance of God's laws. And as wisdom is  
 profitable to direct men to the prosecution  
 of the most worthy ends, another part of  
 its province is chusing the best means for  
 attaining them ; and this also appeareth in  
 religion. Its directions principally turn up-  
 on the practice of piety and virtue ; and  
 what better and more natural way can there  
 be for arriving at perfection in any thing,  
 than practising that wherein we would be  
 perfect ? If we would hope to be finally  
 blessed in beholding God's face in righte-  
 ousness, what better preparation can there  
 be for it, than, when we behold the glory  
 of the Lord, displayed in his word, to be  
 changed into his image, to become parta-  
 kers of a divine nature, and, cleansing our-  
 selves from the filthiness of the flesh and  
 spirit, to perfect holiness in his fear ; thus to  
 grow up gradually, by a continual progress  
 in every religious virtue, to a meetness for  
 the inheritance of the saints in light. True  
 it is, that through the prejudices which are  
 natural

natural to us, and selfish affections, which are very strong, the discipline of religion is irksome to men, especially at their first entrance into it; so that true virtue, as practised in opposition to the bent and tendency of depraved appetites and passions, is justly represented under the notion of self-denial and mortification. This at first view may, to unattentive minds, have an unnatural appearance, and not seem worthy the name of wisdom; for that which is to be denied, thwarted, and controuled, being a part of our nature, the discipline which prescribeth the denying it, must necessarily prescribe pain, (indeed the rule of our religion acknowledgeth this, representing that part of the exercise it enjoineth, under the notion of pulling out the right eye, and cutting off the right hand) and therefore it may seem to be a discipline not wisely calculated for promoting the felicity of the human nature, which is confessedly an end of wisdom. Yet upon a more close and serious consideration, it will appear, that self-denial and mortification is a necessary part of wisdom, as a remedy accommodated to the infirmities of our present state, and the disorders of our nature.

We

SERM. We are divided against ourselves, and find

I. opposite tendencies in our hearts, carnal inclinations and passions leading one way, and reason and conscience proposing another directly contrary. They must be strangers to self-reflection, who do not find it so in fact and experience; and if it be so, it is plain that something, which must be called ourselves, and a part of our nature, must be denied; either appetite and passion on the one hand, or reason and conscience on the other. But it is certain, and every considerate person will be convinced of it, that the latter is the superior, the more excellent, and, of right, the governing part; and that conforming ourselves to its direction will yield the greater, more exalted, and abiding happiness. Now, is it not wise and reasonable to deny an inferior, and worse self, for the sake of a better and superior? And thus the law of mortifying the deeds of the body, of crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts, is wisely enjoined for the saving of the spirit, for rescuing it from corruption, and raising it to a state of wisdom, activity, and true pleasure.

Since, then, this doctrine of *Solomon* sets religious virtue in such an inviting light; and since, as he elsewhere speaketh, there is



a price put in our hands to attain it, let us not be of the fools who have no heart to purchase it. This is the unhappy condition of many to whom divine wisdom crieth, and understanding lifteth up her voice. The impetuous clamor of their lusts and passions prevaileth against the calm voice of reason; their depraved affections, indulged, grow up to such confirmed vicious habits, as harden their hearts to an utter insensibility, and a total neglect of wisdom's most earnest solicitations. Solomon, in this chapter, representeth the fatal consequences of this in a very clear and affecting manner; and with his words I shall conclude: *Wisdom uttereth her voice in the streets, and crieth in the chief places of concourse, in the opening of the gates, and in the city; that is, in the plainest and most intelligible manner: But then he adds, in the name of wisdom, Because I called, and ye refused; have set at naught my counsels, and would none of my reproofs—they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord; therefore, shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.*


## S E R M O N II.

The EXCELLENCY of W I S D O M.

P R O V E R B S VIII. 6, 7.

*Hear, for I will speak of excellent things,  
and the opening of my lips shall be right  
things; for my mouth shall speak truth.*

SERM. II. **H**AVING endeavoured to explain the nature, characters, ends, and uses, of that wisdom which *Solomon* recommendeth in this book, shewing that it comprehendeth the whole system of religious virtue, the fear of God, all the pious devout affections and regards which are due to the supreme Being; justice and good-will to men; sobriety, or a due government of our inferior appetites and passions, together with the proper effects of these qualities and dispositions of mind in our conversations, doing good, and eschewing evil; and having endeavoured to justify the notion he intendeth to give us, that it may have a proper influence on our temper and practice, that this is true wisdom; I shall, next, apply myself  
to


to the consideration of some arguments S E R M.  
whereby he inforceth it, and urgeth us to II.  
study, embrace, and conform our lives to 

its direction. One argument is contained in the text, which is a part of wisdom's elegant speech, addressed to the sons of men, in the most open and solemn manner. She is represented, in the beginning of this chapter, as making a public appearance in a rude, ignorant, and corrupt world, loudly proclaiming her doctrines and counsels, and calling upon all men, without exception, even of the most simple and stupid, to hearken to them. And what consideration could be more powerful to engage their attention than this, that she speaketh of *excellent things*; the opening of her lips is of *right things*, and her mouth speaketh *truth*.

That this is the just character of the instructions and precepts of religious virtue, I will endeavour to shew you in this discourse; and then I shall make some practical reflections. You cannot but observe, that other writers of scripture, as well as *Solomon*, attribute high excellency to religion; particularly we meet with many declarations of that sort in the books of *Job* and the *Psalms*. It is compared with things which are among men of the greatest price, and preferred to them;

SERM. them ; which method of comparison is a  
 II. very natural one in enquiring into and de-  
 scribing worth. It must indeed be supposed  
 that we are, in some measure, acquainted  
 with the things which wisdom *speaketh*,  
 otherwise it would be a vain attempt to  
 shew their excellence. But, besides that, I  
 have already mentioned some of them, in  
 the brief account I gave of the design and  
 main subject of this book ; I hope that is a  
 supposition not unfit to be made in such an  
 assembly : For though it must be acknow-  
 ledged, that the compleat scheme of reli-  
 gion and morality, and every thing belong-  
 ing to it which may be comprehended in  
 the doctrine of wisdom, is not without dif-  
 ficulties ; some of the smaller lines in the  
 divine draught may not be clearly discerned,  
 perhaps not all of them, by any even of  
 those who have searched into it with the  
 greatest care ; yet the principal strokes are  
 so clear, that he who *runs may read*, as the  
 prophet speaketh ; scarcely any Christian can  
 be ignorant of them, at least so far ignorant,  
 as not to be able to judge of their excel-  
 lence.

My method for illustrating *Solomon's* ar-  
 gument in the text, shall be this :

*First*, I will consider the excellence of SERM.  
the doctrines and injunctions of wis- II.  
dom, absolutely and in themselves, and   
under that head explain their rectitude  
and truth.

*Secondly*, I shall, after the example of  
this, and other sacred writers, compare  
them with other things which are most  
valued by men, and shew their supe-  
rior worth.

*First*, let us consider the excellence of  
the doctrines and injunctions of wisdom, ab-  
solutely and in themselves. And here it  
would seem reasonable, first of all, that we  
should fix an idea of excellence, making it  
the standard whereby to try every thing  
which pretendeth to that character: But,  
as far as I can see, the sacred writers satisfy  
themselves, with respect to this matter, by  
appealing to the common sense of mankind,  
and suppose a necessary approbation and  
esteem which must be the standard, at least  
the characteristic, of excellency to us. Their  
manner of speaking seems to be altogether  
unintelligible, unless there be some common  
and plain rule wherein all men are agreed,  
and which must have so deep a foundation

SERM. in nature, as the necessary invariable determination of our minds. If you suppose the character of excellent and right to be the result of arbitrary human constitutions, it would never be uniform, but must have as much variety as the measures of the understandings, fancies, customs, affections, prejudices, or whatever else might influence men in making such constitutions. But we will find, by looking into our own minds, that we do not learn our notions of excellent and right that way; they are before the consideration of all laws, appointments, orders, and instructions whatsoever; for we bring all these to the test in our own minds, and try them by a sense which we have prior to any of them. This is not acquired (though it may be improved) by study and learning, for then very few would be qualified to judge; but in the text wisdom appealeth to the simple and to fools, submitting her instructions to their examination. Nay, this sense cannot depend on any positive declaration even of God's will, nor is the meaning, properly, of excellent and right things, such things as he hath commanded. When *St. Paul* giveth these epithets to religious virtue, much of the same signification with those in the text, *whatsoever*



ever things are true, and pure, and just, and honest, and lovely, I cannot think he means that these things are so because prescribed as duty in the word of God, considered as a divine law; for then he would have expressed himself more plainly and intelligibly thus; whatsoever things are commanded, think on these things; and though the very same things are enjoined by the supreme authority of God, and enforced by the gospel motives, by which they derive a new obligation upon the mind of man; yet honesty and turpitude, loveliness and deformity, are characters of actions which can have no reference to legislative authority, but purely to that impression of moral excellence which is made deep in the human heart. Besides, the character of excellent is in a peculiar, and indeed the highest sense, applied to God's laws and to himself, which shews that it is not to be understood to be fixed by a positive declaration of his will; for if it were, when it is said that his laws are excellent, and himself an excellent Being, the meaning would be, that his laws are, and himself is, just what he pleases; which is in effect to say, that his moral perfections are not essential to him. It remains then, that the original idea of excel-

S E R M. lence is, in this sense, essential to our nature ;

II. that it is one of those perceptions to which we are necessarily determined when the object fitted to excite it is presented to us. By our constitution we are tied down to certain sensations or ways of perceiving, which seem to be uniform, alike in all men, and subject to no alterations, in which we must finally acquiesce as the sole judges within their proper sphere. *Job* says, chap. xii. 11. *Doth not the ear try words, and the mouth taste his meats.* The perception of tastes is natural, the same originally in every man, no one learneth it from another, as we do the signification of words, arts, and habits of divers kinds ; and every man's taste is the only judge for himself of its proper object, no one can change it, or conform his manner of perception to the will of another ; so that if a proclamation was made, offering meats and drinks to all who should be willing to receive them, and this argument used, not that they are wholesome or medicinal, tending to restore and preserve health, for that might be difficult to judge of, and requireth skill and experience, but that they are sweet or palatable ; to whom is the appeal understood to be made, but to every one for himself? for the mouth tasteth meats.



meats. In like manner, says *Job*, *the ear trieth words*; probably he means, the understanding trieth doctrines, and the mind trieth the goodness of things, and must pronounce the best judgment on every one that is proposed to it. There is a taste in the mind, or a power of discerning of excellency, of right and truth, as well as in the mouth a taste of meats; and it is as natural and much more invariable. When certain characters, actions, and principles, are proposed to us, we have as necessarily a perception of excellent and vile, right and wrong, of true and false, as we have of sweet, and bitter, and sour, from the objects of the external sense. And as this latter is capable of being improved by experience, or vitiated by a distemper, which doth not hinder its being natural; so in the other case, there is not in all men an equal degree or extent of knowledge in the things of wisdom, which ariseth from an inequality in their capacities, means of information, and attention; but still there is in all men a sense of the difference between moral good and evil, of the excellence of the one, and the turpitude of the other, as soon as it is understood. I do not say that this ne-


SERM. necessarily determines our practice ; we find by  
 II. experience that it is otherwise, and that  
 { men misled by their selfish inclinations, vicious customs and habits, and strong prejudices, chuse what they know to be evil, and refuse what they know to be good ; but every one who, according to *Solomon's* exhortation, will hear and seriously consider, is qualified to discern that the things which wisdom speaketh, are indeed excellent.

If the question be, What are those things, in the instructions of wisdom, or of religion and virtue, which appear to be so excellent? I answer, every thing. Let any man seriously consider the great branches of religion as they are proposed to us in the scripture, let them think on them severally, and then in conjunction, as making up one system, and let him calmly pronounce judgment, whether they, or their opposites, are the more excellent and amiable? whether the fear and love of God, with a constant tenor of practice agreeable to these great principles, be better than irreligion and profaneness? whether charity, fidelity, gratitude, temperance, chastity, patience, be better than malice, fraud, violence, perfidiousness, drunkenness, lewdness, and a continued course

course of outrageous insolence against God and man? and then let him judge whether it be not true, which the prophet hath said, *Micah vi. 8. God hath shewed thee, O man, what is good.*

But I think the wise man hath very well explained his own meaning in the following words of the text, and leads us into a just way of conceiving the excellence of religious virtue; for, *faith wisdom, the opening of my lips shall be of right things, and my mouth shall speak truth.* Right and true are characters which we cannot but acknowledge to be excellent wherever we discern them; set them against their opposites, in any case wherein you are competent judges, and fully able to distinguish, that you may see to which of them your own minds must necessarily give the preference. An action or a character, in which rectitude and integrity eminently shine forth, or a rule which proposeth them to us, such as that of our Saviour, *Matt. vii. 12. Whatever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* This will command our veneration, and truth will always appear lovely, even when our private interests and affections stand in greatest opposition to it. When

SERM. any bias inclineth us to the side of iniquity  
 II. or of falshood, yet still we are conscious of  
 a superior excellence and amiableness in  
 righteousness and truth. These are the characters of God's laws, which engage the esteem and affection of his servants, I mean his moral laws, which are clearly declared in his word, and were known by the light of nature; for the apostle says, *the work of the law is written in the hearts of men*; the Psalmist likewise, *Psal. xix. 8. The statutes of the Lord are right*; and ver. 9. *His judgments are altogether righteous*. And *Psal. cxix. 138. Thy testimonies are right, good, and very faithful*. It is true, that righteousness is often taken in a limited sense for one part of our duty to men, rendering to all their due; but sometimes it comprehendeth universal religion and virtue, to which the character of right is ascribed, not merely with regard to the authority of God enjoining it, but because of an inseparable rectitude in the things themselves, prior to all laws. Not only strict justice, but other parts of our duty, come under the denomination of righteousness, because of their congruity to that sense of right and wrong essential to the rational nature; for example, the homage  
 we

we owe to Almighty God, as well as the S E R M.  
good offices which ought to be performed II.  
to our fellow-creatures ; for reverence, love,   
gratitude, and obedience, to the best of be-  
ings, our constant benefactor, and the re-  
warder of them that diligently seek him,  
will appear as agreeable to the voice of rea-  
son, as that we should preserve the rights  
of, and be beneficent to, them who are made  
of one blood with us, with whom we are  
joined in the communion of the same na-  
ture, linked together by common wants,  
and a mutual capacity of service ; and who  
have the same claim of good offices from  
us, as we have from them.

Again ; there is eternal truth in all God's  
testimonies ; they are founded on self-evi-  
dent maxims. If we reduce what hath been  
already said concerning the excellence and  
equity of the main essential parts of our  
duty, into the form of propositions, such  
as, that the fear and love of God, justice,  
beneficence, gratitude, and sobriety, are  
better than the contrary, no man is so stu-  
pid and perverse, as not to assent to them in  
his own mind, however gainfaying his in-  
clinations and passions may be. We need  
go no farther than plainly to propose them,  
and,

SERM. and, indeed, we can go no farther, they  
 II. are so evident; I question whether any ar-  
 { gument that can be used is clearer than the  
 propositions themselves.

There is another notion of excellence, considered as the measure of perfection which belongs to any particular kind of being, or whereby it is fitted for its proper end. Thus, those things are esteemed excellent which in the best manner, and with the greatest exactness serve the purposes they were designed for, or which come up to the standard of their particular kind, and still, upon a comparison, those are said to excel, which come nearest to it. Now, I have shewn, in a former discourse, that religious virtue justly claims the pre-eminence in the quality of wisdom as far excelling whatever may pretend to that Character, and as serving nobler and more important purposes than any other kind of wisdom doth. But the highest sense of excellence abstracteth from any particular use, or any particular standard, that which absolutely on it's own account, and without reference to any end is to be valued; it is its own end, and our esteem ultimately terminates upon it; and this is peculiar to moral excellence, which irresistibly commands our  
 appro-

approbation without regard to any use or any benefit which can be supposed to accrue from it. In all the variety of circumstances wherein men can possibly be placed, and in all the views we can take of it, righteousness will still appear excellent to a reasonable nature and attract its esteem. SERM. II.

I come in the second place, after the example of *Solomon* and other sacred writers, to compare the Doctrines and precepts of wisdom or religious virtue with other things which are most valued by Men, and to shew their superior worth. That these writers do illustrate the excellence of wisdom in this manner is plain; at the 11th verse of this chapter it is said, *Wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it*, and, ver. 19. *My fruit is better than gold, yea than fine gold, and my revenue than choice silver*. And Chap. iii. 14, 15. *The merchandize of it is better than the merchandize of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared to her*. The Psalmist often declares his esteem of God's laws, as far surpassing *thousands of gold and silver*, and, *Job xxviii. from ver. 15. It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver*

SERM. *silver be weighed for the price thereof; it*

II. *cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx or the saphir. The gold and chryſtal cannot equal it, and the exchange of it ſhall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention ſhall be made of coral, or of pearl, for the price of wiſdom is above rubies: the topaz of Ethiopia ſhall not equal it, neiſhall it be valued with pure gold. To ſtate the compariſon rightly, it would be proper to inquire into the grounds upon which theſe things are valued with which wiſdom is compared, and preferred to them; and it ſeems to be this, that in the preſent ſtate of human nature commerce is neceſſary, conſiſting in an exchange of the produce of the earth in different parts of it, and the fruits of mens induſtry. Since the comfort and conveniency of life cannot be ſufficiently provided for by the ſingle care and labour of one; and we are all ſenſible of this, for a great many hands are employed about even that with which we are fed and cloathed; and ſince no one part of the earth is ſo compleatly furniſhed with all which may be uſeful, but it may be the better for what others can ſpare; which reaſon determines diſtant nations to traffick; on this account, I ſay, commerce is neceſſary; and to make it more eaſy and advantageous,*



geous, there is, by general consent, a common standard or measure established, by which all things are valued which are exchanged; and so *Solomon* says, *Eccles. x. 19. Money answereth all things.* It is this which maketh money itself so much valued, because a man finds that ordinarily it is capable of procuring him the greater abundance of those things which tend to render his condition easy and to please his appetites. What maketh gold more precious than the pebble or iron? It is because it can be sold for more, and by its price command a greater variety of things which belong to the conveniency and pleasure of life. And, because I would not diminish any thing from its value, and I am sure I need not, in order to prove the point before us, that is, to shew the superior excellence of Wisdom, let it be added, that it may be considered as affording men the means and opportunity of doing and receiving good of a higher kind, that is, of virtue itself.

But, now, to shew the truth of what the authors mentioned so constantly and solemnly affirm, that wisdom is better than rubies, pearls, or whatever else can be desired in this world; first, let it be observed, that  
none

SERM. none of them come up to the character of  
 II. excellence before insisted on, and which  
 must be attributed to wisdom. They all have  
 only a limited and relative worth; no man  
 can deliberately value them highly otherwise  
 than with reference to their use, and there-  
 fore they cannot in reason be as much  
 esteemed as those things which must be  
 acknowledged excellent on their own ac-  
 count, and without respect to an higher end.  
 Though for want of reflection and not look-  
 ing narrowly into things, we may hastily  
 take up the imagination of some excellence  
 in such objects, yet upon a more thorough  
 examination, we shall find that their price  
 must be estimated according to their use-  
 fulness, and the advantages which may be  
 procured by them; but the excellence of  
 religious Wisdom is in itself absolute, and  
 the more we inquire into it, and view it on all  
 sides, its dignity and beauty will be still  
 more conspicuous. If we put the case of  
 distress which is incident to all men, of  
 a man, for instance, in lingering sickness, in  
 the utmost agonies of pain, or in the views  
 of death; he loseth all relish for his riches,  
 for they can be of no use to him; the lustre  
 of his gold and pearls fadeth; but the ex-  
 cellence of virtue suffereth no diminution;  
 nay,

may, in that dismal case, appeareth more desirable than ever. SERM.  
II.

*Secondly,* The most precious treasures of this world are not valued, not even altogether by worldly men, but with some regard to virtue; but religious wisdom is necessarily esteemed excellent independently on them, and without any manner of regard to them, which is a consideration that sufficiently sheweth to which upon a comparison, even in the judgment of the most partial, the preference is due. Perhaps this may not at first be assented to, that worldly treasures are valued even by worldly men with some regard to virtue; but, pray, consider, if the most sordid spirits would be contented to enjoy the solitary pleasure of their riches; nay, if they can relish any excellence in them, or find any satisfaction, without society and a communication with some intelligent beings like themselves. I cannot believe there is such an one among mankind, and that it must be something beneath the human nature which can sink into such a low and abject disposition. Now, the social are really virtuous affections, which still subsist, though in a weak and low degree, even in the covetous man; he is indeed an Idolater, as the scripture justly calleth him,

SERM. but he hath not wholly sacrificed all his social dispositions to his idol; he hath an eye  
 II. to the good of some or other besides himself, which his heart findeth to be the greatest pleasure and advantage his riches afford, though it may be they lie within a very small circle, such as his own family, his nearest relations and friends, whose wants at present he supplieth very sparingly as he doth his own; yet still a regard to their future, and, as he imagines, lasting benefit, is the chief support of his satisfaction; and that, in fine, he can have no enjoyment of his jewels and his gold without some degree of benevolence. Consider farther, how we value other mens possession of these precious things, and here perhaps, we will be more impartial; are the possessors at all in our esteem if we suppose them void of inclinations to use their riches for the good of mankind? Are these things at all valued when in the possession of our neighbour, otherwise than as the means and instruments of virtue, consequently inferior and subordinate to virtue itself, from which they derive all their worth? So that in this way of stating the comparison, Wisdom must be acknowledged to have the superior excellence.

And,

And, lastly, the things of this world, which rival wisdom in our esteem, have many inconveniences attending the acquisition and the use of them, which do not affect this invaluable possession; they must be peculiar and exclusive, enjoyed with distinction, and as the engrossed property of the possessor, and they perish in our using them; but for wisdom, let a man labour ever so much in acquiring it, he doth it not to the prejudice of any other, no one hath the less for his attainments, and it encreaseth rather than is diminished, by the use and enjoyment of it.

The proper application to be made of this doctrine, is, that which is frequently recommended in this book, that we should hear the counsels of wisdom, as we are exhorted in the text; that we should make it our choice, and use our utmost endeavours to attain it. *Prov. iv. 7. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.* Certainly the just inference from the excellency of any thing is, that we should use our utmost diligence to be possessed of it, and especially since the excellence appeareth so plainly upon the least reflection; and every

SERM. one who will turn his thoughts that way,  
 II. cannot but acknowledge it; which must  
 exceedingly aggravate the folly of those  
 who *have no heart to it, when a price is  
 put into their hands to get wisdom.* God  
 hath so framed the human heart, that we  
 must necessarily be self-condemned in rebel-  
 ling against his laws, since there is a witness  
 in our own breast of their excellency, their  
 eternal righteousness and truth. If any  
 man, who is even under the greatest disad-  
 vantages for the practice of his duty, would  
 but seriously think with himself how he will  
 be able to answer for chusing what his own  
 heart told him was worse, and refusing what  
 he could not but be sensible was better, it  
 would seem that even this might be suffi-  
 cient to reclaim him from his folly. It re-  
 quireth no depth of penetration to discern  
 the force of the argument; as *Moses* saith  
 concerning the law, the main of which is,  
 that eternal law of righteousness which *So-  
 lomon* representeth under the character of  
 wisdom; and *St. Paul* applieth it to the  
 gospel, which still excelleth in greater per-  
 spicuity, it is *not in heaven, that thou shouldst  
 say, Who shall go up for us to heaven and  
 bring it to us, that we may hear it and do*

*it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea to bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? The word is nigh unto thee, even in thy heart, and in thy mouth, Deut. xxx. 12.*

SERM.  
II.

But, still, let us remember what I observed before, that the sense we have of the excellency of wisdom, and the strong light in which it appeareth to every one who reflecteth upon it, layeth no constraint upon us; if it did, there could be no such thing as virtue or religion at all, for that kind of necessity is inconsistent with its very nature; the approbation is necessary, the election or determination to act, is not; between these two there is a great difference, they are often separated, but always to the reproach of an intelligent creature.

My brethren, it has pleased God to favour us with a gracious revelation by Jesus Christ, with a new and clear publication of the doctrines and laws of religious wisdom. When men had darkened their understanding by their own fault; when, as the apostle saith, *The world by wisdom knew not God*; and elsewhere, *the Gentiles walked in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of*

SERM. *God, through the ignorance that is in them,*  
 II. *because of the hardness of their hearts; who*  
 being past feeling, have given themselves over  
 unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness  
 with greediness; when they were sunk into  
 a wretched impotence to good, the flesh pre-  
 vailed against the spirit, carnal and sensible  
 things made a strong impression on the  
 mind; and though they could not altogether  
 efface the sense of true wisdom, yet very  
 much obscured it, and drew away the heart  
 from an attention to its dictates; when cor-  
 rupt customs, the vain conversation received  
 by tradition from their fathers, had prevailed  
 to the enslaving of sinners; in this case it  
 pleased God, in great mercy, to find out a  
 way for redeeming them by his son *Jesus*  
*Christ*, his substantial word and wisdom,  
 who hath appeared to put away sin, and  
 bring the simple to understanding. The  
 gospel sheweth us true wisdom in its native  
 simplicity and purity, and in that form  
 which is best accommodated to the circum-  
 stances of our condition, enforcing its in-  
 structions by new and powerful motives.  
 The sum of what the grace of God, that  
 bringeth salvation, teacheth us, is, that *de-*  
*nying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should*



live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this SERM. present world, which is just the abridgment II.

of the wisdom which *Solomon* recommendeth. It shineth with a peculiarly attractive grace in the life and precepts of the holy *Jesus*, and a peculiar obligation is added by a clear and positive law, with a very important sanction, the promise of a glorious reward to the obedient, and the threatening of a terrible punishment to the obstinately disobedient, in order to reclaim sinners, and to strengthen men against the many temptations they are liable to in this state of imperfection: And yet farther, in compassion to our infirmities, God hath been pleased to give his Holy Spirit, the *spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him*; whose office it is to illuminate our minds, and assist our feeble endeavours in seeking after wisdom; so that in neglecting it, we shall be altogether inexcusable.

*Secondly*, Let us entertain our minds with the excellency of wisdom as a very agreeable contemplation. We naturally incline to meditate on those things which are much in our esteem, and by that the prevailing dispositions of the heart discover themselves as

SERM. much as any way. The men of the world,  
 II. who have their portion in this life, as the  
 Pfalmist speaketh, spend their solitary hours  
 in thinking on their treasures, contriving  
 how to encrease or preserve them; or they  
 delight themselves with scenes of pleasure  
 which their imagination formeth in the fru-  
 ition of them; as our Lord's parable of the  
 rich man in the 12th of St. *Luke's* gospel  
 representeth him, as first, considering with  
 himself how he should dispose of the vast  
 increase of his ground; and then, saying to  
 his soul, *Thou hast much goods laid up for  
 many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and  
 be merry.* The good man, on the contrary,  
*meditateth on the law of God night and day;*  
 and a very reasonable exercise this is, if we  
 have a just sense of its excellency; nay,  
 such as may well support the mind under  
 most afflicting circumstances; for any dis-  
 appointment, or that which for the present  
 seemeth to be grievous, may be borne, when  
 the soul can relieve itself by having recourse  
 to something more noble and important still  
 within its reach. That man must have a  
 spirit of a very odd constitution, who cannot  
 encourage himself under a disagreeable inci-  
 dent, when he seeth his most important in-  
 terest

terest in a flourishing condition. It was a SERM. strange perverseness in *Haman's* temper, that II. when he was in a prosperous state, applauding himself in the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, and his high promotion in the court of *Abasuerus*, distinguished by the favour of that great monarch and his queen, which was the ruling desire of his ambitious mind; yet all this availed him nothing, because a single man, so little esteemed by him as *Mordecai* the Jew, did not pay him the respect he required. We find by experience the power of innocent amusements in an afflicted state of mind; the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, agreeable sounds, the beauties of nature and of art, soothe the passions, and charm the troubled mind to rest. Now, is not the beauty of holiness, the excellence of wisdom, a nobler subject, and which must have a greater force, if we turn our serious attention to it, when we are oppressed with cares?

In the last place, the excellence of wisdom should affect the characters of men in our esteem, and regulate our regards to them. If it be so excellent in itself, then, certainly,

SERM. those who appear to have the largest share  
 II. of it, the wisest men in *Solomon's* sense, that  
 is, the most virtuous, are the most excellent,  
 and the worthiest of our respect; accordingly he saith, chap. xii. 26. *The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.* How is it that we govern our respect to men? Is it by riches, splendid equipage, high titles, or any thing of a like nature? *David* did not so, for he telleth us, *Psal.* xvi. 3. *All his delight was in the excellent, the saints that were in the earth.* And, *Psal.* cxix. 61. *I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and keep thy precepts.* Nay, he giveth us this as the character of a good man, one who dwelleth in *Zion*, *Psal.* xv. 4. *In his eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honour-eth them that fear the Lord.* *An unjust man is an abomination to the just,* *Prov.* xxix. 27. Not that the just hate the person of any man; it is god-like to be kind to the unthankful and the evil; but their temper and their conversation are not considered by the virtuous with any complacency. Remember, therefore, the direction of the apostle *James*, ii. 1. *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, with respect of persons.* It is, certainly, very unbecoming christians

istians to distinguish men in their respect by external considerations, and such things as have no relation at all to wisdom, but may be in fools as much as the wise; nay, in the vicious to a greater degree than the best of men.

S E R M.  
II.  
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S E R-

## S E R M O N III.

The Ways of WISDOM, Ways  
of PLEASANTNESS.

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PROVERBS III. 17.

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all  
her paths are peace.*

SERM.  
III.

AS the main subject of this book is wisdom or religious virtue, the author useth many arguments to engage men to the study, the choice, and the practice of it; one argument I very lately explained in a discourse on the 6th verse of the 8th chapter, that the things of wisdom *are excellent and right things*: Another is contained in the text, which I shall now consider: *Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.* This properly followeth the other, and between the two there is a connexion, for pleasure naturally followeth esteem; and whatever is apprehended to be excellent, yieldeth delight even in the contemplation, much more in the possession.

If

If we consider wisdom only as an object of SERM. speculation, the mind hath satisfaction in III. meditating upon it; for surely we will acknowledge there are mental as well as corporeal enjoyments, and the mind is agreeably entertained with other objects than those of the external senses. When the understanding is regularly and diligently employed in a search after truth, the soul rejoiceth in finding it, and still the joy riseth in proportion to the excellence and importance of the object. Now, shall the studious searcher into nature, into the order, dependency, and operation of inferior causes, to find out their effects; into the motions and sensible qualities of bodies; into the equality, proportion, and other relations of figures and numbers; shall such a one be highly pleased in the discovery of truth, with evidence which is satisfying to his mind? And shall the harmony of the soul itself, a due balance of the affections, a well-proportioned and becoming disposition or action, be altogether insipid; and righteousness, moral excellence, and holiness, not appear an amiable form? Nay, certainly, the knowledge itself, not to speak of the practice of this sort of wisdom, is pleasant, as *Solomon* telleth

SERM. leth us, *Prov. xxiv. 13. My son, eat thou  
 III. honey because it is good, and the honey-comb,  
 which is sweet to thy taste; so shall the know-  
 ledge of wisdom be to thy soul.*

Farther; let us consider, what no pious mind will call in question, that the greatest delight ariseth from serious devout meditation on God. The saints in scripture express their experience of this with raptures; what they call *beholding the beauty of the Lord, the glory of their God, and the light of his countenance*, is represented as the noblest enjoyment; it is an anticipation of the heavenly felicity; for wherein doth the joy of heaven itself consist? One principal ingredient in it is, *seeing the face of God*, called therefore the beatific vision. Now, what is the view his faithful servants have of the supreme being, in which they so joyfully acquiesce? Certainly, the principal objects of it are his moral perfections; and though all his excellencies are to be considered as inseparable, yet these are what give loveliness to the whole. Though absolute supremacy, independence, eternity, immensity, and infinite power, might produce admiration and astonishment, yet it is only when considered in conjunction with holiness, goodness,

ness,



ness, and immutable truth, they cause de-  
light. These are the perfections which his  
people celebrate with triumphant joy. It  
followeth then, that moral excellence, ab-  
stractly considered, is a delightful object of  
contemplation; and if it be so, the more  
we partake of it ourselves, that is, the more  
virtuous we are, and walk in wisdom's  
ways, the greater is our pleasure; for then  
we have the more thorough acquaintance  
with it, as our author saith, chap. vii. 4.  
*Wisdom is a sister, and understanding a kins-  
woman,* with whom we have agreeable con-  
versation as an intimate friend. This, I  
think, sheweth the truth of the assertion  
in the text, that *the ways of wisdom, are  
ways of pleasantness,* as a consequence from  
the doctrine before explained, that they are  
*excellent and right.*

But I shall now consider this as a distinct  
argument recommending religious virtue;  
and for illustrating it, we must have our  
recourse to fact and experience, for that is  
the only way pleasure can be known. We  
find it necessarily attendeth some impressions  
made on the mind by external objects, or  
some of its its own inward exercises; and,  
on the contrary, pain and uneasiness as ne-  
cessarily arise on other occasions. The ori-  
ginal

S E R M. ginal idea could never be communicated to  
 III. a creature who never felt pleasure, more  
 than a man born blind could have any notion of colours. This would seem to bring the matter to a very short issue, and cut off all occasion of reasoning upon it; for what, may it be thought, have men more to do than appeal to their own sense and by it's report decide the question? Yet this, I am afraid, would be to the disadvantage of religion; for how many are there of mankind who have not such experience of its pleasantness as determineth them to prefer and to choose it? Pleasures of another kind more gross and sensible, while they do not maturely weigh the nature and consequences of them, preponderate in their affection.

But we must be all convinced that pleasure springeth from different occasions; there is a variety of objects which gratify the mind, and in various acts and exertions of its own power it findeth satisfaction; and no man's condition in the world, or the capacity of his nature, can afford him an experimental knowledge of delight in the whole compass of it. Here therefore, we ought to use our reason in order to choose those pleasures which, all things considered, are the best and fittest

fittest for us. Though the original idea cannot be learned by information or reasoning, yet having it once fixed, we may be rationally induced by a calm attention to proper arguments to believe there is pleasure in some things which we ourselves have but little acquaintance with, and so be persuaded to make the experiment. One consideration of great weight in the present case is, the testimony of those who have made a trial of wisdom's ways, and they all agree in assuring us that they are ways of pleasantness and peace. If any thing be in a man's offer which promiseth a very agreeable entertainment, but he himself hath never experienced it, how shall he be determined in that case? One reasonable way, if it be not over-balanced by more powerful arguments on the other side, which cannot be said in the affair we are now considering, is, to take the report of those who are the best acquainted, at least, we may well regard it so far as to make the trial ourselves, and then judge upon more certain knowledge. Good men express themselves very clearly on this head, and in very strong terms; they declare with one voice that they have found exceeding great consolation in the way of God's commandments,

SERM. mandments, not only more pure, but indeed stronger and more intense than all the enjoyments of this world could yield them. The Psalmist saith, in the 119th psalm, ver. 14. *I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies more than in all riches,* and, *Psal. xix. 10. More to be desired than gold, yea than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb;* and *Job* esteemed them *more than his necessary food.* How many declarations have we of the Apostles to this purpose, which are the more to be regarded because of their circumstances, shewing that not only the pleasantness of wisdom's ways or of pure religion is superior to the pleasures of this world, but sufficient to support the the mind against its pains? They were set forth as examples of affliction and persecution, *Spectacles to men and angels, counted as the off-scourings of all things,* as *St. Paul* expresseth it, and the filth of the world, the very refuse of mankind; yet under that load of contempt which was poured upon them, and in all their Distresses, they rejoiced not only in the prospect of a glorious reward at the resurrection of the just, but in the faithful discharge of their Duty even in the present time, in the testimony of their

consciencés, *that in simplicity and godly sincerity they had their conversation in the world.* SERM. III.

And, to conclude, in whatever degree any have experience in this matter, having chosen the ways of wisdom or of God's commandments, they find themselves obliged to acknowledge they are not grievous, but ways of pleasantness and peace.

But, *secondly*, one might appeal to the experience of those who have but the lowest measure of this wisdom; and indeed I cannot think there is any one of mankind so perfectly wicked and abandoned as not to have a sense of some kind of goodness, if not of piety and the virtues which consist in the government of the selfish affections, yet of justice and good will to their fellows, which is an important part of wisdom; I say, not to have a sense of some kind of moral goodness, nay, an esteem of it's excellence and dignity, and that it affordeth a true and even a very great pleasure to the mind. But if bad men have little experimental knowledge of the pleasantness of wisdom's ways, there is another thing they have experience of which proveth it, that is, the painfulness of the ways of sin and  
VOL. III F folly;

SERM.

III.

folly; for from that, if it be sufficiently attested, it necessarily followeth that the directly contrary course of wisdom or religious virtue must have yielded satisfaction to them, and will yield satisfaction to any who choose it. Now, let any man who hath given himself the most unbounded liberty in gratifying his inclinations, who in defiance of all the warnings he hath had, and the ineffectual remonstrances of his own conscience, hath indulged his passions and his lusts without any controul, let him but calmly consider what pleasure he findeth in a review; whether his enjoyments are not succeeded with remorse? Nay, whether his short-lived pleasures of sin are not much over-ballanced by the stinging durable reflections of his self-accusing and reproaching heart? Notwithstanding all his endeavours to divert and stifle it, (sometimes indeed these methods to a great degree, and the hearts of men are brought to a hardness and insensibility which is amazing, their consciences, as the Apostle speaketh, are seared, but is that an ease worthy of a man, which ariseth from stupid inconsideration?) I say, notwithstanding all his endeavours to stifle it, conscience will at sometimes with an irresistible force break in upon

upon his joys and mar them, especially if any grievous calamities befall the sinner, or if death and judgment are presented to his view; terror and anguish then take hold of him and the wounds of his spirit are intolerable. Though very often during a course of prosperity men do not know the terrors of the Lord, the unutterable griefs of an awakened conscience, yet no one who giveth himself leave to think seriously on so important a subject but must be convinced there is a reality in them, and his own heart will tell him the ways of sin lay a foundation for self-reproaches which are very grievous, too dear a price for short-lived criminal pleasures.


You see now wherein the principal pain and uneasiness that followeth sin, and on the other hand wherein the pleasantness of wisdom's ways consisteth, the one in self-condemnation, the other in self-approbation. These are pleasures and pains very intimate, the spring of them is in our own hearts, their operations are immediate, there is no intervening distance to abate their force; we need not go far to seek our comforts, and we cannot shun our sorrows, for how can we fly from our own thoughts? It must be

SERM. a great aggravation of our griefs that they  
 III. are of our own procuring, and it raiseth  
 joy to the greatest height that it springeth  
 from an inward cause, and is the result of our  
 own wise choice; for then the mind hath  
 the satisfying prospect of its continuance  
 only by persevering in the same course.  
*Prov. xiv. 14. The backslider in heart shall  
 be filled with his own ways, and a good man  
 shall be satisfied from himself.* There is no  
 way of accounting for this but by the con-  
 stitution of our nature, and resolving it into  
 the will of our great and wise Creator, who  
 in so forming our souls hath shewn plainly  
 that we are made for religion and virtue, to  
 which end he hath furnished us with a  
 powerful argument always ready at hand,  
 seeing in the practice of it we must be self-  
 approved, which is a very great happiness,  
 and in the contrary, self-condemned, which  
 is an extreme misery, who can doubt but it  
 was the intention of our maker, the wisest  
 and most gracious of all beings, to direct  
 our choice to the ways of wisdom.

*Thirdly,* The pleasantness of wisdom's  
 ways may appear from this consideration,  
 that they lead to the enjoyment of the divine  
 favour, and our walking in them is the only  
 foundation



foundation upon which we can have confidence towards God. It must be acknowledged, that he who is absolutely supreme, can make his creatures happy or miserable; and reason confirmeth what the scripture declareth, *that life is in his favour*. It is, therefore, an unspeakable pleasure to know that we are entitled to his approbation, and an extreme misery to be under the apprehensions of his resentment: *Who knoweth the power of his anger?* His justice is armed with omnipotence to inflict punishment, beyond the reach of human imagination, on the obstinate workers of iniquity: But what can be wanting to the felicity of such as are in a state of favour with him, seeing he is infinitely powerful and infinitely good? Now, there is no other ground upon which we can rationally form an expectation that God will approve us, but our being approved to ourselves by a faithful discharge of our duty; for this is a most evident truth, that if God accepteth of his reasonable creatures at all, it must be in their doing that which, upon a diligent and impartial inquiry, appeareth to their own understandings best. If any pretended revelation did teach the contrary, I do not see that we

SERM. could possibly believe it, because it would  
 III.  destroy natural religion, and, in effect, deny  
 the moral attributes of God, the only foundation upon which we can fear, and love, and obey him. But christianity, the only complete revelation of his will, is so far from teaching any such unreasonable doctrine, that it expressly establisheth our hope in the way already explained, as alone agreeable to the dictates of reason. St. *John*, in his 1st epistle, 3d chapter, teacheth us, that the only ground upon which we can assure our hearts before God, or be persuaded of our acceptance in his sight, is our knowing that *we are of the truth*, or that we have sincerely embraced and obeyed the gospel, by the genuine fruits of charity and obedience in our lives. If our hearts do not condemn us for insincerity, that is, acting against our consciences, or giving ourselves up to the conduct of lusts and passions, through their prevailing influence, or through sloth and inattention, then we have confidence towards God; and that confidence will be a spring of perpetual joy; for as terror and confusion must seize the mind sensible of guilt, and of its being obnoxious to the divine displeasure, so the strongest consolation

consolation must arise from the hope of being acquitted by the great judge of the whole world, especially when we consider the solemnity of the judgment, and the consequences of it, as they are described in scripture, with an intention, as on the one hand, to alarm sinners, and bring them to repentance; so on the other, to comfort good men, by assuring them that *their work of faith, their labour of love, and patience of hope*, shall not be in vain. Now, if it be so, that the experience of the best men assureth us, that the study and practice of religion is pleasant; if the experience of all men, who are in the least degree attentive, and even of the greatest sinners, proves that the contrary crooked ways of vice and wickedness have always a mixture of uneasiness and bitterness in the review; and if both reason and scripture make it evident, that the exercise of true religion and virtue is the only foundation upon which we can have good hope towards God, then it must be acknowledged to be true, which *Solomon* says in the text, that *the ways of wisdom are pleasantness, and her paths are peace*.

But yet farther to confirm us in this persuasion, we may consider the pleasures which

SERM. accompany the practice of sincere religion ;  
 III. that is, which arise from the testimony of  
 an approving conscience, and the hope of  
 the glory of God ; we may consider these,  
 I say, in comparison with other pleasures  
 which are opposite to them, and which  
 continually solicit our affections and our pur-  
 suit. For seeing the human nature is not  
 capable of all kinds of delight at once, it is  
 reasonable for us to make the best our choice ;  
 and seeing the pleasures of wisdom and of  
 sin are utterly inconsistent, so that of neces-  
 sity we must *hold to the one, and refuse the*  
*other*, the true question, in order to our be-  
 ing rightly determined, is, which of the two  
 kinds are the most worthy, and in all re-  
 spects the most eligible ? It would be a vain  
 attempt to persuade men that there is no  
 real pleasure in the gratification of their  
 senses and the appetites of human nature ;  
 to argue that the hungry feel no satisfaction  
 in meats, and the thirsty in refreshing drinks,  
 is to argue against sense, and experience will  
 quickly show the vanity of such reasoning :  
 Nay, it may be acknowledged farther, that  
 voluptuous men, the lascivious and the in-  
 temperate, have by an habitual indulging of  
 their inclinations, and by vicious customs,  
 raised

raised in themselves desires of carnal enjoyments, far beyond the demands of nature, which yield pleasures in the moment of gratifying them, though at the same time they are accompanied with a great deal more pain, like quenching unnatural thirst in a fever; let it, I say, be allowed, that they find pleasure in gratifying these desires, for that is the very bait which allures them to their criminal excesses, against the sober dictates of their own minds; yet still it will appear that the pleasure of wisdom's ways is far more excellent, and on many accounts to be preferred.

*First*, it is a just prejudice against the gratifications of sense, or of the merely animal life; I mean against their being chief in our esteem and affection, that they are common with us to the brutal kinds. We see the beasts have the outward senses to as great a degree of perfection as we; they eat, they drink, and perform all the functions of the animal nature, and, as far as we can judge, with as exquisite a relish, and as high a satisfaction as ourselves. Now, do not we value ourselves upon the prerogative of reason, whereby we are exalted above, not only the inanimate and vegetable, but the sensitive creatures?

SERM. creatures? And shall we sink so far beneath  
 III. the dignity of our species, as in the choice  
 of our pleasures, to be upon a level with the  
 beasts of the earth? As every sort of being  
 capable of any happiness at all, hath enjoy-  
 ments suitable to its powers and measures of  
 perfection, those which are peculiar to man,  
 must be the most becoming him; and such  
 are the pleasures of wisdom, of their parti-  
 cipating in which the brutes give not the  
 least discovery. Not only so, but the plea-  
 sures of sense, licentiously indulged, and in  
 the forbidden degree, weaken reason, and  
 marr its free exercise, which is a strong ob-  
 jection against them. Can any thing be  
 worthy an intelligent and free agent, which  
 darkens his understanding, and impares his  
 freedom? Now, every man hath too much  
 experience, if he seriously reflecteth, not to  
 be sensible that carnal gratifications, im-  
 moderately pursued, cast a shadow over the un-  
 derstanding; that they are accompanied with  
 perturbation, and dissipate the vigour of the  
 soul. Set against these the joys of an ap-  
 proving conscience, the peace which ariseth  
 from the love of God's law, and an inward  
 sense of our own integrity, and see whether  
 they are not of a nobler character? They  
 are


are pure and serene, attended with no tumult; and instead of impairing the higher powers of the mind, the understanding and liberty, they preserve them in the greatest composure and undisturbed exercise, and in their most healthful and vigorous state.

SERM.  
III.

*2dly*, The pleasures of this world are but very precarious; we can have no sure hold of them, nor any certainty in our prospect of a future enjoyment of them; a man hath it not in his power to command them when he will; they depend on external objects which cannot be always present, and if they were, could not always please. It is but a poor consolation that lies at the mercy of time and chance, and which therefore must be subject to continual disappointments. When one has the keenest appetites, the strongest inclinations to entertain himself agreeably, his hopes are often frustrated, being liable to many unforeseen incidents and indispositions in the object, or a sudden indisposition in the faculty marring his expected pleasure: But the good man is satisfied from himself, his joy and peace do not depend on variable accidents, he retireth into his own heart, where he enjoys an inward harmony and tranquility, not interrupted by jarring

SERM. jarring passions, or the galling reproaches of  
 III. a guilty conscience. Who would not prefer  
 even a moderate satisfaction which never fails, but is always ready to meet us when we turn our thoughts towards it, to a delight which might for once, or very seldom, be transporting; (if that were the case, though really it is not, for the pleasures of the spiritual kind are the more intense as well as certain) I say, to an enjoyment, which, if it were very great and even superior, is difficult of access, requireth a concurrence of various circumstances and events not in our power, and overballanceth all the satisfaction it yields, with painful delays and vexatious disappointments? Especially, if we add, in the next place, that carnal pleasures are but of a short continuance, being designed by the author of nature not to be the chief business and enjoyment of a reasonable being, but for certain particular ends in the animal life, which, when they are answered, the pleasure dies, nay, is often turned into aversion and distaste, and always the review of them is at least insipid. Thus the persons whom *Solomon* calleth *wine-bibbers* and *riotous eaters of flesh*, have no lasting satisfaction in that sensual delight they chuse; when



when the ends of nature are obtained, the SERM.  
appetite palls, satiety comes in the place of III.  
pleasure, meats and drinks become nauseous, 

and the use of them oppresseth rather than pleaseth. No man is able to recal pleasures of that sort, he rather shuns a reflection upon them, from a consciousness that they will not bear the calm examination of his own mind. On the contrary, the pleasantness of wisdom's ways, designed for the constant exercise, and the constant entertainment of the mind, never flattens, never becomes tasteless or burthenome; it will abide the trial of our coolest thoughts, and the more we examine it, still it will be the more delightful, always fresh, always new; and the more we use it, the more it encreaseth, and will still encrease, till the pure stream endeth *in rivers of pleasures which are at God's right hand*, as the Psalmist speaketh; and the joy groweth up to that *fulnes* which is in his presence.

*Lastly*, These are to be accounted the greatest, the noblest, and in all respects the most valuable comforts, which support and relieve the mind in its greatest need. Seeing we find ourselves liable to calamities of several sorts, and particularly to death, which

is

SERM. is the most shocking to nature on its own  
 III. account, and is more dreadful to a confide-  
 rate mind, because of its important conse-  
 quences, certainly it must be our wisdom  
 to make the best provision we can against  
 the evil day, and to chuse those pleasures,  
 if any such there be, which will not fail  
 even then. But no enjoyment of this world,  
 and least of all the pleasures of sin, stand us  
 in any stead when the hour of distress com-  
 eth. What comfort hath the miser in his  
 treasures, what delight hath the vicious in  
 his debauches, when sickness seizeth the  
 body, and the fear of judgment taketh hold  
 of the soul? But then the religious, the  
 truly wise man, possesseth an undisturbed,  
 calm, and a self-applauding triumph, he  
 looketh back on a well-spent life with joy,  
 appealing to God as *Hezekiah* did, *Remem-  
 ber, Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked  
 before thee, in truth, and with a perfect  
 heart, and have done that which is good in  
 thy sight.* And he looketh forward to a  
 future judgment, and an eternal state, with  
 confidence.

And now, my brethren, these things are  
 spoken *as to wise men, judge ye what is said;*  
 let us calmly consider and judge, whether,  
 abstracting

abstracting from other arguments, religion hath not the advantage of superior pleasure on its side, and even on that account justly claimeth that we should prefer it to the contrary course. I know the prejudices of men incline them to a different opinion, and it is very usual for those who are the least acquainted with it, to paint it in their own imagination with a sour forbidding aspect. Whatever other arguments may enforce it, and hard necessity, perhaps, may strongly urge them to it, when they think on a future judgment, yet they must lay their account to part with all pleasure when they devote themselves to the study of godliness and sobriety; especially, the light in which the New Testament setteth the religious exercises which it enjoineth, the duties of repentance, mortification, self-denial, and patience, carry sorrow and severity in the very sound of them; and to confirm all this, it is sometimes observed, that the people who seem to be serious and devout, who have a great appearance of piety, are the most estranged from joy.

This is a matter worthy of our serious consideration, that we may be able to form a right judgment; but when the objection is allowed

SERM. allowed all its just weight, I hope it will  
 III. still appear that the ways of wisdom are  
 } ways of pleasantness. To begin with what  
 was last mentioned as an argument from  
 fact and experience, that some serious and  
 devout persons seem to have the least plea-  
 sure; not to mention the case of hypocrites,  
 who, as our Saviour saith, disfigure their  
 faces, and are of a sad countenance, which  
 ought not at all to affect the cause of reli-  
 gion, being a mere counterfeit; it must be  
 acknowledged that some serious melancholy  
 persons spend their lives very uncomfortably,  
 almost in continual fear and grief. But  
 whence doth this arise? Pray, take their  
 own testimony; they will all agree that the  
 true cause is a suspicion of their insincerity;  
 not only their past transgressions are the oc-  
 casion of their present grief, but they are  
 afraid lest their compliance with the gospel  
 terms of acceptance be defective, their per-  
 formance of their duty cometh so far short  
 as they think of what God requireth, and  
 the corruptions of their hearts are so strong,  
 breaking out into so many transgressions.  
 Now, can it ever be reasonable to impute  
 that sorrow to religion as the proper cause,  
 which by the confession of those who suffer  
 it.

it ariseth wholly from the want or imperfection of religion? Ask those whose deep humiliation and fear render life uncomfortable, whether they would not be comforted even more than in the greatest abundance of corn and wine, if they found in themselves sensibly *faith working by love*, and all the christian virtues in such lively vigorous exercise as their own consciences could without any scruple witness to their sincerity; and they will readily answer in the affirmative; so that their experience is no objection against the doctrine of the text, but rather confirmeth it. Besides, if some melancholy persons who are religiously disposed shall imagine that religion abridgeth their freedom in the use of some things, which are in themselves innocent, this proceedeth from a mistake, and is wholly to be attributed to their weakness. The chearful temperate use of worldly enjoyments is not prohibited by the precepts of wisdom, which only retrench overgrown immoderate desires; and these are so far from tending to the measure of happiness which the liberal author of nature designed for us in the present state, that they mar it rather.

SERM. 2dly, It must be acknowledged that difficulty and pain, in certain instances, attend the first entrance upon a religious and virtuous course of life. When men **have** abandoned themselves to profligate wickedness, and a long custom of sinning hath strengthened their proneness to it, it cannot be expected it should be easy for them to break it off at once and practice the contrary virtues. We see that habits of any sort are with difficulty unlearned and disused, especially those which are founded on a propensity of nature and bias of the mind. The scripture therefore representeth repentance and mortification as painful, expressing them by *rending the heart, plucking out the eye, and cutting off the hand*; yet even the very beginnings of reformation are not without pleasure; the first purposes which a man formeth of doing his duty yield him satisfaction, especially since there is hope of a happy issue if they be heartily pursued; and we are not left to struggle alone with our weakness, but assured that the superior aids of divine grace **will** be granted to them that ask. But every step of our progress in the paths of holiness **will** bring an increase of delight sufficient to recompense all the toil and uneasiness **which attend**

attend it. Let a man arm himself with resolution to resist the most vehement temptations, and thwart the most pressing inclinations of his own heart to sin, he will find that every instance of his doing so will diffuse joy thro' his mind, and make his conquest easier in the next assault; *the righteous shall hold on his way, and he who hath clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger.*


S E R M.  
III.

If; now, it appeareth that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness and peace; if the objections against it are so weak and insufficient; if the real difficulties arise not from the nature and reason of the thing, but from our prejudices, inexperience, and irresolution, and they are all superable by the means God hath afforded, that *grace of his which bringeth Salvation, and hath appeared unto us*; if it be so, one would think the argument is very strong, *confounding the strong hold of sin*, spoiling it of that in which its greatest strength lieth, namely, pleasure; for wisdom is superior even in that, and allureth us by a more solid, lasting, and certain satisfaction. Surely human nature must be strangely lost to a just sense of its own true interest, if it can resist such a motive. Though the demands of autho-

SERM. rity might seem harsh, and the threatenings  
 III. of penalties affright, yet the prospect of  
 } pleasure must, one would think, powerfully,  
 infirmate itself into the mind, and captivate  
 its affections.

In a particular manner, let the thoughts of christians dwell on the glorious gospel whereby their consolation is amply provided for. Our Saviour spoke his excellent doctrines and precepts to his disciples, *that his joy might remain in them, and that their joy might be full*; he hath promised the holy Spirit under the amiable character of the *comforter*; it is the peculiar work of that divine Agent, that resident in the church in behalf of the Father and the Son, to confirm the argument in the text, to minister consolation to them who sincerely walk in wisdom's ways. And this should engage us to adore our gracious God and Redeemer who had our comfort so much at heart. We have a bountiful master who not only hath ascertained to his servants a great reward in reversion, but, even now, imparteth to them that joy which is their strength, and attracteth their desires to that perfection of comfort which is to be enjoyed in his presence; for the spirit is given as a pledge or  
 earnest



earnest of the future inheritance, *Eph. i. 14.* SERM.  
*2 Cor. v. 5.* confirming our hopes and mak- III.  
ing us earnestly desirous, *not to be unclothed,*   
*but clothed upon with our house which is*  
*from heaven.*

## S E R M O N I V.

WISDOM the STRENGTH of the  
M I N D.

P R O V E R B S XXIV. 5.

*A wise man is strong, yea a Man of know-  
ledge increaseth strength.*S E R M.  
I V.

**T**HE state of human affairs in this world is found by experience to be very uncertain; the prosperity we enjoy this day may not continue to the next; we see so many surprizing revolutions in the external conditions of men, of all stations in life, as confirm what the Psalmist saith, *Psal. lxxii. 9. Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the ballance, they are altogether lighter than vanity.* These changes very often have unhappy effects on the temper of our minds; they produce dispiriting fears and overwhelming sorrows, and, as a consequence of both, perplexity and irresolution, which are the dishonour and torment of the reasonable

sonable nature. In the sudden approaches of difficulty, the mind is filled with consternation, which darkeneth the understanding, and confoundeth the active powers; and under the pressures of affliction and the reverses of what is commonly called fortune, it is feeble and unresolved. It must be acknowledged that a defence against these evils would be very desirable; if there be any such thing at all to be attained as a just security and confidence of mind on a rational foundation, who would not purchase it at any rate, that seeing it is not possible to prevent outward changes, we may at least prevent their dismal inward effects, and possess a constant equanimity, an uniform peace and steady resolution in our souls? And this, I think, *Solomon* doth in his book of *Proverbs*, among other great advantages, attribute to wisdom or religious virtue; particularly in the text, where he saith, *A wise man is strong, yea a man of knowledge increaseth strength.*

No one will imagine that it is bodily strength which is here meant, which hath no connection at all with wisdom (a fool, or a wicked man, may have more brutal force than the wisest and the best of man-

SERM. kind) but a rational and virtuous fortitude  
 IV. which groweth up with other branches of  
 religion, and is the happy attendant of an  
 increasing and universal integrity.

In discoursing on this subject, I think it will be natural,

*First*, To consider the diseased and feeble state of mind against which wisdom is the proper remedy; or that weakness and the symptoms of it, which is natural to men without wisdom or virtue.

*Secondly*, I will endeavour to shew wherein the strength of the wise man lieth, and how wisdom or religious virtue is the cure of our weakness and its symptoms.

*1st*, Let us consider the diseased and feeble state of mind, against which wisdom is the proper remedy; and it seemeth to consist in an indisposition for the due exercise of its powers. The body is then distempered and weak, when it is unfit for the functions of nature, when its members or organs are unapt for the right discharge of their proper offices in the animal œconomy; and so the mind, rendered incapable of such offices, such activity and exertions as become such a being, is weak and diseased. This is its unhappy case when  
 the

the understanding is so over-clouded as not to discern what is necessary to a just conduct, or when the self-determining power is infebled that it cannot act steadily and uniformly, or it hath not that self-enjoyment, inward composure and tranquillity, which ought to attend the due exercise of all its faculties in a sound and healthful constitution; so that the principal symptoms of that weak and distempered condition are darkness, irresolution, and discomfort.

I have already insinuated, that the weakness against which wisdom fortifieth the soul is especially discovered in the difficulties of life, and therefore principally appeareth in the prevalence of the passions which are excited by them, and are summed up in aversion, that is, in the prevalence of fear, and sorrow, and anger. It is true, the other passions have by a different manner of operation the same effect; they are all of them the weak part of the human nature; they are, indeed, when duly governed, very useful and ornamental to such a creature as man in his present condition, and plainly shew the great wisdom and goodness of our Creator; but reason and moral conscience is the man; in its vigor and authority over the inferior springs of action, our strength lieth: The  
excesses

SERM. excesses of passion and lower affection to  
 IV. which we find ourselves liable in this proba-  
 tionary state, are the distempers of the  
 mind which wisdom cureth. But what I  
 chiefly intend at this time, agreeably to many  
 passages in this book, to which I may after-  
 wards refer, is, to shew how the wise man  
 is strong, and the man of knowledge in-  
 creaseth strength against the trials and ad-  
 verse occurrences of life.

*Ist*, Fear is an infirmity natural to man,  
 which very often hath pernicious effects,  
 and in itself, abstracting from its effects, is  
 very uncomfortable. I believe every one  
 hath experience enough to make him sensible  
 that *fear hath torment*. Though there seem-  
 eth to be a great difference as to this parti-  
 cular in the natural frame and constitution of  
 men; some are much more hardy and re-  
 solved, more calm, and have greater presence  
 of mind in the expectation of evil than others;  
 yet I scarcely believe there are any who have  
 not felt sometimes such shocks and surprizes,  
 under the apprehension of danger, as were  
 painful to them. Now, there needeth no  
 reasoning to shew that this is a weakness and  
 misery; we know it by an inward consciouf-  
 ness. Every living creature, according to

its measure of perfection, hath a self-enjoyment, findeth ease and satisfaction in its sound and healthful state; and it might be expected it should be so, considering the great goodness of the Creator. But it was wisely provided that such of them as are liable to dangers and annoyances from abroad, should have a painful apprehension of them, in order to their being put upon the speediest methods for avoiding them. This is the end of fear in their constitution. We see the brute kinds plainly discover it, in their narrow sphere of sensible objects which threaten them, and from which all their danger ariseth; they are quickly apprised, and immediately directed, without deliberation, to all they can do for their safety. But man is made with a larger comprehension, and with the privilege of foresight, by which he discovereth a greater variety of dangers, and seeth them at a greater distance; and this certainly was not originally intended to be his torment; but, if it be so in event, it must be by way of penal infliction for his faults, or a distemper of his mind against which there is a proper remedy provided. This, then, is the first part of our weakness, of which wisdom is the cure,

SERM.

IV.

2dly, If we alter the situation of difficult uneasy circumstances and events in life, and, instead of the perturbation which attendeth the prospect of them as future, consider them as actually incumbent, they produce the passion called grief, which in our present condition we are too well acquainted with to need any explication of it. It is not, indeed, equal in all men, no more than fear, even when the outward occasion is the same or equal. There are some spirits which can much better than others sustain their infirmity; and yet I think we must all be sensible, that in the vast variety of troubles to which man is born, one or other doth so press the weak side of every human constitution, that it requireth a force above that of mere, unimproved, and uncultivated nature to support it; that is, it requireth religious wisdom; without the aid of which, it will sink us into a painful indisposition and weakness of mind.

Another passion belonging to the same class, is anger; when the disagreeable event is considered as an injury, and as befalling us by the injustice or ill-will of a voluntary agent. The true design of this in our constitution, is the same with that of the other passions,



passions, that is, our own preservation; and there it ought to rest. But often it is accompanied with a violent propension to the misery of the apprehended injurious, and transporteth men into a behaviour very unbecoming them, and which they cannot reflect upon without regret and confusion.

S E R M.  
IV.

Now, let us consider the symptoms which commonly appear in men, and are produced by these original causes of our disorders in our present infirm state, that so we may see the need of wisdom as a remedy, if it be indeed a remedy. And, first, we find that during the prevalence of the passions already mentioned, and especially in their first and most violent assaults, the understanding is obscured, at least, we have not the due use of it. How often are men in the extremities of fear, and sorrow, and anger, reduced almost to an incapacity of thinking? and even, in lower degrees of these passions, they have not such clear views of things, which especially are more immediately necessary in their present circumstances, as otherways they might have. It seemeth to be the natural tendency of pain to arrest the thoughts; the mind is detained in the afflicting consideration of that which rendereth it uneasy, without having freedom to  
view

SERM. view other objects, or even the grievous ob-  
 IV. ject itself on all sides; whereas the proper  
 exercise of the rational powers is, in con-  
 sidering calmly and deliberately what is pre-  
 sented to the mind, especially, which nearly  
 concerneth its own interest; attentively  
 viewing all its properties, relations, and ten-  
 dencies, comparing sedately all things which  
 may enlighten the counsels of the heart, and  
 so prepare for a just conclusion. And,  
 surely, the mind is weak and diseased, when  
 the understanding is not rightly exercised;  
 for that is the glory of man, the leading fa-  
 culty of the soul; according to the direction  
 of which, and the result of its deliberations,  
 every thing must be regularly done, both  
 for the purposes of duty and happiness.

2dly, In pursuance of this, the counsels  
 of the mind are full of perplexity. How-  
 ever unprofitably and indeliberately, yet still  
 it thinketh on the disagreeable object, and  
 cannot be diverted from it; its thoughts are  
 attended with a great deal of disturbance  
 and confusion, but as little light as comfort;  
 for, if the passions darken the understand-  
 ing, they quicken the imagination, which  
 during their prevalence is exceeding fruitful,  
 continually employed in forming images of  
 the

the same complexion with that which setteth it a work ; frightful ones, when we are under the power of fear ; melancholy, when grief is prevalent ; and images of provocations received, and mischief to be done in return, during the impetuosity of anger.

3dly, As these imaginations raised in the mind by the influence of passion, are not the proper directors of our conduct, the prevalence of them, and their multiplicity, accompanied with darkness, confusion, and tumult, produce irresolution, instability, and fatal precipitation. The mind, if it determineth itself at all, doth it upon slight grounds, or such as are not duly and maturely weighed, and therefore rashly ; the consequence of which is unsteadiness ; for if we form a purpose upon the imagination or suggestion of a passion which happeneth to be uppermost, having no sure ground, it quickly changeth, and so doth the purpose with it. But, for the most part, the mind is in suspense, not knowing what to resolve ; it looketh on the right hand and on the left, and can see nothing but uncertainty. I think every one must be convinced that this, indeed, is weakness, and exceedingly uncomfortable ; the soul is rendered, in a great measure,

SE R M. measure, incapable of doing any thing worthy of itself, or in prosecution of its true interest, and it hath very little enjoyment. The Psalmist expresseth himself very feelingly on this subject, *Psal. xiii. 2. How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?* When sorrow or fear is in the heart, the soul is then taking counsel in itself, but to little purpose, and with very little satisfaction. If it be possible to find relief against the disadvantages and discomfort of such a state, to which we are all subject in some degree, one would think we should be disposed readily to embrace it; which leadeth me to consider, in the

*Second Place*, Wherein the strength of the wise man lieth, and how wisdom, or religious virtue, is fitted to administer a cure of our weakness and its symptoms; which I shall illustrate according to the method already laid down, that is, by shewing it is a proper antidote against the evils I have mentioned. And, first, it is a defence against fear; so *Solomon* teacheth us, chap. iii. 23. having exhorted to keep sound wisdom and discretion, he addeth, *Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy feet shall not stumble;*

ble; when thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet. And the following words, in the 25th verse, may be understood as a continuation of the promise, *Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh.* But, to explain this more particularly, let us observe, that religious wisdom supporteth the mind against the fear of uncomfortable events in life, because it representeth them as too inconsiderable to affect our main interests. That which naturally maketh us solicitous about any future event is, the opinion we have of its importance to us; if we apprehend it to be of small moment, the foundation of fear is taken away. This is the reason why men of weak and corrupt minds are thrown into such confusion when any danger threateneth their worldly concerns, because they regard them as their All, and cannot relieve themselves by looking up to a superior interest, which is safe, and out of the reach of danger. But the good *man* is satisfied from himself, his integrity is his chief treasure; and while that remaineth untouched, he is secure against every thing in this world which can befall him, and

SERM. meeteth danger with intrepidity, because it  
 IV. can only deprive him of things which are  
 not the highest in his esteem, nay, are considered only as minute circumstances in comparison, far from his principal and most substantial felicity. That virtue is a greater good than riches, worldly honours, and carnal pleasures, hath been professed as a principle by many heathens; and every one *who nameth the name of Christ*, and is his disciple, must be supposed to avow it; or, in words agreeable to the stile of the gospel, that the new creature, the image of God repaired in us, the spiritual life effected in the soul by the grace of Christ, and the operation of the Holy Spirit, is more excellent than any enjoyment in this life, and the immediate and most necessary preparation for the greatest happiness in the next. But the wise man is thoroughly possessed with these sentiments, and according to them formeth the dispositions of his spirit, and according to them are governed all his affections and passions, his desire and aversion, his joy and grief, his hope and fear.

2dly, The testimony of our conscience concerning our sincerity, which is the peculiar enjoyment of the man whom *Solomon calleth wise*, is an effectual preservative  
 against

against immoderate dejecting fears, as it SERM. giveth us confidence towards God, and as- IV. surance of his favour. Men cannot help, even those who are the most averse to them, having apprehensions of a Supreme Being, the wise and just governor of the world, who is pleased with the righteous, and angry with the wicked every day, and his vengeance ready to break upon their heads in terrible judgments; and, therefore, when danger threateneth them, the terror of it is increased by this jealousy, that it is fraught with the displeasure of the incensed deity, which striketh the soul with dread, far beyond what could be raised by the event in itself considered. A guilty accusing conscience is haunted continually with the frightful images and grievous remembrance of its own crimes, which pierce it through with anxiety, and make it imagine every thing it meeteth, to be a messenger of wrath. But the good man is free from such distracting surmises and confounding fears. This is the reason of what *Solomon* observeth, and which is confirmed by experience, *Prov. xxviii. 1.* *The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion.* Not but that wicked men are often fearless of danger,

SERM. and meet it with the greatest signs of resolution; yet it is certain, the farther men depart from virtue and integrity, their courage must be the more unsteady, and the appearance of it, which is founded in passion, is no other than brutal rage, like the fierceness of a lion, or the mettle of an horse that rusheth into the battle; but passion is not able to bear up the mind in a series of dangers; for the clamour of conscience will return and strike the stoutest heart with terror and amazement. A sedate and constant fortitude, especially in adversity of a long continuance, can only be the effect of an immoveable uprightnes, and flow from the inward peaceful reflections of an approving mind.

3dly, The wise man is strong against fear, because his confidence is in the divine all-sufficiency, love, and faithfulness. This is the reason our author giveth, chap. iii. 26. *For the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken.* No wonder they are at a loss in hazardous conjunctures, who know of no superior power to interpose in their behalf, to avert evil, or over-rule it to a good issue. Chance and necessity, as the cause of events, are the refuge of ignorant minds, wilfully shut and hardened against



against the knowledge of God, as the great SERM.  
and wise governor of the world; but a poor IV.  
refuge they are in the evil day. What com-  
fort can any one have in looking to empty

insignificant words (for really chance and necessity are no more) under the doubtful expectation of an overwhelming calamity? But faith controuleteth the fears of a religious mind, for it representeth an intelligent, powerful, and gracious providence, as superintending all affairs, and directing all events irresistibly; it resteth satisfied in infinite goodness, from which joyful hopes may be formed even in the last extremity; it reflecteth comfortably on the experience which good men have had of God's favour, relieving them, and giving an expected end to all their troubles; for he hath been *their dwelling-place in all generations*, as the Psalmist speaketh; and especially, embracing the revelation God hath given, it relieth on his covenant with his people, in which are solemn promises sufficient to support their spirits even in the last article of danger, such as, *that he will never leave nor forsake them; he will give grace and glory, and withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly; and, that all things shall*

SERM. *work together for good to them that love*

IV. *God.*

And as the soul of man, conscious of its spiritual nature and independence on the perishing body, and of its natural desire of immortality, extendeth its presaging views to an eternal state, and can never be thoroughly secure against fear, without some good prospect of a future felicity; this is the compleat consolation and support of the good or the wise man; he rejoiceth in the hope of the glory of God, in the midst of surrounding calamities; and when there is no hope of evasion this confidence is not abated. *Job* resolved, therefore, that though *God should slay him, yet he would trust in him*; which, surely, must import an expectation of favour from him after death. The christian religion proposeth this to us more clearly, for our Lord Jesus Christ hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel; and therefore the very reason the apostle giveth, why *we faint not, though our outward man perisheth*, is, *because we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

What

What I have said on this head, sheweth in a great measure the strength of the wise man against *sorrow*, so that it will not be necessary to insist upon it; we have no more to do than alter the scene, to transfer the calamities of life from the prospect to the incumbency of them; and that which supports the mind against the one, will be also a relief against the other.

SERM.  
IV.  
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The reasons why afflicting occurrences are often so shocking to men that life sinketh under the burden and pineth away in misery, are, that we over-value the good things of which they deprive us; for in proportion to the affection of desire, so will the grief always be; and because they are inflamed with an apprehension of God's wrath, and the consciousness of guilt maketh them to be considered as penal inflictions of his justice, on which account deliverance is despaired of, Nay, the melancholy view of the mourner is lengthned out to the utmost duration of his being, that is, to eternity. Against all this, religious virtue is the sovereign and universal relief; it representeth a more substantial enjoyment to counterballance the present pain, a reconciled God and an approving conscience, as a perpetual spring of joy, and an eternal

SERM. weight of glory to recompense the pain and  
 IV. toil of the present state, which are, in comparison, but a light affliction and for a moment.

The same principles and sentiments in the mind of a wise man restrain immoderate anger, which, as *Solomon* saith, *resteth in the bosom of fools*, *Eccles. vii. 9.* He considereth the transports of passionate wrath as the impotence of the soul destroying it's peace; that no provocations or injuries which can be done to him in this world can affect his main interest; they appear to him very inconsiderable things while he enjoyeth tranquillity within, and believeth God is his friend, who can make even his enemies to be at peace with him, can assuage their malice or controul it's most violent efforts, and whose loving kindness is a fund of superior consolation, even better than life itself, beyond which the utmost rage of men cannot reach; and, finally, as the great rule by which he formeth his temper and conduct is, the imitation of the Deity, he considereth that nothing is more godlike than to forgive injuries, and be kind to the unthankful and evil.

But let us, next, consider the advantage of religious wisdom in delivering us from

the symptoms of weakness arising from the S E R M. passions. The first I mentioned was ignorance and confusion; the understanding is so IV.

darkened that it cannot discern the way we should chuse, and form a just and deliberate judgment of things, which certainly is a great unhappiness. Now, it is the invaluable advantage of true wisdom, that it openeth the eyes, and setteth things before the mind in a clear and full view. *The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple, the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes, Psal. xix. 7, 8.* Whatever difficulty there may appear in the paths of virtue to the corrupt and unexperienced, *they are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. Prov. viii. 9.* There is an admirable simplicity in religion, and the highway of holiness, as the prophet calleth it, *Isa. xxxv. 8.* is such that *the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.* Whereas the ways of sin are crooked and intricate, a man engaged in them still meeteth with one difficulty after another, and vexeth himself with unprofitable projects, which only tend to involve him in farther trouble, *Prov. xv. 19.* *The way of the slothful man is an hedge of*

SERM. of thorns, (and the case is same of other sinners wandering in the maze of errors) but

IV. *the way of the righteous is plain. Solomon saith, Ecces. ii. 14. A wise man's eyes are in his head, but a fool walketh in darkness. And again, chap. x. 2. A wise man's heart is at his right-hand, but a fool's is at his left.* The vicious distempered mind is like one without eyes in a rough road full of precipices; irregular passions mislead the understanding, so that it is at a loss not knowing what hand to turn to in the greatest urgency of affairs, having forsaken the paths of truth and judgment. But the understanding of the wise dispassionate man is always a ready guide to him, directing his active powers with promptness and dexterity.

In pursuance of this, the man of knowledge increaseth strength against irresolution, unsteadiness, and precipitancy; his behaviour is consistent and uniform, because it is conducted by one invariable principle. The apostle representeth it as the happy fruit of that perfection to which christians arrive by the gospel ministration, *that they are no more like children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind, Eph. iv. 17.* As the passions of men naturally make them fickle  
and

and unstable ; true wisdom, which consisteth in the mastery of the passions, must have the contrary effect ; and accordingly you will always observe, that the most dispassionate men are the most constant ; for conscience and reason hold the sovereignty in the soul, and their voice is still the same.

SERM.

IV.

Again, as bodily strength produceth facility and chearfulness in action, *the strong man rejoiceth to run his race*, which would be a great oppression to the weak ; the strong in a religious sense, that is, the wise and virtuous, *run* in the path of righteousness, *and do not faint*, as the prophet speaketh, *they walk and are not weary*, their good works are performed with vigor and alacrity, and their hearts are enlarged to run in the of God's commandments. This effect of wisdom *Solomon* observeth, chap. iv. 12. *When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened, and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.* As a man walking in a narrow difficult path, or labouring under an incumbrance to which his strength is unequal, findeth himself cramped and uneasy, his progress is slow and painful, so the weak and imperfect in a religious sense, pressed down by weights, embarrassed and entangled with

SERM. the sins which easily beset them, do not run

IV. the race which is set before them, but their  
 steps are straitened and they often stumble.  
 From these inconveniences wisdom is the effectual relief; it establisheth and invigorateth the powers of the mind, it enableth the person indued with it, to attend his proper work with ease and satisfaction, and to continue with patience in well-doing.

And you may observe the text saith, the man of knowledge increaseth strength; though the first entrance of it maketh a great change in the condition and conduct of men, and from that time discretion beginneth to preserve and understanding to keep them, as our author observeth, chap. ii. 10. 11. yet it is not perfect at once, but by degrees groweth up to maturity, and every step we advance brings an additional strength with all the comfortable consequences of it, as Job saith, chap. xvii. 9. *The righteous shall hold on his way, and they that have clean hands be stronger and stronger.* That which completeth the benefit of this spiritual strength, is, that the wise man is conscious of it, and enjoyeth it with pleasure; not that he proudly valueth himself upon his strength, or treats others with a supercilious contempt; such a temper is far  
 from



from a wise man, his humility is a great part of his religion and his strength; but as in the animal nature a sound constitution and vigor is felt by those who possess it, and it produceth ease and the more comfortable enjoyment of life, whereas declining strength is painful and burthensome to itself; so the sensible fruition of it is inseparable from a healthful state of the mind, that is, established virtue and integrity.

Having given this account of strength and weakness of mind, as they arise from the opposite causes of wisdom, or the prevalence of irregular affections and passions, let us apply it to ourselves, and enquire carefully into the state and temper of our minds. Certainly, the enquiry is of great importance if we have it at heart to know whether wisdom hath enter'd into our souls, as *Solomon* speaketh, and what measure of it we have attained. And though to men unaccustomed to this exercise of communing with their own hearts, as the *Psalmist* calleth it, without which there can be no proficiency in virtue, it may appear difficult, the difficulty is far from being insuperable, if we could but engage ourselves to a vigorous attention; the objects of enquiry are not distant remote things, but such as are known by an inward

con-

SERM. consciousness; and certainly it is reproachful

IV. for a man to be a stranger to himself and to what passeth in his own mind.

Let us, then, try what equanimity we maintain in the changes of life; do our spirits rise and fall with every varying emergent? Do our fears and hopes, our joys and sorrows, depend on the smiles and frowns of this world, so as in threatening or adverse turns of providence, the understanding is darkened, the counsels are perplexed, courage faileth and resolution becometh unstable? If it be so, the constitution of the mind is weak, and there is a great defect of wisdom. As I am persuaded every one who is acquainted with himself will find these symptoms in a degree to be regretted, you may see what the cause is, and what would be the cure. Have we not just cause to bewail the imperfection of our integrity and all the religious virtues? If by a vigorous zeal and constant diligence in them we were growing up from feeble infancy to the stature of perfect men, we should find the advantage of it, in a presence and tranquillity of mind established above the reach of time and chance. Security and confidence doth so naturally spring from virtue, that whoever hath any  
just

just sense of the one is led to consider the other as its inseparable attendant; accordingly, some of the wiser heathens have expressed themselves excellently on this subject, and one of their poets saith, concerning the virtuous man, That if the frame of nature were dissolved, he would meet its ruins unterrified. But our divine religion explaineth the confidence of a good man very fully, and sheweth the true grounds of it, which are so firm and so clear, that it is unworthy of a christian, of his privileges, his character, and the vocation wherewith he is called, not to retain *his confidence, and the rejoicing of his hope, stedfast to the end.*

SERM.  
IV.

One would think it sufficient to recommend true piety and christian virtue, if it giveth such confidence and security of mind which is so very desirable in our present state, a state of discipline and trial, wherein there is much vanity and vexation of spirit; and, as *Solomon* observeth, God hath wisely given *travel and grief to the children of men, as a part of their portion under the sun.* But still let us remember there is no other foundation upon which we can be strong, in the sense of the text, or attain to firmness and serenity of mind, but wisdom, or the practice

SERM. practice of pure undefiled religion. There  
 IV. are very different courses taken by men to  
 support themselves against the vicissitudes of  
 time, and the fears and sorrows which they  
 occasion; some have recourse to schemes  
 and projects of their own, in order to ob-  
 tain rest: If this or the other design were  
 accomplished, and such an affair settled,  
 then they are secure: But as it is altogether  
 uncertain, whether they shall ever obtain  
 their end; so if they did obtain it, they may  
 be never the nearer tranquillity; for the state  
 of human affairs always is and must be  
 changeable; so that the security arising from  
 our own devices, or any imagined outward  
 circumstances, is intirely groundless. *Solo-*  
*mon* maketh a comparison between wisdom  
 and money, as a defence, *Eccles. vii. 12.*  
 and he acknowledgeth they may be both so  
 called. But though money sometimes is a  
 means of safety to the proprietor, it also  
 sometimes exposeth him to mischief and  
 danger; but the excellency of knowledge,  
 saith our author, is, that in all events *it*  
*giveth life to them that have it.* In pati-  
 ence, confidence in God, resignation to his  
 will, contracting our desires to the things of  
 this world, and the other branches of reli-  
 gious

gious virtue, is our only solid peace, as the prophet having reprov'd the Jews for their vain confidence in *Egypt* for their safety, telleth them, *Isaiab xxx. 15.* In returning and rest ye shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.

SERM.  
IV.

## S E R M O N V.

The Favour of GOD obtained by  
W I S D O M.

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PROVERBS VIII. 35.

*Whoſo findeth me findeth life, and ſhall obtain  
favour of the Lord.*

SERM.  
V.

I HAVE, in diſcourſing from ſeveral paſſages of this book, conſidered ſome of the arguments by which the wiſe man recommendeth religious virtue under the character of wiſdom, ſuch as the excellency of its ways, the pleaſantneſs of them, and that ſecurity and confidence which ariſeth in the mind of a wiſe or a good man, from the conſciouſneſs of his own integrity. Another very ſtrong argument is contained in the text, *that whoſo findeth wiſdom findeth life, and ſhall obtain favour of the Lord.* I do not think that life here is to be underſtood in ſo narrow a ſenſe as to mean only, or principally, the continuance of this preſent life; though there are other declarations of

*Solomon*

Solomon in this book, which must be so interpreted, as chap. ix. 11. *By me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.* And chap. x. 27. *The fear of the Lord prolongeth days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.* Yet, considering that life in this text is not so limited, that often in scripture it hath a larger signification, and that the words added to explain this advantage of wisdom, and shew the true cause of it, namely, obtaining favour of the Lord, leads us to more important and durable effects than the meer lengthening out our present state of existence: Considering all this, I say, it seemeth reasonable by life to understand that which indeed is better, and for which life, in the first and more obvious sense, is only valuable, that is, happiness; and so it must be taken in that saying of our Saviour, *Luke xii. 5. The life of a man (or his enjoyment and felicity) doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* The intention of this text, then, is to represent a very great blessedness to good men, whether in the present or a future state, annexed to wisdom or religious virtue, in consequence of their obtaining God's favour.

SERM.

V.



The great creator of all things hath so framed the human nature, that very important consequences in the most sensible manner affecting us, necessarily result from our own dispositions, and our course of action, which should reasonably determine us to chuse moral good, and eschew evil. And this evidently sheweth that man was made for virtue, since by his constitution he cannot be happy without it; as in the other parts of the creation, from the obvious relations and uses of creatures, we infer the Almighty Maker's counsel and design. But seeing we are capable of knowing him as the free and intelligent ruler of the world, and of apprehending his favour and displeasure towards us according to our works, whether this be discovered by the principles of natural religion, or the positive declarations of his word; thence distinct and very strong arguments are drawn, which should induce us to chuse the good, and refuse the evil; for they represent him as a lawgiver, whose precepts claim the respect of his subjects, as they are enforced by the promises and threatenings of one who is able to save and to destroy. *Solomon* telleth us, chap. xxiv. 14. that *when we have found the knowledge*

*ledge*



ledge of wisdom, there shall be a reward, and SERM.  
our expectation shall not be cut off. But here V.  
he ascertaineth the reward, and mentioneth  
particularly what it is, namely, the favour  
of the Lord. I shall,

*First*, Endeavour to shew how great, how  
substantial and comprehensive a felicity  
this is.

*Secondly*, The title which wisdom, or reli-  
gious virtue giveth to it ; or upon what  
ground we may expect, according to  
the declaration in the text, that if we  
find wisdom, we shall obtain the favour  
of the Lord.

*First*, To show how great, how substan-  
tial and comprehensive a felicity this is. And  
one would think it will be easily allowed, if  
we consider our most obvious notions of the  
Deity ; that idea which all his works, and  
more particularly the holy scripture, give us  
of him, as a being infinitely perfect and all-  
sufficient, the fountain of life and of hap-  
piness. We judge of the importance of any  
person's favour, and of the security and ad-  
vantage which may arise to ourselves from  
it, by his power and capacity. The desire

SERM. even of a poor man *is his kindness*, and ought  
 V. to be gratefully acknowledged; but one cannot  
 form such hopes from it, as from the friendship of the great, whose exalted condition putteth many things in their power to give, which we esteem good for us. Now, if God hath the supreme and absolute dominion over all things; if, as the Psalmist saith, *Psal. xxxiii. 9. He spake and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast.* And verse 11. *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.* Then that must be a just inference, ver. 12. *Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.* It is impossible his favourites should be unhappy, because he neither wanteth power to effect what his good-will inclineth to, nor wisdom to contrive the best method for their safety and advantage. The account, therefore, which the saints in scripture give of what they call their portion, the happiness they chuse, in which all their desires and hopes center, as in opposition to the very different choices made by others; the accounts, I say, are very short indeed, but very full; the light of God's countenance, his blessing, his loving-kindness.

ness. These terms are equivalent, and all mean the same thing which in my text is called *the favour of the Lord*, which good men regard as the All of their felicity: If they enjoy it, there is nothing wanting to them; if they be deprived of it, there is nothing can supply its place, or afford any true consolation. Those who are so unhappy, or rather so foolish, as to neglect this chief good, still, however, as their nature unalterably determineth them, intent upon happiness, fall into a great variety of pursuits; they say, *Who will shew us any good?* Psal. iv. 6. Though there are objects suitable to the inclinations God hath planted in our nature, and in conferring them upon us the liberality of his providence appeareth; yet even supposing them sought after, and enjoyed without sin, they come short of being our true felicity, both in the perfection of degree, and in the duration of them. They cannot yield solid contentment and satisfaction to the mind of man, because they are too low in their kind for its high capacity; and they are of a perishing nature; pleasure is but for a season, honour only an empty shadow; nothing can be more variable and uncertain than it is; and *riches make them-*

SERM.  
V.  
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SERM. *selves wings, and flee as an eagle towards*  
 V. *heaven.* But the favour of God is a sovereign good, and never-failing foundation of hope, and spring of comfort; it extendeth to all possible cases, and is a support in the most distressed situation of affairs; of which we have a remarkable example in the history of *Jacob's* returning from the land of *Syria*. When his family had grown to a considerable number, and his substance likewise encreased in a painful service, indeed under a long oppression, so as to draw upon him the envy and discontent of his father-in-law, from whom he escaped with difficulty, a new and a greater danger meeteth him from his brother, with whom he had parted on ill terms, and expected now the destructive effects of his resentment against himself and his defenceless family. In this great extremity, having made the best dispositions he could for saving at least some of his household, last of all, he betook himself to prayer, the earnestness and importunity of which is represented by an angel's wrestling with him in the likeness of a man, and the result was, that he obtained a blessing; that is, the promise of God's special favour, which had been made to *Abraham* and *Isaac*, was re-

newed to him. There is no mention of S E R M. any particular promise with respect to the V. present exigency in answer to his prayers, that is, that he should escape from *Eſau*; and there was no need of any, for the favour of God is in all events sufficient for his servants, their rock and refuge in every article of danger; when that foundation is once laid, and an interest in the loving-kindness of their God ascertained to them, they are fully satisfied, and reason with themselves in this manner; let the appearances be ever so dismal and shocking, our God is able to deliver us; but if he has thought fit to appoint otherwise, and that the present danger must put an end to life, still we are safe, his favour reacheth beyond the line of life, and maketh death itself our gain. Such hope had those glorious confessors for the true religion, *Shadrach, Meſkach, and Abednego*, when doomed to a fiery furnace by *Nebuchadnezzar*, and their hope inspired them with heroic resolution, *Dan. iii. 16.* They answered, and said, *O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king.*

SERM. *king.* *But if not, be it known unto thee, O*  
 V. *king, we will not serve thy gods, nor worship*  
*the golden image which thou hast set up. I*  
*come, in the*

*Second Place,* To consider the title which wisdom or religious virtue giveth to the favour of God, or upon what grounds we may expect, according to the declaration in the text, that if we find wisdom, we shall obtain favour of the Lord. As I shewed before, that the perfection of felicity, and the greatness of the reward, imported in the favour of God, is justly inferred from his glorious natural excellencies, his absolute dominion and power over all things; so that the wise, that is, the virtuous and the good, are intitled to his favour, may be justly argued from his moral attributes. We must necessarily suppose that the Supreme Being is infinitely good, righteous, and true, and that he exerciseth these perfections in the government of his reasonable creatures. This is proved in the same manner as the existence of God, and his other attributes, that is, by arguing from effects to their causes, from the exercise of powers and principles to their being; and from this most certain truth, that all  
 real

real and absolute excellencies must belong to the infinite, unoriginated, and independent cause of all things. Every considerate person will find himself obliged to acknowledge that the moral attributes are real and absolute excellencies, most justly and worthily therefore ascribed to the infinitely perfect Being. Besides, this must be allowed to be the foundation of true religion, and, therefore, hath been universally acknowledged wherever it was professed or practised; for how can men do any thing that is good out of a regard to the Deity, which is the very meaning of religion, unless they first believe him to be good, and a lover of virtue?

And, indeed, the greatest corruptions of religion and morality have taken their rise from wrong notions of God. What wonder is it, if the worshippers are misled to cruelty, lasciviousness, and ambition, if it be once believed that the objects of worship themselves are of the same dispositions, and that wicked practices are agreeable to them? But if, on the contrary, we are fully convinced that God is perfectly holy, just, benevolent, and faithful, then we are furnished with the strongest motives to practice, and *to think on the things which are*  
*pure,*

SERM. *pure, and true, and honest, and virtuous,*  
 V. because we are sure these things are approved  
 by him. What the scripture declareth on  
 this subject is perfectly agreeable to reason,  
 for it celebrateth the holiness and the justice  
 of God, especially as manifested in the di-  
 stinction he maketh between good and bad  
 men, *Psal. xi. 5, 6, 7. The Lord trieth the*  
*righteous, but the wicked and him that loveth*  
*violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he*  
*shall rain snares, fire, and brimstone, and*  
*an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion*  
*of their cup. For the righteous Lord loveth*  
*righteousness, his countenance doth behold*  
*the upright.* And elsewhere we are taught,  
 that because he is holy therefore he delight-  
 eth in holiness, he hateth sin, and the evil  
 and the vicious are an abomination to him.

But this is so evident, I need not spend  
 time in endeavouring to illustrate it. I shall,  
 therefore, apply myself to the consideration  
 of an obvious objection taken from the  
 promiscuous administration of things in this  
 world. How doth it appear that the wise  
 and virtuous obtain favour of the Lord, since  
 his providence doth not distinguish them by  
 marks of favour; but, by the confession of  
 the sacred writers themselves, they are in as  
 bad



bad a condition with respect to the affairs of S E R M.  
this life as the wicked? *Eccles. ix. 1, 2. The* V.

*righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; no man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before him. All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked, to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner, and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.* Nay, it is often

found in experience, that when wickedness is triumphant, and the proud are counted happy, the most eminently religious suffer cruel persecution; the apostles were set forth as examples suffering all manner of adversity and tribulations, counted the off-scourings of all things, and the filth of the world. This objection hath been often advanced against the equity and wisdom of providence, and as seeming to prove that the affairs of this world are under no intelligent direction, but left to blind chance or necessity; and taking it in its whole compass, it would require a large consideration; but I shall at present only examine it with a view to the point before us, that is, I will shew that it is not conclusive against

the

SERM. the doctrine of the text, that the wise, or  
 V. the religious, *obtain favour of the Lord.*

And in the first place, it is to be observed, that the present state is appointed by the wisdom of God to be a state of discipline, and improvement, wherein, as all men are imperfect in a moral sense, so is their condition with respect to happiness, mixed and imperfect; a great deal of what is generally accounted affliction such as the inferiority of some men to others in respect to the advantages of nature and outward estate, a mean birth, a weak constitution of body, poverty, and other things of a like nature; a great deal of this, I say, might be resolved into the mere sovereignty of the divine dominion. There is a vast variety in the works of God even which we see; the very kinds of them cannot be numbered, and herein doth his greatness and his wisdom appear. Now, surely in disposing the several parts of his creation, in settling the order of his kingdom, and assigning their different stations to the subjects of his providential rule, the great Creator and Governor is not accountable to any of his creatures; he doth whatever pleaseth him, and who can say, What dost thou? Will a man complain that he was not made an angel, or a brute that it is not raised  
 to

to the dignity of a man? So in the same species, as there is wisely appointed an inequality, we need go no farther than the same sovereign freedom of providence as the cause of it, without any consideration of merit in the creatures. In a great house, as the apostle saith, *2 Tim. ii. 20. There are vessels of gold and silver, also of wood and earth; some to honour, and some to dishonour.* But, indeed, the best men have sin enough to justify all the severity they meet with. If the moral attributes of God require that a very important distinction should be made between bad and good men, which last character really means no more than the sincerely though imperfectly religious, it is reasonable to expect there should be a difference between the latter and the perfectly innocent; and since there is not a just man that liveth upon the earth and sinneth not, the providence of God is sufficiently vindicated in appointing to all men *vexation, and travel, and grief, under the sun*; which, however, when the whole of our existence and our most important interests are taken into consideration, may well be called a light affliction, and but for a moment. Here it is that God *visiteth the faults of his children*  
*with*

SERM.

V.

SERM. *with rods, and their sins with chastisement,*  
 V. *yet without taking away his loving kindness*  
 from them, *Psal. lxxxix. 33.* but still, they will acknowledge they are punished far less than their iniquities deserve; nay, very often the suffering and afflicting infirmities of men, even of good men, are the natural as well as penal consequences of their sin; and, surely, it is not reasonable to expect that the nature and constitution of things should be altered to exempt them from troubles which they well deserve.

2dly, The sufferings of good men in the present state may be considered as trials; so the scripture representeth them; and it is very consistent with the favour of God to his servants that he should try them in order to their growth in virtue, and so becoming still more the objects of his favour. We ought to be sensible that religion is the highest perfection, and continuance and growth in it the noblest enjoyment we are capable of in this world, as well as that it is a reasonable service; and, therefore, the methods of providence towards us which have a tendency to the increase of virtue are to be accounted tokens of God's favour rather than objections against it. *Rev. iii. 19. As many*


*The Favour of God obtained by Wisdom.* On this account it is that christians are reconciled to their present suffering, and even glory in their tribulations, because they know that *tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, Rom. v. 3.* The apostle *James* therefore exhorts christians to count it all joy when they fall into diverse temptations, knowing that the trial of their faith worketh patience, *James i. 2.* and *St. Peter, 1 Ep. i. 6, 7.* faith to the persecuted christian *Jews, Ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations; that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold which perisheth, though it be tried by the fire, may be found to praise, and honour, and glory.* As God intended that some of his servants should, for his honour, and promoting the interest of truth and pure religion, be rare examples of those virtues which especially shine in tribulation, as patience, fortitude, meekness, and charity; and intended for them a great reward, it was fit he should appoint for them a proper scene wherein those virtues might be eminently displayed, that is, infirmities, reproaches, persecutions, and distresses.

SERM.

V.



But, in the third place, the perfectly satisfying answer to the objection, is, that the greatest distinction between good and bad men is to be made in another state; and then the reward of the righteous will be so complete as to make amends for all their toils and sorrows in this world. It is consistent with the greatest love of God to subject his creatures, even though perfectly innocent, to very grievous sufferings, when he not only hath it in his power, but hath actually purposed and declared it, that he will recompense them sufficiently by a proportionably greater felicity afterwards. The most glorious example of this is our Lord *Jesus Christ*, who *though holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners*, suffered unutterable griefs, yet without any diminution of the Father's love to him, which abundantly shewed itself in the fulness of joy that followed, and his exaltation at the right-hand of the majesty on high. Thus although good men are obnoxious to many calamities in life, it doth not follow, that therefore they have not obtained favour of the Lord, because the favour of the Lord is not a principle which exerteth itself necessarily but freely, and the manifestations of it  
are

are directed by wisdom, choosing the best SERM.  
time, and the best manner for making the V.  
objects of it happy. 

Hitherto I have gone no further, except in mentioning the example of Christ, than reason itself and the principles of natural religion will direct us. It must be confessed they leave clouds and darkness upon the future state, yet not without strong though general intimations of an hereafter, and of a retribution to come, which have wonderfully supported some great men, even among the heathens, in the last extremity, and the agonies of death itself. But, now, our Lord *Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, through the gospel*; the way is opened into the *holiest of all*, into heaven itself by his blood, so that we have clear and full assurance, that he who findeth wisdom shall obtain favour of the Lord; for he shall obtain the *inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; that crown of glory, and of righteousness, which the righteous judge hath promised to them who love his appearing, which is the best and most complete evidence and effect of the divine favour.

SERM.

V.

I see no reason why this may not be comprehended in the meaning of the text; for though the Old Testament writers speak but darkly of the future felicity in comparison of what the gospel doth, the covenant God made with *Israel* being founded on other and inferior promises, yet in those ancient authors we have some strong intimations concerning it, besides what the principles of natural religion suggested; you know our Saviour argueth convincingly against the *Sadduces*, who denied that there are any spirits, and, consequently, that men are capable of subsisting in a future state, from these words of God to *Moses*, *I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob*. Since God is not *the God of the dead, but of the living*, it is a just inference, that these eminent patriarchs did not altogether perish when their natural lives ended, but that they subsisted in another state, and therein enjoyed the most perfect accomplishment of that glorious promise, *that God would be their God*. Some of the later prophets speak yet more clearly of the future glory, and even of the resurrection of the dead; and since so ancient a believer as *Job* expressed his hope in these strong terms, *I know that*

*my*



*my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, Job xix. 25.* It is reasonable to think that *Solomon* also understood it, and that he had it in his view when he spoke of the favour of the Lord as the full reward of wisdom.

But however that be, what will most obviously occur to a christian's thoughts, as the compleat reward of religion, and the perfect enjoyment of God's favour, are those things promised in the gospel, *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, which God hath laid up for them that love him.* Let us then, my brethren, meditate on those excellent descriptions which the inspired writers give us of the future state. They not only assure us that if we be *stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, our labour shall not be in vain; and that in due time we shall reap, if we faint not:* They not only represent the state of the saints after death, as perfectly free from all uneasiness, which is the negative part, yet absolutely necessary to felicity, *there shall be no more hunger, or thirst, no more sorrow, and sigh-*

SERM. *ing, no more pain*; they not only represent

V. it in such general terms as shew it to be exceeding glorious and happy, as when it is set forth under the notion of a kingdom, a crown, a royal palace, and building of God; but they explain the particular ingredients which, to a serious composed mind, must appear the noblest enjoyments that a rational nature is capable of, such as the society of angels, and the perfected spirits of the just, an entire deliverance from temptation and sin, the perfection of knowledge and of charity, being like God, and seeing him as he is; and all the blessed exercises and fruitions of the soul not to suffer any abatement by its re-union with the body, which in the present state lays such weight upon it, and cramps its aspiring powers, but as consummated, rather, at the resurrection; the body then immortal, and spiritual, fashioned like unto the glorious body of *Jesus Christ*, being every way a well qualified companion to the mind in all its high entertainments, and so to continue through all eternity. We may consider, at the same time, the strong assurances God hath given his servants for the confirmation of their faith and hope; not only we have his faithful word to rely

on, but, as the apostle saith, *Heb. vi. 17, 18.* *Being willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, he confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lye, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.*

I shall now, in conclusion, only make two practical reflections on what hath been said. *First*, we may see what is the noblest end of life, the worthiest of our affections, our choice, and of our most diligent and constant endeavours, that we may attain it. If life be in the favour of God, if *his loving-kindness be better than life*, and imports in it so many and great blessings, then it is certainly reasonable for us to pursue it by all methods in our power, and in preference to all other things. Men can never be justified to themselves, nor have inward peace in such a wrong choice and course of action, as seeking those things which are mean and unworthy, in comparison, and neglecting that which must appear to themselves best. Thus the prophet presseth sinners, and it might be thought any one would easily apprehend

SERM. the justness and the force of his reasoning,

V. *Isaiab lv. 2, 3. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness; incline your ear to me, and come; bear, and your soul shall live. And, to the same purpose, our Saviour, John vi. 27. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life; which the Son of Man shall give unto you, for him hath God the Father sealed.* It is very strange that human nature should be so infatuated, so lost to its true interest, and the proper use of its higher powers, as to be led entirely by sense, and give itself up to the direction of appetites and passions; which upon the least consideration must appear to be the lower part, and far from the principal end of our being. Yet so it is, that many men, even christians, are governed by their brutish inclinations, and aim at nothing higher than gratifying them: But besides that this is most unreasonable and unworthy of men, it is directly contrary to the profession of religion, the proper end of which is to obtain the favour of the Lord.

2dly,

2dly, The way to obtain this end is plainly marked out to us in scripture, particularly in this Text; and it is very inexcusable folly and thoughtlessness if we mistake it. Supposing men to have a general persuasion that the favour of God is of the greatest consequence to them, and they cannot be happy without it, yet still an attachment to their sins misleads them another way, that is, they flatter themselves that it is possible to obtain it without reforming their lives. How many are there who presume in their hearts that they are the favourites of God, though they go on in their sinful courses, and harden themselves more and more in their vices? To what cause can this be attributed, or what are the pretences by which men professing religion thus fatally deceive themselves? Indeed the very profession of religion itself deceives them, though it is very surprizing that it should. Thus the *Jews*, because they were the people of God, in covenant with him, the posterity of *Abraham*, and of *Israel*, and because they constantly performed the outward rites of worship which he appointed, therefore imagined they were in a good state towards God; though the prophets often represented to them

SERM.  
V.  
}

SERM. them the vanity of such pretences, which  
 V. were refuted by many plain instances de-  
 monstrating that God had no regard to them. Their own history shewed that though he brought their fathers out of *Egypt* with a strong hand, and *they did eat spiritual meat, and drank spiritual drink*, yet with many of them he was not well pleased. He afterwards forsook *Shiloh*, the tent which he placed with men; and the ark of the covenant in which they trusted for their defence, was taken into captivity, the temple itself was burned; and the last fatal catastrophe of the *Jewish* nation demonstrated that the favour of God is not annexed to the greatest outward privileges, since even *they* may come short of it, *whose are the fathers, and the giving of the Laws, and the service of God, and the promises*. After such examples, shall we vainly imagine that any external privileges, professions, or acts of devotion, will entitle us to the divine acceptance? Our blessed Saviour hath taken much pains to guard his disciples against such a pernicious error; he hath expressly assured us, that if we should say to him at the last day, *have we not eaten and drank in thy presence, prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast*  
 out

*The Favour of God obtained by Wisdom.* 139  
*out devils, and in thy name have done many* SERM.  
*wonderful works? His answer will be, I ne-* V.  
*ver knew you, depart from me, ye that work*  
*iniquity, Mat. vii. 22.*

SER-

## S E R M O N VI.

LONG-LIFE, RICHES, and HONOUR,  
the Fruits of WISDOM.

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PROVERBS III. 16.

*Length of days is in her right-hand, and in  
her left-hand riches and honour.*

SERM.  
VI.


**M**ANY and great are the advantages which *Solomon* attributeth to wisdom or religious virtue, thereby recommending it to our choice. It must be acknowledged that those mentioned in the text are of the lowest kind, and so they will always appear to a mind well instructed, and which hath a true taste of real excellence. The pleasures of self-approbation, the inward tranquillity of soul, which ariseth from the testimony of an unrepublishing heart, supporting it in all events, and a sense of the favour of God, are enjoyments of a far superior nature, as well as more durable, than the longest, and most prosperous, and honourable life which can be hoped for in this world.



world. Yet, since length of days, riches, and honour, are insisted on by the inspired writers as the effects of wisdom, it will be very proper for us to consider them in that view; and we shall find that, at least, religion hath not, generally speaking, such a tendency to distress, misery, and dishonour, even in this life; and, on the contrary, that irreligion and wickedness is not such a sure way to become rich and great, as many are apt to imagine, who, it is certain, govern themselves by sentiments entirely opposite to those of *Solomon*; and the very reason why they chuse the ways of injustice, dishonesty, and vice, is, because, postponing the concerns of their souls and of eternity, they hope thereby to secure and to promote their present interests, which are higher in their esteem.

To explain the doctrine of the text, and prevent mistaken notions concerning it, I must observe that there is a great difference between the Old Testament and the New, with respect to the motives by which religious virtue is severally enforced in them; and the assertion of our author might be pronounced by him in another sense, and on other accounts than it can be now according  
to

SERM.  
VI.

SERM. to the gospel. It is certain that by the co-  
 VI.  venant God made with the people of *Israel*,  
 and that is the foundation the Old Testa-  
 ment writers go upon in their doctrine;  
 there was an established connexion between  
 obedience and outward prosperity; the land  
 of *Canaan*, and an undisturbed safety in it,  
 with success against their enemies who  
 should at any time invade them; these blef-  
 sings were positively promised to that na-  
 tion, upon the condition of their keeping  
 God's law. Accordingly we find in their  
 history, that whenever they declined to ido-  
 latry and other sins, desolating judgments  
 brake in upon them, their enemies trium-  
 phed, their country was wasted, and they  
 were brought into bondage. On the other  
 hand, no sooner they repented, returned to  
 their God and to their duty, reformed their  
 manners, and practised piety and righteouf-  
 ness, than immediately there was a change  
 in the state of their affairs, which presently  
 were in a flourishing condition, their adver-  
 saries fell before them, their losses were re-  
 paired, and God established them in the  
 quiet possession of the promised land. And  
 as these were the measures constantly and  
 uniformly kept with the whole nation, the  
 conduct

conduct of providence towards particular persons was, not always, but for the most part, agreeable to them. The most righteous men, and of the most exemplary lives for piety and virtue, were prosperous, and, according to the declaration in the text, had length of days, riches, and honour. *Abraham*, from a small beginning, grew to a great estate; *Jacob* also, *Joseph*, *Job*, *Moses*, *David*, *Daniel*, and others, men of the most distinguished worth, and the most illustrious characters we meet with in the Old Testament history; though some of them had very grievous trials, (as the whole *Israelitish* nation had, which is not inconsistent with the promise of external prosperity made to them, since that was the event) yet, in the main, their lives were rather happy than afflicted, and the difficulties they met with in the beginning ended in their prosperity.

But the New Testament differeth from this very widely, both in its general declarations, and the instances of fact which its history containeth. Our Lord assureth his disciples, all who will embrace his religion, and subject themselves to his rules, that they must expect tribulation, and through it enter into the kingdom of God: He requireth  
of

SERM. of them, as the very condition of their being his approved followers, and entitled to his favour, that they should resign and be ready to forsake (having in comparison) all their worldly interests. So that length of days, riches, and honour, instead of being promised as the rewards of christianity, in some cases, must be renounced by all the servants and disciples of Jesus Christ. And then, for particular instances in history, so far as the scripture bringeth it down, they are perfectly agreeable to these general declarations. No one of the apostles (and theirs are the most eminent characters for religious wisdom) lived in any external splendor; on the contrary, they were tried with continual affliction, persecutions, reproaches, and distresses, and approved themselves to God and to the churches as faithful ministers, in labours, imprisonments, perils, fastings, troubles of various kinds, poverty, and all manner of ill usage in the world, instead of riches and honour.

There seemeth to be an objection against this, especially from two expressions in the New Testament; the one is that of our Saviour, *Matt. vi. 33. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things* (the

the things of this world, from an anxiety about which he had been dissuading them) *shall be added unto you.* The other is, **1 Tim. iv. 8.** *Godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*

For the first, it is plain our Lord's design is to shew the folly of an inordinate carefulness, not about abundance of worldly things, outward splendor, and great wealth, but the necessaries of life, what we shall eat and drink, and wherewithal we shall be cloathed. The promise therefore must be understood to extend no farther than to answer the intention of superseding our thoughtfulness about these needful things, encouraging us to trust chearfully in the bounty of providence, for supplying us with them, and it doth not reach to honour and riches; and yet even in that limited sense, we must not conceive of it inconsistently with the whole current of the gospel doctrine, which requireth a resignation of our very lives, and a readiness to part with them for the honour of God, and to preserve a good conscience. As to the other text, **1 Tim. iv. 8.** it seemeth to mean, that in the practice of true religion we may hope that, ordinarily, God's gracious care will be employed for our sup-

SERM. port and preservation. In the 9th and 10th  
 VI. verses the apostle adds, *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, for therefore we labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe*; plainly enough intimating that we are not to expect an exemption from troubles, or to enjoy a life of external ease and splendor; for he saith expressly, *we labour and suffer reproach*; but only that God, whose providence preserveth the lives of all men, taketh a special care of sincere christians. But that outward prosperity is not intended to be the reward of religion, and that the promise of it is not the sanction of the law of faith, or of christianity, but the promise of eternal life, is evident, because there is no necessary connexion between the condition and the promise. No man who rightly understandeth, and seriously considereth the strain of the New Testament, and withal reflecteth on the general course of providence which in this point explaineth it, can believe that riches and honour are annexed to the exercise of godliness as the proper recompence of it; for then they ought to follow it constantly, and uniformly, and in exact proportion, which it is certain

tain they do not; as the blessedness of the future state is *always* awarded by the Lord, the righteous judge, to them who seek it by patient continuance in well-doing, and who love his appearing.

But though what hath been said on this subject is strictly true, and it was necessary to observe it, that we may rightly understand the scriptures, and know upon what foot religion standeth according to the gospel; nay, even under the Old Testament itself, the promises of prosperity to good men were not to be taken so absolutely, but that the case of persecution was always to be expected, which sometimes proved so violent a temptation to the best men, as to shock them in the belief of the reality and advantage of religion, which we find was the case of the Psalmist, the prophet *Jeremiah*, and others: Notwithstanding all this, if we observe the ordinary methods of divine providence, and the general course and state of things, with their connexion and dependence in this world, we shall find that, for the most part, the practice of the christian virtues hath a tendency even to our outward advantage, and to promote our present interest, rather than the contrary. The observation holdeth more universally with re-

SERM. spect to communities, some of which have  
 VI. risen from very small beginnings, to great  
 and powerful nations, by industry, frugality, the exact distribution of justice, fidelity, and other virtues; as, on the other hand, the history of all ages sheweth, that the most opulent and flourishing kingdoms have been precipitated into ruin, by avarice, oppression, luxury, and injustice. So true is that proverb of *Solomon's*, *that righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people.*

But, though in the case of private persons, the distinction is not often so remarkable between the good and the bad, in the present administration of providence, the righteous and the wicked being involved in the same common calamities, and the former sometimes suffering by the vices and the cruelties of the latter, which God doth not interpose to restrain, intending to set all things right, which seem now irregular, in a future state of retribution; yet, bad as the world is, wisdom is better than folly, and men, generally speaking, make their way in it to all the happiness it affordeth, by sobriety, godliness, and righteousness, much better than by a course of iniquity and vice; which I shall endeavour, in the remaining part of this discourse, to illustrate.



The first, of wisdom's gifts represented as in her right hand, whereby is signified its being principal in its kind, and preferable to other temporal advantages, is, *length of days*. Life must be allowed more valuable than any of the various enjoyments of this world, because it importeth the capacity, and is the foundation of them all. Death puts an end to all our pleasures, gains, and honours; the rich and the poor, the great and the small, lie down together in the silent grave; and with enjoyment, the dissolution of life concludes our hopes and projects; *Job xvii.*

11. *My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart.* And ver.

15. *And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it?* So that if there be any thing here worthy of our esteem and our choice, any advantage which we would desire to continue possessed of, or any change for the better to be expected, length of days is to be valued in the first place. I would not be understood to raise the value of life so, that we should be excessively fond of it, than which nothing can be more dangerous to integrity, and even to happiness, for it often betrayeth men into the most unworthy actions, and layeth a foundation for the greatest miseries they can suffer, in the per-

SERM. petual distracting fears and discontent of their

VI. own minds: But it is certain *Solomon* judgeth rightly, when he placeth it in the right hand of wisdom, for it must have the preference of riches and honour, though not of an approving conscience; and especially, if the present be considered as a state of preparation for eternity, wherein we have the opportunity and the means of providing for an unchangeable hereafter, such a duration of life, in which that great work may be brought to a happy conclusion, must be accounted by us a great blessing; and, generally speaking, I do not say always, length of days is upon this account desirable.

But, that a religious or a virtuous course of life naturally tendeth to prolong our days, we may be convinced by experience. If we compare the state of mankind at different times, I mean with respect to health and longevity, we shall find that always, in those nations and ages wherein regular virtue was most practised, nature itself was in the greatest vigour, and life drawn out to the longest period. Whereas vice, and a licentious dissolution of manners, constantly corrupted the strain, bringing on a multitude of mortal diseases, which shorten the days of men, rendering their condition unhappy,

happy, and with life itself are propagated to wretched posterity. The virtuous simplicity of the first ages may be one reason why the patriarchs were so long-lived; and the abounding of wickedness in their degenerate offspring is one great cause why the term of life is so shortened, and the vigour of the human constitution so remarkably impaired. If we descend to the particular branches of wisdom, or the particular virtues, we may easily see the eminent influence which some of them have on the preservation of life, and the unhappy tendency of the contrary to its destruction.

SERM.  
VI.

Temperance, in particular, doth very much contribute to health and long-life; and the immoralities opposite to it, are the occasion of many distempers which have raged among mankind, and daily bring multitudes to the grave. Debauchery, gluttony, drunkenness, luxury, lasciviousness, all contrary to sobriety, which consisteth in the due government of the carnal appetites, make life so feeble and joyless as it is in many men, and bring them in crowds to an untimely end.

Meekness and patience, likewise, are virtues which concur to the producing of the same happy effect; as they controul and re-

SERM. strain anger and all the disagreeable passions  
 VI. it comprehendeth, whereby life, when they  
 prevail, is rendered uncomfortable and even  
 pineth away. We see that people of choleric  
 and peevish tempers not only are estranged  
 from joy, the serenity and peace of the mind  
 is broken, but those inward distempers prey  
 upon the very vitals, and the body itself  
 languisheth by their pernicious influence. It  
 is observed in the sacred history, that *Moses*  
 preserved a wonderful measure of health and  
 vigor in a very advanced age. When he  
 was one hundred and twenty, his natural  
 force was not abated, though at that time  
 the age of man was reduced to the standard,  
 which still continueth, of seventy years, as  
 appeareth by the 90th Psalm of which he  
 was the author. And though it must be  
 acknowledged that being a person of so  
 great eminency, so serviceable to God, and  
 useful to the *Israelites* his peculiar people,  
 the prolonging of his life may well be at-  
 tributed to a special providence, yet we may  
 reasonably apprehend that natural causes con-  
 curred to the same end, and particularly,  
 that his very uncommon equanimity and  
 good temper, never ruffled with passion,  
 had a share in bringing him to such an easy  
 and happy old age; for this was his charac-  
 ter,

ter, Num. xii, 3. *That he was very meek* SERM.  
*above all the men which were upon the face* VI.  
*of the earth.* And in lower instances, where

nothing miraculous can be pretended, it is known in experience that a serene dispassionate mind contributeth very much to the preserving a firm and healthful habit of body.

It is also worthy of our observation under this head, that benevolence and the social virtues comprehended in it tend to secure life against that foreign violence to which the unjust, the cruel, and the inhumane, are obnoxious. It is certain that, next to the providence of God, the greatest security of our being in this world against external dangers is in the good will and kind offices of our neighbours; as the greatest hazard ariseth from them, if they are ill affected towards us. Men in a regular society and in peace, are the guardians of each others safety, and their united affections are their common defence; as, when it is otherwise, they are the most dangerous enemies to one another. Now, what is it that will most effectually procure the good-will and esteem of men, and consequently screen our lives against any danger from their injuries? Certainly, the practice of the social virtues. A man who is known by the general tenor of his life and actions

SERM. actions to be just and faithful, honest and  
 VI. beneficent, will have the esteem and love of  
 all who have not divested themselves of humanity, and are not under the power of strong prejudices or irregular passions; and consequently hath great advantages for his safety, to which the world about him will think themselves obliged to contribute as far as they can. The Psalmist saith *Psal. lv. 23. bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.* This, as it may be ascribed to the justice of divine providence, which, though it doth not fully recompence good and evil in this world, yet, being the guardian of human society, often interposeth to punish and restrain those particular evils which are destructive to mankind; so in their own nature the crimes of such men tend to shorten life, by awakening the justice and even the passions of men against the guilty.

The second gift of wisdom mentioned in the text is riches, which it is natural enough for men to desire, indeed to an extreme; some with one view some with another. There are many who have their hearts immoderately set on riches, and labour incessantly to obtain them, only as the means of ambition and luxury, or what they call living well, by which really is meant no more than  
 having

having it in their power to gratify their sensual inclinations. There are but very few in comparifon, who covet wealth for its own fake, and heap up treasures *only to behold them with their eyes*, as *Solomon* fpeaketh elfewhere, or to enjoy the fordid pleafure of poffeffing them without any regard to their ufe, which is the fpirit and character of a mifer. Men have generally an eye to fome future ufe of their riches, and indeed not only to themfelves but others, though very often the purfuit of them is attended with a finful anxiety, with a narrow felfifh fpirit, and both the purfuit, and poffeffion accompanied with an undue confidence in them, and a haughty contempt of thofe, it may be, of greater merit, who are in a lower condition.

These are the abufes of wealth ; but we may confider it in another view, and fuch a one, as it may well be attributed to the bounty of providence and lawfully fought after ; that is, firft, as the means of living eafy, and enjoying the comforts of this world with moderation. Nature teacheth, and religion doth not forbid it, that we fhould endeavour to render our condition in this world tolerable, to be above penury and pinching wants ; not above the need of honeft induftry and frugality, which is really

SERM. a virtue, and very suitable to the present  
 VI. state of men, whatever their station and  
 circumstances in life be; but above that  
 contempt which generally attendeth ab-  
 ject poverty, and those temptations to which  
 many are exposed by it, according to *Agur's*  
 prayer, *Prov. xxx. 9. That I may not be*  
*poor, and steal, and take the Name of God in*  
*vain.* But especially, wealth may be valued  
 as the means and the ability of doing good  
 in a religious and moral Sense; of justice,  
 and promoting the interest of truth and vir-  
 tue, of beneficence and compassion, reliev-  
 ing the necessities of the poor, and in many  
 respects of being profitable to men. Riches,  
 then, are in their own nature indifferent,  
 capable of being used, and in fact they are  
 used, either to good or bad purposes; and  
 since they have an aptitude to the former as  
 well as the latter, it is no dishonour to wis-  
 dom to place them in her gift, though a  
 left-hand gift, as *Solomon* expresseth it, and  
 of an inferior nature.

But the question is concerning the tenden-  
 cy of virtue to the acquisition of wealth. Let  
 it still be remembered that this is not the  
 principal advantage of religion, nor at all  
 the proper reward of it from the hand of  
 the great judge in pursuance of his promises



or declared rule of proceeding with his servants and followers; there is therefore no necessary connexion between virtue and riches, which are not always *to men of understanding*, as *Solomon* observeth, *Eccles. ix. 11.* nor indeed to the best men; sometimes the ungodly prosper in the world, and increase in riches, as the Psalmist saith, and maketh it the subject of a grievous complaint, *Psal. lxxiii. 7. Their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than their heart could wish*; yet, generally speaking, and in the ordinary course of things, virtue is the surest way of thriving in this world, which may be thus accounted for.

We find by experience that men ordinarily acquire riches by their parsimony, their industry, and their credit; now, to all these the moral virtues comprehended in wisdom are eminently serviceable. First, men grow rich by sparing, by avoiding extravagant and consuming expences, by living within their estates, so as their incomes or ordinary acquisitions, the fruits of their industry, exceed their consumption; for the contrary must tend to poverty. But the natural effect of temperance, chastity, humility, is to retrench a great many exorbitancies: When men, by the direction of these virtues, have  
formed

SERM. formed the dispositions of their minds, and  
 VI. by their influence have learned moderation,  
 to be content with a little, and to deny the  
 pomp of life, and that false appearance of  
 greatness, which is imagined to be in sumptuous living, this must of course cut off a great deal of expence, which the pride, and vanity, and luxury of others maketh them liable to. *Solomon* says, *Prov. vi. 26. By means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread*; and, in chap. xxix. 3. *He that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance.* And it is certain that gluttony, drunkenness, and the pride of life, the affecting an unnecessary shew of magnificence and grandeur, which are all contrary to virtuous wisdom, must have the same effect. There is, it is true, a sordid parsimony, which is itself a vice; and a withholding more than is meet, which as it tendeth to poverty, so is altogether inconsistent with charity; but true virtue avoideth both extremes, the abject meanness of the covetous, as well as the foolish expensiveness of the prodigal.

Again; diligence is necessary to the acquiring of riches. Our author's observation is, *Prov. x. 4. He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent*

*gent maketh rich* ; and, in his account, diligence is a part of wisdom. He insisteth a great deal in this book on the evil of sloth, and particularly sheweth its tendency to poverty ; which indeed is too plain both from reason and experience to need any illustration ; but at the same time representeth sloth as folly, as in itself very sinful, and directly contrary to what virtue would incline men to. It is the reproach of a reasonable nature, a neglect of the talents, the active powers and opportunities God hath given, for our improvement of which we are accountable to him, and upbraided even by the brute kinds, which in their narrow spheres are industrious to answer their proper ends of life.

*3dly*, Considering men as in civil society, and having traffick and commerce with one another, mutual confidence is of great advantage for their getting riches. As industry and the diligent improvement of the substance one hath in his hands, or his ability, of whatever kind it is, is the only ordinary means of becoming rich ; he who is trusted hath the advantage of improving upon another's stock as if it were his own ; but what is it that procureth such credit ? Certainly the reputation of virtue, of justice, honesty,

SERM. honesty, and fidelity. It is true, something  
 VI. else is necessary to what is commonly called  
 credit, that is, the opinion of a man's hav-  
 ing a fund or ability to discharge the obli-  
 gations he is under in point of right and  
 property; for the want of ability, as well as  
 of honesty, may be the occasion of his fail-  
 ing in it; but then there must necessarily be  
 an opinion of his integrity; and what can  
 establish that opinion, and such a character  
 in the world, but a virtuous course of life,  
 practising constantly the things which are  
 honest, just, and true?

And, in the last place, honour is bestowed  
 by wisdom, or is the effect of virtue. Ho-  
 nour signifieth that esteem, with the out-  
 ward tokens and expressions of it, which  
 men have in the world; and it may be con-  
 sidered as flowing from external advantages,  
 particularly riches and power; for from  
 these inequalities of condition, which affect  
 civil society, especially power, ariseth a di-  
 stinction of respect; and in this sense the  
 tendency of virtue to honour may be illu-  
 strated the same way as its tendency to  
 riches; that is, honour is procured by the  
 same means by which this ordinary source  
 of it is procured, namely, by frugality, by  
 diligence; for, sayeth *Solomon*, Prov. xii. 24.

*The*

*The hand of the diligent shall bear rule, but the slothful shall be under tribute.* And chap. SERM. VI.

xxii. 29. *See'st thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men;* and by a reputation for justice, generosity, and other virtues: Still understanding this not as infallibly certain, or as if it were secured by the sanction of the divine laws, like the future reward; sometimes we see, on the contrary, the wicked great in power, and the vilest of men exalted, surrounded with the applauses and acclamations of an ignorant and vicious multitude, as persons of the same character acquire great riches: But it is not always so; and in the nature of things, and ordinarily, wisdom or virtue is as profitable and likely a means for these purposes, as any other, and more; nay, it is plain, that often men, really the most corrupt, find themselves obliged to put on the appearance and disguise of virtue, of sobriety, of justice, and honesty, in their way to riches and honour.

But in another sense honour is the more certain effect of wisdom or religious virtue, because virtue itself maketh the very character which is honourable, or the subject of esteem; for men are necessarily determined to approve moral goodness wherever

SERM. they see the genuine discoveries of it, and  
 VI. neglecting the dazzling lustre and badges of  
 external grandeur, they cannot help having  
 in their heart a veneration for the man who,  
 by the whole course of his behaviour ap-  
 pears to be pious, sober, just, and charita-  
 ble, let his condition be what it will.

My brethren, I would once more, in the  
 conclusion, repeat the caution which has been  
 already mentioned, that riches, or honour, or  
 any thing of a parallel nature, any outward  
 advantages in this world, are not the proper  
 rewards of religion; and though godliness,  
 in some sense, *hath the promise of the life  
 that now is*, yet that is none of the *better*  
 promises on which the gospel covenant is  
 established. Christianity proposeth other  
 kind of motives to us than those of this  
 world, and requireth, in order to sincerity,  
 that we should be influenced by them. If  
 indeed we could assure men of riches and  
 honour, as the certain recompence of their  
 piety and virtue, perhaps many might be  
 prevailed with, regarding those more than  
 the superior arguments which the gospel  
 doth insist on; but then piety and virtue  
 would cease to be what they really are ac-  
 cording to the true nature and spirit of chri-  
 stianity, which requireth that we should  
 forsake

forfake all those things, that we should practise religious virtue for its own sake, on the account of its own amiable excellence, and with a view to our obtaining the favour of God, beholding his face in righteousness, and being satisfied with his likeness.

But the principal use we ought to make of the doctrine as it hath been explained, is to remove an objection or a prejudice men have against religion, apprehending it to be contrary to their interest in this world; to shew the folly of the covetous and ambitious, and the unreasonableness of the grounds men generally go upon in their pursuit of riches and honour. It is thought that conscience standeth in the way of wealth as an obstacle, and that to be good and virtuous, is the way to be poor and despised. It is so, I acknowledge, sometimes; so it was in the first ages of christianity, and always in a state of persecution; and in that case the faithful servants of Christ must forsake the *unrighteous Mammon*, nay forsake all their lawful worldly interests, and even hate their own lives, that they may cleave to their master, and preserve their integrity. Besides, it is not to be thought that the profession and the practice of true religion will exempt men from the common calamities of this

SERM. world, or alter their natural circumstances  
 VI. and relative conditions which arise from the  
 establishment of human societies. Good  
 men as well as bad are liable to sickness and  
 death, and *St. Paul* supposeth, *1 Cor.* vii.  
 21. That men might be called to the pro-  
 fession and privileges of the gospel in a state  
 of servitude, from which christianity did  
 not release them, but directed them how to  
 bear it; but, at least, all these calamities and  
 afflictions, bad men are as liable to as the  
 religious; nay, there is a natural probability,  
 and ordinarily it is found true in fact, that  
 the practice of real piety and virtue will be  
 no hindrance to men's present interest, but  
 rather promote it. Now, is it not extreme  
 folly for men to risque their salvation, that  
 they may save their lives, and get worldly  
 gain, and yet not be in a better way to se-  
 cure those ends, but rather likely to come  
 short of them; to sacrifice their consciences  
 to their honour, and yet lose that honour  
 they so earnestly seek after, which generally  
 is the case of ambitious wicked men. *This*  
*their way is their folly*; and though it hath  
 been proved to be so by innumerable in-  
 stances from the beginning of the world,  
 yet men go on still in the same track, and  
 posterity approve the maxims and the con-  
 duct



duct of their fathers, as the Psalmist observeth, *Pfal.* xlix. 13.

S E R M.  
VI.  
}

*Lastly,* We may see, and ought to acknowledge, the wisdom and the bounty of providence, which so ordereth and disposeth the affairs of this world, that generally mens interest doth not interfere with their duty, and they do not expose themselves to very great inconveniencies and disadvantages by a strict adherence to the practice of virtue. We are here in a state of probation, and must lay our account with difficulties; yet the affairs of this life are so ballanced, that we have encouragements to our duty, as well as discouraging trials, and the former seem rather, in the whole, to over-balance the other; so that we are not without witnesses of the divine goodness, and indeed of the real gain and advantage of godliness.

## S E R M O N VII.

The Love of WISDOM necessary  
to the attaining of it.

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PROVERBS VIII. 17.

*I love them that love me, and those that seek  
me early shall find me.*

SERM.  
VII.

**T**HE design of this book is to teach men wisdom, that is, true religion and virtue, as we are told in the beginning of it, chap. i. 1, 2. *The proverbs of Solomon, to know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding.* The author useth many arguments which should induce us to make wisdom our choice and our study, some of which I have, in several discourses, insisted upon, such as those taken from the excellency and pleasantness of its ways; from the confidence and security of mind which ariseth from it in all the vicissitudes of time; and the promise of God that they who find it shall obtain his favour. I have shewn you likewise, in explaining the  
words

words of *Solomon*, chap. iii. 16. that though outward prosperity is not the principal end, nor the proper reward of religion, nay, to pursue it as the principal end is inconsistent with sincerity; yet divine providence hath so wisely and graciously ordered the state of things in this world, that, generally speaking, the practice of virtue is not detrimental to our present interest, but rather tendeth to promote it. There are, besides these, particular arguments enforcing the particular branches of wisdom, as piety, diligence, temperance, justice, and charity, which I shall not insist on, and some other general considerations, especially the terrible punishment and miserable effects of folly, that is, of irreligion and wickedness, which I hope will be sufficiently plain to any attentive person, from what hath been said.

I shall therefore, in the next place, consider some of the means which *Solomon* proposeth, and the necessary qualifications on our part that we may attain wisdom. It is certain that a great many of mankind come short of it, and even many of those to whom *wisdom crieth, and understanding lifteth up her voice*; that is, who enjoy the best opportunities by the publication of the will of God to them, and the gracious instructions

SERM. he hath vouchsafed to the world by his messengers. It is not consistent with the nature of true religious wisdom, nor indeed with our nature, that it should be forced upon us, or dispensed as some other of God's gifts are to men promiscuously, without any regard to previous dispositions, or preparatory endeavours used by them. It can never be reasonably thought, that such an accomplishment as wisdom, so perfective of the human nature, and advantageous to it, should prevent our desires and our labour to obtain it; it is enough that God hath endued us with a capacity, and furnished us with sufficient motives and sufficient means, by a due improvement of, and attention to which, we may arrive to such a measure of it as will render us happy, and still more and more happy in proportion to our proficiency.

The first qualification mentioned in the text is the love of wisdom, which will naturally introduce us to an acquaintance with it. Wisdom is represented in the stile and manner of writing used by *Solomon* and other ancient authors, as a divine person making a solemn entry into the world, displaying her native excellence and beauty, and inviting men, even the most simple and ignorant, to converse familiarly with her, in order

der to their acquiring valuable knowledge, and those perfections which are highly ornamental, as well as useful, and which will afford the most agreeable entertainment to their minds; but such as remain stupidly insensible of her transcendent dignity, and through a vehement attachment to low and sensual enjoyments, neglect her kind sollicitations, can have no benefit by them. I shall,

*First*, Endeavour to explain the love of wisdom, and shew the several sentiments and dispositions which are imported in it. And,

*Secondly*, How it contributeth to our obtaining wisdom.

*First*, To explain the love of wisdom, and shew the sentiments and dispositions which are imported in it. The affections and passions of the human nature, are the moving springs which set our active powers at work: Desire, hope, and joy, which are all included in love, have a powerful influence on the mind determining it to action. And as the operations of this principle are uniform, by understanding love, and the natural

SERM. natural exertions of it towards any object  
 VII. (and we cannot but be sensible of it, if we  
 attend to what passeth in our own minds)  
 we may understand how it operateth toward every object to which it is applied; which is only saying in other words, with respect to the present subject, that, as in all other cases, the love of wisdom sheweth itself by a high esteem, by fervent desires, and by a sincere delight in its ways.

Various are the methods by which the objects of affection are introduced into the mind, some wholly by the senses; no sooner the object is presented, than, according to natural instinct, the affection is raised, preventing any reflexion or consideration. Of this we have many instances, and indeed, not only the desire of private good is thus excited, but our affection to other beings, a complacency in their happiness, or a vigorous inclination to do them good as far as it is in our power. Thus, for instance, if we see any of our fellow-creatures in distress or danger, how natural is compassion, and how strong a principle, often prevailing even against private interest, and the call of selfish inclinations? How quickly, and without any reflection at all upon the reasonableness of it, or considering at all that

it is his duty, will a man find himself determined to use his utmost power for relieving one whom he seeth in great extremity and ready to perish, even with danger, trouble, and disadvantage to himself? Nay, there are plain enough discoveries of such affections, or instincts resembling them, in the inferior kinds of animals, who are not capable of any moral reflection or abstract thinking at all.

But there are other objects of affection which are brought into the mind after a different manner, that is, by reflection, inquiry, comparing things, and forming general notions of them. There are excellent objects which, when well understood, we cannot but highly esteem, but they do not occur to our senses; we are led to the knowledge of them by experience, observation, and reasoning. Of this sort is what *Solomon* calleth wisdom or virtue, which is not an object of sense, but a quality of the mind intirely abstracted from all material beings, and taking none of their properties into the idea of it, as real, however, as any of them, and as truly an object of love and esteem to the mind which discerneth it. When the affections of piety, reverence for supreme  
moral

SERM. moral excellence, of gratitude, benevolence,  
 VII. and honesty, are brought into the mind,  
 there is love excited to them, and they appear very amiable and attractive objects. It is this indeed which is strictly moral goodness or virtue, not a mere proneness to do good, raised and excited to action by the impression which outward things make upon the senses, but a temper formed to goodness, with the understanding and approbation of a self-reflecting mind, which discerneth its excellence; and *Solomon* very properly calleth it wisdom, because it is peculiar to intelligent beings, and is the just improvement of their rational powers.

What, therefore, I think is first of all imported in the love of wisdom, is, a high esteem of its superior excellence, as the result of mature consideration. *Solomon* prefeth his disciples to *exalt wisdom*, chap. iv. 8. that is, to entertain very exalted thoughts of her dignity, for these will naturally command our affections, and engage us to earnestness and diligence in the pursuit of her. And it is for this reason that he very often compareth her with things which are the most desired by men, and asserteth that she is principal, far transcending gold and silver, more excellent than the ruby or the topaz ;  
 the



the design of which comparisons is to induce men to an attentive consideration.

The beauty of wisdom doth not strike the senses as external objects do ; it doth not by noise and tumult, or by a glittering shew, captivate the fancy, which instead of favouring is rather an enemy to its pretensions ; but it addresseth the understanding, and bespeaketh our affection, by that substantial worth which will abide a strict and impartial examination. This is what methinks we should be induced easily to comply with, because it is so becoming that reason we boast of as the high prerogative of our nature. Here now is a great difference between the love of wisdom and other affections, that it is always accompanied with the approbation of the understanding, nay, and still the more we consider the more we approve it. It is an affection wherein we shall always be justified to ourselves, which is a strong argument in its favour, as it layeth a sure foundation of inward peace. Is it not unworthy of intelligent creatures to run blindly into the pursuit of any thing, without having carefully inquired into, and judged of its nature, its worth, and its usefulness ? Those creatures are not to be blamed who have no capacity of reflecting and reasoning

SERM. foning on their own propensities and inclinations, for being directed wholly by them ;  
 VII. but it is reproachful for us not to shew ourselves men, *and call to mind*, as the prophet speaketh, not to compare the objects of our own affections and desires, and give the preference to those which our reason must pronounce the most worthy. Now, wisdom doth not, as many other objects do, solicit our affections, and invite our prosecution indeliberately ; she calls upon us to make the exactest scrutiny we can, and would have none to be her votaries, but upon the terms of a fair and impartial examination. And indeed a great point is gained when the mind is brought to such a disposition ; for it is no small difficulty to disengage it from strong prepossession in favour of external and sensible things, and such a fair and impartial trial will issue in the highest esteem of wisdom, and that will even irresistibly draw our affections. It will therefore lead to a just decision of the great question concerning what ought to have the chief room in our hearts, if we will dwell in our own thoughts upon a deliberate comparison between wisdom, and all those things which stand in competition with it ; and if we shall

shall find ourselves obliged to acknowledge its superior excellence, then it followeth,

2dly, That we should desire it above all things. This also *Solomon* proposeth as a qualification and means of attaining to wisdom, *Prov. xviii. 1. Through desire a man having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddeth with all wisdom*; a strong prevailing desire in his heart towards its native worth and most amiable beauty putteth him upon using the most vigorous and constant endeavours for acquiring it, which shall be successful. Desire is, in the human constitution, an active spring of our movements and operations; as the weight of bodies determineth their descent towards the center, so desire carrieth the mind towards its object; its force appeareth universally in all the business of human life, and in the whole compass of our enjoyments; it is that which exciteth every one of the powers of nature to its proper exercise. Seeing it is so, if the obtaining of wisdom be proposed as our end, we must be engaged in the prosecution of it, just as in the prosecution of all other ends, that is by desire. But in the human nature there is a great variety of inclinations, and they cannot all have an equal degree of force; that which is the strongest carrieth the

the

SERM. the mind, and determineth it to action ; the  
 VII. rest are gratified, and their demands com-  
 plied with, only by its permission, or when  
 it is abated. Thus the different lusts of  
 men, according to their predominancy, form  
 their dispositions and different vicious cha-  
 racters ; the voluptuous, the proud, and the  
 covetous, are so severally denominated from  
 the desire which hath the ascendant over  
 them ; they have a variety of desires, but  
 that which is the most prevailing, consti-  
 tuteth the temper.

As these different corrupt affections are  
 the great obstructions to wisdom, they are  
 then effectually removed when wisdom itself  
 becometh principal in the esteem of the  
 mind, and its ruling desire : And, therefore,  
 what the divine instructions of this book  
 constantly aim at is, that we should eagerly,  
 affectionately, and vehemently, desire reli-  
 gion and virtue preferably to all other things,  
 which is very reasonably insisted on and re-  
 commended to us, because in many cases  
 the determination of the desire, and the mea-  
 sures and degrees of it depend on the mind  
 itself. The influence of desire is very great,  
 and it strongly, nay sometimes irresistibly  
 carrieth the mind ; yet we are not moved  
 necessarily, as bodies are by springs and  
 weights ;

weights ; the soul hath a great share in forming, raising, and regulating its own desires, and by an attention to the motives of desire, examining them carefully, and applying itself to the consideration of proper arguments, which it hath naturally a power to do, the current of its inclinations may be changed ; those which are evil and irregular cured, and the good farther strengthened and confirmed.

Our blessed Saviour, in his excellent sermon on the mount, which containeth the sum of his salutary doctrine, pronounceth them blessed *who hunger and thirst after righteousness*, Matt. v. 6. That righteousness is true religion, the same thing which *Solomon* calleth wisdom, and the best preparatory disposition in order to our attaining it, and enjoying the happy fruits and rewards of it, is an eager appetite, expressed by hungering and thirsting, which is raised in the mind by a serious attention. Afterwards, in his instructive parables, *Matt. xiii.* he representeth true piety and virtue under the similitude of treasure hid in a field, and a pearl of great price, to the end we may be engaged to seek it earnestly and above all things, which is the first and absolutely necessary qualification in order to our attaining

SERM. it. This was the excellent spirit of the  
 VII. apostle *Paul*, *Philip. iii. 8. Yea, doubtless,*  
 and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of *Christ Jesus my Lord*; by which is meant true christianity, pure and undefiled religion before God the father, thus explained by him in these words, ver. 10. which, in the style of this apostle, evidently signify holiness, charity, meekness, and patience, after the example of *Christ*; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death. This he prized above all things, and counted them but loss and dung that he might attain it. But the insincerity of many may appear to themselves, if they bring the temper of their minds to a fair trial; for they cannot but be conscious to themselves, that other opposite inclinations prevail; though they may have some desires to wisdom, especially because it is of so great importance to their interest, yet they have little sense of its beauty and amiable excellence; or things more gross, and of an inferior nature, preponderate, and their desires of religious virtue are, as *Solomon* elsewhere speaketh, feeble and ineffectual, *Prov. xiii. 4. The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing.*

nothing. We ought to examine our pious SERM. inclinations after this manner, what is it VII. they terminate upon? Is it the beauty of holiness itself? And are they more prevailing in the mind than other inclinations?

3dly, Love naturally sheweth itself in the complacency which the mind taketh in the enjoyment of, or even in meditating upon, the beloved objects. Thus the love of wisdom is testified by delighting in it, and this *Solomon* requireth as the necessary condition of obtaining it, and partaking of its happy fruits, *Prov. ii. 10, 11. When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.* We may observe that this is one ingredient in the sentiments and dispositions of the pious. *David* often expresseth his great satisfaction in the way of *Gods testimonies, which are the ways of wisdom, he rejoiced in them more than in riches. Psal. cxix. 14. And made them his songs in the house of his pilgrimage.* *Job* also maintained his integrity by this plain evidence of it, that he delighted in God, which he could not do without delighting in his law, nay, he saith expressly that he esteemed the divine precepts more than his necessary food. And though the pleasures of

SERM. religion seem to be the result of an intimate  
 VII. acquaintance with it, doubtless they are then  
 the strongest, and a growing experience will  
 be accompanied with an increase of joy,  
 yet pleasure attendeth the first sincere in-  
 clinations to wisdom, and the first hearty  
 endeavours to attain it. Desire indeed feteth  
 the mind and all its powers on work, and  
 still in our imperfect state, is the most pre-  
 valent spring of diligence. Our condition  
 is like that of children, of new-born babes,  
 as St. Peter describeth it, *who desire milk that  
 they may grow thereby*; but that very desire  
 hath enjoyment in it, and the entrance of  
 wisdom giveth pleasure to the soul. It  
 may therefore be very proper for us to reflect  
 on our joys, and to consider what it is we  
 have the greatest complacency in, that we  
 may know what manner of spirits we are  
 of, for the constitution of the mind appear-  
 eth as much this way as any other. The  
 worldly man entertaineth himself with the  
 highest satisfaction in his great possessions,  
 he saith to his soul, *Thou hast much goods  
 laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat,  
 drink, and be merry, Luke xii. 19.* And  
 every one according to the particular temper  
 and complexion of his spirit rejoiceth in the  
 fruition of the object which is the most



agreeable to him. Whether therefore we are sincere lovers of wisdom, we may judge, by the pleasure we take in its ways and instructions. The experience of delight, and the high relish of agreeable objects will powerfully determine the mind for its own sake to meditate upon them, and by this we may know whether we are *after the flesh or the spirit*; for they that are *after the flesh, mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit, mind the things of the spirit, Rom. viii. 5.* For whatever kind of object yields us the greatest joy, that it is which the mind will naturally attend to, and frequently entertain itself with. Let us then compare the joy which ariseth from wisdom, and that which we have in other things, and thus judge of our own dispositions: A perception of pleasure in the gratification of our natural appetites is the necessary effect of our constitution, and therefore is not to be condemned as if there were any thing criminal in it; but the mind is impotent and irreligious which is entirely under the power of them, and hath no taste of the rational and superior pleasantness of wisdom's ways, in which they who are wise perceive a vastly greater dignity and happiness. These are the ways, these the

SERM.  
VII.

SERM. sentiments and dispositions by which the  
 VII. love of wisdom discovereth itself; and I  
 shall consider in the

*Second* place, how they contribute to our attaining that excellent quality. We see in the ordinary course of human life and affairs, *desire* putteth men upon that labour and diligence which are the ordinary means of success, and even reconcileth them to that difficulty and pain, which otherwise would seem very grievous; such an effect it had upon *Jacob*, as to make seven years of service seem but as a few days, *Gen. xxix. 20.* Which however he complaineth of chap. *xxxi. 40.* as very irksom, *the frost consumed him by night, and the heat by day;* and in a multitude of instances, we commonly see that strong affections excite men to painful labour, and even make sufferings appear light, which otherwise would be thought insupportable. The covetous and the ambitious toil incessantly, they rise early and sit up late, *they eat the bread of sorrows,* that they may compass the ends to which their several inclinations them, though they are under discouragement from experience, which often sheweth that such endeavours are unsuccessful. But there is a more certain connection

*necessary to the attaining of it.*

183

nection between the love of wisdom and the obtaining it, because it doth not depend on things without, which are not in our power, and the very affection is a part and degree of the acquisition and the enjoyment. An high esteem, an earnest desire, and transcendent delight in religion and virtue, have in them the reality of religion and virtue itself, which being a quality of the mind, must be principally seated in the affections, and is really, though imperfectly, there where it is beloved. The love of wisdom includeth in it the root of every pious and virtuous inclination and every good practice; they who love it, will be disposed to hearken to its counsels, to receive its instructions, and conform to its rules.

SERM.  
VII.

*Solomon telleth us, Prov, viii. 9. that the words of wisdom or righteousness are all plain to him that understandeth; it is not difficult to a mind that hath a fervent affection to it, as Moses excellently speaketh concerning the commandments of the moral law, Deut. xxx. 11. And it is applied by the apostle to the word of faith or the gospel, which is to us the rule of religious virtue. This commandment is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, who shall go up for us to hea-*

SERM. *ven and bring it unto us, that we may hear*  
 VII. *it and do it; neither is it beyond the sea, that*  
*thou shouldest say, who shall go over the sea*  
*for us, and bring it unto us that we may hear*  
*it and do it. But the word is very nigh un-*  
*to thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that*  
*thou mayest do it. The glorious character of*  
 wisdom's ways is plainness and perspecuity; we are not put on an impracticable work, or such as is attended with insuperable hardships, as if it were like climbing up to heaven, or ransacking the bowels of the earth; they lie open to them, who with hearty desire, and with pleasure and alacrity, apply themselves in that honourable pursuit. Our greatest labour is with our own hearts, to get them duly prepared, divested of prejudices and prepossessions, to quiet the clamors and tumults within, to impose silence upon the senses and the imagination, which, are continually presenting to us vain diversions and amusements; when this is done, and the fervent love of wisdom will effect it, for how can we pretend to love that which hath not the ascendant in our hearts, and doth not command the attendance of our thoughts in preference to other things; but, I say, when this is done, we may say, unto wisdom, as *Prov. vii. 4. Thou art my*  
*sister,*

*necessary to the attaining of it.*

185

*sister, and call understanding a kinswoman.* SERM.

VII.

The man who hath arrived to a just dominion over himself, who hath the command of his passions and can restrain his loose irregular appetites, is already possessed of wisdom, and is truly a virtuous man. Now, this is so far from being extremely difficult to the person who loveth religious wisdom, that it is the inseparable character and certain effect of a prevailing love to it; for how can it be esteemed above all things, earnestly desired, and delighted in, unless other opposite affections yield to it, and the mind, despising and forsaking them, cleaveth to it. It is true *Solomon* saith, *Prov. xxiv. 7. That knowledge is too high for a fool, that is, the scorner*: The proud and the wicked man, whose mind is enslaved to his passions, imagineth a mighty difficulty in it, but it is of his own making; his corrupt and vicious affections confirmed by evil customs are predominant, they are become even nature in him, and he is become impotent, unable to unlearn them, to deliver himself from their power, and change his course, *as the Ethiopian is to change his skin, or the leopard his spots*; that is, he hath made it hard for himself, by an habitual indulgence to his passions, whereby he hath put himself under  
their

SERM. their power; but still a sincere affection to  
 VII. wisdom, and strong resolution, would conquer it; for the words of the prophet referred to *Jer. xiii. 23.* are not to be understood of a natural impossibility, but a great difficulty occasioned by evil habits. It is prejudice only and corrupt affection which make the things of wisdom too high for a man. To the upright heart and sincerely disposed to embrace the instructions of virtue, its mysteries become very plain and familiar, *Prov. xiv. 6.* *The scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not, but knowledge is easy to him that understandeth.*

2dly, The love of wisdom contributeth to our attaining it, as it is a disposition highly pleasing to God, to which he hath made gracious promises, particularly of instruction. We must conceive of the supreme being as a lover of virtue and goodness, of every thing which is truly amiable on the account of moral excellence; and if it be so, he hath complacency in those of mankind, whose affections are placed on the same thing which is his delight. Original perfect wisdom loveth its own image in the creatures, and even such a tendency towards it, as a high esteem, and earnest desire, and transcen-



transcendent delight; for, as I observed before, these are the reality, at least, the beginning of wisdom or true religious virtue itself. Now, if they who have this qualification are thereby entitled to the favour of God, it followeth that they are in the best preparation for wisdom, and a continual advancement in proportion to the measure of their love to it; because *he is the Father of lights from whom every good and perfect gift cometh down*, and he hath commanded such *as lack wisdom, to ask it from him*, with a sincere love to it, who giveth *liberally and doth not upbraid*. As he communicateth freely of his bounty to all his creatures, and *his mercies are over all his works*, he will not be sparing of his gifts to the objects of his peculiar complacency. Wisdom is a gift which it is every way worthy of him, and congruous to his moral attributes, to bestow on those whom *he delighteth to honour*. Providence indeed dispenseth its gifts very liberally, and with an undistinguishing hand, *even to the unthankful and the evil*; but wisdom is of a more peculiar nature, and a more certain mark of the divine favour, appropriated therefore to them who have a more especial interest in his regard. As this is agreeable to the sentiments we nat-

SERM. naturally have of the Deity, the scripture con-  
 VII. taineth exprefs promises of divine instruction  
 to ſuch as are religiously diſpoſed to receive  
 it; and, as I obſerved before, all pious diſ-  
 poſitions are comprehended in the love of  
 wiſdom. Thus, in *Prov. i. 23. Turn you at  
 my reproof, behold, I will pour out my ſpi-  
 rit upon you, I will make known my words un-  
 to you.* This promiſe, though ſometimes  
 mentioned in the Old Teſtament, is more  
 clearly and expreſſly given in the New, and  
 the advantages of it are more fully explain-  
 ed. There we are taught, that the Holy  
 Ghoſt was ſent down from heaven to in-  
 ſtruct finners, to *convince the world of ſin,  
 of righteouſneſs, and judgment*; not only to  
 inſpire the apoſtles and aſſiſt them in an ex-  
 traordinary manner for the confirmation of  
 chriſtianity, but to abide always in the  
 chriſtian church, to accompany the mini-  
 ſtration of righteouſneſs by his gracious in-  
 fluence, enlightening the minds of men, re-  
 claiming them from their errors, delivering  
 them from their prejudices againſt the wiſ-  
 dom which is from above, and, in fine,  
 operating powerfully on their minds, that  
 good diſpoſitions may be formed in them,  
 and carried on to perfection.



*necessary to the attaining of it.*

189

These considerations shew, that as we have the greatest encouragements and advantages for attaining to wisdom, that is, to true and sincere religion, with the happy fruits of it by the christian dispensation, and since God *worketh in us, both to will and to do of his good pleasure*, we ought to use all diligence in humble and affectionate concurrence with him. SERM.  
VII.

And, on the other hand, our remissness, and our continuance in folly, will be altogether inexcusable. Since God hath put such a price in our hands to get wisdom, no other account can be given of our coming short of it, but that we *have no heart to it*, *Prov. xvii. 16.*

S E R-

# SERMON VIII.

DILIGENCE in seeking WISDOM  
always successful.

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PROVERBS VIII. 17.

*Those that seek me early, shall find me:*

SERM.  
VIII.

**T**HE father of lights, from whom every good and perfect gift cometh down, bestoweth his mercies very freely on mankind; but his gifts are not all equal, nor do they equally require previous dispositions and the use of preparatory means on our part. Our beings, with all the powers and capacities which belong to them, are derived from the divine bounty; and to them it can never be supposed that any merit, or any agency of ours, could have in the least contributed. We see that the enjoyments of life, not only those which are absolutely necessary to its preservation, but those which render it comfortable, are dispensed by the indiscriminating hand of providence, and often in as large a measure to the unthankful and evil, as to the good.

good and virtuous. But wisdom, especially SERM.  
in the sense of this writer, though origi- VIII.  
nally from God, is of a peculiar nature, and

it doth not prevent any qualifying dispositions and endeavours in those who obtain it. The foundation of it is laid in the faculties of the mind, that *spirit which is in man*, and *the inspiration of the Almighty, which giveth him understanding*; we have affections and determinations in our nature which lead to it; but wisdom itself is an attainment to which our own active endeavours contribute, and the noblest powers of the mind are voluntarily and vigorously exerted in it. Upon a comparison with the common favours of providence, this blessed accomplishment which giveth such a lustre to the human nature, being its highest improvement, will appear far more excellent to any one who duly considereth it; it is too great, and the consequences of it too important, that it should be prostituted to the fool or the wicked, the sensual or the vicious, the lazy and unactive. One qualification for attaining wisdom I have already explained, that is, the love of it; another is contained in the same text, and an express promise of success is made to it in the name of wisdom, *those that seek me early shall find me.* The  
love

SERM. love of wisdom is not an idle affection, resting in the heart; it is an active principle, which will exert itself in vigorous endeavours. Nothing is more usual with men than to give good words, to pay a complimentary respect to religious virtue, and acknowledge its transcendent excellency; and, the truth is, they cannot help acknowledging it in their hearts, being naturally and necessarily determined so to do. But when they are called upon to practise according to the direction of their avowed principle, then the coldness of their love, and the strength of their contrary inclinations appear. Nothing can sufficiently prove the sincerity of our professed affection to wisdom, but that *seeking it early* recommended in the text; which I shall, in this discourse,

*First*, Endeavour to explain; and then,  
*Secondly*, Shew the advantage of it in the assurance of success, or the happy event; if we seek wisdom early we shall find it.

*First*, Let us consider what is meant by seeking wisdom early; which is evidently this, that it hath the chiefest room in our cares and application. That which is highest  
 in

in our esteem, most earnestly desired and SERM. delighted in, will naturally engage our first VIII. concern and endeavours, while matters of an inferior consideration are justly postponed. Our Saviour requireth us to seek, first, *the kingdom of God and his righteousness*; and the apostle recommendeth it to christians, that they *seek the things which are above*. Both these exhortations signify the same thing with that in the text; for what is the kingdom of God and his righteousness? and what are the things above, but the perfection of wisdom? Or, if we will make a difference between religion and the rewards of it, yet that maketh no difference in the manner of seeking; for glory, honour, and immortality, are sought no otherwise than by a patient continuance in well-doing, which is nothing else but the practice of religious wisdom. Diligence in seeking wisdom evidently supposeth a high esteem for it, and an ardent desire; but the sentiments and dispositions imported in the love of it, I considered in discoursing on the first part of the text: In pursuance of which, and as the very meaning of *seeking wisdom*, there must be an assiduous and constant use of all proper means, and the vigorous exercise of our own powers, of our understand-

SERM.

VIII.



ings, in attending to and meditating on instruction, and of our active powers in practising according to it. We all know what diligence is, in the things of this world; our naturally active powers do always exert themselves according to the predominant inclinations and bent of the mind, and in proportion to the strength of them. *Solomon* observeth, that the *adulterer waiteth for the twilight*; he spareth no pains, he endureth fatigues and tedious delays, that he may accomplish his wicked purposes. The covetous and the ambitious rise early and sit up late, that they may acquire riches and honours. Change the object, and you will see what it is to be diligent in religion; that it importeth an earnest intention of mind, which is particularly the spirit and life of all religious labour; for it is not here as in ordinary outward work, where the labour of the hands produceth the proper effect, however the mind is employed; but the soul must especially exert itself with vigour and earnest application, without which, external actions are of no avail, indeed, but empty forms, serving no other purpose than to dishonour God, and expose men to condemnation for hypocrisy.

*Secondly,*

*Secondly*, And if we would indeed seek wisdom, it must be by the constant use of the proper means in order to our obtaining it. These the nature of the thing directeth, and to us they are clearly marked out in that divine revelation which is given to us for a rule. We are required to search the holy scriptures, and attend to the opportunities of instruction, to hearken diligently, and, as *Solomon* speaketh, *to wait at wisdom's doors*; especially to practise religious virtue, which is naturally the way to acquire habits of it, and even to arrive to perfection in them. We can never reasonably pretend to desire any thing which is attainable, the way being prescribed for attaining it, while we neglect that way, and abandon ourselves to a supine indolence, or to a contrary course. In the common affairs of life we judge of a man's dispositions by his practice, and of his intention by the means he maketh use of; if we observe a man diligent in his calling, we conclude, and very justly, that he is intent upon the comfortable maintainance of his family; if we see one continually practising any art, we judge that it is his intention to be master of it, and reap the benefit which may arise from it. After the same manner we may reasonably infer, that

SERM.  
VIII.  
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SERM. if a man be industrious in using the means  
 VIII. of religion, and practising its rules, it is his  
 intention to get the knowledge of it, and  
 perfection in it; if he patiently continueth  
 in well-doing, and is stedfast and unmove-  
 able, abounding in the work of the Lord,  
 he knoweth and expecteth his labour shall  
 not be in vain. But, on the contrary, let  
 his profession be ever so good, and if he  
 flatters himself that his love of wisdom is  
 great, and his desires and hopes of the re-  
 ward of it very strong, yet if he doth not  
*deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live  
 soberly, righteously, and godly, in this world;*  
 if instead of *crucifying the flesh with its af-  
 fections and lusts, he giveth up himself to  
 work wickedness with greediness;* the prac-  
 tice of that person giveth his profession the  
 lie, he deceiveth himself, and his pretended  
 religion is vain. Not every one who maketh  
 the loudest and most pompous profession,  
 or, as our Saviour expresseth it, who saith  
 unto him, *Lord, Lord,* pretending the greatest  
 respect to him, is the greatest proficient in  
 wisdom, the most approved disciple of Christ,  
 and the best qualified for entering into the  
 kingdom of heaven: But he who is labori-  
 ous in good works, and is continually en-  
 deavouring to do the will of God. *Many,*  
 saith



faith our Lord, *shall strive to enter in, and shall not be able.* God hath shewn us the particular path wherein we must walk, and the course we must run; it is not by being industrious in uncommanded rites, *voluntary humility, and will-worship*; nor yet by a formal repetition of external services, even though they be of divine institution, but the plain way of holiness; being righteous before God, and *walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless.* There is an established progress in religious virtue, and the *path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; and there is, according to the declarations of God's word, an established connection between holiness and eternal life, which is really nothing else than the perfection of holiness. We may as well pretend to dissolve the heavens and the earth, to alter the frame of nature, as to change that constitution in the moral world, fixed in the eternal and invariable counsels of the great lawgiver; as the prophet *Jeremiah*, chap. xxxiii. representeth the covenant God made with *Israel* as immutable, like what he calleth *the covenant of the night and of the day, and the ordinances of heaven.* The desires and the hopes of men, who

SERM.  
VIII.

SERMON. make any profession of religion at all, are  
 VIII. generally set upon the reward of it under  
 the notion of a great happiness, which indeed God proposeth in order to encourage and engage us to diligence. But the truth is, to seek it; and to seek wisdom or religion itself, is just the same thing; and the sacred writers always take care to teach us, that in vain shall we hope to obtain the crown of glory, unless by the practice of holiness, or walking in the paths of virtue: *2 Tim. ii. 5. If a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned except he striveth lawfully*, according to the rules of the course; that is, in the present case, by a careful abstinence from all sin, and abounding in the exercise of every virtue.

. *Lastly*, Being thus solicitous, and having made a choice of the best means, diligence, or *seeking early*, importeth using them frequently and with spirit and vigour. The scriptures often warn us against sloth, and, particularly, *Solomon* in this book, giveth us a very clear and lively description of that disease of the mind which debaseth it, wasteth its strength by an insensible but fatal consumption, and burieth its natural active powers in a vile stupidity. It is true what he for the most part describeth under that name,

name, and earnestly disuadeth from, shewing its unhappy tendency, is idleness and inactivity in temporal affairs, which is itself folly and wickedness; but it may be easily applied to the business of religion, in which we cannot hope to make any progress, without an earnest and vigorous application; for these are prejudices to be conquered, temptations and infirmities to be resisted, and, in the generality of men, corrupt customs and foolish opinions to be unlearned, which will require mature consideration and care, both in the study and the practice of wisdom. The criminal negligence by all means to be avoided is, either the total omission of our duty, or the superficial and spiritless performance, both which proceed from the same indisposition of mind, they are equally faulty, and obstruct our proficiency in wisdom.

A serious attention to the frame of our nature, and the present constitution of things, will convince us that industry is very becoming such creatures as we are. From the relation and dependance of things, and the uses they serve in the systems of nature, we infer the design of them; and if that way of reasoning be just, nothing will appear more plain to any considerate person, than that

SERM. the powers and capacities of our nature,  
 VIII. now in a state of weakness, a kind of in-  
 fancy, are to be improved by use, and car-  
 ried on by degrees to maturity in their best  
 and noblest accomplishments, that is, in  
 knowledge and virtue. And our blessed Sa-  
 viour, the great master of our religion,  
 whose precepts are perfectly agreeable to  
 reason, hath enjoined industry to his disci-  
 ples that they may grow up to perfection;  
 the method he prescribeth of advancing in  
 religion to *the stature of perfect men*, as the  
 apostle speaketh, is, by a careful considera-  
 tion, and study, and practice; it is by use  
 that we have our internal senses exercised to  
 discern good and evil; and by use we ac-  
 quire a facility in the practice of patience,  
 temperance, godliness, and all the other  
 christian graces. Such diligence is esta-  
 blished by a perpetual and universal law of  
 christianity, which bindeth every disciple  
 of the Lord Jesus; and in proportion to it  
 he hath declared, that their rewards shall  
 be, when he cometh to reckon with his  
 servants, and *render to every man according  
 to his works*. He hath entrusted them all  
 with talents, distributing to them as he hath  
 thought fit, according to their several abi-  
 lities; but a price is put into the hand of  
 every

every one to get wisdom; and the slothful servant is, in his account, a wicked one, and will be condemned for his unprofitableness: But, for the diligent and faithful, their recompence shall be in exact proportion to the measure of their improvement. SERM.  
VIII.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the seeking of wisdom *early*, and shewn you, that it importeth a sollicitude and earnest intention of mind to attain it, the choice of proper means, and diligence in the use of them. I proceed in the

*Second* place, to consider the advantages of it, the assurance we have of success, or the happy event, that if we seek wisdom *early*, we shall find it. It will be the less necessary to insist upon this, because I explained so largely the influence which the first qualification, the love of wisdom hath upon our obtaining it; and with the love of wisdom seeking it early, hath a necessary connection, as the certain inseparable effect; so that the manner of its contributing to the end of our growing wiser or more virtuous, is illustrated the same way. You see the text containeth an express promise made in the name of wisdom, they that seek me early shall find me. Diligence importeth

SERM. eth in it, those dispositions of mind, and  
 VIII. that practice with which we must suppose  
 the supreme Being, infinitely good, and a  
 perfect lover of virtue, so pleased, that he  
 will bestow whatever is necessary on his  
 part in order to mens possessing that blessed  
 quality and endowment with the happy  
 fruits of it. It is the greatest evidence we  
 can give of a prevailing love to wisdom,  
 which surely God approveth above all  
 things, and of a readiness to thwart and deny  
 for its sake the love of ease and aversion to  
 labour, and all selfish affections, which  
 might hinder our progress; the greatest  
 evidence of a spirit prepared to undergo all  
 the difficulty and pains which may arise  
 from the indolence and depravity, which  
 every man may find in himself. The great  
 qualifications which the scriptures require  
 (and they are all imported in diligence) for  
 our making progress in religious wisdom,  
 are, hearing, or a careful unprejudiced at-  
 tention to divine instruction, meekness, hu-  
 mility, and obedience; on these conditions  
 God will give his holy spirit, whose good  
 offices for our attaining wisdom and advancing  
 even to consummate virtue, are largely ex-  
 plained in the gospel. Our Saviour hath  
 assured us, that his heavenly *Father will give*

*his holy spirit to them ask, and seek, and knock*; that is, who use great earnestness, importunity, and constancy, to obtain it, in order by that divine assistance to become wiser and better, more pious and virtuous.

SERM.  
VIII.

Again, it is plain that diligence in seeking wisdom or religion is really practising it. This is a means which the nature of the thing, and the scripture direct us to use; and we find in all those things the knowledge whereof or dexterity in them is acquired, it is by application and practice we arrive to perfection. Thus it is that habits of all sorts are attained, and facility and pleasure in them; that which men indeed have a capacity for, but are unpractised in it, is difficult at first and painful, afterwards becometh easy and delightful; and it cannot be otherwise considering the imperfection of the human capacity. Seeing, therefore, the seeking of wisdom is doing those things wherein it consisteth, the effect of our being accustomed to them, must be our finding or increasing in it.

Having now finished what I intended, in general, in discoursing on this text, I hope I shall not depart far from the design of it, in recommending two particular directions by way of application; one is, to seek wisdom in  
the

SERM. the beginning of every day ; and the other, to  
 VIII. seek it in the morning of life or in youth. *First,*  
 Religion is the proper business of every day ;  
 it is not a solemn separate affair, which only  
 requires an attendance at some special seasons,  
 and ordinarily to be laid aside ; it ought to mix  
 itself with all our concerns, and if it be so, it  
 must be fit for us to begin every day with it.  
 Thus did the pious Psalmist, *Pf. v. 3. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning. O Lord, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*  
 They who sincerely seek God, seek wisdom in the first place, and fervent prayer is one means of obtaining it ; *James i. 5. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, and it shall be given him.* A religious disposition will naturally direct to this ; for if devout affections are prevalent, they will determine our first waking thoughts to it as the most esteemed object ; and, surely, if the bent of our inclinations is towards wisdom, we shall be inclined to fix on this as the best opportunity for applying ourselves to it, when refreshed with sleep, the body giveth less disturbance to the mind, and is more free from that dulness and inactivity, which affect it when tired and worn out with labour, and with those amusements and avocations



cations with which the senses and the imagination load it through the daily course of our conversation with the world. Every day of our lives we enter into new scenes of vanity and temptation, against which the greatest vigilance and precaution we can use is scarcely sufficient for our defence; but certainly it must be a great advantage to have the soul fortified by an early resolution, as the result of serious thought, and by a diligent endeavour to get such impressions made as may abide through the whole course of our affairs, and enable us to maintain an uniform tenor of spirit in all events which may befall us, and the variety of business in which we may be engaged. Other affairs which men are solicitous about, they apply themselves to early; and if religion be a business of the greatest importance, it justly requireth an early attendance; especially, that wisdom may get the start of folly in our thoughts, and the exercises of our minds (which very often it doth not) and a seasonable provision may be made against the natural weakness of the mind, and the temptations which may be expected to assault it. The merchant, that he may increase his gain in the way of his lawful occupation; the husbandman, that he may know the state of his flocks, and whether his

SERM.  
VIII.

SERM. his fruits be safe and prospering, and apply  
 VIII. his cares as their condition requireth; the  
 scholar, that he may make proficiency in his  
 learning riseth early, and is assiduous in labour; and shall not he whose business is religion, and who hath his salvation to work out, be as diligent, and attend his most important concern in the prime of every day, the best season for such labour.

2dly, Let the young be persuaded to seek wisdom early, to seek it in youth, a season which hath great advantages for such exercises. *Solomon*, having in his book of *Ecclesiastes* largely described the vanity and vexation of all things under the sun, and having made bitter reflections on the folly of irreligion, and of men's indulging themselves in the way of their hearts, and the flight of their eyes, proposeth this exhortation, chap. xii. 1. and presseth it by strong arguments, *remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*. When all the powers of nature are in their vigor, and the mind in the best aptitude to receive strong and lasting impressions; then is the properest season for learning any thing, but especially, considering the proneness of mankind to folly, which is confirmed and rendered more inveterate by custom, it is plain we shall

shall most successfully employ ourselves in the study of religion in the prime of life; for how much easier is it for the mind undebauched by vicious customs, to receive a good tincture, and be turned towards virtue, than to unlearn evil habits, which have long prevailed and taken deep root, and to mortify corrupt inclinations, which are become obdurate by indulgence having had a long possession. If young persons could be persuaded to enter into a serious consideration of the infirmities and disadvantages of old age, *the evil days*, as *Solomon* calleth them, *and the years wherein we shall say, there is no pleasure in them*, it might happily prevail with them to provide better against the otherwise insupportable burden, by a seasonable diligence in their duty; that the sorrows of those painful and uncomfortable remains of life might be alleviated, by the peaceful reflections of an approving conscience on a well ordered conversation, rather than load declining years with a work, to which they are altogether unequal, the very beginning of religion, the exercise of repentance from dead works; and proceeding upon that early foundation, so to finish a good course, as to have well grounded hope of an abundant entrance into the everlasting

king-

SER M. kingdom of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Besides,  
 VIII. it is altogether uncertain, whether ever you  
 shall arrive at old age (as every one from daily observation and experience will find himself obliged to acknowledge, however little influence it may have on the temper of his mind and his conduct); and therefore to neglect the seeking of wisdom in youth is to risque your salvation, and to lose what may be the best, nay only, opportunity of providing for a future state. It is true, youth hath its disadvantages too; it is the age of folly and vanity; animal affections are then vehement; inexperience and thoughtlessness, precipitate the unwary young man into snares; but this is so far from being a just objection against seeking wisdom early, that, on the contrary, it is a strong argument for it, there being no other preservative against the mentioned inconveniency and all its fatal consequences; and the difficulties however great are not lessened, but increased rather, by neglecting the concerns of religion, and yielding to vicious inclinations.

But the more general application relateth to all the stages of life, indeed, to every part of our time. I do not mean that we should be continually employed in the immediate duties of what is strictly called religion.

ligion. Wisdom is more comprehensive, and its influence should reach to the directing all our affairs. It is a good precedent *David* giveth us, *Psal. ci. 2.* *I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. I will walk within my house with a perfect heart:* in all my domestic concerns, and, by a parity of reason, in all the other business of life. But as all our affairs should be conducted by the principles of religious virtue, I shewed you, that to seek it *early*, signifieth making it the chief business, the ruling desire of our hearts, and our constant labour, as *Solomon* often in this book adviseth, assuring us, that our labour shall not be in vain, chap. ii. 3, 4. *If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.* And in chap. iv. 5, 7. *Get wisdom, get understanding, forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth. Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding.* What *Solomon* saith concerning the success of industry in religion, is attested by the experience of others, who by due pains, in spite of all disadvantages, have attained to it.

SERM. Unwearied endeavours have overcome difficulties, which seemed to be very great, removed hindrances which were in the way, and let the diligent students into the secrets of it, making those things, which, according to this author's expression, *are too high for a fool*, plain and familiar to them.

But, besides the excellency of the thing itself, that is, of wisdom or virtue, which should engage us to the prosecution of it, *Solomon* telleth us, we shall have great benefit by it, as in chap. iv. 6, 8. *She shall preserve and keep thee, she shall promote thee, and bring thee to honour.* It is natural for men to seek happiness; whatever other principles of action we have, affections to other beings, and particular selfish passions, we are sure there is in every one of mankind a general desire of felicity, and that we have a power of choosing the means for obtaining it, in which reason, observation, and experience are our guides. Now, the seeking of wisdom, or a constant and diligent use of the proper means for obtaining religious virtue, by a careful attention to the rules and motives of it, and endeavouring to grow up to perfection in practice, this is the highest enjoyment our nature is capable of, as well as the most reasonable exercise of our powers.

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God hath annexed pleasure to such diligence, and the *good man is satisfied from himself*; a pure and a solid satisfaction ariseth from such an exercise of his capacities, and use of his talents. We have the concurring testimony of good men concerning the joy which springeth up in their minds from a serious affectionate meditation on God's precepts, and, especially, from their abounding in good works; whereas an unmanly indolence taketh away the relish of life itself, and rendereth it but an insipid and burthensome duration; and for the pleasure of the external senses, though they enjoy it to as great perfection as any men, not the less but the more for their keeping within the bounds of innocence and moderation; yet it is far from being their chief enjoyment: The improving of their minds in knowledge and virtue, and the practice of piety, righteousness, and charity, yieldeth a vastly more noble and intense satisfaction. Every step of our proficiency in wisdom will bring an increase of pleasure; the *light which is sown for the righteous shineth more and more to the perfect day*; and the joy of the upright in heart, as it will grow up to a full harvest in the future state, when they who sow to the spirit, bringing forth the fruits of

SERM.  
VIII.

SERM. it plentifully, shall reap life everlasting, *Gal.*  
 VIII. vi. 8. So even in this present life, which is  
 their seed time, they reap true and substantial happiness in the approbation of their own consciences, and firmly believing in Christ, though *now they see him not, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.*

This being the best improvement we can make of our powers and capacities, we trespass against the law of our creation as well as against the revealed will of God; either if we do not so employ those powers and capacities, or use them to contrary purposes. We see other creatures which have active powers constantly using them according to the direction of nature; and if we carefully attend to our own constitution, it must appear that this is the most proper improvement we can make of our powers. *Solomon* sendeth the fluggard for instruction to the ant, which by a natural instinct is diligent in providing against future wants, and to answer the purposes of its being. Creatures of a superior order are zealous and diligent in their higher spheres, and in employing their capacities for the proper ends of them. And shall we only be unactive, hide our talents in the earth, or abuse them to mean and unworthy purposes?



Christianity addeth strong motives to those of reason and the religion of nature. That description which the apostles give us of the great and awful day of the Lord, they apply, in *exhorting us to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ*, or in religious wisdom, *2 Pet. iii. 18.* The example of our Saviour is set before us, who from his earliest youth increased in wisdom and favour with God and man, as he grew in stature, *Luke ii. 52.* And through the whole course of his life, he went about doing good. We have enemies of our salvation, who are continually laying snares for us, and going about seeking whom they may devour; and therefore we should be sober and vigilant, seeking wisdom to be defended against their malicious efforts and their subtle devices. And, lastly, we have the promise of divine assistance, which is a very great encouragement; if to the diligent use of all other means we add fervent prayer, our Saviour hath assured us, that God will give his Holy Spirit; and therefore, *if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him.*

SERM.  
VIII.

## S E R M O N IX.

SELF-GOVERNMENT essential to  
WISDOM.

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PROVERBS XXV. 28.

*He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is  
like a city broken down, and without walls.*

SERM.  
IX.

AS it is the professed design of this book to recommend religious virtue under the character of wisdom, the author, in his concise and unconnected manner of writing, hinteth several strong arguments to press his main scope, which I have endeavoured to explain; and then I proposed to consider the directions he giveth in order to our attaining wisdom. If men are once won to a just esteem of that great endowment which is the very perfection of the human nature, the noblest accomplishment of the mind; and if they be thoroughly sensible of the unspeakable advantages which will accrue to them from it both in this world and the next, this will naturally produce the love of wisdom,

wisdom, and an ardent desire after it, which is the first qualification; and, next, an earnest diligent endeavour, or seeking wisdom early; both which I have considered. But the great question is concerning the proper object of our diligence. In every art or science a man learneth, he must know how to employ his industry; it is not enough to tell him he must take pains, he must be made to understand how he ought to bestow his pains. The artificer is acquainted with his tools, and the manner of using them, and with the proper materials of his labour: The man of letters is directed in the choice of his books, and the proper subject of his study. In like manner the teachers of religious wisdom shew us what are the objects about which it is conversant, and they are our own hearts: The votaries of virtue must there apply their strength and their most careful attention; and their constant business is to observe, and duly to regulate, the affections, dispositions, and voluntary movements of their own minds. *Solomon* directeth us, *Prov. iv. 23. To keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life*; and, in the text, he sheweth the wretched, the forlorn, and ruinous condition of the person who hath no rule over

SERM.  
IX.

SERM. his own spirit; he is *like a city that is broken down, and without walls, without order and beauty, without strength and safety; a confused, irregular, and deformed heap, open to every assault, and defenceless against any invader.*

IX.


This, one would think, is a subject recommended to our study and application by the immediate interest we have in it. What is it that can possibly concern a man more than the art of self-government, the consequences of it so nearly affect him, and a perception of the advantages of it in inward tranquillity so obvious, indeed, unavoidable, and of the disadvantage of neglecting it in the continual reproaches of his own heart? Is it not very inexcusable for a man to be a stranger to himself, and not to know how to improve the best of his own natural powers and affections, so as he may be carried to his proper perfection, and enjoy all the happiness he is capable of? Would it not shew a trifling and over-curious temper for a man to spend his time in inquiring into the state, the situation, the customs, policy, and laws of far distant countries, and be a stranger to his own, to which he hath so near a relation, and so much a better opportunity of improving his knowledge to valuable purposes?

poses? In like manner, every kind of knowledge may be reckoned unprofitable while the knowledge of ourselves is neglected, and we do not make it our business to understand the maxims and rules by which we should govern our spirits. For a man to take a great deal of pains abroad, to spend his time and labour in acquiring the art of working in metal, in wood and stone, a dexterity in cultivating the ground, to be skilful in commerce, to understand the history of nature in as great an extent as *Solomon* did, who had understanding exceeding much, and *largeness of heart even as the sand which is on the sea-shore*; so as not only to treat judiciously of moral subjects, but to speak with knowledge of trees, *from the cedar which is in Lebanon, to the hyssop which springeth out of the wall*; of beasts also, and fowls, and creeping things, and fishes, 1 Kings iv. 29. To know the distances and magnitude of the heavenly bodies, and the laws according to which they are moved in their several orbs, to be an able politician, well acquainted with the interests of states and kingdoms, and the rules by which they ought to be governed; for a man, I say, to arrive at a great measure of perfection in these kinds of knowledge, however useful

SERM. and valuable in many respects, and yet to  
 IX. be ignorant of himself, and of the true prin-  
 ciples and maxims by which he ought to  
 conduct his life and form the dispositions of  
 his mind, is to be wise in trifles, and foolish  
 in matters of the greatest moment. What-  
 ever reputation may be acquired by skill in  
 those things which may be justly called fo-  
 reign, as having no relation to the principal  
 ends of our being, such skill, when exer-  
 cised ultimately on objects of this sort, is  
 but unprofitable, and indeed folly; yet are  
 many of mankind, even of those who are  
 reputed wise, guilty of this folly; for though  
 the object of religious wisdom be very near  
 us, and our most immediate concern, it is  
 very often overlooked, the minds of men  
 being too much engrossed by the objects of  
 sense, or through a secret unwillingness to  
 enter into study and discipline. I will en-  
 deavour, in this discourse,

*First,* To give you, at least, a general no-  
 tion of what it is to have rule over our  
 own spirits; and then you will see the  
 usefulness of it, and the inseparable con-  
 nection it hath with attaining to, and  
 making progress in, wisdom.

*First,*

First, Let us consider what it is to have S E R M.  
 rule over our own spirits. It is observed by IX.  
 expositors, that the word rendered *spirit*,   
 sometimes, in the writings of this author,  
 signifieth anger, as, *Eccles. x. 4. If the spirit*  
*of the ruler (that is his wrath) rise against*  
*thee, leave not thy place; for yielding paci-*  
*fictly offences. And Prov. xvi. 32. He that*  
*is slow to anger, is better than the mighty,*  
*and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that*  
*taketh a city.* This, no doubt, is one of the  
 passions which ought to be kept under a  
 steady government, if we would make any  
 proficiency in wisdom, for *it resteth in the*  
*bosom of fools.* But there are other affections  
 and passions of the human nature, which  
 for the same reason it is necessary to restrain  
 and controul, because, often rising to an ex-  
 orbitant height, they are enemies to virtue.

To have a just view of this subject, we  
 ought to consider the intire constitution of  
 our minds, and all their powers and facul-  
 ties, affections and passions, between which  
 there is supposed a great difference, seeing  
 it is the same agent who is to rule and be  
 ruled; that is, the same spirit. There is  
 something in it which hath a right to do-  
 minion, as being in its nature superior;  
 there

SERM. there are other parts which hold an inferior

IX. place, and ought to be in subjection. Now, if we attend to the constitution of the human spirit in its full extent, we shall find in it a great variety of powers and affections, various senses or ways of perceiving things without us; various desires and aversions; a power of reflecting upon ourselves, of comparing our own thoughts, and the representations which are made to our minds of things as good or evil; of inquiring into the importance of them, and all the considerations which should direct our choice, and of determining upon the whole. We find also that which is called *conscience*, a sense of duty and sin, and of moral good and evil; a necessary self-approbation arising from the one, and reproach and condemnation from the other. There are, besides, a great many propensities in our minds which cannot be called in the strictest sense natural, but incidental rather, and which take their rise, not from the essence of our constitution, but from particular occasions in life, various complexion of body, and other incidental causes. To make this plain by examples; we see a great difference in the tempers of men, some eagerly covet wealth, others have an impatient thirst for power and



and honour, and others are prone to the pursuit of pleasure; some timorous spirits are very apt to fall into panicks, are thrown into consternation by any sudden surprising emergent, which presenteth danger to the imagination; and others fall into furious transports of anger upon any apprehension of an injury, or appearance of provocation. But that these are not natural in the strictest sense, that is, necessarily belonging to our constitution, I think appeareth from this consideration, that they are not uniform. Nature operateth alike, and by certain invariable laws. All kinds of beings in the universe continue in their motions and relations after the ordinance of their great author, as the Psalmist speaketh, *Psal.* cxix. 91. concerning the heavens and the earth. And so in some things, the human nature is as uniform as any other; there are certain sensations, powers, and appetites, in all men, of which we can no more divest ourselves, than we can cease to be; but these particular propensities, of which I am speaking, are not so; they are strong in some, in others weak, or scarcely to be discerned at all, which sheweth them either to be contracted, or to depend on accidental causes. Nay, they vary in the same persons; he  
who

S E R M.  
IX.  
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SERM. who is voluptuous in youth, becometh, per-  
 IX. haps, covetous in his more advanced years,  
 and peevish and froward in his old age; so  
 that even opposite dispositions prevail in him  
 at different times. Besides, they have been,  
 the very strongest of them, conquered and  
 amended, by firm resolution, by diligence  
 in the use of proper means, with the assist-  
 ance of divine grace.

As to the causes of these affections and  
 propensions in men, there is generally  
 thought to be, and probably is, a remote  
 tendency to particular dispositions of mind  
 from the very frame of the body. One is  
 sanguine, another is cholerick, another is  
 melancholy; but there is no such infelicity  
 of bodily constitution as hath a necessary in-  
 fluence on the mind, while it continueth  
 possessed of its natural powers to form its  
 temper, otherwise the disorders arising from  
 this cause would be faultless; the constitu-  
 tion of the body may minister great temp-  
 tations, yet the mind hath a natural force,  
 and is under a law to resist them.

I am apt to believe, the more general  
 cause of criminal disorders, and contracted  
 faulty dispositions, is from rash opinions  
 hastily taken up, and on no just grounds.  
 Every man may find, if he considers what  
 passeth

passeth in his own heart, that besides the impressions which are necessarily made by external objects, there are images continually formed in the fancy, and there are often confused combinations of thoughts, representations of things, which have no existence, nor any foundation in reason. The imagination joineth notions very arbitrarily together; sometimes only the dark side of an object is seen, without attending to that which is more agreeable; sometimes only those parts are viewed which are apt to administer pleasure and move desire, stripping it of every thing which hath a contrary tendency, which however ought to be considered, in order to form a true judgment. Very often our false opinions are imbibed from the company we converse with, or occasioned by outward circumstances, education, and custom, all which are known to have a great share in forming the tempers and manners of men.

From this short and general view of the human spirit, we may take our rise to the consideration of the government which is established in it, where the proper authority is lodged, and what ought to be subject. There are some things exempted from this dominion, and are indeed not properly under

SERM. der any law, because we have no liberty in  
 IX. them. The original determinations of our  
 nature we cannot possibly alter nor hinder,  
 and we are not obliged to it. We cannot  
 put a stop to the perception we have by our  
 senses, to our hearing sounds, seeing colours,  
 and perceiving other sensible qualities ; nor  
 yet to the original appetites, as hunger and  
 thirst, or to the natural desire of happiness ;  
 nor indeed to the approbation of actions  
 morally good, when we understand them,  
 and the disapprobation of that which is evil.  
 These things do not belong to the rule of  
 our spirits, they are the constant necessary  
 effects of the law of nature, or the consti-  
 tution which the Author of our beings hath  
 given us.

But there are powers and affections in  
 our minds, the exercise whereof is under  
 our direction, and we are accountable to our-  
 selves for it. For instance, a man's rule  
 over his spirit consisteth in suspending his de-  
 termination, till he hath duly examined the  
 causes and motives upon which it is found-  
 ed. I observed before, that we are liable  
 to many mistakes in this state of infirmity,  
 whereby we are drawn into a wrong con-  
 duct ; not that the fault consisteth in the  
 erroneous opinions themselves, but the cri-  
 minal

minal causes by which we are betrayed into them, and in too hastily following their direction without inquiring whether it be right or wrong. This power of deliberating and suspending determinations we are conscious of, and can never justify it to ourselves, that we do not exercise it upon proper occasions. No man findeth himself under a necessity of consenting to every proposal which is made to him, or of following every suggestion in his mind. He hath a power of doing or forbearing, of choosing or refusing; nay, we are not under a necessity of acting according to the first apparent probability; we can suspend our judgment and our choice till we have considered more maturely, till we have examined whether there be not a stronger argument, and a juster motive of action on the other side. By a constant careful attention, a sincere, that is, a diligent impartial inquiry, a great many of our errors might be corrected, which are the unhappy sources of ill conduct; those vain images formed in the fancy, into the eager and indeliberate pursuit of which we suffer ourselves to be hurried, might be prevented, and that confused assemblage of thoughts which excite strong propensities and aversions, very often unreasonable, might be broken,

SERM.  
IX.



SERM.

IX.


This is the first, and indeed an essential branch of self-dominion, or rule over our own spirits, without which we have not the right use of reason, which is our principal distinguishing faculty, nor can regularly pursue the proper ends of such a being. On the one hand, it is to be considered, that our condition and capacity is limited and imperfect; we cannot, at one view, comprehend the whole of things which are necessary to be considered, in order to the direction of our choice and our practice, but must take them in gradually, and pursue our enquiries by leisurely steps, as the narrowness of the mind will allow. How then is the understanding to be exercised, if it is to be exercised at all in forming our conduct, but in deliberation? And what room is there for deliberation, unless the active powers be suspended to give way to it? On the other hand, this is the high prerogative of our being, above inferior agents, particularly those of the brutal kind. God hath made us with a variety of desires and affections, between which a ballance is to be preserved, that we may attain to the ends of our being, and enjoy our true happiness. We have selfish desires, which terminate in private good or enjoyment: We will find  
in

in our own hearts too, a desire of the good of others, and a desire to those actions wherein our own minds may approve us, to the things which are pure, true, and just, and honest, and lovely: The former are in many men strong and vehement, being continually indulged and complied with; the other are overlooked and neglected, whereby they become weak; and yet the force of them appeareth very great, by the most painful sensations which arise in the mind for counter-acting them. It is for those creatures which have no desires but what center in themselves, to follow their direction wholly and without any hesitation; but for us whom God hath endued with a capacity, and even a sense of obligation to do good to others, and to please him, we ought to cherish and actively endeavour to strengthen those nobler sentiments and dispositions, which is at the same time pursuing our own happiness in the best manner; for perceptions of the highest pleasure are annexed to them. But in order to preserve this due ballance of the affections, and answer the ends of our entire constitution, which are so much superior to those of the brutes, it is necessary we should have, and habitually exert the power of suspending

SERM. our determinations, till we have examined  
 IX. and been satisfied, concerning the motives  
 upon which we act. The more we have  
 of this power, and exercise it, the more we  
 are masters of ourselves, and have rule  
 over our own spirits; and that mind is  
 impotent and without any defence against  
 fatal misconduct, which acteth rashly and  
 indeliberately.

But more particularly, to have the rule  
 over our own spirits, is, to keep the passions  
 under an exact discipline, and to restrain  
 their excesses. By the passions are meant  
 those vehement sensations and emotions,  
 which accompany desire and aversion, the  
 great springs of action in mankind. Ex-  
 perience sheweth, that often strong agita-  
 tions of body, and violent perturbations of  
 mind attend our pursuit of what is appre-  
 hended to be good, and our aversion to,  
 and endeavour to shun evil. These in their  
 original design, as planted in us by the wise  
 and gracious Author of nature, are a very useful  
 part of the constitution, directing and ex-  
 citing us to the vigorous use of proper means  
 for our own preservation and happiness, to  
 which men would not be generally deter-  
 mined by calm reason and desire.



Concerning every one of the passions we SERM.  
may understand by serious reflection the par- IX.  
ticular ends and uses they serve; and it is   
the province of reason and conscience to  
keep them within those limits which the  
ends and uses direct, that is, to provide that  
they do not transport us beyond the just de-  
sign, or into a vehemence above what the  
importance of it will allow. This will be  
best understood by particular examples. An-  
ger is a passion which the author of nature  
hath planted in us for our own necessary  
defence, by repelling injuries, and that we  
may exert ourselves with vigour for the pre-  
servation of our lawful interests against un-  
just invasion; but it riseth to an extreme  
which ought to be repressed; when it trans-  
porteth us beyond those bounds, and when  
it terminateth in the destruction or hurt of  
the injurious, without regard to our own  
safety, which is the proper end.

Again; there are natural desires in men  
of very unequal moment which often rise to  
passions. But how unreasonable and weak  
is it to be passionate for trifles? and those  
desires which are of greater consideration to  
the state of the world, but do not relate to  
the highest ends of life, certainly we ought  
so to govern, that the anxiety and uneasi-  
ness

SERM. ness of them do not entirely destroy the re-  
 IX. lish of life, and render us unfit for pursuing  
 { the main business of it. The desire of offspring is a natural one and lawful, but it was heightened by passion in *Rachel* to a great extreme, when she said, *give me children, or I die.*

Besides these passions which have a foundation in nature, and the excess only is faulty, which the mind ought to restrain by calm and serious consideration, there are others raised on occasions merely fantastical; custom, habit, and other causes, beget false opinions, which represent things under the appearance of good, and stamp a great importance upon them, which have really no relation to the necessities and the ends of our being, as the objects of the original desires have; such as gay apparel, equipage, titles, which have the inviting idea of magnificence and grandeur annexed to them. But if we calmly consider the human nature, we will see they have no connection with the main concerns of it; and yet these fantastical things are known to be the occasion of very violent and disturbing passions, which a wise man ought to restrain; and it evidently belongeth to a just government of himself.

Fear is, by the wise and good Creator, SERM.  
placed in our nature for its preservation, IX.  
that being apprised of danger, we should  
arm against it, and take all necessary pre-  
cautions for our safety; but very often it  
hath the contrary effect, it so dispiriteth and  
enfeebleth a man, as to render him quite  
uncapable of doing any thing for his own  
defence, which is a great instance of weak-  
ness and want of due government over our  
own spirits; but it might be successfully  
opposed by reason and vigorous resolution,  
though reason and conscience have, perhaps,  
as hard a task in conquering fear as any in-  
firmity of the human nature. But it is not  
necessary to go through all the passions and  
infirmities of the human mind, which ought  
to be kept under discipline, the examples I  
have mentioned will be sufficient to answer  
the design I proposed, that is, to give you a  
general notion of what it is to have rule  
over our own spirits. I come, in the

*Second* place, To consider the reasonable-  
ness and usefulness of it, and the connection  
it hath with attaining to, and making pro-  
gress in, wisdom. The true end of self-  
government is, that the superior powers of  
the mind may be preserved in their due ex-

SERM. exercise, and that the nobler affections of our  
 IX. nature may have their full force. Any one  
 who but a little reflecteth on the frame of  
 men, will see that the understanding is a  
 high faculty, by which we all suppose our-  
 selves distinguished from the inferior kinds  
 of animals; we value ourselves upon it; its  
 capacity is large, reaching to a vast variety  
 of objects; its exercises are various, and we  
 have strong perceptions of pleasure arising  
 from them. Should we not then exert our  
 utmost power to preserve it free and undis-  
 turbed, and to enjoy the use and improve-  
 ment of it to the highest degree of perfec-  
 tion we are capable of? But the irregula-  
 rities mentioned in the lower parts of our  
 nature, the vanities and errors of the ima-  
 gination, and the extravagancies of the pas-  
 sions, tend to darken the understanding and  
 marr its free exercise, as every one's experi-  
 ence will satisfy him who doth at all attend  
 to what passeth in his own mind; and  
 therefore, certainly, we should with our ut-  
 most power oppose those disorders which  
 obscure that which is a principal glory of  
 our frame.

Again; the self-determining power is an  
 excellent one, and a high prerogative of our  
 nature. We cannot, I think, but be sensi-  
 ble

ble that there is a great dignity and pleasure in the exercise of true liberty, or of acting freely according to the best judgment we can make of things; and that it is an abject and a painful state of mind, to be driven and hurried blindly, without seeing the grounds we go upon. Now, a confused imagination and tumultuous passions tend to destroy freedom; the soul, through their influence, is cramped and straitened, nay, becometh impotent, and so is deprived of the true and substantial pleasures of liberty. This is a just reason for resisting vigorously the tyranny of lust and passion. Why do we so highly resent the incroachment made upon our freedom by others, and tenaciously assert the right of judging for ourselves, and acting according to the best judgment we can make, if we will meanly give up that right to an usurping tyrant within, which equally taketh away the privilege, namely, liberty in acting according to the approbation of the understanding upon a deliberate inquiry, which they who are conducted wholly by their imaginations and passions cannot boast of. It is true such men boast of liberty, which they place in casting off the restraints of reason and conscience, but, indeed, are under the basest and most wretched servitude,

SERM. tude, while as St. *Peter* observeth, 2 epist.

IX. ii. 19. *They are the servants of corruption,*  
 { *for of whom a man is overcome, of the same*  
*is he brought into bondage.*

Besides, as man was not made wholly for the business and ends of the animal life, like the beasts which perish, he hath some affections which carry him to higher ends. Every man who is arrived to the exercise of understanding, hath some sense of duty to the Deity, and benevolence to his fellow-creatures; in these we cannot but approve ourselves, and they yield the highest satisfaction, though in many men such sentiments and affections are weak and ineffectual; but, why? Certainly, because they are overborne by the excesses of other affections, because the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, are strong, therefore the love of God and man is weak; the generous sentiments of piety and charity almost stifled. Now, is it not a deplorable condition men are in, when the inferior, the brutal desires, are overgrown, tyrannizing in the heart without controul, while the nobler affections, which are the glory of the human nature, and carry it to its highest ends, are almost extinguished. This should inspire us with resolution to restore the

the

the sovereignty of reason, and recover the SERM. rule over our own spirits. IX.

And, now, is it not apparent that this is the most important concern of ours? That this liberty, consisting in the freedom of the mind from the power of its own infirmities, and especially corrupt appetites and passions, is worth the contending for with the warmest zeal, seeing it is so necessary to all the great purposes of reasonable natures, all that ought to be dear and valuable to us as men, or which belongeth to the dignity of our being, and the place we hold in the universal system? What man is there whose indignation would not rise against the thought of degrading himself into the condition of inanimate things, or of brutes? Doth it not appear, even to our first thoughts, much more worthy, that conscious of the excellence of our nature we should aspire to its true perfection, and maintain its dignity, which is then only done when we are governed by understanding and conscience. The text representeth the condition of the man who hath no rule over his own spirit, as very deplorable; he is *like a city that is broken down, and without walls*; the image of a weak and a despicable state. Such a city is exposed to the assaults of its enemies, without

SERM. without any means of defending itself, pre-


IX. serving its rights, or protecting its inhabitants: Just so is the man in whom reason and conscience have lost their force, and no more maintain their dominion over the lower affections; he is a prey to every temptation, having no defence against it; fierce passions; with an impetuous fury, drive him (and he hath no power to resist them) just as ships are driven by a tempest. In this case it is impossible to attain to wisdom or virtue, and to make any progress in it, for it is the best exercise of reason. Religion is a reasonable service, and liberty is essentially necessary to it; for without willingness, or a free choice (every one is sensible) there can be no such thing as religion or virtue. Though we may very well conceive moral goodness, indeed, the most perfect, without what *Solomon* calleth rule over our own spirit, or a mastery over passions and other infirmities; because there is no such thing, no affections or dispositions of a contrary tendency in the most perfect being; nor doth goodness necessarily include it: Yet in the imperfect state of the human nature, the measure of virtue dependeth on, and is proportionate to the degree of our conquest over the frailties, the selfish affections and pas-



fions of our own minds; and it may be justly said, not only that rule over the spirit hath a connection with wisdom in the moral and religious sense, but that it is the very thing itself. SERM.  
IX.

This, my brethren, giveth us just occasion to consider with regret the degeneracy of mankind; *Solomon* saith, *Eccles. vii. 29. That God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions.* The integrity of our nature consisteth in the dominion of the superior powers, and the subordination of the appetites and passions to them; but it is deformed when, on the contrary, the lower affections get the ascendant, and reason and conscience are dethroned, which experience as well as the scripture sheweth to be the unhappy case of sinners who are *disobedient, and deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures*, the brutal part ruleth over the man; passions indulged become untractable and impetuous; and custom in sinning is a principle strong as nature itself. The prophet representeth the difficulty of reforming habitually vicious and wicked men, by comparing it to a natural impossibility; *Jer. xiii. 23. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots, then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil?*

But,

SERM. But, in the next place, I propose to our  
IX.  serious thoughts the unspeakable obligations we are under to the mercy of God for the gracious contrivance of the gospel, the principal design of which is to recover us to liberty, or to self-dominion; to restore the just empire of reason and conscience, and to free us from the intolerable and most ignominious servitude of sin. That which our blessed Saviour intended to lead us to, is, a deliverance from the power of our lusts and passions, base and cruel masters; and though we have the principles in our constitution, which, duly improved, might bring us to that state of freedom, yet considering how impotent we were become, God saw it needful, and we are greatly indebted to him for it, by a signal and gracious interposition to carry on that work. To this purpose what could be better designed? God hath shewed us what is good by a clear revelation; true wisdom is taught by a law, not left to be found out by reason, which in the greatest part of men is weak, and its light very much obscured; and a sanction is added of the greatest force to strike our minds, and determine us to obedience. Eternal life is promised to the sincere, and everlasting destruction is threatened against impenitent sinners.

ners. To encourage and animate us in shaking off the yoke of sin, and returning to God, the hope of forgiveness is confirmed by the sacrifice of Christ's death, in whom God hath declared himself well pleased, and reconciled to sinners who obey the gospel; and the spirit is promised and given to help our infirmities, and where the spirit *of the Lord is, there is liberty*, 2 Cor. iii. 17. The tendency of his assistance and operations, and of the whole christian ministration, is to rescue sinners from the most reproachful and painful bondage of sin, and teach them to rule over themselves, to deny self, not reason and conscience, the power of which is re-established by the ministration of the Spirit, but the extravagancies of passion, and the irregular desires of the flesh and of the mind. Let us, therefore, having so great encouragement, be prevailed with to use our best endeavours that we may more and more understand and accustom ourselves to this discipline, that so making constant proficiency in wisdom, we may enjoy the fruits of it here in pleasantness and peace, and have the assured hopes of the reward which God hath promised hereafter to the wise, *Dan. xii. 3. That they shall shine as the brightness of the firmament*, not in outward splendor, but true substantial glory.

SERM.  
IX.

## S E R M O N X.

The PROUD and SCORNFUL incapable  
of attaining to WISDOM.

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PROVERBS XIV. 6.

*A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.*

SERM. X. **I**F wisdom or religious virtue be the noblest accomplishment of the human nature, most suitable to such beings as we are, in itself transcendently excellent, and upon a comparison far more valuable than all we can desire in this world ; if it will afford the truest and most substantial pleasures to our minds while we live here, and the best prospect of future felicity in the enjoyment of the divine favour, yet without any real disadvantage to our present outward interest ; all which I have endeavoured to shew in discoursing from several passages in this book : If, I say, it be so, then certainly they who are convinced of this, should use their utmost endeavours in the constant pursuit of wisdom ; they should resolutely thwart every  
incon-

inconsistent inclination, and deny whatever may hinder their attaining it. The greatest difficulties we have to overcome, in order to our acquiring this blessed quality, and all its happy fruits, arise from ourselves; we have so many selfish affections and passions, which being indulged grow to an exorbitant height of power, and the tendency of them is contrary to virtue, that it will require the strictest and most constant attention to be preserved from their corrupting influence. I have lately explained self-government, or, as *Solomon* expresseth it, having a rule over our own spirits; that is, observing a strict discipline in our minds, keeping a careful universal watch over our own senses, imagination, appetites, and passions, so far as they are under the direction of the understanding and conscience; and I shewed you the necessity and usefulness of this, in order to our attaining to, and making proficiency in, religion.

I propose, in discoursing from this text, to consider particularly the character and disposition of the *Scorner*, and the obstruction which ariseth from it to men's becoming wise, which you see *Solomon* representeth as so great, that it will defeat all means, and disappoint all the diligence men can use;

SERM.  
X.  
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S E R M. for it is supposed that the scorner may seek  
 X. wisdom, and be at pains for it, and yet never find it. Not that he discerneth wisdom to consist in true religion and virtue, and seeketh after these; for in a diligent pursuit of this kind his labour should not be lost: But he seeketh after wisdom, that is, knowledge and skill to make the best of life; in which he either doth not include religion at all, or it is of such a kind as will by no means answer the end: For as to true religion, his temper, as we shall afterwards see, disqualifieth him as much for seeking as finding it.

Let us, *first*, consider the character. We meet with it often in the writings of *Solomon*, and in other parts of scripture, by attending to which we shall find the following ingredients in it: First, *pride*, which signifieth an undue desire of honour, or an overvaluing one's self, and a joy and triumph of heart on account of some apprehended excellence or advantage, with a contempt of others supposed inferior. To have a just notion of this evil, against which the sacred writers inveigh with so great severity, representing it as what rendereth men obnoxious to the divine displeasure, and precipitateth them into the most fatal misconduct,

duct, and indeed into destruction; we may observe, that it is a perversion or misapplication of an original desire in the human nature, that is, the desire of honour, which God hath planted in us for excellent purposes; for it is of great use to our happiness, and a security to virtue. But when the desire terminateth ultimately, not on the things which are praise-worthy, but upon praise and respect separated from worth, and is founded, not on any real excellency, but those things to which the weakness and folly of men have annexed esteem, it is then a faulty ambition; and the overvaluing ourselves upon such things, while we despise others, or, in general, upon the apprehended right to, or possession of any good esteemed above its real nature and use, is sinful pride. Thus, for example, the goods of fortune, as they are commonly called, riches and power, being the foundations of distinction among men to which the opinion of the world hath affixed the idea of grandeur and magnificence; the natural perfections of the body, as strength and beauty; the accomplishments of the mind, whether natural or acquired, such as wit and knowledge. In fine, whatever is reputable in the eyes of mankind, and particularly those we converse

SERM. with ; these are the subjects of a secret triumph and self-applause in the thoughts of the proud, and the foundations upon which they claim a distinguishing respect, despising in their hearts, and carrying it haughtily and superciliously towards those whom they apprehend to be inferior to them.

To explain this subject more fully, it must be observed, that the overvaluing one's self, which is meant by pride, hath a relation to some other beings, and includeth a comparison. And as the scripture representeth pride under the notion of impiety, and the source of an undutiful behaviour towards God, *Psal. x. 4. The wicked through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God* ; this sin doth import too great an elation of the mind, too high an esteem of one's self, even upon a comparison with the Deity. Not that any of mankind, or any intelligent creatures who acknowledge the being of God, do avowedly set themselves above him, for that would be too manifest an absurdity ; but they entertain such fond thoughts of their own perfection, merit, and sufficiency, as are really inconsistent with their professed acknowledgment of his supremacy and their dependence, as derogate from his infinite unparalleled excellency,



cellency, and are unbecoming the relation which creatures bear to him. To speak and to act as if our lips were our own, and our powers to be employed wholly for ourselves, and by the direction of our own wills, without subordination or any regard to his ; as if we lived independently on him, and possessed any thing which we did not receive from his bounty ; as if we had no need to have recourse to his liberality for the supply of our wants ; as if we had a sovereign right to dispose of ourselves, and our own interests and affairs ; or as if we were not accountable to him for all our actions : This is proudly to exalt ourselves against God, and to forget that we are and must necessarily be in the condition of frail depending creatures. Like this was the pride of the angels, who, as *St. Jude* telleth us, *kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation* ; and the apostle *Paul* representeth it as the cause of the devil's condemnation, *1 Tim. iii. 6*. Not that it is to be imagined he ever thought himself greater than the Almighty in power and perfection, and would on that account attempt to dethrone him by superior force ; but in the pride of his heart, the high conceit of his sufficiency to

SERM. conduct himself, he refused to be in sub-  
 X. jection to his maker, and obey his laws.

2dly, The pride of mens hearts is discovered by affecting a pre-eminence above their fellows, and a fond presumptuous opinion of their own excellency upon a comparison with them, which really is a rebellion against the established order God hath appointed in the world ; for he hath linked us together in society, and made humble condescending love the firm cement of it. I hinted already what I take to be the just foundation for explaining this, that is, the natural desire of approbation and esteem. All sin is the perverting that which is right, and to have a true notion of the present diseases of our own sinful state, we ought to look back to the primitive order of nature. Now, I say, the desire of honour, that is, of approbation and esteem founded in good offices and the things which are indeed praise worthy, is wisely planted in our minds by the author of nature, as a security of our duty, and to engage us to mutual benevolence ; but in our degeneracy it is become a selfish desire, and honour is sought independently on the true grounds of it, which is the very evil of this branch of pride : Still, however, there is a relation had

to moral excellence, which we find ourselves SERM.  
obliged to acknowledge as the only true ex- X.  
cellence; and the proudest man, in his most  
presumptuous thoughts of himself, valueth  
himself on what he imagineth to import a  
capacity, or the appearance of a disposition,  
to do good of some kind or other.

Not to mention any farther the occasions  
of pride, or the apprehended good things,  
whereupon men value themselves, which  
are more remote from the present subject,  
you may especially take notice of these two,  
which are directly to the purpose, as tend-  
ing to unfit men for attaining wisdom.  
First, there are some who value themselves  
much, and claim a great deal of honour on  
account of their understanding, that is, ei-  
ther their actual knowledge, or capacity of  
investigating and discerning truth; though,  
indeed, this ground of glorying, or of claim-  
ing respect, if it be thoroughly examined,  
will appear a very insufficient one; for it is  
certain that the most enlarged human un-  
derstandings are but weak, and labour under  
many defects; the wisest man must be sen-  
sible that his knowledge is very scanty, and  
besides the difficulty which attendeth the  
acquisition of it, as *Solomon* saith, *he that*  
*increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow*; it is

SERM. liable to many accidents; a distemper of  
 X. body, or a stroke on the head, may make a  
 { man of the happiest memory and the clearest  
 judgment, forget his own name; so narrow,  
 as well as peccarious, is that understanding  
 of which men boast, and affect a distinction  
 by it above others; though after all, their  
 superiority will not be always so heartily ac-  
 knowledged as they imagine; as it is not  
 consistent that a man should particularly  
 know the points wherein another is wiser  
 than himself, the generality of people, how-  
 ever envious on other accounts, are pretty  
 well satisfied with their own share of this  
 talent. And,

2dly, Religion itself is to some the subject  
 of glorying and vain elation of mind; not  
 the reality of it, for that excludeth boasting,  
 but the appearance. There were people  
 zealously professing religion among the an-  
 cient *Jews*, whom the prophet thus descri-  
 beth, and methinks the description very na-  
 turally marketh them out as scorers; *Isaiab*  
*lxv. 5. They say, stand by thyself, come not*  
*near me, for I am holier than thou.* The  
 Pharisees, in our Saviour's time, were their  
 true successors, a generation whom our Lord  
 representeth as far from the kingdom of  
 heaven, farther than even publicans and  
 harlots;

harlots, and this was a principal part of SERM.  
their character, they preceeded to a peculiar X.  
reputation for sanctity, and would have great  
acknowledgment made to them, as the  
strictest devotees of their time and their na-  
tion, not on account of true substantial piety  
and goodness, which would have given  
them quite other sentiments and dispositions;  
they neglected judgment, mercy, faith, and  
the love of God, these weightiest matters  
of the law; but they had a fiery zeal for the  
ritual parts of religion, ceremonies of little  
importance, and the traditions of the elders;  
they fasted often, paid tithes of all they  
possessed, took care to wash their hands,  
and their cups, and pots, and tables, and to  
make broad their phylacteries; on this foun-  
dation they pretended to eminent piety.  
When yet our blessed Saviour representeth  
them as the worst of men, which must be the  
case of all such hypocrites as make a religi-  
ous profession subservient to ambitious views,  
which sincere religion utterly abhorreth.

As pride, on whatever pretence it is  
founded, is an evil disposition, it must be  
judged of especially by what passeth in the  
heart; prevailing affections do first and most  
naturally discover themselves in the thoughts;  
that which is most in their esteem, men in-

SERM. cline most to meditate upon with pleasure,  
 X. and if their ownelves, or some imagined  
 excellency of theirs, affordeth the most agreeable entertainment to their minds, and they dwell upon it with an inward exultation, without taking into the account, and considering at the same time, what in reason ought to abate it, this evidently sheweth, if they would attend to it, a fond and presumptuous conceit. Thus *Nebuchadnezzar*, whose pride was so outrageous, insulting God himself, who punished him by degrading him into the condition of a beast, exulted in his power and greatness, when he beheld the magnificence of his works, and the splendor of his royal seat. *Dan. iv. 30.* *Is not this great Babylon that I have built, for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my Majesty.*

Again, There are outward signs which too plainly indicate the pride of the heart; the very gestures and looks of men discover the vanity and elation of their minds; *Solomon*, and other of the sacred writers, speak of lofty eyes, and haughty looks, and pride of countenance. It is not possible for the most careless observer not to distinguish this disease by some obvious symptoms, those airs of superiority which some assume, their affec-

affectation of praise, and their behaviour SERM.  
when it is bestowed on them; for, as *Solo-* X.


*mon* justly observeth, *Prov.* xxvii. 21. *As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise*: His eagerness in pursuing, and manner of receiving it, plainly enough discover the complexion of his spirit; and an insolent behaviour towards others, endeavouring to lessen their characters, to derogate from their worth, and aggravate their failings, insulting their misfortunes and apprehended weakness, and an impatience of contradiction; these and the like obvious symptoms, instances of self-sufficiency and contempt of their fellows, clearly shew the pride of mens hearts; and contentions, animosities, wranglings, and disturbing the peace of societies for trifles, or matters of small moment, and merely selfish and personal; these are effects which must be attributed to the same cause, for, as our author saith, *Prov.* xxi. 24. *Proud and baughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.*

This pride is the first ingredient in the character of the scorner: Another comprehensive one, which, I may say, finisheth it, is contempt of religion and virtue. Sometimes it is the unhappy case of sinners, but only of those who have gone on in a course  
of

SERM. of sin, and been long accustomed to do

X. evil, that they at last banish the truth they  
 long detained in unrighteousness, and get  
 rid of those principles which were troublesome when believed, by reproaching their  
 wicked practices. This they do not arrive  
 to suddenly; not till having often baffled  
 conscience, and by indulging them, given  
 such a power to corrupt lusts and vicious  
 habits, that they overcome all resistance.  
 But it is the greatest height of impiety, and  
 an insolent defiance of almighty God, when  
 religion and all that is sacred, even the eter-  
 nal moral differences of good and evil, are  
 made the subjects of ridicule. There is ob-  
 served, in the 1st Psalm, a gradation in evil.  
*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the  
 counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the  
 way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the  
 scornful.* It is our unhappiness to tread at  
 all in these destructive paths; but it is still  
 worse to be fixed and obstinate in them;  
 and worst of all is the state of that Sinner,  
 who is established in the society of those  
 who have cast off all restraint, and openly  
 deride all goodness. *They are fools, Solomon  
 saith, who make a mock at sin,* divert them-  
 selves with it as only a trifling amusement,  
 and laugh at the evil of it, and the tremend-



ous consequences which grave and serious SERM.  
 persons talk of; this is, as he elsewhere X.  
 speaketh, *sporting with firebrands, arrows,*   
*and death.* The prophet *Isaiab*, chap. xxviii.

22. adviseth the *Jews*, *not to be mockers,*  
*lest their bands be made strong,* lest they be  
 abandoned, in the righteous judgment of  
 God, to the incorrigible hardness of their  
 impenitent hearts, without any further means  
 of being reclaimed, and so their ill condi-  
 tion being remediless, they treasure up wrath  
 to themselves against the day of wrath.

One of the plainest descriptions we meet  
 with of these scorers is in the 2d epistle of  
 St. *Pcter* chap. iii. 3, 4. *Knowing this, that*  
*there shall come in the last days scoffers, walk-*  
*ing after their own lusts, and saying, where*  
*is the promise of his coming? For since the*  
*fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they*  
*were from the beginning of the creation.*  
 They support themselves in their impiety,  
 and found their contempt of religion, upon  
 some sort of reasoning, whereby they ima-  
 gine they prove that the great motives to  
 godliness are merely chimerical, and but  
 idle dreams; as in the instance before us,  
 the scoffers are represented as alledging that  
 there is nothing at all in the promise of  
 God's coming to judge the world, to reward  
 his

SERM. his faithful servants, and to punish the disobedient; that the hopes formed upon that promise are merely visionary, and that the threatenings of punishment are empty scarecrows; and the argument to confirm this is taken from fact, and the experience of many ages; for the promise was made very long ago, yet we see no effect of it, nor any sensible sign of its accomplishment; the world goeth on in its old course, and things continue on the same foot since the fathers fell asleep; they seem to be forgotten, and none of these great things come to pass, in the expectation of which they died; one generation succeedeth another in the same track, and it is like to be so still, without any evidence of God's interposing in the manner his promises import. But such fond imaginations under the colour and appearance of reasoning, in which the scoffers flatter themselves they shew an uncommon strength and genius, courage and freedom of thought, the apostle imputeth to wilful ignorance, ver. 5. a stupid inattention to the plainest and most obvious truths concerning the power and wisdom of God in making the world, and disposing its several parts, and of his having actually interposed in the government of it, so directing events in the

inanimate creation as to answer the ends of SERM.  
moral government, by distributing rewards X.  
and punishments to men. Whatever the  
particular topic be, whether that of a fu-  
ture state, the essential difference of good  
and evil, a wise, just, and good providence  
ruling the world, or whatever other impor-  
tant principle, the spirit and manner of the  
scorners is the same; entering on subjects of  
the greatest moment with abundance of self-  
sufficiency, and it may be, a vivacity of  
imagination instead of a penetrating judg-  
ment, they think by halves, and take up with  
a bare unexamined probability on the side  
in favour of which they are prejudiced by  
their corrupt affections, or, perhaps, with  
a bold jest instead of a solid argument.

Indeed, their moral character, that is,  
the temper of their minds and their conduct,  
is of essential consideration to give us a just  
notion of the scorners. St. *Peter* saith in  
the place already mentioned, *they walk af-  
ter their own lusts*. And St. *Jude*, speak-  
ing of the same persons, whom he calls  
mockers, and the apostles of Christ foretold  
they should come in the last time, he de-  
scribeth them thus, *they walk after their  
own ungodly lusts, they are sensual, not having  
the spirit*. It is certain mens affections have  
a great

SER. M. a great influence on their understanding, and  
 X. go far in forming their judgment of things; they are easily induced to imagine that true which they are fond of, and very unwilling to discover a truth which must reproach them, is contrary to their interests, and will give them uneasiness in a course they are resolved to pursue. This is directly the case of a vicious man, with respect to religious inquiries, or seeking after wisdom. The truth lieth against the interest of his lusts and wicked habits, which he cannot, or rather will not, bring himself to a resolution of forsaking, and therefore is ready to catch at any pretence whereby he may countenance his continuing in them. If there be reality in religion, if there be a necessary and most important difference between moral good and evil, both in their nature and consequences, the sinner must be self-condemned, and therefore he maketh a hard shift to get rid of such troublesome principles, and at last to confound light and darkness, good and evil, *so to draw iniquity with the cords of vanity*, as the prophet speaketh, *Isaiab* v. 18. Or, to be encouraged in his wicked ways by frivolous deceitful pretences, till at last he arriveth to the utmost height of scorning, bidding defiance to Almighty  
 God,

God, as it followeth, ver. 19. *Let him make* SERM.  
*speed, and hasten his work that we may see it,* X.  
*and let the counsel of the holy One of Israel*  
*draw nigh and come, that we may know it.*

Thus I have explained to you the character of the scorner, which is a composition of pride, a contemptuous disbelief and rejection of the principles of religion, and obstinacy in vice. I proceed in the

*Second* place to show that it is, and must necessarily be the greatest obstruction to mens becoming truly wise; insomuch, that if the scorner (as the text saith) *seeketh wisdom, yet he findeth it not.* And this will easily appear, if we attend to the particulars already mentioned. First, it is plain that pride is a great hinderance both to the attainment of knowledge and virtue; whoever hath a high conceit of himself, on whatever account it is, if he hath an excessive value for any endowment, quality, or advantage of any kind, he is possessed of, he will despise not only other men, whom he looketh upon as his inferiors, in that point which he esteemeth so justly distinguishing, but he will despise other things which yet are acknowledged by a great many, indeed, the generality of men, to be very valuable

SERM. and praiseworthy. He that valueth himself  
 X. upon his riches, will despise another who  
 boasteth of high titles, a noble descent, or  
 some such distinguishing privilege; and  
 both of them have a very low opinion of  
 the wise and virtuous man, as a simple, a  
 weak, or a mean-spirited creature, not ca-  
 pable either through the weakness of his  
 understanding, or a silly scrupulousness, to  
 make his way in the world successfully, or  
 to make any figure in life. The man with  
 whom wisdom is in such contempt is not  
 likely to find it; though he should use some  
 diligence to acquire the reputable part, or  
 rather the external appearance, yet the reali-  
 ty of wisdom, which is religious virtue,  
 meekness, godliness, patience, self-denial,  
 and charity, these are despised by him:  
 How then can he find them? for *wisdom  
 loveth only them that love her, and those only  
 shall find, who seek her early*, Prov. viii. 17.

But, more particularly, the man who is  
 proud of his wisdom and his religion, is the  
 farthest off from becoming truly wise and  
 religious. His high conceit of his own suf-  
 ficiency, and of his great capacity and ac-  
 quisitions, rendereth him indeed incapable  
 of, and disinclined to, the only proper  
 means whereby that real excellent quality  
 can

can be attained; and therefore *Solomon* exhorteth the person who would hope to be a proficient in true wisdom, *not to be wise in his own eyes, nor lean to his own understanding*, Prov. iii. 5, 7. And *St. Paul* telleth us, *1 Cor.* viii. *That knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth; and if a man thinketh he knoweth any thing (so as to be conceited of his knowledge) he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.* And *Gal.* vi. 3. *If a man think himself to be something (a person of great weight and consideration, by reason of his great attainments, and fit to prescribe to others in the matters of religion) while he is nothing (no such person) he deceiveth himself:* By the practice of modesty and humble condescending charity, we should have much more ground of rejoicing and glorying in ourselves. What was it that made the *Jews*, and especially the proudest sect of them, the *Pharisees*, so untractable to the instructions of our Saviour, and such enemies to the simplicity of the gospel? It was evidently the pride of their hearts, and the high conceit they had of their own knowledge and sanctity. Our Lord plainly telleth them they were so much under the power of worldly and ambitious views, and had it so much at heart to maintain the applause of men, as persons

SERM.  
X.  
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SERM. of the greatest eminency, that this was the  
 X. very cause of their infidelity, or rejecting  
 his religion, which taught the professors of  
 it to pursue substantial goodness and the ap-  
 probation of God, not the esteem of the  
 world; *for how, saith he, John v. 44. can ye believe, who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only. And John xii. 43. Some of the chief rulers believed in Christ, were convinced in their hearts that the doctrine he taught was true and divine, yet they did not own that conviction, nor confess him to be the true Messiah, as they really believed he was, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God, and therefore would not expose themselves to excommunication and the reproach of apostacy, which at that time could not be avoided by any who would embrace the christian religion.*

The same reason for which Christ crucified, or the doctrine of the gospel, was to the *Jews* a stumbling-block, made it to the *Greeks* foolishness. As the former proudly endeavouring to establish a righteousness of their own by their own performances, would not submit to the righteousness, or the method of justification or acceptance with God, which is by faith. So to the other who valued



valued themselves upon their philosophy and their eloquence, their science so called, which was then in great reputation, such a simple institution as that of christianity, so plain, accommodated to the weakest capacities, without any shew of learning, taught by illiterate men who sought not their own honour, nor at all attributed the contrivance or the success of their doctrine to any skill and wisdom of theirs, but wholly to God: To these proud conceited *Greeks*, I say, such an artless institution as that of the gospel, appeared very contemptible. And, in general, that it must be so, that the pride of men, a high conceit of their own wisdom must hinder them to become truly wise, is evident, because it marreth diligence and impartiality, without which no man can be successful in his enquiries, nor attain to understanding in any thing. The scorner will not admit a suspicion of any error; the opinion and the schemes of religion he hath embraced, however wrong and faulty in themselves, have a great advantage to recommend them to his esteem, because they are his own, and they are now no more to be subjected to a new examination: To discover an error would be an affront to him, and he standeth too fair with himself to sub-

S E R M.  
X.  
}

SERM. mit to it; and what need is there of any  
 Y. more diligence in searching? he hath formed  
 his judgment of things, and the measures of  
 his conduct, with a sufficiency of knowledge  
 and prudence. Farther, as this disposition  
 naturally groweth upon men when they do  
 not set themselves in opposition to it, and  
 take proper methods to subdue it, it must  
 at last effectually defeat all means of instruc-  
 tion and amendment, because it maketh the  
 scorner impatient of admonitions and re-  
 bukes. So *Solomon* often telleth us, that the  
 scorner heareth not reproof, that he hateth  
 it, and the person who in the friendliest  
 manner offereth it to him; and it is con-  
 cerning persons of this temper, that our Sa-  
 viour warneth his disciples, that they should  
 prudently avoid laying the wise admonitions  
 of the gospel before them, lest they should  
 not only be defeated by their incorrigible  
 obstinacy, but be the occasion of brutish  
 violence and contempt, which he expresseth  
 thus, *Matt. vii. 6. Give not that which is  
 holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls  
 before swine, lest they trample them under  
 their feet, and turn again and rend you.*  
 The man who is so far engaged in the in-  
 terest of his vices; and so wholly under their  
 power, that even his understanding is cap-  
 tivated

tivated, and he denieth and despiseth the SERM.  
X. first principles of religion and virtue, seemeth to be altogether incurable; all the avenues of his soul shut up, that wisdom cannot enter; and the proud impious imaginations he hath set up in its place, are an impregnable defence against it.

Besides, this perverse disposition rendereth men obnoxious to the displeasure of God, and entirely disqualified for receiving favour from him, especially that great favour of instruction, such a perfect gift as wisdom, which cometh *down from the father of lights.* *Prov. iii. 34. Surely he scorneth the scorers, but giveth grace unto the lowly;* he will deal with the insolent despisers of his glorious perfections and sovereign dominion according to their wickedness. Other sinners disobey, but they defy him; they are represented elsewhere in scripture, as saying, *Who is Lord over us? and, we are lords, we will come no more unto thee.* The proud are in a very peculiar manner, and above all others, the enemies of God, therefore he resisteth them, as the apostle *James iv. 6.* interpreteth the words of *Solomon* just now mentioned. Seeing then the scorner rendereth himself so utterly incapable by wicked prejudices, unfitting his own rational powers

SERM. for their proper exercise in a fair enquiry;  
 X. and seeing by his wickedness he so provoketh  
 God, grieving his spirit who teacheth men, and giveth them understanding, how is it possible he should find wisdom?

All the application I shall make, is only to exhort you to humility, as a most necessary qualification for your increase in useful knowledge, and in every christian virtue; *God giveth grace to the humble.* There is no disposition more becoming our religious profession and character as disciples of Christ, who hath commanded his followers to imitate him, and learn of him, for *that he is meek and lowly in heart*, and declared that one of the best preparations for entering into his kingdom is humility, which he representeth by the emblem of the harmless innocence and unambitious simplicity of a child, *Matt. xviii. 3.* having called a little child, and set him in the midst, he said, *except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*

There may be mistaken notions concerning this as well as other christian virtues. It is far from consisting in any such sentiments

ments as disparage the human nature, or any such temper and behaviour as are unworthy its dignity; we must not degrade ourselves into a lower species that we may be humble men; that is rather to unman ourselves: nay, we ought to contend for the privileges of our being, for the freedom which belongeth to us as men, in the use of our reason for directing our conduct, and all other common rights; to betray and give them up to any invader, is abject baseness, and no virtue at all: And as the apostle, *Rom. xii. 3.* exhorteth every man *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but soberly,* humility doth not require any man to think more meanly than the truth. But with respect to God, it consisteth in a just sense of our own subjection and dependance, of our own weakness and guilt, that we may be ready to yield him that obedience and resignation he claimeth, and to comply with those methods for our instruction and salvation he prescribeth; and with respect to men, it consisteth in a due regard of their common rights, and to those which belong to every one in particular, according to their several relations, and their valuable and useful abilities, qualities, and accomplishments of any kind, without encroaching

SERM. croaching upon them, or derogating from  
 X. them; or from the honour and good offices  
 they justly claim, according to the laws of hu-  
 manity, justice, and charity. This disposition  
 and behaviour directly opposite to that of the  
 scorner, as it will entitle us to the favour of  
 God, and the approbation of all good men, *for  
 before honour is humility, and pride goeth before  
 a fall*; and our Saviour telleth us, *Luke xviii.  
 14. Every one that exalteth himself shall be  
 abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be  
 exalted*, so it will preserve an inward equa-  
 nimity and self-satisfaction, free from those  
 tempests and furious tumults of mind to  
 which the pride and passions of men always  
 expose them, and is the surest way to grow  
 in every valuable quality, and particularly,  
*to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our  
 Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, 2 Pet. iii,  
 18.*

## S E R M O N XI.

Attending public I N S T R U C T I O N,  
and other instrumental D U T I E S,  
recommended.

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P R O V E R B S VIII. 34.

*Blessed is the man that beareth me, watching  
daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of  
my doors.*

I Have endeavoured in some discourses, SERM.  
XI.  
from several passages in this book, to lay  
before you the necessary qualifications for  
our attaining true wisdom or religious vir-  
tue, and set against them the greatest hin-  
derances, which must be removed; particu-  
ly insisting on the prevailing love of wisdom,  
diligence in the use of all proper means for  
acquiring it, a dispassionate temper of mind,  
and humility. It is certain that our vehe-  
ment irregular affections and passions do  
most unhappily obstruct our growth in grace  
and saving knowledge, and nothing more  
than pride and affectation. I might have  
enlarged

SERM. enlarged on other particular Vices which the  
 XI. author hath hinted in his *Proverbs*, as ob-  
 structions to wisdom, such as cowardice, or  
 an undue fear of men, lasciviousness, intem-  
 perance, covetousness, and wrath, which  
 do all of them darken the mind, marr its  
 progress in any kind of valuable knowledge,  
 weaken its force and expose it a prey to  
 temptations; but some of these have been  
 occasionally touched upon, and such general  
 rules of self-government laid down, as, if  
 duly applied, might be a defence to us  
 against them all.

What I intend at this time, is, to re-  
 commend the careful use of those solemn  
 means, which God hath graciously instituted  
 for our attaining to religious wisdom; and I  
 think the text giveth a just occasion for it:  
*Solomon* representeth wisdom as a divine per-  
 son, making a public appearance in the  
 world, setting up a court, or rather a school,  
 sending out her ministers, inviting men, even  
 the most rude and ignorant, to become her  
 disciples, by which they may hope for great  
 advantage. I know not what can be more  
 naturally understood by all this, than the  
 gracious design God hath formed and exe-  
 cuted for recovering men from their igno-  
 rance, corruption, and misery, and bringing  
 them



them into the way of virtue and happiness, SERM.  
 by an exprefs revelation and positive institu- XI.  
 tions, which he hath published to them with  
 all necessary solemnity. However amiable  
 and excellent wisdom may appear to con-  
 siderate minds, in her most simple and na-  
 tural form, and whatever force there may  
 be apprehended in reason to overcome pre-  
 judices againſt the things which are pure,  
 and juſt, and true, and honeſt, and virtuous;  
 yet mankind were become ſo degenerate, ſo  
 univerſally depraved, even *dead in treſpaſſes  
 and ſins*, that to reclaim them there need-  
 ed, and we ought to eſteem it an invaluable  
 advantage, and a very great favour that there  
 is granted, a ſpecial interpoſition of hea-  
 ven, a plain and direct call from God by a  
 poſitive law, with encouragements beyond  
 what human underſtanding could deviſe,  
 and aſſiſtance above the mere force of na-  
 ture. The divine revelation hath indeed ap-  
 peared in different forms, and the laſt is the  
 moſt perfect, I mean the goſpel, *Heb. i. 1,*  
*2. God who at ſundry times, and in divers*  
*manners, ſpake in times paſt unto the fathers*  
*by the prophets, hath in theſe laſt days ſpoken*  
*unto us by his Son.* And we may be ſure the  
 moſt compleat ſyſtem, with the greateſt ad-  
 vantages of every ſort, the moſt powerful  
 ſanction

SERM. sanction to enforce it, the clearest instruction,  
 XI. and the purest manner of administration,  
 as well as the most convincing evidence of  
 its truth and divine authority; were worthy  
 of such a messenger.

But I will consider the open appearance of wisdom and the public plan of her doctrines and rules, abstractly from what is peculiar in any dispensation. The respect which is due from men, is, *to bear*, and the text pronounceth them blessed who do so. Their duty is farther thus expressed, *watching daily at the gates of wisdom, and waiting at the posts of her doors*. As the gates and avenues to the houses of the great are filled with retainers, as servants, subjects, vassals, and other dependants (according to the various distinctions of men in higher or lower stations) who are continually thronging thither to pay their homage, and to present their petitions; and as scholars intent upon learning, diligently attend public lectures, and all other means of teaching, so we ought to make our court to wisdom, and be most solicitous to embrace every opportunity of admission into her favour. It will be no difficulty to understand the particulars which are represented by this allusion, that is, the instrumental duties of religion,

ligon, pursuant to the established methods of S E R M. instruction which God hath appointed, such XI. as searching the holy books, the standing record of the divine doctrine and laws, which God himself often enjoineth, and it hath been successfully practised by the best proficients in wisdom; the attending opportunities of public instruction, *not forsaking the assembling ourselves together*, as the apostle directeth, *Heb. x. 25.* and assiduity in prayer for that illumination, which God hath promised by giving his *spirit to them that ask.* But I shall not pursue the detail of these particulars, which are obvious to every one who knoweth the method God hath taken in revealing his will, and the forms of service he hath prescribed. I will endeavour in this discourse to shew you,

- I. The reasonableness of attending all the instituted means of our instruction.
- II. The respect of wisdom, which is imported in hearing.
- III. The proper dispositions of mind, and the manner of hearing and using all means, signified by *watching daily at the gates of wisdom, and waiting at the posts of her doors.*

First,

SERM. *First*, To shew the reasonableness of our  
 XI. attending all the instituted means of instruction; and this will easily appear to any considerate person: If God had never vouchsafed to men a positive revelation, *if wisdom had never cried, nor understanding lifted up her voice in that manner to the children of men*, if we had never known any thing of her but by the soft whispers in our own breasts, that sense of moral goodness and excellence, which we feel whenever we attend to it, though it is in the generality of men very much overborne by the tumults of the imagination, by vehement selfish passions, and evil habits; if, I say, it were so, we should have been obliged, under all the discouragements and difficulties which attend our present frailty, to *feel* after virtue if happily *we might find it*, as the apostle speaketh of mens seeking God by the light of nature, *Acts xvii. 27*. And it is surprizing to what length some have arrived without the help of that *grace which bringeth salvation, and hath appeared unto us*. But when it hath pleased God to erect a kingdom in the world, when we have laws published, examples, promises, divine assistance, when there is a public administration whereby we are *called to glory and virtue*, and the divine

power hath given us all things which pertain unto life and godliness; for us to be obstinately unattentive, *like the adder that stoppeth her ear and will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charming ever so wisely*, as the Psalmist expresseth the obduracy of sinners, *Psal. lviii*, to treat all the offers God hath made us with neglect, and the means he hath appointed for our reformation, without so much as repairing to the courts of his wisdom, or using any of the methods prescribed for our instruction and amendment; this surely is great ingratitude, a heinous contempt of God's authority, an affront to his love, and it must be inexcusable folly so to neglect our own true interest. Yet how many are there who shew a wretched indifference to the means of their sanctification and salvation, choosing to spend their time in amusement, or wholly about the affairs of the present life, while the solemn invitations of wisdom, the *feast she hath prepared* for their entertainment, as *Solomon* representeth the provision which divine grace hath made for the souls of men, in the ixth chapter of this book, while, I say, these invitations are contemned as if they were mere trifles? But supposing men so far sensible of the respect due to a divine revelation,

S E R M.  
X I.

SERM. tion, that they attend the publishing it,  
 XI. and use the outward means God hath appointed for their Instruction, a great deal more remaineth yet to be done, that they may be entitled to the blessedness here pronounced by *Solomon*, to those who hear wisdom. It is not merely an outward attendance the word of God demandeth, many who pay it that respect, and even profess to believe it, yet receive the grace of God in vain; I, will therefore proceed in the

*Second* place, to consider what is imported in hearing. And let us observe that the scripture representeth this as the sum of that duty and respect which God demandeth for Christ who is his wisdom, and the great revealer of his will to mankind. In one of the most celebrated prophecies of the Old Testament, concerning the Messias, this is expressly required with great solemnity, and under the most severe penalties, *Deut. xviii. 15.* *The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, like unto me (saith Moses) unto him shall ye hearken; almost the same words are repeated in ver. 18. and in the 19th it is added, and it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto*

my words which he shall speak in my name, I SERM.  
will require it of him. When the Son of God XI.

appeared in flesh, and entered upon his public ministry, a voice from the excellent glory, as St. Peter; an eye and ear witness calleth it, recommended him to some of the apostles, and by their testimony to the world in this manner, *Mat. xvii. 5. This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.* Thus it is apparent that whatever is meant by hearing Christ the wisdom of the Father, or hearing that last and most perfect revelation God hath given of his mind to the world, it is enjoined and enforced with all the authority and obligatory power with which any divine precept can be enforced. By *Moses* God made his will known to *Israel*; and gradually prepared the way by predictions and types for the compleat scheme of revealed religion in the gospel, which is the clearest call of wisdom to the children of men. *Moses* who was to be regarded by the people of God, as an inspired teacher, foretelleth the coming of another great prophet, the author of a new dispensation, and declareth before-hand, in the name of God, that he was to be hearkened unto under the highest penalty for contempt and disobedience; and

SERM. when this divine messenger actually came  
 XI. into the world, God himself, by an express  
 voice from heaven, commanded men to  
 bear him.

Now, *bearing*, in the text, and other parallel declarations of scripture, importeth a serious and attentive consideration; not merely the use of the external sense commonly signified by that word, but principally, a diligent application of the mind to understand the important contents of the divine message. Our blessed Saviour, in his parable of the sower, *Matt. xiii.* representeth some hearers of the gospel by the similitude of ground by the way-side, so hard, being constantly trod upon, that the seed doth not enter into it, but is catched away by the fowls; which he thus applieth to the careless unattentive professors of religion; they hear indeed, but *understand not the word of the kingdom; then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which is sown in their hearts.* Their not understanding it is not a simple ignorance arising from incapacity, or spoken of without any regard to the causes of it; for it is plain our Lord intendeth to lay blame on such hearers, and to charge them with guilt, which he could not do, if their ignorance proceeded altogether



ther from a defect of natural capacity ; or, SERM.  
which is the same thing in this respect, that XI.  
it equally vindicateth them from guilt, the  
want of sufficient perspicuity in the gospel,  
when compared with the rational powers of  
those to whom it is directed. But, by not  
understanding, is meant not considering,  
which hath just the same effect with igno-  
rance as to any good improvement ; or,  
however, no other ignorance is meant, than  
such as is the fruit of inattention, which ex-  
perience sheweth us it very often is. It is  
very plain that the best use we can make of  
our understanding, is in a close and vigorous  
attention ; and our progress in useful know-  
ledge dependeth more upon this than any  
thing else we can do. External informa-  
tion, and hearing, in the most obvious sense,  
is at first necessary, and may be afterwards  
very useful, but inward application of the  
mind, and fixing its thoughts upon the im-  
portant object, is more universally profitable.  
This is always within the reach of our own  
power, and without it the other will make  
no impression, nor can we obtain any be-  
nefit by it.

This is what we are, in the first place, to  
understand by hearing ; an attentive regard  
to instruction. Amidst the amusements of

SERM. a vain world, and a variety of voices found-  
 XI. ing in our ears, and calling us different ways,  
 the wisdom of God hath the first right to  
 be heard, and what he prescribeth, to be at-  
 tended to. A great and necessary point is  
 then gained, and a foundation laid for our  
 obedience; for as one fatal, and, indeed,  
 very general cause of disobedience, is inat-  
 tention, when once we are delivered from  
 that, a quite contrary course may be ex-  
 pected. There can be little doubt but reli-  
 gion will make way for itself and prevail, if  
 we let it so far into our hearts, as to give it  
 a fair hearing. It may be justly said, no  
 man was ever impious and wicked upon  
 mature deliberation; and to say otherwise is  
 to affront religion, and in effect to say the  
 directly contrary to what the apostle affirm-  
 eth, that *it is a reasonable service*. But  
 though in fact a great many who hear and  
 profess religion, are so hardened through  
 the deceitfulness of sin, that no impress-  
 ion is made upon them, it is, we will acknow-  
 ledge, a reasonable demand on behalf of di-  
 vine wisdom, and particularly of the great  
 prophet whom God hath sent into the  
 world, that we should listen to and seri-  
 ously consider what he saith; and that we  
 should try whether there be such truth and  
 such

such importance in his doctrines and pre-  
 cepts as is pretended. The christian reve-  
 lation is far from requiring the assent and  
 obedience of men without inquiring; on the  
 contrary, the first teachers of it always ad-  
 dressed themselves to the understandings of  
 men, and appealed to their reason, desiring  
 every one candidly to examine, and to judge  
 for himself; and particularly in the xviiith of  
 the *Acts* and 11th verse, the *Bereans* are  
 greatly commended, as shewing a more no-  
 ble spirit than others, in that *they received*  
*the word with all readiness of mind*, that is,  
 not without examination, but upon a full  
 trial, and after searching carefully whether  
 those things *were so* as the apostle repre-  
 sented them.

2dly, Hearing signifieth a submissive dis-  
 position, receiving with a suitable deference  
 what our heavenly Father is pleased to re-  
 veal to us, giving it such an entertainment  
 as the nature of the things revealed severally  
 requireth. To hear, is to turn at the re-  
 proofs of wisdom, to tremble at the threat-  
 nings of God, to hope in his promises, and  
 practise what he enjoineth; and, in general,  
 that we may give such a becoming enter-  
 tainment to every declaration of his will, we  
 must believe them all: Nor is this a blind

SERM. and irrational persuasion, but such as we are  
 XI. determined to by the highest and best evi-  
 { dence, having first impartially examined,  
 and been satisfied concerning the characters  
 and proofs of a divine revelation. There  
 cannot be a more certain principle than this  
 upon which our faith resteth, *it is impossible  
 for God to lie.* He can neither be deceived  
 himself, nor deceive us; but *he that hath  
 received the testimony of Christ* (to whom  
 God beareth witness by many signs and  
 wonders) *hath set to his seal, that God is  
 true,* John iii. 33. An implicit faith our  
 Lord justly claimeth, that we should take  
 upon trust whatever he hath revealed, rest-  
 ing on his infallibility, and *casting down  
 imaginations, and every high thing which  
 exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.*  
 Whatever difficulties there may appear in  
 the sayings of divine wisdom from the pre-  
 judices of men, whatever irregular lusts and  
 passions may suggest in opposition to them,  
 we ought to be in the humblest manner re-  
 signed to our great unerring teacher. Many,  
 indeed, of our Saviour's hearers were of-  
 fended at his doctrines and spiritual precepts;  
 they objected that his sayings were hard; they  
 asked how these things could be, and they  
 forsook him. But it is only our prejudices  
 and

and passions he requireth us to deny, that we may be his disciples; not our reason, for to that he teacheth nothing contrary.

SERM.  
XI.

Certain it is, God doth not require us to believe a contradiction or absurdity, or what appeareth to be so to our own understanding upon an impartial inquiry, it being impossible that we should really believe it; and to imagine that christianity containeth any such thing, is to reproach it and its blessed author. If, for example, any one should impose upon us, under the pretence of divine authority, such a principle as *transubstantiation*, which containeth a manifest absurdity, and destroyeth the very foundations of human knowledge, as we could not possibly assent to it with understanding, we ought not to profess it. It is the suggestions of corrupt appetite and passions, the inclinations of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, we ought to deny, in order to the obedience of faith, not the principles of reason, which are originally from God, and as truly as revelation is.

We ought, however, to make a difference between the teachers of divine truth; such as God hath sealed, and given them sufficient credentials of their mission from him, should be submitted to, and their doctrine

SERM. doctrine received without reserve; but the  
 XI. instructions of all other teachers ought to  
 be examined and compared with the authentic declarations of a well-attested revelation, and no farther received than as they are founded upon inquiry, by every one judging for himself, agreeable to them. And thus our Saviour, the author of our religion, hath taught us to distinguish between him and others, *Matt. xxiii. 8.* He will not allow his professed followers to be called, or to call any man *rabbi*, master, and that because one is their teacher and master, even Christ. To allow men an equal authority with him, or which is in effect the same, to regard them as infallible interpreters of his mind, is to deny him. An implicit faith in him, is what he requireth from his disciples, and is the very spirit of christianity; an implicit faith in men is the bane of it.

*Lastly,* Hearing wisdom importeth an absolute unreserved obedience. A multitude of instances might be produced to shew that, according to the stile of the sacred writers, this is the sense of hearing God; and that for this good reason, because obedience will be the certain effect of hearing, as it hath been already explained. If we hear with  
 attention

attention and reverence, impartially and SERM.  
without prejudice, our minds will then say XI.

to the Lord, *Speak, for thy servant heareth;* and as Saul did at his conversion, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts vii. 6.

I am ready, without delay or conferring with flesh and blood, to follow thy direction, and no sooner shall I be favoured with an intimation of thy will, than I shall immediately prepare myself to do it. This respect to Christ our supreme teacher, I take to be that wherein a truly christian disposition doth consist, the very sum of our duty, at least that which God will accept, but nothing less, according to the grace of the gospel. Defects there may be, no doubt there are, even in a heart thus disposed, through remaining ignorance and infirmities; but when such is the habitual prevailing temper, the soul hath confidence towards God, as being one who sincerely heareth his wisdom. Sincerity is to be determined by the prevalence of good affections against the contrary; that is, sincere love to God which prevaieth against the love of the world; and so we then sincerely hear Christ, when it is the fixed governing purpose of our hearts to follow him, whatsoever may call or solicit us to the contrary.

If

SER. M. If all men upon earth should press us to  
 XI. what, upon the best inquiry we can make,  
 { appeareth disagreeable to his will, we ought  
 to forsake them and follow him ; if our present  
 interest, and the most importunate inclinations  
 of the flesh, should direct us one way, and he  
 another, we must renounce them, and cleave to  
 him. I come, in the

*Third* place, to consider the proper dispositions  
 of mind, and the manner of hearing and using  
 all means, signified by *watching daily at the  
 gates of wisdom, and waiting at the posts of  
 her doors*. And, first, it importeth a sense of  
 our constant need of instruction, that we may  
 be still making farther progress in knowledge  
 and in grace. It is not enough that we have  
 once entered into the courts of wisdom, and  
 are listed among her votaries, that we have  
 given a respectful attention to her laws, and  
 even obeyed them ; there is a necessity of  
 renewed continual application ; and that,  
 unsatisfied with the present measure of our  
 attainments, we should daily endeavour to  
 make farther proficiency. The wisest and  
 best men are most sensible of their defects,  
 and therefore, after the example of *Moses*  
 and *David*, they incessantly pray that God  
 would



would shew them his glory, and teach them SERM.  
 his way. The apostle representeth to us XI.  
 the genuine spirit of a christian, in the ac-  
 count he giveth of himself, most worthy of  
 our imitation, *Phil. iii. 12, &c. Not as tho'*  
*I had already attained, or were already per-*  
*fect; but I follow after, that I may appre-*  
*bend that for which I am also apprehended of*  
*Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself*  
*to have apprehended; but this one thing I do,*  
*forgetting those things which are behind, and*  
*reaching forth unto those things which are*  
*before, I press towards the mark, for the*  
*prize of the high calling of God in Christ*  
*Jesus.* If this be the temper of our minds,  
 it will incline us to a daily attendance at the  
 gates of wisdom, that is, a daily use of the  
 appointed means for our increase in know-  
 ledge and virtue. There is a rich treasure  
 of important truth in the sacred oracles,  
 which, by searching and a regular diligence  
 in the use of appointed means, may be found  
 out, and usefully applied for our advancing  
 to perfection in religious virtue; and the di-  
 vine Spirit, who presideth over means, and  
 gives them efficacy, interposeth by his gra-  
 cious influence, co-operating with the sacred  
 institutions, whereby they become effectual;  
 which being the earnest expectation and hope

SERM. of sincere christians; engageth them to a  
 XI. constant attendance. Besides a growth in

knowledge, which is earnestly desired, as being the foundation of increase in every good quality, and abounding in every good work, we are so apt to let divine truths slip out of our minds, that we need to be often stirred up by way of remembrance, which is one proper end of the holy ministrations: For this it was that the apostle *Peter* wrote both his epistles, as he telleth us in the 3d chapter of his second epistle, and 1st verse; and he declareth it to have been the proper business of his apostolic office, as long as he lived, to stir up christians, chap. i. 12, 13. *Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of those things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth: yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance.* But still, a religious practice, what our Saviour calleth *good fruits*, the fruits of righteousness and charity, and the apostle describeth as works which are *good and profitable to men*, these are the great end of sacred ministrations, and should be our end in attending them. Then are we the true disciples of wisdom, and watch at her gates not in vain, when

we constantly pursue the design of reforming our lives, strengthening good dispositions, correcting bad ones, and that we may abound more and more in the fruits of righteousness, *which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory of God.*

2dly, Our watching at the gates of wisdom, and waiting at the posts of her doors, that is, the regular performance of the instrumental duties of religion, requireth a constant care and sollicitude that the benefit of them may not be lost; and, particularly, a strict vigilance over our own spirits and our whole behaviour. They who wait at the doors of the great, are always ready to embrace every occasion of getting their business done, their homage paid, or their petitions presented; they will not amuse themselves with trifles, neglecting their chief concern, that would be very indecent in such circumstances, and foolish. When we go up to the house of God, to the solemnities of public worship, or use any other means appointed for our instruction, we ought to consider ourselves as servants in waiting, and to be wholly taken up in the business of our present service, attending with earnest desire and a resolution of ready obedience, every signification of our master's will. *Behold,*

SERM. *bold*, saith the Psalmist, *Psal. cxxiii. 2. as*  
 XI. *the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their*  
*masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the*  
*hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon*  
*the Lord our God.* But every one who re-  
 flecteth on himself, will find, by experience,  
 it is no small difficulty to preserve such a  
 temper of mind, to watch all the avenues  
 of the heart, and keep it with diligence, as  
*Solomon* adviseth, to prevent the incurSIONS  
 of vanity, and restrain the wanderings of the  
 imagination, so that the service of God may  
 be performed, and the proper design of it  
 pursued without distraction.

3dly, We have need of patience, which  
 also is signified by waiting. Our progress  
 in religious knowledge and virtue is gradual.  
 God hath been pleased to accommodate his  
 methods of instruction to our weakness; as  
 little children are taught the first rudiments  
 of knowledge very slowly, and the same  
 things must be often repeated and inculcated  
 to make an impression upon their minds; so  
 the prophet representeth the divine con-  
 descension in communicating useful truths  
 and precepts to those who are slow of heart  
 to understand and receive them, *Isa. xxviii.*  
 10. *For precept must be upon precept, pre-*  
*cept upon precept, line upon line, line upon*  
*line,*

*line, here a little and there a little.* So we ought to attend with unwearied assiduity the means of religion, till we obtain the benefit of them. I do not say we should be patient of any thing that is sinful in ourselves, for that is not the proper object of patience; and it is certain there is sin in our imperfections and infirmities, intended to be cured by the prescriptions of wisdom; yet patience is the character of a continuance in well doing, as well as of enduring afflictions, and while we have many difficulties to struggle with, arising from temptations and from our own frailty, we ought not to weary and faint in our minds, for that will end in unactive sloth; the gates of wisdom will then be unfrequented by us, or we shall repair to them without earnest desire, without spirit and resolution, whereby our attendance will become unprofitable to us. Very often indeed so it is, that little sensible advantage is obtained by the means of religion, which is always chargeable on ourselves; for the means are in themselves, well fitted to their proper end. Any one who seriously considers them, will see that this is particularly the character of the christian institutions. But from whatever cause it ariseth, there is a danger of the

SERM.  
XI.  
}

SERM. service of God's being insipid and burthen-  
 XI. some to us, and of our being indifferent  
 and spiritless in it, against which we should  
 guard with the utmost care, and always endeavour with alacrity and vigor to use the means of our religious instruction and improvement.

Let us, my brethren, very seriously consider this important declaration in the text, that they are blessed who *hear wisdom, watching at her gates, and the posts of her doors*. If wisdom be in itself an excellent attainment, the very perfection and integrity of the human nature, if its ways be pleasantness and peace, and will entitle us to a great future reward, then certainly we should seek it with the greatest earnestness, cry after it, as *Solomon* speaketh, and use diligently all proper means for attaining it. As they are blessed who hear, on the contrary, they make themselves unhappy who despise instruction; as it is said at ver. 36. of this chapter, in the name of wisdom, *He that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me, love death; and yet more fully, in the first chapter of this book from the 24th verse, the miserable effects of such despite to wisdom are laid before us, because I have called and ye refused,*

fused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded it; but ye have set at nought all my counsels, and would none of my reproof; I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall you call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof; therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

SERM.

XI.

These threatenings in their full meaning are certainly intended against obstinate incorrigible sinners; but even lower degrees of disrespect to the appointed means of instruction are faulty, which yet do not amount to an utter hatred of knowledge and rejecting the fear of the Lord. As it is very plain that Christianity requireth our assembling together for the purposes of worship; I cannot but observe, that some christians neglecting it so much as they do, sheweth too great an indifference to the injunctions of our Lord, and to the design of such assemblies. This is so much the rather to

SERM. be taken notice of because it hath for some  
 XI. time been growing among the protestants  
 of our denomination. Perhaps some may think they cannot expect any great improvement in knowledge by the public instructions; yet their declining them is an offensive example, tending to bring them into disesteem and disuse among others who both need and may receive information by them in matters of the greatest moment. Besides, a well-disposed mind may bear (and think it no disagreeable entertainment) to be stirred up by way of remembrance, by the repeating and inculcating useful truths. And considering the many avocations we have from pious exercises, it may not be unprofitable for the best and wisest, jointly with their fellow-christians, at set-times to engage their solemn attention to the things of religion, and endeavour to excite good affections in themselves, which may contribute to their defence against the returning temptations of the world. On these accounts, I cannot but wish, for their own sakes, and for the common edification of the churches, that christians were more earnest and constant in attending the public instructions of wisdom, *and watching at her gates.*



## S E R M O N XII.

Walking with WISE MEN, a MEANS  
of attaining to WISDOM.

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PROVERBS XIII. 20.

*He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise.*


I Have propos'd to your consieration, from SERM.  
XII.  
several passages in this book, some necessary qualifications and rules in order to our attaining true wisdom, and to our establishment and growth in it: The last I insisted on, was, the diligent use of the means God hath instituted for this end. Divine wisdom crieth, and understanding hath lifted up her voice, as this author speaketh, that is, God hath given a gracious revelation of his will, sent messengers into the world, and established a public order for the instruction and reformation of men; and on our part the most submissive respect is due to his appointed method; *bearing, watching at the gates of wisdom, and waiting daily at the posts of her doors*; or a

SERM. reverent attendance on the solemnities of religion, receiving with a sincere purpose of conforming our lives to it; all which we shall find upon an impartial enquiry to be the will of God, and hoping with an earnest expectation, and patient waiting, for the invaluable benefits he hath promised to communicate to men by the methods of his grace.

I propose now to consider it as a good expedient for our becoming virtuous, and increasing in virtue, that we should designedly, and of choice, associate with virtuous persons, and shun as infectious the society of the wicked. *He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise.* I shall,

- I. Endeavour to shew you what it is to walk with wise men, in the sense of this text.
- II. The influence of it to our attaining wisdom.

*First,* What it is to walk with wise men; and I take it to signify, that we should chuse persons of that character for our intimate friends, and voluntarily join in their company and conversation. A man may be carried, or forced to go, contrary to his inclinations; but

but walking is the motion which one SERM.  
 chooseth. As the general tenor of a man's XII.  
 designs, and the course of his free actions,   
 is, by the sacred writers, described under  
 the notion of *his walk*; to walk with a  
 person, in their stile, denoteth a friendly  
 communication and delightful society, tak-  
 ing him into our councils, intimating our  
 difficulties to him, seeking his advice, and  
 depending on his aid.

Thus it is, that the servants of God walk  
 with him, and, in proportion to their capa-  
 city of mutual good offices, so they walk  
 with one another. It followeth then, that a  
 mere involuntary presence with the vicious,  
 or being unwillingly deprived of the society  
 of the good, is not a trespass against the  
 rule here recommended. The first of these  
 cases will not make us those companions of  
 the wicked, who are threatened with de-  
 struction in the last words of this verse, *the  
 companion of fools shall be destroyed*; nor is  
 the other, being necessarily and unavoidably  
 deprived of the society of good men, a  
 culpable neglect of the means to get wis-  
 dom. Providence may appoint a good man's  
 station among sinners, perhaps, for the  
 trial of his integrity, or that he may be a  
 witness against their crimes. *Noah* had the

SERM. affliction to be in a world of the ungodly,  
 XII. when a mighty torrent of iniquity and profaneſs brought on a flood of waters which overthrew *their foundation*, as it is expreſſed in the book of *Job*; and juſt *Lot* lived in *Sodom*, where *his righteous ſoul was vexed in ſeeing and bearing every day, the filthy converſation of the wicked*. Surely it was not imputed to theſe excellent perſons as a fault that they did not walk with wiſe men, when there were no wiſe men for them to walk with; and ſo far from being the guilty companions of fools, who ſhould periſh with them in one common deſtruction, God marked them out to a peculiar ſalvation; and having made their hearty but ineffectual remonſtrances againſt the prevailing wickedneſs of the times and places they lived in, they were preſerved from the ruin which came like a whirlwind on finners by an extraordinary divine interpoſition.

Again, ſometimes the beſt men converſe familiarly with the wicked, and it is neceſſary for them to do ſo, yet without a participation in their crimes. On the contrary, it is their deſign and aſſiduous endeavour to convince the unrighteous of their errors, and reclaim them from their follies. Thus our Saviour converſed with publicans

and finners, though he was *holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from finners.* This was indeed imputed unto him as a fault by the *Pharisees*, who placed religion wholly in external forms, and valued themselves upon an appearance of sanctity, whereby they were distinguished from others, whom they superciliously despised; but our Lord vindicateth his conduct upon the very best principles, the most perfect zeal for virtue, and charity to men. After him, the apostles, imitating his example, and inspired with his spirit, laboured incessantly for the conversion of an ignorant and a corrupt world; and instead of being infected with the folly of those they conversed with, they were the successful instruments of making many wise and turning them to righteousness.

Besides that noble design which religion, far from disallowing, urgeth us earnestly to, as the very best we can pursue, I mean, to endeavour by wholesome counsels, as well as a good example, the conversion of sinners from the error of their way; besides this, I say, the present state of human affairs requireth that we associate with men of all characters. Civil communities, so necessary for the preservation of order and peace in the world, are made up of good  
and

SERM. and bad ; good offices of fellow citizens, and  
 XII. a correspondence for the purposes of society,  
 are not appropriated to the wise, though it  
 is certain they are the most useful members,  
 in proportion to the measure of their wisdom  
 or virtue.

Nay, in nearer relations, scarce is there any so happy as to be free from the company of *fools* ; even families are seldom so well constituted but that the virtuous are joined in them with the froward and vicious ; yet in such cases it doth not become immediately our duty to discharge ourselves with violence from the obligation, and break off all occasions of such correspondence ; on the contrary, the scripture, in such a case, prescribeth patience, meekness, and compassion to the evil. The apostle directeth christians to carry it so to their fellow professors of the gospel, whose immoral lives dishonour it, as to testify an abhorrence of wicked practices, and to preserve themselves from infection by ill example. I Cor. v. 11. *I have written to you, not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother (that is a christian) be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one no not to eat : He carrieth so far as to the avoiding, when it can be done,*

done, the offices of civil friendship with scandalous christians; not that we should implicitly follow the decrees of the church, and shun the company of those she excommunicateth; but every man judging for himself, pursuant to the rule in my text, is for his own sake to avoid the intimate conversation of those whom he plainly seeth to be wicked, that so he may escape the contagion of sin: And yet when the apostle directeth christians to shun the company of the vicious, that must not proceed from ill will, nor should be attended with bitter wrathful reproaches, and marks of contempt, which are very opposite to the spirit of christianity; it should rather flow from a charitable design to reclaim the offender, for thus he elsewhere directeth, *2 Thes. iii. 14. If any man obey not our word by this epistle (that is, the moral precepts of the gospel which he had recommended) note that man and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed; yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.* But in the place before referred to, *1 Cor. v.* the apostle plainly sheweth, that he did not mean to forbid all kind of correspondence with, or denying the offices of humanity to bad men, only that we should for the honour of our profession

SERM. fession discountenance vice in professed christians; for saith he, at the 10th verse, *not altogether* (to abstain from the company of) *the fornicators of this world, or the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world.*

On the other hand, it is not to be supposed that the mere advantage of any man's providential situation will entitle him to the benefit of walking with wise men. His lot may be with the best and most virtuous without any good design on his part, or without any other views than to his secular interest, and therefore without any advantage to his obtaining wisdom. The queen of *Sheba* celebrateth the felicity of *Solomon's* servants, *because they stood before him, and heard his wisdom*; but if any of them was not induced to make that happy station his choice, from a desire and prospect of instruction in virtue, but merely for the honour and outward emolument which attended his place, there was nothing praiseworthy in his being so near that wisest of men, nor did it shew any disposition to be wiser and better.

Upon the whole, to understand what it is to walk with the wise, we must return to what I said at first; it is voluntarily to associate,



associate, and of choice enter into intimacies of friendship with them. The general inclination of mankind determineth them to society, and this natural inclination exerteth itself not only in forming particular associations, such as civil communities larger and lesser, and families, for special ends in life; it engageth us to converse together for mutual satisfaction. Thus we find, universally, men of all capacities and conditions shew a desire of conversation, though very different, according to the diversity of their tastes, occasioned by education, degrees of understanding, prevailing affections, and outward circumstances. There is none even in the lowest station, and of the weakest understanding, and whose disposition to society hath been the least improved, but incline to company of some sort or other; none of such a contemplative genius, or that can best entertain himself in solitude with his own meditations, and even the highest pleasures of self-reflection and devotion, but that he needeth conversation both for his improvement and pleasure. There is no man so full of himself, and who hath such a high conceit of his own sufficiency, and contempt of others in comparison with himself, but he will find himself obliged, so  
strong

SERM.

XII.

SERM. strong is this propensity of human nature,  
 XII. to descend sometimes from his heights of  
 pride and vanity, to a friendly communica-  
 tion with his fellows.

But this general inclination, or instinct I may call it, exerteth itself freely, and, as I observed before, with a great difference; and it is the agreeableness of character and disposition which directeth our choice. The sensual, the men of business, the curious triflers, the learned, and the pious, join with one another, and take pleasure in conversing together. To walk with wise men, then, or with the virtuous and good, is to single out persons of that character, in preference to all others, for our intimate companions.

And, in the next place, it must import the improvement of conversation for the purposes of wisdom. If men of that character, in any instances depart from it, and converse foolishly, spending their time in trifling vanity, or much of it in an indifferent manner, about the affairs and innocent amusements of life, as often they do, in so far they do not walk together as wise men, or to the purposes of wisdom; though I do not say that, in all the cases mentioned, they act inconsistently with their general character;

character ; and, no doubt, the strictest virtue alloweth them, at proper times, to converse together about worldly affairs and lawful recreation ; but what I think the text chiefly importeth is, that wisdom and virtue should be the principal subject, and the main design of their social communications.

Farther, it follows, that in all our voluntary associations, even those which are entered into for the purposes of this life, our choice should be determined with a regard to virtue, and such persons taken into our company as are wise, so far as the ties of nature and providential circumstances will allow. A good man may have his lot assigned him by providence among the wicked, and in that case it must be his endeavour to preserve his integrity ; but he would make it his choice rather to be in a place where he should be less exposed to temptations, and where the practice of virtue is not discouraged, but promoted rather, by well-disposed society. A wise man may have domestic associates of a contrary character, as parents or children ; but in voluntary relations he should be careful to enquire into the dispositions of the persons he joineth with, and his care in this should be proportioned to the intimacies of the friendship to be contracted. *Solomon*  
himself

SERM. himself was not wise enough in the affinities  
 XII. he made, by some of which he was en-  
 snared and drawn away from the paths of  
 wisdom. His pious father made an excellent  
 resolution, *Psal. ci. 4, 6. A froward heart  
 shall depart from me, I will not know a wicked  
 person. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful  
 of the land, that they may dwell with me.*  
 Thus I have endeavoured to shew you what  
 it is to walk with wise men in the sense of  
 this text; I come, in the

*Second place,* To consider the influence  
 and efficacy of it as a means for our attain-  
 ing wisdom. It is certain that company  
 hath a great share in forming the tempers  
 and manners of men, experience abundantly  
 demonstrateth it. Any one who is acquainted  
 with the world, and hath made it his bu-  
 siness to study mankind, will see that their  
 way of behaviour, even their likings and  
 averfions, depend in a great measure on the  
 society they have been the most conversant  
 with; and this goeth so far as to their moral  
 dispositions; I do not say necessarily and uni-  
 versally, for there are some so obstinately  
 wicked and perverse, as to defeat the efficacy  
 of the best conversation and example, as well  
 as all other means for reforming them; and  
 some

some rare examples of virtue, who have made a successful stand against the strongest temptations, and maintained their unspotted innocence against the infection of the worst company, the prevailing corruption and impiety of the worst times and places wherein they have lived. But, generally speaking, it is not so; which is sufficient to our purpose, that is, to shew that walking with wise men is one useful means of acquiring wisdom, and to keep company with fools is the way to be corrupted.

But to explain the nature of this influence more particularly, I think it must be attributed to two causes; first, a desire to be agreeable to those we familiarly converse with; and, secondly, the force of example. First, a desire to be agreeable to those we converse with; and this we find to be very powerful in human nature. Who is there of mankind that doth not love approbation? A great part of our actions are thus only to be accounted for, without any prospect of advantage to ourselves; nay, when we are sure of disadvantage to our private interests, and when the best principles of action are very weak and little regarded, we do a great many things merely to please others, and gain their esteem. Interest is denied, even

SERM. life sacrificed, and conscience prostituted for  
 XII. this end. Very often the desire operateth  
 strongly in secret, and when we ourselves  
 do not attend to it; but if we narrowly examine a great part of our conduct, we shall find there is no other reason to be given for it. In the modes of living and outward deportment, which take up a great deal of our thoughts and cares, what other view is pursued than conforming to custom? what other rule than fashion, which has really no other standard than the general approbation, or the judgment, it may be, the humour and caprice of persons who are more eminent, and therefore esteemed. The original desire itself was planted in the human nature for excellent purposes, and, if duly regulated, is very useful to engage us to one another for our common advantage, and to direct and strengthen us in the practice of the social virtues. The desire of approbation riseth yet higher in serious and thoughtful minds, who have a just sense of the divine majesty, believing that he seeth them, and is perfectly acquainted with all their ways, even the most secret motions of their hearts, and therefore form their dispositions and conduct to please him. This is what the scripture calleth *walking with God*, and  
*walking*

walking before him; and in proportion as SERM.  
this instinct of nature exciteth itself towards XII.  
all intelligent beings with whom we are  
conversant, and in whose presence we are,  
their affections and characters must have a  
great influence in the forming of ours, whe-  
ther they be good or bad. And thus it ap-  
peareth that the choice of our intimate  
friends, to whose observation we lay our-  
selves and our manner of life most open, must  
very much contribute to the forming of our  
dispositions, and regulating our whole be-  
haviour.

But, *2dly*, this is to be attributed to the  
force of example. As the proneness of man-  
kind to imitation is very well known, good  
examples are proposed to us in scripture as  
an help to the practice of religion. The  
apostles call upon christians to be the fol-  
lowers of them, whose lives are indeed  
bright patterns of every thing that is pure,  
and true, and just, and honest, and lovely;  
and they set before us shining precedents in  
the lives of the ancient saints, *that being  
compassed about with so great a cloud of wit-  
nesses, we may lay aside every weight, and  
the sin which doth easily beset us, and run the  
race set before us.* If we consult experience,  
we may see the force of example in others,

SERM. and feel it in ourselves ; the things to which  
 XII. we were merely indifferent, perhaps disin-  
 clined, or thought them scarcely practicable,  
 when we see them done before our eyes, we  
 are immediately inflamed with a desire of  
 doing them ourselves. As to the practice of  
 virtue, in particular, the influence of exam-  
 ple may be thus accounted for ; it is ren-  
 dered familiar to us, and appeareth very  
 amiable when set before us in such a lively  
 and affecting manner. As a good picture  
 striketh the mind with a greater force, and  
 giveth a more lively idea of the object re-  
 presented by it, than any description by  
 words can do ; so to represent religion in pre-  
 cepts, doth not so powerfully move the af-  
 fections as when we see it delineated in life.  
 The beauty of holiness must appear very great  
 to any one who understandeth it, and power-  
 fully attract the desires ; but in the pre-  
 sent imperfection of human nature, and when  
 we have so many contrary inclinations, this  
 prejudice lieth against it, that it seemeth  
 extremely difficult, which prejudice is re-  
 moved by example ; for we are thereby  
 convinced, that it is not a lovely phantom  
 made to entertain a curious imagination, but  
 that there is a reality in it, and that it is  
 practicable in human life. The example of  
 God.



God is proposed to us in scripture as the most unexceptionably worthy of our imitation; *be ye holy, saith the Lord, as I am holy*; and the example of Jesus Christ, which cometh nearer our case, for it sheweth us virtue practised to perfection in the human nature; and all that humility, meekness, patience, resignation, zeal, and charity, which he recommendeth to us, shewn to us in life, under the greatest trials and most grievous sufferings: But still it seemeth to be a kind of excuse for our coming far short of that perfect pattern, that we have many frailties, irregular desires and passions, from which he was altogether free. And therefore to cut off all handle of that sort, all pretence whereby we might imagine ourselves discharged of the obligation, we see the rules of religious virtue reduced to practice in men of like passions, who also *were compassed about with infirmities*. Though their example is but imperfect, yet it is very worthy of our imitation, and most sensibly reproacheth our failures. Must it not carry strong conviction to see men, naturally weak as we are, liable to the same temptations, to vanity, sensual affections, pride, fear, and wrath; to see them conquer their most vehement selfish desires, and their strongest pas-

SERM.

XII.

fions? What pretence can there be for our defects? they had as exquisite a sense of pleasure, of pain, of profit, and loss, of honour and dishonour, as we; yet have overcome their most violent corrupt inclinations, and overcome the world by their faith, and through the influence of the gospel motives. Had they the assistance of divine grace? the same assistance is offered us. Did they know *how to be abased, and how to abound; and were instructed to be full, and to be hungry; to abound, and to suffer need; in every state to be content,* as St. Paul speaketh of himself, *Phil. iv. 12.* who saith expressly, at the 13th verse, *he could do all this through Christ strengthening him?* The same Lord is able and willing to strengthen other of his servants; he is *rich unto all who call upon him, his grace is sufficient for them, and his strength made perfect in their weakness.*

It is farther to be observed, to the purpose of the text, that still the nearer the example is, the greater force it hath. The distant report of confessors and martyrs, their heroic achievements and sufferings, the most grievous persecutions for the cause of pure religion; and rather than make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, though they are much more illustrious, yet  
may

may not affect us so sensibly, nor can be such constant remembrancers to us of our duty, as the less celebrated instances of piety and virtue in our own familiar acquaintances: Their good conversation every day upbraideth our faults; and besides their words, which it may be expected will convey instruction to us, and tend to recommend religion, and be, as the apostle saith, *such as may be to the use of edifying, and minister grace to the bearers*: Besides this, I say, their practice itself is a friendly admonition to walk, as they do, *circumspectly, blameless, and harmless, in the midst of a perverse generation.*

Thus the advantage of walking with wise men is very evident, in order to our becoming wise and virtuous; as on the other hand, the pernicious tendency of chusing the company of fools, will appear to any one who considereth it. As the good works of sincere christians shining before men, induce them to glorify God, to acknowledge the reality of religion, and so fall into the practice of it; the evil works of bad men, especially who make a religious profession, have the directly opposite tendency, namely, to persuade careless unattentive men, that virtue is but an empty shadow, for which it is not

SERM. reasonable to forego what they think the  
 XII. substantial, that is, the sensual enjoyments  
 of life; and that a vicious is more eligible  
 than a religious course. How many are  
 there who have at first some good senti-  
 ments, and feeble virtuous inclinations, who  
 startle at ill actions, and are afraid to venture  
 upon them, and yet by seeing the wicked  
 practices of others, which by degrees be-  
 come familiar to them, they overcome their  
 fears, and at last get an impious courage to  
 commit the greatest iniquities? Thus it is  
 that misled sinners hasten to their ruin, and  
*being the companions of fools are destroyed.*

I shall now, in conclusion, make some  
 practical reflections on what hath been said.  
 And, *first*, we may observe that wise, that  
 is, virtuous and good men, are a great blef-  
 sing to the world, though they are frequently  
 despised in it; their condition often expo-  
 seth them to neglect and contempt, because  
 they are poor; thus *Solomon* observeth, *Eccl.*  
*ix. 16. The poor man's wisdom is despised,*  
*and his words are not heard;* their virtue it-  
 self is hated by the ungodly, because it gall-  
 eth them by condemning their own follies;  
 and yet really they are the most useful to  
 mankind. It is on their account provi-  
 dence regardeth the places where they live,  
 over-

overspread with wickedness; and God de-  
ferreth his anger, so that transgressors are  
not cut off. But especially, because by their  
good lives they are the most effectual preach-  
ers of righteousness, and continually solicit  
men to reform. If religion be the greatest  
good to the world if it did generally obtain,  
then they who, especially, and in the most  
effectual manner, promote it, are the most  
beneficial to mankind; and still it is to be  
hoped, that when providence continueth  
such means of reformation, it is with a gra-  
cious design to make them successful, and  
do some great good by them; but, indeed,  
when they are taken away, it is a fatal prog-  
nostic. The holy Psalmist, therefore, re-  
gretteth this as a most deplorable case, which  
none could remedy but God himself, *Psal.*  
*xii. 1. Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth,*  
*the faithful fail from among the children of*  
*men:* And it may well be feared that it  
hath a dismal portendency of worse times,  
if such persons are taken away; *Isa. lvii. 1.*  
*The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it*  
*to heart, and merciful men are taken away,*  
*none considering that the righteous is taken*  
*away from the evil to come.* But when vile  
men are exalted, when they grow in power

SERM.  
XII.  
}

SERM. and influence, the world then groweth quick-  
 XII. ly worse, and all things tend to ruin: For,  
 2dly, I infer that bad men are not only  
 useles to the greatest purposes of life, but  
 mischievous in society. There cannot be a  
 character more justly abhorred by mankind,  
 than that of a person who is publickly hurt-  
 ful; our benevolence to society, to one's  
 country, or other communities, fill the heart  
 with indignation against him, as those ex-  
 cellent principles claim a peculiar esteem for  
 the good patriot, and the lover of mankind.  
 Now, certainly, he is a public nuisance, who  
 by an open profligate life, debaucheth the  
 world as far as he can, and draweth multi-  
 tudes with him to ruin; and the more  
 exalted his station, and consequently, the  
 greater his influence is, still he is the more  
 pernicious. Outward appearances dazzle  
 the multitude; magnificent titles, a splen-  
 did equipage, and such like glaring things,  
 procure a great deal of respect; but strip  
 him of those false ornaments, and what a  
 poor character, how despicable, nay, a com-  
 mon pest, is a wicked great man, hastening  
 to his own destruction, and hurrying thou-  
 sands along with him? And let this be ap-  
 plied by others of foolish and irregular lives,  
 the influence of whose example is propor-  
 tionably

tionably hurtful in lesser associations. How SERM. deeply should it affect the hearts of sinners, XII. that instead of being serviceable, they have been mischievous to families and other societies in which they were joined, especially those in superior relations, whose instructions and good examples might be very profitable? How many parents, and others in stations of authority, who by living well, and by care in the management of children, and such as are committed to their trust and inspection, might be the happy instruments of forming them to virtue, on the contrary lead them headlong to all manner of wickedness, and to destruction at last? I will only add, in the

*Last* place, That we ought to be very careful in the choice of our friends and intimate companions. Friendship is certainly one of the greatest and noblest pleasures of life; they who are utter strangers to it have, indeed, but a low taste of life, and have not experienced its best enjoyments: But it is not every kind of familiarity among men, that is worthy the sacred name of friendship; when it is abused to mean and unworthy purposes, or is founded on selfish corrupt affections and passions, it is then not only vicious, but humourfome, precarious,

and

S E R M. and unconstant, yielding no solid and abiding pleasure. Friendship founded in wisdom, and improved to the purposes of virtue, carrieth in it the best sentiments and affections, and the truest and highest pleasures that the human nature is capable of, and which will last to the utmost duration of our beings, even to perpetuity. If then we be sensible of our own frailty, and our danger of declining from the right way, should we not avoid the intimacies which may betray our integrity, and expose us to many temptations; and, on the contrary, chuse those which may be the means of correcting bad dispositions, and strengthening good ones, and by which we may reasonably hope for daily good instructions, and an example to be set before us, which shall tend to our furtherance in every christian virtue?



# SERMON XIII.

The FOUNDATION of CONFIDENCE  
towards G O D, explained.

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I JOHN III. 19, 20, 21.

*And hereby we know that we are of the truth,  
and shall assure our hearts before him. For  
if our hearts condemn us, God is greater  
than our hearts, and knoweth all things.  
Beloved, if our hearts condemn us not, then  
have we confidence towards God.*

**N**OTHING can possibly be of greater SERM.  
importance to men, than to know XIII.  
how they may obtain the divine approba-  
tion, and upon what grounds they may hope  
for it; consequences of the last moment to  
our happiness or misery depend upon it;  
if God justifieth, who is he that condemn-  
eth? There is no superior tribunal to reverse  
his decrees, nothing to be dreaded from any  
adverse power; if he condemneth there is  
no defence against his wrath, and who  
knoweth its power? It can reach to the  
whole

SERM. whole of our being, and to a length of duration beyond what the jealous self-condemning mind can imagine. Now, seeing God, as the governor of mankind, hath given them a law (he was written it in their hearts, and at fundry times, and in divers manners revealed his will to them) we justly infer from his moral perfections, that he will judge them according to that law, rewarding the obedient, and punishing the disobedient. But the question is, whether there be any rule whereby we may judge beforehand what sentence we are to expect? And if there be any such rule, and a possibility of arriving at certainty in this judgment concerning ourselves, here is the proper subject of our most solicitous inquiry. Who would not employ all the powers of his mind in a matter of such concernment, postponing all other affairs as trifles in comparison? Who would not apply himself with the greatest earnestness to the trial of this one point, if it is to be known, what sentence he is to expect from the righteous and most awful tribunal of God, and upon what terms he is with the judge of the world? What inward confidence and security of mind, what comfortable enjoyment even of his present existence must the man possess,

who

who hath the solid hope of being acquitted by his supreme ruler, perfectly wise, powerful, and just, in whose favour is life? On the contrary, what horror, trembling, and confusion, must seize the heart which is even suspicious of being disapproved by him, and hath the foreboding apprehensions of a future condemnation?

SERM.  
XIII.

The apostle hath preremptorily determined this matter in my text, shewing us upon what grounds we may assure our hearts before God, as he speaketh, that is, satisfy ourselves that we are entitled to his acceptance, as knowing that *we are of the truth*, or have fulfilled the obligations to obedience we are under, according to the true intent and meaning of his law: and then he explaineth himself more fully by laying down this general doctrine, that the testimony of our own consciences is the only just measure of our expectations from God; if they condemn us, as wilfully and wickedly transgressing his law, and coming short of that duty which he requireth, we have nothing to look for but his displeasure; for he is greater than our hearts, which are immediately subject to his judgment, more impartial than they; and he knoweth all things, all the secret insincerity which is in them,

SERM. them, and every aggravating circumstance

XIII. which attendeth our offences. On the other

hand, if our hearts do not condemn, but acquit us, then we have confidence towards God; we may enjoy inward serenity, and can look to the superior divine tribunal without terror; we are persuaded that the services we now perform are acceptable to him, which seemeth to be the apostle's immediate design, for he addeth, ver. 22. *and whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do the things that are pleasing to him*; not that he will grant us every thing we desire, which may not be best for us; but that he will accept our dutiful addresses, and bestow those blessings, which his infinite wisdom seeth fittest for us; and upon the same foundation, we shall have boldness in the day of judgment, as this sacred writer elsewhere speaketh, we shall not be afraid of Christ's coming, in the glory of his Father, to pronounce the last decisive sentence, which shall finally determine the condition of every man. It is true, the preceding context relateth particularly to charity, which St. *John*, after the example of his great master, earnestly recommendeth in all his writings; he layeth a mighty stress on the love of the brethren;

brethren; *by it we know that we are passed from death to life*; and while the opposite disposition ruleth in the hearts of men, they abide in death; that is, in a state of servitude to sin, and liable to the wrath of God as the punishment of it: By charity we imitate God, who is love; and when it is warm and vigorous in the heart, expressing itself in acts of beneficence, we shew a just sense of that love which he hath so gloriously manifested to us, in sending his Son to die for our redemption! But all this is not to be understood as if charity were the whole of religion, and our hope towards God were founded on it in exclusion of other virtues: Charity doth not *bide a multitude of sins in this sense*, that it maketh amends for them, and, by its merit in God's sight, procureth the forgiveness of them. There is an absolute necessity, in order to be approved of God, that we be just, and temperate, and patient, and godly, as well as charitable; and our Saviour's doctrine, which his beloved disciple did not intend to contradict is, *John xiv. 23. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, not one or some, but all of them, and they enjoin universal righteousness, he it is that loveth me, and he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him*; without that we cannot

SERM. assure our hearts before God; and our  
 XIII. knowledge of it is just the same thing as  
 knowing we are of the truth. The plain  
 meaning, therefore, of the text is, that if  
 our hearts witness for us, that we are sincere  
 in doing the will of God, or keeping his  
 commandments, then we have confidence  
 towards him; but if they witness the con-  
 trary, that we wilfully and wickedly break  
 his laws, then the conclusion concerning our-  
 selves is also directly contrary, namely, that  
 we have no reason to hope for his approba-  
 tion, but to expect his displeasure. This is  
 the doctrine which I shall endeavour in the  
 following discourse to explain and establish;  
 and then I shall draw some inferences from  
 it, which, I think, are of great importance  
 and usefulness.

I am sensible this doctrine needeth expli-  
 cation, when we apply it to the present state  
 of human nature; a state of infirmity and  
 imperfection, and to minds ignorant and  
 weak, prejudiced and unattentive; and yet,  
 I believe it may, notwithstanding all these  
 disadvantages, be reduced to such a cer-  
 tainty, that every man who is truly disposed  
 to do it, may be able to pass a right judg-  
 ment upon his own state, his own temper and  
 actions, whether they are approved of God

or not; in order to which, I shall lay down SERM.  
the following propositions: XIII.

*First*, That the approbation and the condemnation of our own consciences, upon which our hope towards God and the fear of his displeasure depend, do not relate to absolute innocence, and to every thing which, strictly speaking, may be called sinful. If the question were concerning sinless perfection, and concerning every kind and degree of moral evil, no man's heart could acquit him; *for there is not a just man that liveth upon the earth, and sinneth not.* The same apostle in this very epistle teacheth us, *that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* So far from knowing that we are of the truth, and assuring our hearts before God, by pretending to an unfinning obedience, men making such a presumptuous claim, shew only their ignorance of themselves and of the truth, not their innocence; for the very best, who are always jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy, and look the most strictly into their own hearts and lives, are always sensible of their own frailties, and that they could not abide a trial by God's all-searching eye, if he should mark every one of their

SERM. infirmities, and therefore are ready to say,  
 XIII. in the words of the Psalmist, *If thou shouldst*  
 mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? *Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.* We must therefore distinguish, and the scripture hath taught us to do so, between *sinning*, and *committing sin or working iniquity*; that is, between unallowed failings, and wilful deliberate disobedience to the laws of God against the conviction of our own minds; a consciousness of the latter destroyeth our confidence towards God, and filleth our hearts with foreboding fears of his wrath; but notwithstanding the former, we assure our hearts before him.

Nor is this the peculiar doctrine of christianity, tho' more fully and solemnly ascertained by it. No man who hath worthy sentiments of the supreme Being, as the just, and wise, and merciful ruler of his reasonable creatures, can doubt that he maketh a difference between the obstinately wicked, who do not like to retain him in their knowledge, and who, with an high hand, presumptuously violate his laws which they know; between them, I say, and upright persons who are sincerely disposed to do his will as far as they can understand it; who

are



are diligent to know their duty, and heartily inclined to practise it, though they have still some involuntary errors, and are chargeable with sins of infirmity. Can we suffer ourselves to believe that the good God, who hath written the work of his law on the hearts of all men, and given them consciences to bear witness to it, in pursuance of which, he exerciseth a constant care over them, by his goodness inviting sinners to repentance, and observing the dispositions and behaviour of every one; can we suffer ourselves to believe that he doth not distinguish between them who desire to fear him, and in the general tenor of their lives, shew a prevailing regard to virtue, though with some imperfections, and the incorrigible offenders, who are *contentious and obey not the truth* made known to them, but take pleasure in unrighteousness? And that he doth not approve the former, and disapprove the other? To imagine that this merciful indulgence to the infirmities of the sincere, which they bewail, are daily striving against, and endeavouring to amend, is a special grace of the gospel to them who are under that dispensation from which others equally sincere are excluded, is to make the gospel an instrument of partiality,

SERM. and is a very unbecoming notion concern-  
 XIII. ing the most equitable and gracious admini-  
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 nistration of divine Providence.

But indeed the gospel itself hath taught us to think otherwise, and to believe that God observeth impartially the same measures of judgment towards all Men. To this purpose the instance of *Cornelius* is very remarkable; he was a Gentile, thereby separated in the judgment of the *Jews* from the people of God so far, that *St. Peter*, not yet fully understanding the extent of Christ's kingdom, and the generous maxims upon which it is founded, was unwilling to go into his house, that is, to converse with him about religious matters, imagining himself to be under a prohibition by the *Mosaic* law, till God by a vision taught him *to call no man common or unclean*. This Gentile was a devout worshipper of the true God, and his character in other respects suitable to his devotion, though he was not free from those infirmities which are common to men; and his sincere services were accepted by the impartial and gracious judge of them, of which he not only had the good hope which is founded on the testimony of an approving conscience, common to good men,

men, but by special favour, an extraordinary messenger was sent from heaven to assure him of it, *Acts* x. 3. *An angel of the Lord said unto him, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God;* and as a farther token of the divine approbation, telleth him how he should be further instructed in his duty: Whereupon the apostle *Peter*, taught by the spirit of God, and having a very clear example before him, maketh this excellent declaration, ver. 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness (so far as human infirmity can attain, that is, not without some failings) is accepted with him.*

*Secondly*, Not only is there such a merciful allowance for sins of infirmity properly so called, failings into which sincere persons fall through ignorance, or inadvertency and surprize, which in the whole are unavoidable, so that they do not destroy our hope towards God; but God is also graciously pleased to accept of repentance, that is, a thorough and sincere conversion from evil dispositions, vicious habits, and wicked practices, to good; from impiety, to godliness;

from superstition, to pure worship; from immorality, to every kind of virtue. Now especially, since he hath given all men assurance of the future judgment by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, whom he hath ordained to be the judge, he *commandeth them all every where to repent*, and hath annexed the blessing of a free and gracious remission of all their sins to repentance; having promised to them who truly repent and are converted, *that their iniquities shall be blotted out*, *Acts iii. 19.* When we consider the universal bounty of providence, and that great goodness which God manifesteth particularly to mankind, guilty as they must acknowledge themselves to be; he beareth long with sinners, unwilling that they should perish, and is kind to the *unthankful and the evil*; we have the greatest reason to believe he will have a compassionate regard to the penitent, and that if men forsake their evil ways, and unrighteous doings, and turn to the sincere love and practice of virtue, he will not severely mark their renounced wickedness, but approve of, and reward their change of heart and life. But to christians the case is exceeding plain, by the express assurance God hath given of an entire forgiveness, and of eternal salvation to all  
who

who break off their sinful courses by righteousness, and a thorough and effectual reformation. This is the professed design of the gospel, the great doctrine taught by *John Baptist*, and afterwards by our Saviour himself. We must therefore understand the declaration in the text according to it; for seeing the judgment we pronounce upon ourselves hath a necessary reference to the judgment of God, and our hearts condemn or acquit us as we believe he will, his rule of judging must be ours; if, notwithstanding many and heinous transgressions, nay, a long continued wicked course of life, God will absolve the penitent, so that upon his turning from all his sins, that he hath committed, to do that which is lawful and right, and to keep all the statutes of the Lord, he shall surely live; his transgressions shall not be mentioned to him, in the righteousness of his latter amended life, *he shall live*, *Ezek.*

SERM.  
XIII.

xviii. 21. or, be saved by the divine mercy: If it be so, the man whose heart witnesseth for him that he hath so sincerely repented, that he hath submitted to the *righteousness that is by faith*, that is, to the terms of christianity, that he hath brought forth fruits meet for amendment of life, *ceased to do evil and learned to do well*; that man hath

con-

SERM. confidence towards God, or a well grounded  
 XIII. hope of his gracious acceptance.

But, the greatest difficulty attending this subject remaineth yet to be considered; which ariseth from mens liableness to mistake in the judgment they make of themselves, even of their own moral characters and actions. The scripture teacheth us, and experience confirmeth it, that there are many errors of this sort. On the one hand, the ways of sinners are often *pure in their own Eyes*, when God, who *pondereth the heart*, judgeth quite otherwise concerning them. What multitudes are there, who not only in outward profession but in their own deceived minds, make confident claims to the favour of God, which have no foundation at all? And, particularly, some through the deceitfulness of sin, and an habitual course of obstinate abandoned wickedness, are hardened into an utter insensibility, so as to be past feeling of their own guilt, and past fear of the divine wrath; their consciences, as the apostle speaketh, *fear'd as with an hot iron*, cease to do their office in reproaching them for their crimes, and denouncing the judgments of God against them. Is it to be thought that because their own hearts do not condemn them, there-

fore God will justify them? No certainly; for then the more obdurate and stupid any sinner is, the better would his condition be; but our most obvious notions of the holiness and justice of God will not suffer us to entertain such a thought. On the other hand, there are some too ready to condemn themselves; melancholy religious persons, through a present violent distemper of mind, or rather perhaps a distemper of body affecting the mind, and causing vehement perturbation, pronounce a hasty and unjust sentence against themselves. Far be it from us to think that such a rash and wrong judgment hath any connection with the judgment of God. Surely the *judge of the whole world will do right*; he is *not unrighteous to forget his servants work of faith and labour of love, which they have shewed towards his name*, although under a cloud, and in the present confusion of their thoughts, they may not be able to see their own integrity. But this whole case of mens erroneous judgments concerning themselves gives occasion to these farther observations for explaining the point now under consideration.

3<sup>dly</sup>, Then, that hope towards God which is laid on any other foundation than the testimony

SERM. testimony of conscience concerning our sincerity in obeying the law which we are under, hath nothing to do with the present subject. The apostle doth not say in the text, or mean, that whenever men have confident hope of the divine approbation and acceptance, however they came by it, and upon whatever ground, they shall be accordingly approved or accepted; but that if their hearts do not condemn them for insincerity, or wilful transgression, impenitently continued in, they have well grounded confidence. The reason why I observe this is, because very often presumptuous sinners have strong expectations of the mercy of God; but their hope is built on quite another bottom than their hearts approving their moral dispositions and behaviour, nay, in direct opposition to the judgment of their consciences concerning them. Some lay great stress on their religious profession, and the soundness of their faith; others rely on their exact observance of rites and ceremonies; the hope of the Pharisees was founded upon their fasting often, making long prayers, their ceremonial washings, their punctual tything of mint, annise, and cummin, and such like things. In like manner some christians depend on their baptism, their receiving



receiving the sacrament of the Lord's supper, S E R M.  
their being members of the purest primitive XIII.  
and apostolic churches; not to mention the  
grosser superstition of those who place their  
confidence in penances, pilgrimages, the  
merits of the saints, the absolutions, indul-  
gencies, prayers, and sacrifices of the church.  
Others, again, grossly mistake the true no-  
tion of repentance, which consisteth in an  
universal change of heart and conversation  
from evil to good, substituting in the room  
of it, sorrows, confessions, humiliations, and  
good dispositions, which produce no real  
amendment of life. And, lastly, some pre-  
sumptuously trust in the merits of Christ,  
even when their consciences accuse them of  
continuing to live in obstinate disobedience  
to his laws. Now, all these dangerous er-  
rors and false hopes are so far from receiv-  
ing any countenance from the text, that, on  
the contrary, it is the apostle's intention to  
call us off from them, and direct us to a  
quite different way of trying our claim to  
the divine approbation, namely, by a diligent  
inquiry into our tempers and moral conduct,  
which I shall afterwards endeavour to shew  
you is much more just, and founded in in-  
variable truth. By a parity of reason, the  
self-condemnings of distempered good minds  
are

SERM. are not, according to the true design of the  
 XIII. text, to be looked upon as any evidence

that God will condemn them; because so far as they have any appearance of a rational ground (for the most part, indeed, they proceed in a great measure from a disordered imagination) they are founded on a mistake, either of the terms of acceptance with God, or the nature of the offences with which the heart chargeth itself. If we imagine that God will be so inexorably severe, as to punish every the least deviation from his law, even though not allowed, or sincerely repented of; or if we magnify such infirmities, as the best are not altogether free from in this imperfect state, into heinous unpardonable crimes; if the want of vehement emotions of mind be accounted want of love to God, though they are only accidental, depending on other causes, and the love of God doth not consist in them, but in a calm deliberate esteem, with a sincere disposition to keep his commandments; if blasphemous thoughts arising in the mind, utterly abhorred, and earnestly resisted, are reckoned its heinous transgressions, though really they are not imputed to it as its faults in any degree; in these, and such like cases, the judgment of condemnation, which by  
 mistake

mistake the heart passeth against itself, God SERM.  
will not confirm; and the cure of the mis- XIII.  
takes, so far as they are curable in a rational  
way, is by better information concerning the  
nature of God, his infinite goodness and  
righteousness, and concerning the terms of  
the gospel. Our present inquiry relateth to  
the calm judgment of the conscience or heart  
upon its own prevailing dispositions, its de-  
liberate purposes, and the general tenor of  
its actions.

*4thly*, As the judgment of our hearts con-  
cerning ourselves is of the last moment, and  
the most important consequences depend  
upon it; for it is plainly the design of the  
text to teach us that the approbation or dis-  
approbation of Almighty God is to be ex-  
pected according as the heart doth or doth  
not condemn us; and therefore mistakes in  
this matter are infinitely dangerous; so, if  
we are not wanting to ourselves, they may  
be avoided. Fallibility is universally the  
character of the human understanding; no  
man who attendeth to what passeth in his  
own mind, but must be convinced he hath  
in many instances made a wrong judgment;  
and we have all reason to believe that many  
errors remain with us. But errors are not  
all

SERM. all alike hurtful ; some of them are perfectly  
 XIII. innocent, and produce no bad effects at all :

What is any man the worse for his judging amiss concerning the magnitude and distance of the heavenly bodies ? The correcting his mistake may give him pleasure, but without that, he might have been as good a man, and in the main as happy. But in the affair we are now considering, a mistake cannot be harmless ; at least on the one side, which is the most dangerous, it endeth in a miserable disappointment. For a man to flatter himself that he is entitled to the favour of God, and to find at last that *wrath abideth upon him*. I conclude, then, we are not under a fatal necessity of being deceived, else I should not at all know how this text is to be understood, or, indeed, how the justice of God could be vindicated to the full conviction of men. Let us consider how our minds are affected upon the discovery of error, how it must appear to our own reflecting thoughts, and what consequences we can think may, and ought to follow it, from the judgment of others, particularly a superior. If the mistake was absolutely invincible, that is, the person falling into it was not furnished with a capacity, or had no means whereby he could possibly shun it, then it was certainly

excusable; a man's heart cannot condemn S E R M.  
him for it; he may consider it as proceed- XIII.  
ing from a natural imperfection, or as infelicity, but cannot impute it to himself, and therefore he cannot think the sentence just whereby he should incur any penal consequences on that account. But if, upon a review of our errors, it appeareth to us that they proceeded not from a total impotence in ourselves, or from the want of sufficient means to have prevented them, but from a criminal disposition in the mind, the case is quite different; the heart then chargeth it self as guilty; the actions done in the pursuance of the mistake appear to be our faults, the penalties incurred by it to be just, and the opposite condemning sentence of a higher tribunal is vindicated in our own thoughts. In the present case, if our hearts do not condemn when they might and ought to have condemned us, that is, if we are led into the erroneous judgment by our own fault, and we had it in our own power to have prevented it by a due use of the means and opportunities we enjoyed, it doth not follow that God will acquit us, or that we have any just ground of confidence towards him, nor is the declaration in the text so to be understood.

SERM.

XIII.

5<sup>thly</sup>, therefore, the judgment we pass upon ourselves, or upon our own temper and course of actions, ought not to be rash and indeliberate. The least consideration of the frame and the powers of our minds must convince us, that attention, in order to prevent mistakes, and to judge rightly in matters of importance, is one of the first duties incumbent on such creatures as we are. Seeing the human understanding is so imperfect, far from a comprehensive intuition of things, even many truths, which may be clearly known, do not appear to its first view; what can be more reasonable and becoming us, than that we should not run hastily into a conclusion upon points which nearly concern our duty and our happiness, but that we should apply ourselves to a diligent examination of the evidence upon which a judgment is to be formed, which every man is conscious to himself he hath it in his own power to do, and for neglecting it his heart will reproach him? We know by experience, that many errors have been thus prevented, and many corrected; and, surely, we must acknowledge there is no affair which more justly calleth for our deliberation and careful inquiry, than the judgment

judgment we make of ourselves, upon which we are to found our expectations from God our supreme judge. SERM.  
XIII.

6thly, There is another source of error which it will require our utmost care to guard against, that is, prejudices and prepossessions, the influence of evil habits, and corrupt selfish affections byasing the mind. They must be strangers to the weakness of the human nature, who do not know how much the private inclinations and aversions of men sway their judgment: How easily do we go into opinions which are agreeable to us? how difficultly are we persuaded to assent to what must give us uneasiness? Into that most pernicious of all errors, the heart's not condemning for heinous crimes, men do not fall but by an habitual course of wickedness, and through the influence of the most corrupt affections. So strong is the sense of moral differences naturally in the minds of all mankind, that no man ever yet arrived to such a height of stupidity as to call evil good; or to be easy and confident in a vicious course of life, till after a strong reluctance he hath violently conquered his reason, and after many ineffectual remonstrances so baffled conscience, that it ceaseth to reprove; and then the judgment

SERM. of God condemning, contrary to the present judgment, or rather insensibility of the heart not condemning, will appear manifestly righteous, and the conscience of the criminal, when delivered from the vehemently prevailing and hardening prejudices, must acknowledge it. But there are other cases more difficult than this, namely, when men still retain a regard for conscience, so that they have never habitually and wilfully acted against its admonitions, and yet through prejudice have been misled into those opinions, and practices pursuant to them, which are really evil, and which upon farther illumination, and a more diligent inquiry, they themselves have condemned. The most remarkable example of this kind is that of the apostle *Paul*, who before his conversion to the christian faith, by the account he giveth of himself, and we are sure it is true, was a conscientious man; he was, *touching the righteousness of the law, blameless; he had lived in all good conscience*, even while he was a pharisee; and saith that he had served God with a pure conscience; and yet afterwards, being better instructed by christianity, reflecting on that former period of his life, he representeth his own actions as very criminal; he calleth himself the chief of sinners,



sinners, and a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious. What judgment is to be made of such *an heart not condemning*, it is hard for us precisely to determine. We are sure that God will make all the favourable allowances for the weakness of his creatures, that the most perfect equity and goodness require; but the case particularly referred to, leads us to this farther observation.

SERM.  
XIII.

*Lastly*, That there are different degrees of sincerity, which is the only object of the heart, or the conscience's approbation, and that only which God will accept. It not only implieth that we do not act against the present conviction of our minds, but that they are not chargeable with gross carelessness, or wilful, obstinate prejudices, misleading the judgment. It is true, that as sincerity may well be called the whole of religion, it is imperfect in this life. There is no man so happy as to be wholly and universally free from the least degree of faulty inattention, or any bias upon his mind drawing him into failings. But this is not to be carried so far as that we may not have sufficient assurance of our own sincerity to be a just ground of confidence towards God. That which the mind must approve, which will afford it true satisfaction in itself,

SERM. and which God will accept, is, the habi-  
 XIII. tual prevalence of good dispositions against  
 the contrary, though infirmities still remain. And this is what every man may discern concerning himself who carefully attendeth to what passeth in his own mind. May not one who is accustomed to self reflection, know what are the affections that rule the general tenor of his conduct? And in particular instances, which have been the subject of deliberation, wherein there are sensible opposite tendencies in the heart, may he not be able to judge which of them prevaileth, whether prejudice, passion, and selfish desire, shunning a diligent inquiry; or if the voice of conscience be heard against their clamour, and that judgment followed which is the result of an attentive and impartial examination?

I cannot in this discourse finish what I intended to say from the text, and therefore I shall for the present conclude with this reflection, that as sincerity admitteth of various degrees, we should always endeavour to grow in it. By a vigorous attention of mind, and the diligent use of proper means, especially a careful improvement of the gospel grace, our conquest over passions and lusts which darken and mislead the  
 mind,

mind, will advance gradually; they that have *pure hearts, and clean hands, shall wax stronger and stronger* in holiness and virtue, that is, become more and more sincere; and as sincerity increaseth, so will the evidences of it to the mind itself; *the path of the just is like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day*; still more apparent by its genuine fruits before men, and in a more sensible manner inwardly perceived by its own conspicuous lustre, so as to leave no room for hesitation concerning its reality, nor any remaining doubts of the divine approbation, considering the merciful terms of the gospel,

# SERMON XIV.

The FOUNDATION of CONFIDENCE  
towards G O D, explained.

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I JOHN III. 19, 20, 21.

*And hereby we know that we are of the truth,  
and shall assure our hearts before him. For  
if our heart condemn us, God is greater  
than our heart, and knoweth all things.  
Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then  
have we confidence towards God.*

SERM. XIV. **T**HE design of this text is to teach us upon what grounds we may hope for the divine approbation, or have just reason to fear his displeasure, namely, the testimony of our consciences concerning our obedience or disobedience to his law, either that which he hath engraved on our hearts, and *shewed us to be good* by the light of nature, or which he hath given us by a positive and express revelation. As this doctrine is liable to be misapprehended, I explained it in a former discourse in several propositions; the  
sum

Sum of which is, that the subject of the heart's testimony upon which it acquitteth men, is not perfect innocence; and that for which it condemneth them, is not every the least failure which strictly may be called a sin; if that were the measure of the divine judgment, no man living could hope to be justified in the sight of God. But as he will accept of sincere obedience, tho' not without some infirmities, and will only condemn for wilful transgressions; this sheweth upon what testimony of conscience we have reason to hope for his favour, or dread his indignation: That as unallowed failures will not be imputed, so God will be merciful to the unrighteousness of the penitent, and remember their sins no more, as the gospel expressly assureth us; and therefore the man whose heart witnesseth for him that he hath forsaken his wicked ways, hath ceased to do evil, and learned to do well; that he hath not only purposed to amend, but brought forth, and continues to bring forth, fruits meet for repentance and amendment of life, hath a just foundation for confidence towards God: That as this confidence is appropriated to the judgment of the heart already mentioned, the hope of divine acceptance, which is formed upon  
any

S E R M.  
XIV.

SERM. any other grounds, such as religious pro-  
 XIV. fession, observance of positive institutions,  
 { faith, or whatever else is, or may be separated from sincere obedience and true repentance, all such hope is deceitful: That men are liable to mistakes in this important affair, they sometimes speak peace to themselves, or their hearts do not condemn them, when yet God doth not speak peace to them; but yet such mistakes may be avoided, and we are not under a fatal necessity of being deceived, if, as the prophet speaketh, *we will shew ourselves men*, or act a part becoming rational creatures; that therefore the judgment of the heart concerning itself, upon which stress may be laid, must not be rash and indeliberate, but the result of a diligent examination; and, farther, the mind must be divested of strong misleading prejudices and prepossessions, especially a vehement love of sin, producing an insensibility of the excellence and the motives of virtue; which is so far from being inevitable, that no man can arrive to it till after a long continued course of obstinate wickedness, and violently resisting the remonstrances of his conscience. In fine, what the true decision of this important point turneth upon, is sincerity, which being the whole of true religion,

gion, is imperfect in this life, but that which God will accept, being the habitual prevalence of good dispositions against the contrary; and in the deliberate purposes of the heart cleaving to that which is good, and chusing to do what we know or believe to be right, even in opposition to passions, selfish inclinations, and wordly interest: Of this every man who is truly disposed may be able to judge concerning himself, with sufficient certainty; however, the surest way to make the testimony of approving conscience so clear, that it may be safely relied on and leave no room to doubt, is, to endeavour to grow always in sincerity, that is, in all goodness, and in the love and practice of every virtue. I proceed now,

*Secondly,* To illustrate and confirm the truth of the doctrine thus explained, namely, that the judgment of the heart concerning itself, either acquitting or condemning it of insincerity, is the only just ground upon which we can expect the divine approbation or disapprobation. The authority of the apostle is sufficient to determine the point to christians, and, I think, his meaning is so plain that there can be no hesitation concerning it. We may observe, however, that what St. *John* here

3 teacheth

SERM. teacheth us is supported by the concurring  
 XIV. testimony of other sacred writers. The  
 apostle *Paul* saith, *Gal. vi. 4. Let every man  
 prove his own work* (examine his own actions,  
 tracing them to their secret springs, that he  
 may be approved to his conscience) *and then  
 he shall have rejoicing in himself*, which no  
 christian can or ought to have without hope  
 of the divine approbation. It was upon the  
 same foundation *St. Paul* built his own in-  
 ward satisfaction and peace, implying a per-  
 suasion that God accepted him, *2 Cor. i. 12.*  
*Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our  
 consciences, that in simplicity and godly sin-  
 cerity, not in fleshly wisdom, but by the grace  
 of God, we have had our conversation in the  
 world.* In like manner *Hezekiah*, when put  
 to the severest trial, having an immediate  
 warning of death, comforted himself and  
 had confidence towards God, upon which  
 he offered up his acceptable prayers, appeal-  
 ing to God himself, *Remember, Lord, how  
 I have walked before thee in truth and with  
 a perfect heart, 2 Kings xx. 3.*

But I may appeal to the experience of  
 every man who will carefully look into his  
 own heart, whether, upon an accurate self-  
 inspection, there doth not arise, not only an  
 inward serenity and pleasure from a con-  
 sciousness



sciousness of integrity or uniformly good affections, and a regular virtuous course of action, but also confidence towards God; indeed, towards all moral agents, so far as our integrity and our works are known to them; especially towards him who is thoroughly acquainted with all our ways and thoughts, and whom we acknowledge to be the purest and most perfect of all beings? And whether, on the other hand, the self-reproaches of the heart for vicious inclinations and wicked actions be not accompanied with a secret confusion, arising from the consideration of an awful presence, to which moral turpitude is disagreeable; and, if sensible of its own ill deservings, it hath not a secret dread of suitable returns, especially from the righteous judge of the world? The minds which are afraid of looking into themselves, which is the case of many, seem to give a tacit consent to this, there being no imaginable reason why they should decline such an inquiry, which they cannot but be sensible is so becoming them, and which to an honest heart yields so great satisfaction; no reason, I say, but a secret misgiving fear of the consequences, and that they see where it must end, either in abandoning their vices, which they are obstinately

SERM. rately resolved not to part with; or the con-  
 XIV. founding apprehensions of the divine dis-  
 pleasure; which they cannot bear; and  
 therefore betake themselves to the poor un-  
 manly refuge of an affected and resolved ig-  
 norance: Yet even in that they are not safe;  
 for a multitude of occasions there are, not  
 to be avoided, which lay them open to them-  
 selves, and, in spite of all their studied  
 amusements to turn away their attention,  
 give them a frightful view of their own de-  
 formed tempers and actions, filling them with  
 terror. *He, saith our Saviour, John iii. 20.*  
*that doth evil, habitually and incorrigibly,*  
*hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest*  
*his deeds should be reprov'd;* so strong is the  
 impression naturally upon the minds of men,  
 that wilful wickedness and depraved affecti-  
 ons render them obnoxious to superior intelli-  
 gent natures, above all, to the Supreme.

What can be the reason of this, which  
 we find so universal among mankind? The  
 good and the bad are agreed in a persuasion  
 that purity of heart and life is pleasing to  
 the Deity, and that corrupt dispositions and  
 immoral actions are displeasing to him;  
 therefore the self-approving mind hath con-  
 fidence towards him, and the reproaches of  
 the heart, for its dishonesty and unreformed  
 beloved

beloved sin, are necessarily accompanied with diffidence and fear; and the sinners shunning industriously the light of his own spirit or conscience, which *Solomon* calleth *the candle of the Lord, searching the inward parts*; this, I say, must be attributed to the same cause: Shall it be said that all this proceedeth only from human weakness; that the self applauding joy and confidence of a virtuous mind is but enthusiasm, the effect of a deluded warm imagination; and that the distrustful dread of a vicious one ariseth wholly from a superstitious fearfulness, imbibed by the prejudices of education, and cherished by the often-inculcated instructions of weak or designing men? I know nothing in the power of human nature in order to our being assured of truth or being delivered from error, but a fair impartial enquiry, and to that we appeal in the present case. The generality of hardened sinners must according to this rule be acknowledged to have prejudged the cause, and therefore to be unqualified for determining it, for their hearts will tell them they designedly avoid a trial: But if any one will pretend to argue upon it, let it be observed, that there are certain principles, in which the mind must necessarily rest,  
without

SERM. without being able to proceed any farther  
 XIV. in searching the grounds of its persuasion.

A clear and distinct perception of the agreement or disagreement of our own ideas is the certain distinguishing mark of truth or falshood in points of speculation; accordingly there are some propositions self-evident, as we commonly speak, or the truth of which the understanding necessarily perceiveth as soon as they are intelligibly proposed to it, so that it would be a ridiculous attempt to prove them: Again, we find ourselves obliged to acquiesce in the testimony of the external senses concerning the qualities of material objects, together with the immediate effects they produce in us, such as pleasure and pain: If, now, there is an internal sense by which we as necessarily perceive the difference between right and wrong, or moral good and evil in affections and actions; and if, with an application to ourselves, this constantly and uniformly produceth the directly opposite effects of self-approbation and disapprobation, independently on our own choice, together with a confidence and a fear towards other intelligent moral agents, especially the Supreme; and, lastly, if all this appeareth to us whenever we attend to it, still the more evidently,

the more closely we examine it and the less S E R M.  
confused and disturbed our thoughts are; XIV.  
whether it be so or not, let every one judge  
for himself; if, I say, it be so, we may  
then, I think, conclude it is the voice of na-  
ture necessarily resulting from our constitu-  
tion, and the doctrine of the apostle in my  
text is the doctrine of immutable reason,  
supposing only the being of God and his  
moral character.

There is nothing I believe goeth so far to-  
wards erasing those sentiments out of the hu-  
man mind, at least hindering their proper ef-  
fect, as false notions of the Deity and of reli-  
gion. If men can once be persuaded that God  
is not a perfectly holy, righteous, and good  
being, or that he doth not exercise these per-  
fections in the government of his reasonable  
creatures; but that he dealeth with them in a  
way of arbitrary dominion, in consequence of  
which the immediate necessary condition of  
their acceptance with him is not an imitation of  
his moral attributes, and obeying his precepts  
of eternal righteousness to which their consci-  
ences bear witness, but something else substi-  
tuted in the room of that, which it is pretend-  
ed he hath revealed, or which men have in-  
vented; such a persuasion must go a great length  
in unhinging the true foundations of hope to-

SERM. wards him and fear of his displeasure, which

XIV. I have endeavoured to shew both scripture  
 and reason establish; and, indeed, a great  
 way in defeating the work of the law  
 which is written in our hearts. The tradi-  
 tions of men concerning rites and ceremo-  
 nies which they fondly imagine will please  
 God, as our Saviour teacheth, tend to make  
 void his moral precepts: And yet even these  
 false notions of the Deity, and of religion,  
 have not altogether extinguished this light  
 which the Author of nature hath put into our  
 minds, or subverted the foundations of hope  
 and fear arising from the testimony of con-  
 science which are so deep laid in our hearts.  
 When a man hath brought himself to that  
 pernicious opinion concerning the validity  
 and sufficiency of external acts to please  
 God, the merit of others, good but ineffec-  
 tual inclinations, or any such like things  
 which may be separated from doing sincerely  
 the *will of our heavenly Father*, still he dares  
 not altogether trust himself on that bottom;  
 suspicions will arise of self-deceit, and a con-  
 science accusing for crimes unrepented of  
 and unreformed, will break in upon his  
 peace, threatening him with the divine  
 displeasure. On the other hand, *the righteous is bold as a lion*, he possesseth undisturbed  
 tran-

tranquillity, is free from the foreboding apprehensions of vengeance which haunt the guilty heart; nay, maintaineth his integrity in the deepest distresses, and amidst the reproaches of men; if even all the world should join in condemning him, since he acquitteth himself, his confidence towards God remaineth unshaken.


As these sentiments are indelibly imprinted on the human mind, and necessarily result from our constitution, of which God is the author, we must ascribe them to him. His will is declared in the nature of things, and they all serve his purposes. Inanimate beings in their constant motions, and the series of their operations, fulfil the law of their natures; and sensitive creatures, directed by their instincts, always answer the ends of their being which he hath appointed; so it is impossible for us to doubt but that the fundamental laws of the rational nature are his will; and that, in judging and acting according to them, we judge and act agreeably to his mind. Therefore, seeing the author of our being hath endued us with that power which we call conscience, a power of self-reflection, of comparing our own dispositions and actions with a rule engraven on our hearts, whence necessarily

SERM. arifeth pleasure and pain; and this natural-  
 XIV. ly leadeth us to the prefaging expectations  
 of the divine judgment, according to the  
 judgment we pafs upon ourfelves; we cannot help concluding that thus God fpeaketh to us, and maketh known his pleasure; that in acting and judging according to the plain unalterable dictates of our nature and reason, we please him, and in counteracting them we rebel againft his will, which he difapproveth. The original ideas of morality, which we find in our own minds, it is not in our power to change; nor can we think otherwife, than that they are agreeable to the fentiments of all other moral agents; it is by them we form our notions of the divine moral attributes, only removing from our idea of God the imperfections we find in ourfelves; and, therefore, we muft judge that what we neceffarily approve upon a calm and deliberate reflection, he will approve; and what we condemn, he will condemn alfo. And,

*Laftly*, Let it be obferved, that the judgment of God is of a very peculiar kind, altogether unparallelled in human judicature; for reason teacheth, and the fcripture very expreffly, that not only external actions will come under its cognizance, nor will it proceed



ceed only according to external evidence, SERM.  
 but that it reacheth to the most private and XIV.  
 latent springs of action, and the inward af-  
 fections and dispositions of the mind, undiscernable by any human, or, indeed, any created eye, and known only to the searcher of hearts, and to the spirit of a man which is within him. *Every work, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil, shall be brought before the divine tribunal; and when the Lord cometh, he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then every man shall have that praise, that due estimate put upon him and his works, which is according to truth.* It followeth that the mind itself, being the principal scene wherein the works to be tried were transacted, the equity of the sentence to be pronounced on men will be manifest to themselves, which it cannot be unless their conscience witnesseth the sincerity or insincerity of their works upon which the sentence is founded; and not only that it giveth this testimony at the time of judgment, but that it judged the same way when the works were done; at least, would have judged the same way but for its own fault, that is, its inattention and prejudices; for

SERM. without this it seemeth utterly inconceivable, that the heart can justify God. Upon  
 XIV.  the whole, then, it appeareth that if the heart, conscious of its own inclinations, purposes, and actions, condemneth itself, it is the surest evidence we can have of God's condemning; and if the heart divested of prejudice, not conscious of the prevailing love of darkness and evil deeds, and careful in its inquiry, doth not condemn, it is the greatest certainty we can attain to of the divine approbation.

I proceed now to draw some useful inferences from what hath been said. First, it is a dangerous mistake to place the hope of men's acceptance with God, not upon the goodness of their affections, and the integrity of their hearts, but upon the truth of their opinions, and the rectitude of their external actions in themselves, and abstractly considered. It is the former of these which is the proper object of the mind's testimony and judgment concerning itself, not the latter, of which we have not in many cases a sufficient certainty. Upon a review of what passeth in our minds, our inclinations, designs, our motives of action, and our whole conduct, they who are impartially so disposed, can well distinguish between what is  
 right

right and wrong in a moral sense, that is, SERM. between sincerity and insincerity; and as XIV. sincerity is the thing we most approve, and the very best which we can call our own, it must appear to us equitable, that by it, or the contrary, we should be justified or condemned: But by the mere knowledge of truth and right, no man can assure his heart before God; it doth not give him any satisfaction in himself, as integrity doth, nor confidence towards God; so far from it, that our knowledge of the will of God, if it hath not a proper influence in forming the temper of our minds, and directing our behaviour, will aggravate our guilt, and render us the more obnoxious to his displeasure. Thus the apostle *James* saith to some who valued themselves upon the soundness of their belief, as that which would recommend to the favour of God, chap. ii. 19. *Thou believeth there is one God, thou dost well*; so far it is right, but utterly insufficient to establish any hope of acceptance upon, for this plain reason, *the devils also believe and tremble*. Those creatures who, above all others, are irrecoverably lost to goodness and to hope, being reserved in chains unto the last judgment, they believe rightly concerning that great article of reli-

SERM. gion, the unity of God, and other articles  
 XIV. likewise, for probably they have a more ex-  
 tensive knowledge than any of mankind; but what is the effect of their knowledge and their faith? instead of giving them confidence towards God, it maketh them tremble under the apprehensions of his wrath; and so, in proportion, it must do in all minds which detain the truth in unrighteousness.

Shall it be said that the principles of religion which God hath manifested, whether by the light of nature or positive revelation, with a clearness sufficient to render ignorance inexcusable, and his laws injoining our duty, have a precise determined meaning, how then can we be accepted with him, if we come short of that meaning, either in our belief or our practice; if our sentiments are not conformable to the truth which he hath declared, and if we do not really and effectually fulfil the true intent of his law, by doing the very actions it requireth? I answer, this reasoning is founded on a mistake concerning the nature of the obligations which God hath laid us under as reasonable creatures; which obligations do not immediately terminate in the assent of our understandings, not properly subject to a law,

nor in the substance of outward actions, as SERM. that whereby they are satisfied: But the XIV. lawgiver, to whom all things are naked and manifest, and who hath endued us with self-reflecting powers, and a sense of good and evil, he demandeth our hearts, the proper exercise of our affections, and of our active self-determining powers: Our opinions are neither morally good or evil, otherwise than in consequence of this primary obligation; all the virtue which is in them, is derived from integrity of good affections, and a diligent application of our minds to the discovery of truth; and for external acts, as the intention of the divine law is not completely fulfilled in them, they are no farther necessary to our acceptance, nor doth the conscience itself lay the stress of its confidence upon them any farther, than as they are the certain evidences and inseparable fruits of good inward dispositions.

But though wrong opinions in religion and morals, are only so far criminal as they proceed from depraved affection or negligence; when they are embraced, they tend to increase that depravity of heart and corruption of manners. This is the case of superstition, which hath produced very mischievous effects in the world. When men have

SERM. have imbibed false notions of the Deity, and  
XIV. the way of pleasing him, their minds are  
corrupted from the simplicity of a rational devotion; instead of which, they run into empty forms and idle ceremonies, nay, into barbarous and unnatural crimes. But such false notions do not at all excuse the crimes which they produce, because, as I have already observed, they are themselves faulty in the foundation of them, proceeding from inattention, and especially from a defect of good dispositions, or the prevalence of evil ones; and because the wicked course of actions to which they lead, is directly contrary to that sense of good and evil so deeply engraven on the minds of men, as to condemn their vices in spite of all pretences to justify themselves. This the apostle *Paul*, in the 1st to the *Romans*, illustrateth in the instance of the *Gentile* idolatry introducing a deluge of vice; he saith, they went into most absurd opinions concerning the divine nature, changing the *glory of God into images*; and the consequence was, that they were abandoned to vile affections, and to the most heinous unnatural wickedness in practice. But then he sheweth wherein the real malignity of their errors, and the unhappy fruits of them consisted; their erroneous

neous opinions did not proceed from weakness, but *they held the truth in unrighteousness*; they knew God, but perversely would not glorify him, nor were thankful; they became vain in their imaginations; and ver. 28, *Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, they were given up to a reprobate mind*; and the progress of their vices he doth not impute merely to their erroneous opinions, but to their lusts rebelling against the voice of reason and conscience.

S E R M.  
XIV.

I have insisted so much on this subject, not merely because the mistaken notion I proposed to refute is an error in speculation, but especially because it has a very bad influence on practice. When men have once got into this persuasion, that their true religious belief, and the regular conformity of their external acts to the letter of God's law, will recommend them to his favour, their attention is diverted from the goodness of their affections, and the uprightness of their hearts, which is the only just foundation of confidence; and thus their religion degenerateth into hypocrisy. Thus the *Jewish* zealots, whose false pretences are largely refuted by St. *James* in his epistle, imagined that their faith would save them, *while they*

SERM. *they were contentious, and obeyed not the*  
 XIV. *truth, but obeyed unrighteousness, and prac-*  
 tised cruelty. And the Pharisees placed  
 their hope of acceptance on the exact ob-  
 servance of positive institutions, and the out-  
 ward appearance of sanctity in their lives,  
 while they indulged themselves in pride and  
 covetousness: But our Saviour sheweth their  
 insincerity, comparing them to *whited se-*  
*pulchres, which appear outwardly beautiful,*  
*but within are full of dead mens bones and all*  
*uncleanness; so they appeared righteous be-*  
*fore men, but within were full of hypocrisy*  
*and iniquity; and in proportion, still so far*  
 as this dangerous notion prevaileth, sincerity  
 is neglected, which only can render us ac-  
 ceptable to God.

Not only so, but men judge the same  
 way of others as they do concerning them-  
 selves, and imagining they have got posses-  
 sion of the orthodox faith, and what they  
 call the true religion, that is, the right modes  
 of worship, and other outward performan-  
 ces, they pronounce damnation on all who  
 differ from them. Hence arise mutual ha-  
 treds, contentions, and animosities, about  
 religion, whilst real religion, that is, since-  
 rity, is not at all attended to; hence perse-  
 cution for conscience sake, and under the  
 pretence



pretence of charity. Methinks it should be a strong prejudice against the opinion I am now considering, that it produceth so much mischief among men; but at the same time it is founded on a gross error concerning God, and his way of proceeding in judging men, and concerning the nature of religion. What can induce men to impose on the consciences of others, and punish them for not complying with their religious decrees? The most charitable account is, that they think in these things religion consisteth, and by them men will be acceptable to God: But seeing human authority is used, and force, it is evident there is an opposition of judgment, and the compliance of the persecuted must be against the light of their consciences, for which, according to the doctrine of this text, they are self-condemned, and the only just foundation of their confidence towards God is destroyed. Thus it is apparent that persecution, in all its kinds and degrees, and in the best light in which it can be set, instead of promoting religion, it can only be defended and practised on the ruins of sincerity, in which true religion consisteth; and instead of tending charitably to render men acceptable to God, the natural tendency of it is to subvert  
the

SERM.

XIV.

SERM. the only just ground upon which they can  
 XIV. have hope towards him.

2dly, It is to be regretted that some articles of christianity itself have been perverted to purposes contrary to their true design, particularly contrary to the doctrine of this text; especially what the gospel hath taught concerning the mediation of Christ, his sacrifice, and our justification by faith in him, hath been so misapplied. It is the principle of the *Antinomians*, that christians are so *only* justified by faith in his imputed righteousness, that they are discharged from all obligation to obey the divine moral precepts, as necessary to their acceptance with God. This opinion hath by some been carried into practice, who thereupon have abandoned themselves to licentious immorality with confidence; though, indeed, good men, who have contended for it in speculation, have, through the strength of their virtuous affections, escaped its pernicious influence. But many there are who, without examining carefully the principle, place their hope towards God on the merits of Jesus Christ, while their hearts condemn them; at least, if they considered, would condemn them for wilful transgression unrepented of and unreformed. If any such doctrine were taught in

in the New Testament, it would be a strong prejudice against it; for what man, attentively considering the constitution of his own mind, will believe that there is, or can be, any just ground of hope towards God, while his heart doth not acquit him of hypocrisy and iniquity? or who that understandeth and is persuaded of the divine moral attributes, without which religion is lost, both natural and revealed, can think that God would require men to receive a principle which directly tendeth to overturn the obligations of morality, which our Saviour expressly disowneth, for he, near the beginning of his ministry, telleth a great assembly, that

SERM.  
XIV.

*He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.* But that this is not the doctrine of the sacred writers, my text is a plain proof, and so are many other of their declarations. Must not every one who dealeth fairly by the gospel, and considereth it impartially, be convinced that the design of it is what St. Paul saith it is, namely, to teach us, *that denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;* and upon that foundation only look with confidence *for the blessed hope.* Is not the favour of God constantly promised to the virtuous and good, and his wrath

SERM. wrath denounced against the impiety and  
 XIV. unrighteousness of men? It is true that, in  
 the gospel, great virtue is attributed to the  
 blood of Christ, it *cleanseth us from all sin,*  
 it *purgeth our consciences from dead works to*  
*serve the living God*; and by it God hath  
*reconciled the world to himself, not imputing*  
*their trespasses*: But all this is not intended  
 to supersede the necessity of repentance and  
 new sincere obedience; for the sins which  
 we truly forsake, bringing forth fruits meet  
 for amendment of life, and unallowed infir-  
 mities, we have the highest assurance that  
 they shall not be imputed; and the mercy  
 of God, manifested in the death of Christ, is  
 the great confirmation of our hopes: But to  
 carry our confidence further, and to expect  
 the forgiveness of the sins in which we ob-  
 stinately persist, because *he died for us,* and  
*gave full satisfaction for our offences,* is to  
 make him the minister of sin.

I conclude with an exhortation, always to  
 preserve a sacred regard to conscience: See-  
 ing its approbation is of so vast moment, the  
 only ground upon which we can assure our  
 hearts before God, we should pay a submis-  
 sive respect to its dictates, and maintain its  
 rights inviolable, for they are the rights of  
 its great and sole Lord. We should always  
 hear

hear its voice against any thing that may come in competition with it, whether the persuasion or authority of men, or our own passions, worldly interests, and selfish affections: If we do not follow its direction in our conduct, we cannot hope for its approving testimony upon a review of it. It is true you will be even in this method liable to mistakes, and so you will in every method you can take, for infallibility is not the privilege of the human understanding; but always study sincerity, that is, be diligent and unprejudiced in your inquiry, that you may know your duty, and impartially follow the best judgment you can make. This will supply the want of infallibility to the purpose of our acceptance with that equitable judge, who hath himself so framed our nature, that it is the very best way we can act.

The doctrines of the gospel concerning the free Grace of God and the death of Christ, may then be improved to our consolation; *we have entrance with boldness into the divine presence by the blood of Jesus, if we draw near with a true heart, in the assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water, Heb. x. 22.*

## S E R M O N X V.

Walking by FAITH, not by SIGHT,  
explained and recommended.

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2 CORINTHIANS V. 7.

*For we walk by faith not by sight.*

SERM. **T**HERE is nothing more becoming  
XV. such reasonable creatures as we are,  
than upon mature deliberation to fix some  
certain principle as a general rule whereby  
to govern our lives, and constantly to adhere  
to it. The least attention to what passeth  
in our own minds, will convince us that  
there are various springs of action in them;  
we have affections, appetites, and passions,  
of different tendencies, and which deter-  
mine us to the pursuit of different objects,  
as much so as heaven and earth, as spirit  
and body, as the improvement of know-  
ledge and the gratification of sense, as the  
mental pleasures which arise from moral  
good, and the low enjoyments which are  
common to men and brutes. But every  
man,

man, who thinketh at all, must see that the true perfection of his nature doth not consist in, and his highest happiness doth not depend upon, the gratifying without any controul or restraint every inclination or desire which happeneth to arise in him. There is an order established by the Author of our being, that the true ends of it may be obtained; there must be harmony, otherwise the human constitution is an unfinished piece, not like the other works of God, which have all of them the plain characters of wise design appearing in their beautiful union, the parts, however various, being mutually related to each other, and all agreeing in one common end. Now, if there is order and harmony intended originally in the frame of our minds, and if it be necessary to the design of our being and the highest enjoyment we were made for, there must be government; a subordination of some affections to others, so as the former shall be gratified only by the permission of the latter; all the active powers must be under a law to exert themselves only in such a manner, and to such a degree, as one governing principle directeth. Of this we have a plain and sufficient evidence in ourselves, namely, that we cannot allow an unrestrain-

SERM.

XV.

SERM. ed indulgence of every inclination or appetite  
 XV. with the approbation of our own minds. We  
 can never be happy in any thing while we  
 are uneasy in ourselves, I mean, while pain  
 and discontent arise from a review of our own  
 actions; but this is unavoidable when we  
 act contrary to our sense of moral good and  
 evil: Now, it is the first law of our nature,  
 that we should be justified to ourselves,  
 which we can never be, without subjecting  
 all our desires and active powers to con-  
 science.

Still it is to be remembered that we are  
 voluntary Agents, and as such must pursue  
 the ends of our being; our happiness and  
 the perfection of our nature result from the  
 actions which we chuse to do, indeed, they  
 alone are properly our actions; we are not  
 like many other creatures, which necessarily,  
 and without any activity of theirs, fulfil  
 what is called the law of their nature, but  
 such is our constitution, that the ends  
 of it can only be attained by the exercise  
 of our liberty, and by an active obedience  
 to the laws which God hath given us. We  
 are not under a necessity of acting according  
 to the direction of every instinct in our na-  
 ture, but find in ourselves a power of suspend-  
 ing the execution of what we are prompt-  
 ed



ed to, and of deliberating, that we may freely do what to our own understandings appeareth in the whole to be best. This sheweth the advantage of what I mentioned at first, some certain principle fixed as a general rule whereby to govern our lives: To run hastily into every action or course of action to which we are prompted, is unworthy of intelligent beings, for the reasons already insinuated; to go through the progress of a laborious inquiry upon every particular case, without having any settled maxim, to which we may appeal and be determined by it, would embarrass our understandings, and involve them in perplexing difficulties; whereas to have an invariable rule ready at hand with which we can compare every point we are considering, leads to a just and easy decision: In fact, it may be truly said in some sense, that every man doth so conduct himself, whether he attendeth to it or not; he hath either a principle, or some prejudice that hath the force of a principle, which guideth his whole course. What multitudes of mankind are there, who being accustomed to an uncontrouled gratification of their appetites and passions, or having learned from their childhood, and merely from the ex-

SERM.  
XV.  
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SERM. ample of others, a certain manner of acting,  
 XV. go on in the same beaten track without ever  
 enquiring into the grounds of it; and these  
 habits and prejudices are as a law which continually directeth them. Others more wisely consider the reasons of their conduct, and have certain principles upon careful examination approved to their own minds, to which they refer their measures as to a settled rule which constantly determineth them.

The apostle in the text mentioneth two principles of operation in the human mind, directly opposite to each other; the one he rejecteth, the other he declareth to be the established rule by which he conducted his own life, and indeed, the common rule of christians; *we walk by faith, not by sight.* In the preceding part of this chapter he treateth of the glorious hopes in a future state which we have by *Jesus Christ*, which he carrieth so far as to a full assurance that *when the earthly house of this tabernacle*, that is, this frail mortal body, *shall be dissolved*, we shall have *a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* The effect which this expectation produced was a most earnest and solicitous desire of that eternal happiness which was

to be consummated at the resurrection of the dead; and a confidence, as he calleth it, or a firm and steady resolution of adhering inviolably to his duty, whatever temptations or difficulties he might be exposed to. St. *Paul* for himself was resolved though he knew that bonds and afflictions did abide him, to persevere in propagating christianity, and endeavouring to make converts to it; and other christians are, at all hazards, to be *stedfast and unmoveable, abounding in the work of the Lord*, making it their chief study, while they are in the body, and when they depart from it, to be accepted of the Lord. The animating spring of this steady resolution and uniform tenor of conversation is *faith*, or a firm affectionate persuasion concerning the great principles of religion, the being, the attributes, and providence, of the invisible God, the reality and excellence of piety and virtue, and the truth of the gospel motives, particularly the future state of rewards and punishments; I say, it is this *faith*, as in opposition to *sight*, which hath a quite contrary tendency, or the rash and hasty judgment of the mind confining its views to sensible objects, and the present visible appearance of things.

S E R M.  
XV.

SERM.

XV.

I shall in the following discourse distinctly consider these two contrary principles of action, *sight* and *faith*, by which, I hope, we shall see the reasonableness and excellency of the religious, or the christian, life conducted by the latter principle, and be determined to chuse it; at the same time we may be able to form a true judgment concerning the character of our own conversation.

*First*, Let us consider what it is to walk by sight: As walking in the proper and literal sense is a voluntary motion, it signifieth here, and in the usual stile of the scriptures, ordering the course of our voluntary and deliberate actions. As we are conscious of our being free agents, whose works depend upon our own choice, the question is, what guide we shall follow in them? That which is the most obvious, and first occurreth to our minds, the apostle here calleth *sight*, the knowledge conveyed to us by our senses, and the views we have of the external state of things in this world. Every man knoweth his present constitution to be such, that a multitude of outward sensible objects make strong impressions on his mind: The ideas of them are conveyed by various avenues,

ness, and desires and aversions are excited by them, which prompt him to action. He hath appetites which incline him without any reflection at all, to eat, and drink, and enjoy other sensual pleasures; he hath painful sensations, which determine him to avoid some things as hurtful; and the uneasy apprehensions of danger whereby he is excited to shun it and provide for his safety. These and such like instincts or determinations of nature belonging to the animal life, are the first springs of action which we perceive in ourselves, and they continue to have an influence on us through the whole of our present state; not as principal or the governing part of our constitution, for the attentive mind will discern in itself higher capacities and affections, which justly claim the dominion over its active powers; but some of degenerate mankind are so far lost to a sense of the dignity and privileges of their being, as to subject themselves to the affections of the animal nature, as if there were nothing more noble in them than the brutes: In this criminal, which the brutes are not, that they voluntarily dishonour their superior condition, and degrade those excellent powers with which God has distinguished them. This is what God pronounced concerning  
the

SERM. the grossly corrupted human race, whom he  
 XV. therefore destroyed with a flood, *Gen. vi. 3.*  
 that they were flesh; their minds so carnal,  
 and thereby their manners so depraved, that  
 they were become unfit for that rank in his  
 creation, which he had appointed for them.  
 This is the very lowest sense of walking by  
 sight, and yet so prevalent it is in some  
 men, and so governeth their dispositions, as  
 to form their temper and true character.  
 The *Epicurean* philosophy, ignorant of God,  
 and destroying all the principles of religion,  
 placed the chief good of man in pleasure;  
 and to a vicious taste, the pleasures of the  
 external senses are the highest: But it pre-  
 vaileth more in the affections of many men  
 than in their speculations, and the language  
 of their hearts is truly expressed by the  
 apostle, *1 Cor. xv. 32. Let us eat and drink,*  
*for to-morrow we die.* Let us preserve our-  
 selves as long as we can in the free enjoy-  
 ment of all the pleasures of the animal  
 life, for when we die there is an end of us  
 and all our enjoyments for ever: In like  
 manner *Solomon* representeth *Eccl. xi. 9.*  
 the spirit and fixed ruling inclination of the  
 licentious youth, *to walk in the way of his*  
*heart, and the sight of his eyes,* without con-  
 sidering that for all this God will bring him  
 into

into judgment. Nay, the same author seems, SERM.  
by way of penitential confession, to speak XV.  
of himself as far gone in the same profligate  
temper, chap. ii. 10. *Whatsoever mine eyes  
desired, I kept not from them: I with-held  
not my heart from any joy: What can this  
mean but that he did not check any of his  
inclinations? He had no rule over his own  
spirit, his appetites and passions; but grati-  
fied every desire which was excited by his  
senses, which is to walk by sight in the  
worst manner, as the most voluptuous men  
do; who, as the apostle saith, Titus iii. 3.  
Are foolish, disobedient, and deceived, serv-  
ing divers lusts and pleasures.*

2dly, Another sort of conversation, not so  
grossly sensual, may be comprehended in  
walking by sight: Every one knows that  
the human life is distinguished from that of  
all other living things, with great advantages  
and ornaments, besides those which arise di-  
rectly from the purely intellectual and moral  
capacities; tho' these capacities themselves,  
joined as they are in man to the sensitive  
life, raise it to a perfection which it could  
never rise to without them: It is easy to dis-  
cern what an addition both of beauty and  
happiness, reason, and the social virtues  
bring

SERM. bring to our present state of being, which  
 XV. otherwise it could not be capable of; but, I  
 say, abstracting from the highest uses of  
 reason and morality, which make the most  
 important difference between man and the  
 rest of the animal kinds, there are other  
 powers in the human nature which set our  
 condition far above all the brutal species.  
 Men have large comprehensive imaginations,  
 which afford them a vast variety of agree-  
 able entertainment; a sense of natural beauty  
 in the contemplation of objects which conti-  
 nually occur to them, and whence they learn  
 to diversify the pleasures of life by productions  
 of their own art in imitation of nature: An  
 ability of communicating their sentiments,  
 and thereby mutual aid and comfort to one  
 another by speech; a sense and a desire of  
 honour and approbation from each other,  
 which, not to mention any relation it hath  
 to virtue, the highest perfection and im-  
 provement of human nature, and the greatest  
 ornament of human life, yieldeth a delight  
 to the mind, far superior to any we have by  
 external senses, and produceth effects very ad-  
 vantageous to society. In these respects the  
 life of man hath a great pre-eminence above  
 the beasts; it is rendered much more ele-  
 gant as well as happy; and its sphere both



of action and enjoyment greatly enlarged, SERM.  
XV.  
 though still far short of the excellence which might be attained by the due use of our highest capacities. Now, how many are there of mankind who form their schemes for life, and take the measures of their conduct, by no higher principle? *Solomon* is an eminent example, who giveth this account of himself in the days of his vanity, *Eccles. ii.* from the 4th verse, *I made me great works, I builded houses, I planted vineyards, I made gardens and orchards, and planted trees in them of all kinds of fruits. I made pools of water to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees. I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle. I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I got me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments of all sorts.* How many would think themselves happy, and their enjoyments of life complete, in such a situation? But that wise king, reflecting maturely upon it, pronounces all to be vanity and vexation of spirit; surely we may say, *that* being wholly confined to the present state, and  
 abstract-

SERM. abstracting from all regard to religion, and  
 XV. all prospects in another world, it is walk-  
 ing not by faith, but by sight.

3dly, Besides the desires originally plant-  
 ed in our nature, which have been already  
 mentioned, to objects introduced by the ex-  
 ternal or internal senses, and which are a very  
 powerful principle of operation in our minds;  
 besides these, I say, there are secondary in-  
 clinations to those things, which are con-  
 sidered as the means of obtaining the grati-  
 fication of our primary desires; and the  
 conversation or course of deliberate action,  
 which is formed or directed by them, is also  
 comprehended in walking by sight. One  
 who hath lived any time in the world must  
 have observed, that riches and power are  
 ordinarily necessary to acquire and secure the  
 possession of worldly enjoyments; therefore  
 proportionably to the degree in which those  
 enjoyments are valued, and the earnestness  
 with which they are pursued, the means  
 of them are also sought after. Every one  
 must be sensible with what eagerness men  
 labour for riches and power, and how great  
 a share the acquisition of them hath in the  
 business of life; it is for this they rise early  
 and

and sit up late, and eat the bread of sorrows; SERM.  
 for this they submit to incessant toil, and, XV.  
 generally speaking, the more successful they  
 are, still they become the more solicitous,  
 and the more diligent. And it is as plain  
 that these lusts ruling in the human mind  
 corrupt it, and directing the general tenor  
 of a man's life they form a character con-  
 trary to what *St. Paul*, in the text, claimeth  
 for himself and his fellow disciples of Christ,  
 rejoicing in it, and to what he elsewhere  
 calleth a conversation in heaven. The ten-  
 dency and the effect of them riseth no high-  
 er than this present world, and they termi-  
 nate not in the rational and virtuous, but in  
 the merely animal life; as the apostle *John*  
 in other words explaineth the same doc-  
 trine, *the lust of the eyes, and the pride of*  
*life*, that is, the prevailing desire of wealth,  
 and of power, and honour, is *the love of the*  
*world*, inconsistent with *the love of the fa-*  
*ther*, or pure and sincere religion. Not  
 but wealth and power may be improved to  
 the purposes of piety and virtue, and for  
 that end, may be lawfully, if they be mode-  
 rately, desired and pursued; indeed it is from  
 this capacity that they derive their best ap-  
 pearance, and the chief pretence by which  
 the prosecution of them is justified to the  
 mind

SERM. mind itself. But when religion is made little  
 XV. more than a pretence, and the heart is con-  
 scious to itself that the other uses of world-  
 ly emoluments are principal in its view, and  
 the ruling motives to its designs, and its di-  
 ligence are taken from them, such a walk  
 may be justly said, to be by sight, and not by  
 faith; and this is the true character of all  
 our designs and endeavours, whether for  
 ourselves or others, which ultimately termi-  
 nate in the present state.

I come now, in the *second* place, to con-  
 sider the directly opposite principle, that is,  
*faith*, which giveth a quite different turn to  
 the temper and conversation of men, and  
 which the apostle representeth as the ani-  
 mating and governing principle of his own  
 life, and the lives of all sincere christians;  
*we walk by faith, not by sight*. No one  
 that readeth the New Testament can be  
 ignorant of its laying great stress on believ-  
 ing as absolutely necessary to our accep-  
 tance with God, and as the great principle of  
 religion. Christianity itself, or the gospel  
 scheme, as in opposition to the law of *Moses*,  
 is called *faith*, by the obedience of which  
 men are justified; plainly intimating, that  
 not the performance of external rites and  
 cere-

ceremonies will recommend them to the favour of God, but an affectionate persuasion concerning the fundamental doctrines after godliness, producing suitable dispositions of mind, and a suitable practice. But it is not merely to the truth contained in the christian revelation, or the light in which it setteth religious doctrines, that these great effects are attributed: Abraham was justified by faith, as well as we are; *he believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness*; he had a deep affecting impression of the being, the perfection, the providence and the promises of almighty God; and he walked before him, making his faith *perfect by good works*. And, in general, the apostle teacheth us, *Heb. xi. that without faith it is impossible to please God; for he that cometh to God, or would enter into a religious course of life, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of all them who diligently seek him*; which are doctrines not peculiar to christianity, but the essential principles of natural religion. For understanding this the better, let it be observed,

*First*, That nothing can be more absurd than opposing faith to reason; as if it were a blind credulity or an assent to propositions as true, without considering or inquiring

SERM. into the evidence upon which it is founded.

XV. So the mind of man is fram'd, that some ideas and perceptions do necessarily arise in it from external objects, or by an attention to its own powers and operations. There are also self-evident truths, which we cannot help assenting to as soon as they are intelligibly propos'd. But the principles of Religion are not of this sort; the existence of God himself, the first of them all, we have not such an intimate knowledge of as we have of our own existence, but must by searching find it out, that is, collect it by reasoning, or infer it from the existence of other beings, and from other truths first discern'd and acknowledged; upon this foundation the understanding proceedeth to discover the divine attributes and works, and by considering the relations we and other creatures stand in to God and to each other, attending at the same time to the sense of good and evil indelibly written in our hearts, we are convinc'd of moral obligations, and are enabled to form a system of duty which is the proper guide of life. In like manner christianity is so propos'd to us that we may have a rational persuasion of its truth; the divine Author of it and his apostles address'd their doctrines to the understandings of men, supporting them  
with

with proper arguments to induce an intelligent belief; such as the signs, wonders, and divers miracles, which were worked for confirming them; the evident accomplishment of ancient prophecies in the principal facts recorded in the gospel, which are the main articles of our faith, besides the intrinsic goodness of its precepts, and their perfect agreeableness to the best sentiments of the human mind: Thus God as a law-giver dealeth with us according to that constitution of our nature, of which himself is the Author. Our minds are capable of no other obligation with respect to points of belief, than to examine impartially, and without prejudice, that we may assent upon rational grounds; and this is all he requireth. Some indeed have advanced and endeavoured to impose upon others a quite different notion of faith, as if it were a confident persuasion founded upon mere authority, not only without, but directly contrary to, reason; this hath had very unhappy effects. The tendency of it is to turn religion into nonsense and absurdity, and to prejudice men against it as an affront to their understandings, only calculated for fools; and in the believers themselves it hath produced nothing but superstition and enthusiasm instead of a reasonable service.

SERM. But as the mind of man was not made for  
 XV. such a faith, indeed duly exercising its intellectual powers, is not capable of it, however some, by strong prejudices and stupid thoughtlessness, may get into a confused notion which they call believing; so let us never imagine that it is countenanced by the scriptures, which are written for *wise men*, and able *to judge what is said*. Particularly, the faith which the apostle speaketh of in the text, and by which he and other christians walked, is opposed to sight or sense, not to reason, of which it is the noblest use and improvement; and the obedience of faith is resignation, not of our understandings, but of prejudices and corrupt affections.

*2dly*, It is absolutely necessary that the great essential principles of religion, both natural and revealed, be duly attended to, and maturely considered, that they may have their proper effect. It is not enough that we have been once fully satisfied concerning the truth of them, and given our assent even upon the most just and rational foundation; they must be frequently reviewed, and made the subject of our designed and deliberate meditation, in order to their having a suitable influence on our temper




temper and practice ; for they do not operate like the ideas of sensible objects, which immediately and necessarily excite desire, and prompt to action, but by calm and attentive reflection they enter into the heart, and captivate the affections. Experience sheweth, that the most important truths, even known and believed, often lie dormant in the mind like points of useless speculation, without producing any such dispositions, or such a conversation as they tend to ; which is the case of the most abandoned and profligate sinners, whose crimes are highly aggravated by their being committed against conviction. One cause of this surprizing appearance, so disagreeable one would think to the constitution of the human nature, is stupid inattention, which in many cases, and particularly in religion, hath the same effect that ignorance hath. As there can be no affection to that which is altogether unknown, and consequently it cannot ingage us in any prosecution ; the object which is not attended to, is in this respect as if it were unknown ; no desires are excited, the mind seeth no importance in it, feeleth no attractive force. This seemeth to be the case of the unfruitful hearers of the gospel, described by our Saviour in his parable of the sower : *They*

SERM.  
XV.  
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SERM. bear, but they do not understand; which  
 XV. doth not proceed from an incapacity, for  
 then it could not be imputed as a fault, but  
 from careless inattention; the cause whereof  
 generally is, that vicious inclinations, by  
 habitual indulgence, have got the ascendant  
 in the heart, rendering it insensible of the  
 beauty and the great advantages of religion;  
 but whatever the cause be, neglecting to  
 apply its thinking powers to the considera-  
 tion of important subjects intelligibly pro-  
 posed, is properly the guilt and the reproach  
 of a reasonable creature; and the prophet  
*Isaiab* had reason to call upon transgressors  
 to *shew themselves men*, by bringing to mind  
 or seriously attending to the proper motives  
 of action; for that is an obligation from  
 which rational and moral agents can never  
 discharge themselves. And this I take to  
 be an essential ingredient in the crime of  
 unbelief, which is represented in the gospel  
 as so heinous, and whereby so many sinners  
 come short of salvation.

3dly, That faith may be the governing  
 principle of our lives, it must be rooted in  
 the affections as well as the understanding,  
 and the objects of it have the full approba-  
 tion and consent of the mind. The least  
 reflection will enable us to distinguish be-  
 tween

tween a naked assent to truth, and a deep SERM.  
affecting impression of the subject, as of the XV.  
highest dignity and worth, or of the utmost   
consequence to ourselves; the former, be it  
ever so firm, frequently reviewed, and care-  
fully attended to, hath no influence at all  
on the springs of action: Thus we know  
there are many speculative truths discovered  
by diligent observation and abstract reason-  
ing, most certainly believed, and very en-  
tertaining to the mind, which yet have no  
relation to, nor any effect on practice; but  
there are certain instincts or determinations  
in our nature, which set all its active powers  
a-work, and without first moving them, no  
object can have any share in determining our  
conduct, or can engage our pursuit, what-  
ever light it may appear in to the under-  
standing. There is a determination in the  
human mind to approve of moral excellence,  
and affections to it are a part of our consti-  
tution; self-love also is inseparable from our  
nature; but neither of these operateth ne-  
cessarily in the best manner, and to their  
producing their proper and regular effects.  
The objects must be set in a just light, which  
is the province of faith: We cannot help  
approving moral rectitude and goodness  
when it is fairly represented; but it is in

SER. M. our power, by inveterate prejudices, to viti-  
 XV. tiate our taste, and even harden our hearts  
 into an insensibility of the beauty of holiness. In like manner it is impossible to extinguish the desire of happiness; but it is possible, and indeed too usual, to pervert and misapply it, so as to prefer trifles to things of the greatest moment, and, instead of a wise attention to our true interest, to pursue low and transitory enjoyments, as if the whole of man, the all of his happiness, consisted in them; which proceedeth not from want of self-love, but misplacing it; and through the influence of corrupt partial affection misjudging the means whereby our true happiness is to be attained. Upon the whole, then, the true notion of faith, as a principle to walk by, is compleated in these three articles, a right understanding of religious truths, those, I mean, which are essential and directly tend to a good life, an attentive consideration of them, and receiving them in love. This faith is a moral virtue, indeed the root of all moral virtues; so it is always represented in scripture, and so it is properly enjoined as the result of all our moral obligations: For as the due exercise of our rational powers will directly lead us to the knowledge and belief of the great fundamental

damental principles of religion, and nothing SERM.  
can be more apparently our duty, as men, XV.  
than to apply our minds to the serious con-  
sideration of them, so the affections planted  
in our hearts will even naturally terminate  
on them, as excellent in themselves, and of  
the greatest importance to our happiness, if  
the course of these affections be not wilfully  
and obstinately obstructed by violent con-  
tracted prejudices and prepossessions.

Having now finished the explication  
which I proposed of these two directly  
opposite principles, faith and sight, I leave  
it to yourselves to judge which is the more  
reasonable and becoming you. In govern-  
ing ourselves, and taking the measures of  
our conduct by the one, that is, sight, we  
only provide for the lower part of our na-  
ture, and for a very short duration; all our  
cares are employed about the enjoyments of  
the body, of the senses, and the imagina-  
tion, of a transitory life which is but the in-  
fancy of our being; the superior powers of  
our minds are neglected, or not exercised in  
a proper manner, and to answer the ends  
they were designed for. What a disparage-  
ment is it to reason, capable of discerning  
sublime truths, and entertaining the mind  
with high pleasure, to be used wholly in

SERM. the service of this animal life and its interests? And how deplorable is the condition of the human heart, when its best affections, capable of yielding the noblest enjoyment, are altogether uncultivated and unexercised? How unworthy of an immortal spirit are the views of the men who walk by sight? the men whose prospects do not reach beyond the limits of this short and uncertain life? One would think a regard to the dignity of our nature, and the rank it holdeth in the creation, should raise a resentment against such dishonour done to it. Hath God allied us to the world of spirits, and made us capable of contemplating the noblest objects, even himself, and of being like him, which the scripture calls partaking of a divine nature; and shall we chuse to confine our views to this earth, and to have our portion in it? Let us at least wisely consider where our true interest lieth, and what is the course of life in which we may expect the greatest happiness. It is impossible, if we would, to extinguish the powers of reason and conscience altogether; if we do not suffer them to reign, they will at least reproach us for the indignity done them, so severely, as to pall the pleasures of life, and make us feel the most bitter and

inward pains, which *Solomon* calleth *wounds of the spirit*, and saith, *no man can bear them*. And as we cannot help having anxious foreboding thoughts of futurity, no man can satisfy his mind, upon rational evidence, that he shall not subsist in another state after this life is ended; what defence is there against the dismal apprehensions of unhappiness in it? So that our condition in walking by sight, is both mean and miserable. But faith exalteth the human nature, and raiseth it to the divine likeness; it enlargeth the intellectual powers, entertaining them with objects which, though unseen, are certain, and of the most transcendent excellence, such as God himself, the beauty of holiness, and the glories of another world; it is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen; maketh the invisible Deity, with all his amiable perfections, intimately present to the mind, the subject of its most affectionate and delightful contemplations; and it is fully convinced, not in the way of an enthusiastic wilful persuasion, or superstitious bigotry, but by a calm attentive consideration of rational evidence; the mind, I say, is fully convinced that there is an important reality in the happiness of good men in a future state; upon  
 this

SERM.  
 XV.

S E R M. this foundation faith elevateth the affections  
 XV. to divine things, it exciteth fervent desires  
 to the perfection of virtue, producing an inviolable resolution to pursue it constantly as the greatest good of man; it supporteth the mind under all difficulties, and enableth it to resist and to conquer temptations, and giveth an heavenly turn to the temper and the whole conversation, which is formed upon the motives of religious virtue, particularly the hope of seeing God hereafter more perfectly than he can be seen now, and being fully satisfied with his likeness.

If there be such an excellence in faith, if it so improveth the powers of the believing mind, and exalteth its condition, how much are we indebted to the mercy of God for the christian revelation? The principal objects of faith are the being, the perfections, and counsels of God towards men, and that *he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him.* These points are clearly discovered in the gospel: *No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him, John i. 18. And he hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.* If therefore we have embraced this revelation upon a full conviction of its truth and divine authority,



authority, it may be reasonably expected we should do *more than others*; that our affections should be set on things above, that being renewed in the spirit of our minds, we should prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, and that we should live, as the apostle saith he did, Gal. ii. 20. by the faith of the son of God, that is, order our whole conversation conformably to his doctrine.

In conclusion, let us every one for ourselves judge whether we walk by faith or sight, or what is the true character of our temper and conversation. One would think it should not be very difficult for men to know the governing principle of their own actions; what are the motives which generally influence them, and the views they habitually and uniformly pursue; yet so it is, that many deceive themselves in this important matter; they are conscious of believing the truths of religion, and pay some regard to it in practice, at least, so far as to attend its positive institutions, and abstain from gross acts of impiety, at the same time their affections to things on earth are very strong, and they have a principal share in their pursuit. I hope what hath been said may assist us in determining this point, if we are disposed

SERM. to examine impartially. Do the objects of  
XV. faith engage our attention, and have they the  
ascendant in our hearts above all others? Are the things of the world, the pleasures of sense, riches, and honours, pursued in subordination to them? Are virtue knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and charity added to our faith? And doth it produce the works of righteousness habitually in our lives? For by them it is that faith is made perfect? If it be so, *we are in Christ Jesus, and shall be accepted as heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

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