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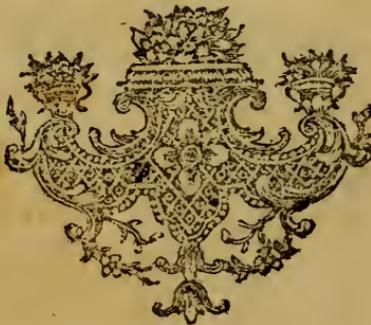
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TEMPLE CHURCH.

By THO. SHERLOCK, D. D.

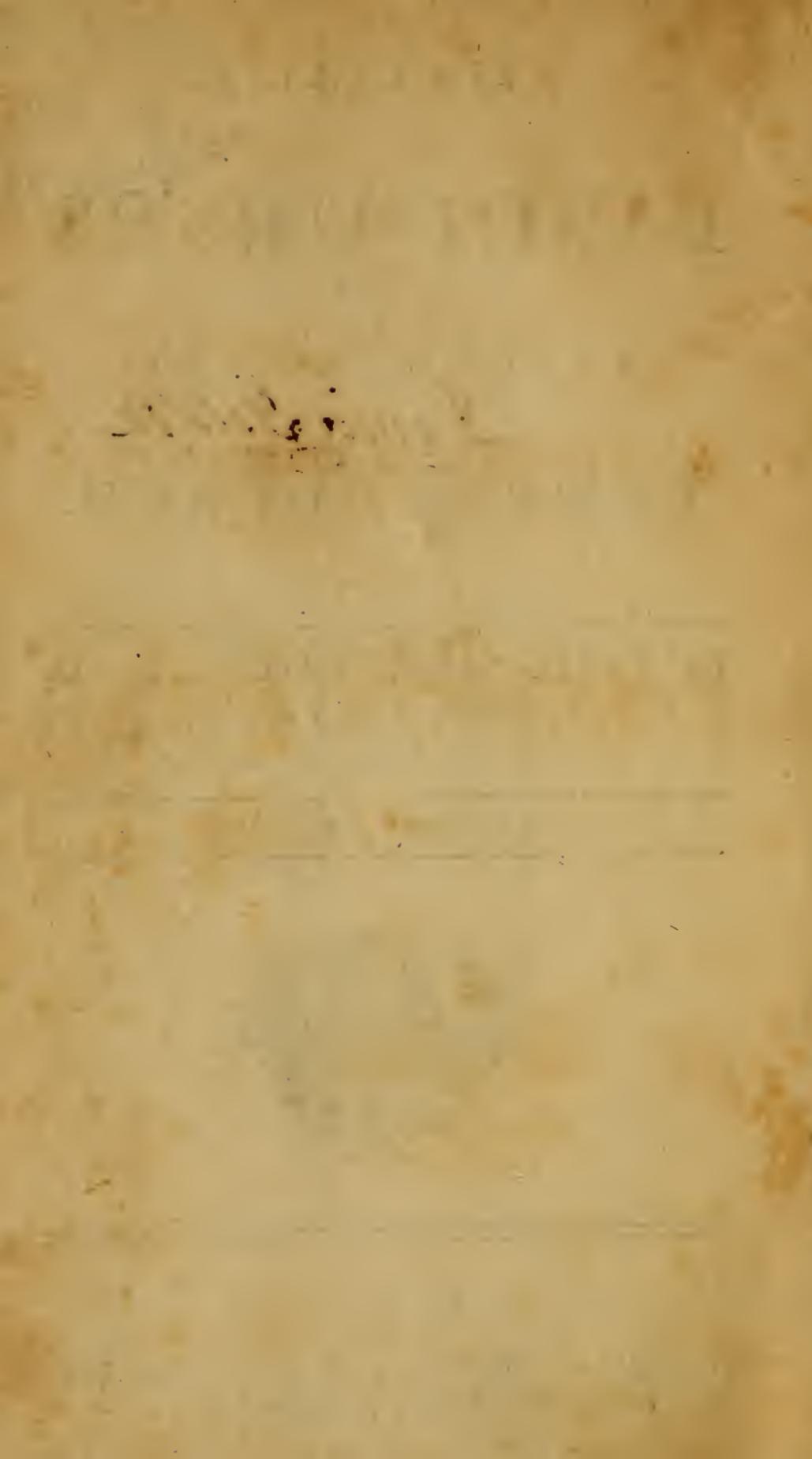
Late Master of the TEMPLE,
And late Lord Bishop of LONDON.

The THIRD EDITION.



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To the WORSHIPFUL the

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John G. G.
Of the TWO HONOURABLE

SOCIETIES of the TEMPLE

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THESE

DISCOURSES

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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DISCOURSE



DISCOURSE I.

P A R T I.

JOHN vi. 67, 68, 69.

Then said Jesus unto the Twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

IN the foregoing Part of this Chapter we read, that the Doctrine of our Saviour had given such Offence to his Hearers, that many even of his Disciples went back, and walked no more with him: Upon which Occasion our Saviour put this Question to the Twelve, *Will ye also go away?* To which St. Peter, in the Name of all, made answer, *Lord, to whom shall we go, Thou hast the Words of eternal Life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.* In this Answer there are three Things expressed,

expressed, or implied, as the Ground of their Constancy and Adherence to Christ :

I. The first is, The miserable Condition they should be in, if they did forsake him, having no other in whom they could trust: *Lord, to whom shall we go?*

II. The second is, The Excellency of his Religion, and the certain Means it afforded of obtaining that which is the great End of Religion, a blessed Life after this: *Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.*

III. The third is, The Authority and divine Commission of Christ, upon which their Faith and Confidence were built: *We believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.* To believe, because we have sufficient Reason to determine our Belief, is a rational Faith; and this is what is meant in the Word ἐγνώκαμεν: *We believe, because we have, from the Things we have heard and seen of you, determined with ourselves, That thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*

These three Reasons, which St. Peter gives for Adherence to Christ, refer to as many general Principles or Maxims:

As first, That Religion, the only Means by which Men can arrive at true Happiness, by which they can attain to the last Perfection and Dignity of their Nature, does not, in the present Circumstances of the World, depend on human Reasoning or Inventions: For, was this the Case, we need not to go from home for Religion, or to seek farther than our own Breast for the Means of reconciling ourselves to God, and obtaining his Favour, and, in consequence of it, Life eternal. Upon such Supposition, St. Peter argued very weakly, in saying, *To whom shall*

shall we go? For to whom need they go to learn that which they were well able to teach themselves?

The second Principle referred to is, That the great End of Religion is future Happiness; and consequently the best Religion is that which will most surely direct us to eternal Life. Upon this Ground St. Peter prefers the Gospel of Christ, *Thou hast the Words of eternal Life.*

The third Thing is, That the Authority and Word of God is the only sure Foundation of Religion, and the only reasonable Ground for us to build our Hopes on. Thus St. Peter accounts for his Confidence in the Religion which Christ taught: *We know, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

In this State of the case, the Necessity of Religion in general is supposed; and the only Question is, from what Fountain we must derive it. The Dispute can only lie between Natural and Revealed Religion: If Nature be able to direct us, it will be hard to justify the Wisdom of God in giving us a Revelation, since the Revelation can only serve the same Purpose, which nature alone could well supply.

Since the Light of the Gospel has shone throughout the World, Nature has been much improving; we see many Things clearly, many Things which Reason readily embraces, which nevertheless the World before was generally a Stranger to. The Gospel has given us true Notions of God and of ourselves, right Conceptions of his Holiness and Purity, and of the Nature of divine Worship: It has taught us a Religion, in the Practice of which our present Ease and Comfort, and our Hopes of future Happiness and Glory, consist; it has rooted
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out Idolatry and Superstition; and by instructing us in the Nature of God, and discovering to us his Unity, his Omnipresence, and infinite Knowledge, it has furnished us even with Principles of Reason, by which we reject and condemn the Rites and Ceremonies of Heathenism and Idolatry, and discover wherein the Beauty and Holiness of divine Worship consist: For the Nature of divine Worship must be deduced from the Nature of God; and 'tis impossible for Men to pay a reasonable Service to God, till they have just and reasonable Notions of him. But now, it seems, this is all become pure natural Religion; and 'tis to our own Reason and Understanding that we are indebted for the Notion of God and of Divine Worship: And whatever else in Religion is agreeable to our Reason, is reckoned to proceed entirely from it: And, had the Unbelievers of this Age heard St. *Peter's* piteous Complaint, *Lord, to whom shall we go?* they would have bid him go to himself, and consult his own Reason, and there he should find all that was worth finding in Religion.

But let us, if you please, examine this Pretence, and see upon what Ground this Plea of natural Religion can be maintained. If Nature can instruct us sufficiently in Religion, we have indeed no Reason to go any were else; so far we are agreed: But whether Nature can or no, is, in Truth, rather a Question of Fact, than mere Speculation; for the Way to know what Nature can do, is to take Nature by itself, and try its Strength alone. There was a Time when Men had little else but Nature to go to; and that is the proper Time to look into, to see what mere and unassisted Nature can do in Religion. Nay, there are still Nations under the Sun, who are, as to Religion, in a mere State of Nature: The glad Tidings of the Gospel have not reached them, nor have they been blessed, or (to speak in the Modern Phrase) *prejudiced* with divine Revelations,

tions, which we, less worthy of them than they, so much complain of: In other Matters they are polite and civilized; they are cunning Traders, fine Artificers, and in many Arts and Sciences not unskilful. Here then we may hope to see natural Religion in its full Perfection; for there is no Want of natural Reason, nor any room to complain of Prejudices or Prepossession: But yet, alas! these Nations are held in the Chains of Darkness, and given up to the blindest Superstition and Idolatry. Men wanted not Reason before the Coming of Christ, nor Opportunity nor Inclination to improve it: Arts and Sciences had long before obtained their just Perfection; the Number of the Stars had been counted and their Motions observed and adjusted; the Philosophy, Oratory, and Poetry of those Ages are still the Delight and Entertainment of this: Religion was not the least Part of their Inquiry; they searched all the Recesses of Reason and Nature; and, had it been in the Power of Reason and Nature to furnish Men with just Notions and Principles of Religion, here we should have found them: But, instead of them, we find nothing but the grossest Superstition and Idolatry; the Creatures of the Earth advanced into Deities, and Men degenerating and making themselves lower than the Beasts of the Field. Time would fail me to tell of the Corruptions and Extravagancies of the politest Nations. Their Religion was their Reproach, and the Service they paid their Gods was a Dishonour to them and to themselves; The most sacred Part of their Devotion was the most impure; and the only Thing that was commendable in it, is, that it was kept as a great Mystery and Secret, and hid under the Darkness of the Night; and, was Reason now to judge, it would approve of nothing in this Religion, but the Modesty of withdrawing itself from the Eyes of the World.

This being the Case wherever Men have been left to mere Reason and Nature to direct them; what Security have the great Patrons of natural Religion now, that were they left only to Reason and Nature, they should not run into the same Errors and Absurdities? Have they more Reason than those who have gone before them? In all other Instances Nature is the same now that ever it was, and we are but acting over again the same Part that our Ancestors acted before us: Wisdom and Prudence and Cunning are now what they formerly were; nor can this Age shew human Nature in any one Character exalted beyond the Examples which Antiquity has left us. Can we shew greater Instances of civil and political Wisdom, than are to be found in the Governments of *Greece* and *Rome*? Are not the civil Laws of *Rome* still had in Admiration? and have they not a Place allowed them still in almost all Kingdoms? Since then in nothing else we are grown wiser than the Heathen World, what Probability is there, that we should have grown wiser in Religion, if we had been left, as they were, to mere Reason and Nature? To this Day there is no Alteration for the better, except only in the Countries where the Gospel has been preached. What shall we say of the *Chinese*, a Nation that wants not either Reason or Learning, and in some Parts of it pretends to excel the World? They have been daily improving in the Arts of Life, and in every Kind of Knowledge and Science; but yet in Religion they are ignorant and Superstitious, and have but very little of what we call natural Religion among them: And what Ground is there to imagine that Reason would have done more, made greater Discoveries of Truth, or more entirely subdued the Passions of Men, in *England* or *France*, or any other Country of *Europe*, than it has in the Eastern or Southern Parts of the World? Are not Men as reasonable Creatures in the
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the East, as they are in the West? and have not they the same Means of exercising and improving their Reason too? Why then should you think that Reason would do that now in this Place, which it has never yet been able to do in any Time or Place whatever?

This Fact is so very plain and undeniable, that I cannot but think, that, would Men consider it fairly they would soon be convinced how much they are indebted to the Revelation of the Gospel, even for that natural Religion which they so fondly boast of: For how comes it to pass that there is so much Reason, such clear natural Religion, in every Country where the Gospel is professed, and so little of both every-where else?

But is there then, you'll say, no such Thing as natural Religion? Does not *St. Paul* lay the Heathen World under Condemnation for not attending to the Dictates of it? *Because, says he, that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead; so that they are without Excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became Fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an Image made like to corruptible Man, and to birds, and four-footed Beasts, and creeping Things.*—A sad Account this of the State of Religion in the Heathen World, and a manifest Proof how much Nature stands in need of Assistance! What we learn from *St. Paul* is plainly this; That, notwithstanding the Care which God had taken to display the Evidences of his own Being and Godhead in every

every Work of the Creation, so that Men could not but have a Notion of the Deity; yet, so little did they profit by that Knowledge, that it served only to render them inexcusable in their Superstition and Idolatry: For, when they *knew God*, (as indeed all the Heathen World had a Notion of a supreme Being) yet they *glorified him not as God; but changed the Glory of the uncorruptible God into an Image made like unto corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-footed Beasts, and creeping Things*. And was not Nature an Excellent Guide to follow, that thus stumbled at the very Threshold, and having from natural Reason the Notion of a supreme Deity, sought to find him among the four-footed Beasts and creeping Things of the Earth? Can you say who it was that thus debased the Reason and Understanding of Mankind? What Evil was it that had diffused itself through the whole Race, and so possessed their Senses, that *seeing they did not perceive, and hearing they did not understand*? Or, do you think, that you alone are exempt from this common, this universal Blindness, and that the same Reason and Nature, that hitherto have misguided all the World into Error and Idolatry, would lead you, out of the common Road, into Truth and pure Religion.

Is it not the utmost Presumption to think thus, and to imagine that we alone are able to surmount the Difficulties which all the World before us has sunk under? And yet thus every Man must think, who sets up natural Religion in Opposition to Revelation: For has mere Nature ever yet, in any one Part of the World, extricated itself from Error? Do the Nations of old, or those which now are, afford any Instances of this Kind? But still you think that Nature is sufficient to direct you; and what else is this but to distinguish yourself from all the World, as if you only were privileged against the common Failings and Corruptions of Mankind?

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But you'll say, Are there not complete Schemes of natural Religion drawn from Principles and Axioms of Reason, without calling in the Help of Revelation? And are they not evident Demonstrations that Nature is able to furnish us with a Religion that is pure and holy and agreeable to the divine Attributes? Allow this; but let us then be informed how it came to pass, that never any System of this pure Religion was in Use and Practice in any Nation, or indeed every fully discovered, till the Gospel had enlightened the World. You may boast of *Socrates* and *Plato*, and some few others in the Heathen World, and tell us perhaps of their great Attainments upon the Strength of mere Reason. Be it so: But what is this to the present Question? Must Millions in every Age of the World be left in Ignorance, because five or six among them may happen to extricate themselves? Would it be reasonable to suffer a whole Nation to perish without Help in a Plague, because some few were not tainted with the Distemper? Or, will you say all Men are seven Feet high, because we see now-and-then some who are?

I question not but the wise Creator of the World formed us for his own Service, and that he gave us whatever was requisite either to the Knowledge or the Performance of our Duty: And that there are still in Nature the Seeds and Principles of Religion, however buried under the Rubbish of Ignorance and Superstition, I as little question. But what was it, I beseech you, that oppressed this Light of Reason and Nature for so many Ages? And what is it that has now set it free? Whatever the Distemper was, Nature plainly wanted Assistance, being unable to disengage herself from the Bonds and Fetters in which she was held: We may disagree perhaps in finding a Name for this Evil, this general Corruption of Nature; but the Thing itself is evident;

dent; the Impotence of Nature stands confessed; the Blindness, the Ignorance of the Heathen World are too plain a Proof of it. This general Corruption and Weakness of Nature made it necessary that Religion should be restored by some other Means, and that Men should have other Helps to resort to, besides their own Strength and Reason. And, if natural Religion is indeed arrived to that State of Perfection so much boasted of, it gives a strong Testimony to the Gospel, and evidently proves it to be an adequate Remedy and Support against the Evil and Corruption of Nature: For, where the Gospel prevails, Nature is restored; and Reason, delivered from Bondage by Grace, sees and approves what is holy, just, and pure: For what else can it be ascribed to, but the Power of the Gospel, that, in every Nation that names the Name of Christ, even Reason and Nature see and condemn the Follies, which others still, for Want of the same Help, are held in Subjection to?

Can this Truth be evaded or denied? And what a Return then do we make for the Blessing we have received? And how despihtfully do we treat the Gospel of Christ, to which we owe that clear Light even of Reason and Nature which we now enjoy, when we endeavour to set up Reason and Nature in Opposition to it? Ought the withered Hand, which Christ has restored and made whole, to be lifted up against him? Or should the Dumb Man's Tongue, just loosened from the Bonds of Silence, blaspheme the Power that set it free? Yet thus foolishly do we sin, when we make natural Religion the Engine to batter down the Gospel; for the Gospel only could, and only has restored the Religion of Nature: And therefore there is a kind of Parricide in the Attempt, and an Infidelity heightened by the aggravating Circumstance of unnatural Baseness and Disingenuity.

Nor will the Success of the Attempt be much greater than the Wisdom and the Piety of it: For, when once Nature leaves her faithful Guide, the Gospel of Christ, it will be as unable to support itself against Error and Superstition, as it was to deliver itself from them, and will by Degrees fall back into its original Blindness and Corruption. Had you a View of the Disputes that arise even upon the Principles of natural Religion, it would shew you what the End will be; for the Wanderings of human Reason are infinite. Under the Gospel-Dispensation we have the immutable Word of God for the Support of our Faith and Hope. We know in whom we have believed; in Him, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived; and, poor as our Services are, we have His Word for it, that our Labour of Love shall not be forgotten. But to them who rely on Nature only, it is not evident, nor can it be, whether any future Reward shall attend their religious Service. Well therefore did St. *Peter* say to Christ, *Thou hast the Words of eternal Life*; for no other Religion can give any Security of Life and Happiness to its Votaries. Whither then shall we go from Christ, or to whom shall we seek for Succour, since he only has the Words of eternal Life?

DISCOURSE I.

PART II.

THE second Thing to be considered is, That the Excellency of Religion consists in affording certain Means of obtaining eternal Life.

Religion is founded in the Principles of Reason and Nature; and, without supposing this Foundation, it would be as rational an Act to preach to Horses as to Men. A Man who has the Use of Reason, cannot consider his Condition and Circumstances in this World, or reflect upon his Notions of Good and Evil, and the Sense he feels in himself that he is an accountable Creature for the Good or Evil he does, without asking himself, how he came into this World, and for what Purpose, and to whom it is that he is, or possibly may be, accountable. When, by tracing his own being to the Original, he finds that there is one supreme all-wise Cause of all Things; when by Experience he sees, that this World neither is, nor can be, the Place for taking a just and adequate Account of the Actions of Men; the Presumption that there is another State after this, in which Men shall live, grows strong and almost irresistible: When he considers farther the Fears and Hopes of Nature with respect to Futurity, the Fear of Death common to all, the Desire of continuing in Being which never forsakes us; and reflects for what Use and Purpose these strong Impressions were given us by the

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Author of Nature; he cannot help concluding that Man was made not merely to act a short Part upon the Stage of this World, but that there is another and more lasting State, to which he bears Relation. And from hence it must necessarily follow, that his Religion must be formed on a View of securing a future Happiness.

Since then the End that Men propose to themselves by Religion is such, it will teach us wherein the true Excellency of Religion consists. If eternal Life and future Happiness are what we aim at, that will be the best Religion, which will most certainly lead us to eternal Life and future Happiness: And it will be to no Purpose to compare Religions together in any other Respects, which have no Relation to this End.

Let us then by this Rule examine the Pretensions of Revelation, and, as we go along compare it with the present State of natural Religion, that we may be able to judge, *To whom we ought to go.*

Eternal Life and Happiness are out of our Power to give ourselves, or to obtain by any Strength and Force, or any Policy or Wisdom. Could our own Arm rescue us from the Jaws of Death and the Powers of the Kingdom of Darkness; could we set open the Gates of Heaven for ourselves and enter in to take Possession of Life and Glory; we should want no Instructions or Assistances from Religion; since what St. *Peter* said of Christ every Man might apply to himself, and say, *I have the Words, or Means of eternal Life.*

But, since we have not this Power of Life and Death; and since there is One who has, who governeth all Things in Heaven and in Earth, who is over all God blessed for evermore; it necessarily fol-

lows, that either we must have no Share or Lot in the Glories of Futurity, or else that we must obtain them from God, and receive them as his Gift and Favour: And consequently, if eternal Life be the End of Religion, and likewise the Gift of God, Religion can be nothing else but the Means proper to be made use of by us to obtain of God this most excellent and perfect Gift of eternal Life: For, if eternal Life be the End of Religion, Religion must be the Means of obtaining eternal Life; and, if eternal Life can only be had from the Gift of God, Religion must be the Means of obtaining this Gift from God.

And thus far all Religions, that ever have appeared in the World, have agreed: The Question has never yet been made by any, whether God is to be applied to for eternal Happiness or no; but every Sect has placed its Excellency in this, that it teaches the properest and most effectual Way of making this Application. Even natural Religion pretends to no more than this; it claims not eternal Life as the Right of Nature, but the Right of Obedience, and of Obedience to God, the Lord of Nature: And the Dispute between natural and revealed Religion is not, whether God is to be applied to for eternal Happiness; but only, whether Nature or Revelation can best teach us how to make this Application.

Prayers, and Praises, and Repentance for Sins past, are Acts of Devotion, which Nature pretends to instruct and direct us in: But why does she teach us to pray, to praise, or to repent, but that she esteems one to be the proper Method of expressing our Wants, the other of expressing our Gratitude, and the third of making Atonement for Iniquity and Offences against God? In all these Acts Reference is had to the over-ruling Power of the Almighty;

ty; and they amount to this Confession, That the End of all Religion is to please God in order to make ourselves happy.

This will shew us what must necessarily be understood by any Person's, or by any Religion's, *having the Words of Eternal Life*: For since eternal Life can only be had by pleasing God, no Person, no Religion, can be said to have the Words of eternal Life upon any other Account, than because it teaches and enables us so far at least to please God, as to obtain eternal Life from him.

If we consider God as the Ruler of this World as well as of the next, Religion indeed will be as necessary a Means of obtaining the Blessings of this Life, as of that which is to come. But this will make no Alteration in the Nature of Religion: For, if the Blessings of this Life are the Gift of God, they must be obtained by pleasing God; and the same Services must intitle us to the Blessings of this Life and of the next, unless you can suppose that there are different Ways of pleasing God, one Way to please him, in order to obtain the Blessings of this World; and another, in order to obtain the Blessings of Heaven.

From this Account of the Nature of Religion, That it is the Knowledge of pleasing God, and serving him acceptably, (I speak of Religion now considered only as a Rule) there are some Consequences which naturally follow, that may be of great Service to us in directing us in our Choice of Religion.

First then; since 'tis the Perfection of Religion to instruct us how to please God; and since to please God, and to act according to the Will of God, are but one and the same Thing; it necessarily follows, that must be the most perfect Religion,

which does most perfectly instruct us in the Knowledge of the Will of God. Allow then Nature to have all the Advantages that ever the greatest Patrons of natural Religion laid claim to on her behalf ; allow Reason to be as clear, as uncorrupted, as unprejudiced, as even our fondest Wishes would make it; yet still it can never be supposed, that Nature and Reason, in all their Glory, can be able to know the Will of God so well as he himself knows it: And therefore, should God ever make a Declaration of his Will, that Declaration must, according to the Nature and Necessity of the Thing, be a more perfect Rule for Religion, than Reason and Nature can possibly furnish us with. Had we the Wisdom and Reason of Cherubims and Seraphims to direct us in the Worship and Service of our Maker, nevertheless it would be our highest Wisdom, as it is theirs, to submit to his Laws, that is, to the Declarations of his Will.

Secondly; From hence it appears, how extremely wrong it is to compare Natural Religion and Revelation together, in order to inquire which is preferable; for 'tis neither more nor less than inquiring, whether we know God's Will better than he himself knows it. False Revelations are no Revelations; and therefore to prefer natural Religion before such pretended Revelations, is only to reject a Forgery: But to suppose that there is, or may be, a true Revelation, and yet to say that natural Religion is a better Guide, is to say that we are wiser than God, and know better how to please him without his Directions than with them. Upon this State of the Case then, a Revelation must be entirely rejected as a Forgery, or entirely submitted to; and the only Debate between natural Religion and Revelation must be, whether we really know a Revelation, or no; and not whether Revelation or Nature
be,

be, in the Nature of Things, the best and surest Foundation of Religion: Which Dispute but ill becomes our Condition, and is a vain Attempt to exalt ourselves and our own Reason *above every Thing that is called God.*

Since then Revelation, considered as such, must needs be the surest Guide in Religion, every reasonable Man is bound to consider the Pretensions of Revelation, when offered to him; for no Man can justify himself in relying merely on natural Religion, till he has satisfied himself that no better Directions are to be had. For since 'tis the Business of Religion to please God, is it not a very natural and a very reasonable Inquiry to make, whether God has any where declared what will please him? at least, 'tis reasonable when we are called to this Inquiry, by having a Revelation tendered to us, supported by such Evidence, which, though it may be easily rejected without Reason, yet to Reason will ever approve itself.

But the Inquiry into the Evidence for any particular Revelation is excluded by those who argue against all Revelation *a priori*, as being inconsistent with the Wisdom of God. What they say amounts to this; That God having given us Reason, has bound us to obey the Dictates of Reason, and tied himself down to judge us by that Rule, and that only: To suppose otherwise they imagine, would be to maintain that God gave us an imperfect Rule at first, and which wanted to be mended; a Thing, they imagine, inconsistent with his Wisdom: And the Rule of Reason being sufficient, all Revelation, they judge, must be useless and impertinent and, consequently can never derive itself from God. But, as it is too apparent to be denied, that Reason and natural Religion never did in any Age universally prevail; to help out the Argument, it is farther supposed,

ed, that whatever happens in the World is agreeable to the original Design of God; and consequently, that those who have least of Reason and natural Religion, are in the State for which God designed them; and, if so, 'tis absurd to suppose a Revelation should be given, to take Men out of that State in which God originally designed to place them.

This is the Sum of the Argument against Revelation *a priori*: To consider it particularly will take more Time than can be allowed: But in brief we may observe,

1. That to argue from the Perfection of human Reason, that we are discharged from receiving any new Laws from God, is inconsistent with as clear a Principle of Reason as any whatever, and which necessarily arises from the Relation between God and Man; which is, That the Creature is bound to obey the Creator, in which Way soever his Will is made known to him: And this surely is true with respect to the highest Order of Beings, as well as to the lowest; for this Plea, now made for human Reason, would be presumptuous in the Mouth of an Angel, and inconsistent with the Subjection he owes to God.

2. As to the Perfection of human Reason, it cannot be, nor, I suppose, will it be maintained, that human Reason is absolutely perfect; and therefore the Meaning must be, that Reason is relatively perfect, considered as the Rule of our Obedience. But this is true only upon Supposition that Reason is the only Rule of our Obedience; for, if there be any other Rule besides, mere Reason cannot be the perfect Rule of our Obedience: And therefore this Argument is really begging the Thing in Question; for it supposes there is no other Rule but Reason, which is the Thing not to be supposed, but to be proved.

proved. As much may be said for every Law, as is said in this Case for human Reason: Every Law being the only Law in the Case, is a perfect Rule for the Subject's Obedience, because the Subject is bound to no more than the Law requires; But, if the Law be amended and enlarged by the same Authority that made it, it is no longer a perfect Rule of Obedience; but, to make it such, it must be taken jointly with the Corrections and Enlargements made by the proper Authority.

3. Hence it follows, That to alter or add to a Law once considered as a perfect Rule of Obedience, when an Alteration of Circumstances requires it, is neither useless nor impertinent, but oftentimes the Effect of Wisdom and Necessity.

4. To say that Revelation is unnecessary, because Reason is a perfect Rule, and at the same time to affirm that those who have but an imperfect Use of Reason have no Need of Revelation, is a manifest Contradiction: To say farther, that those who are in such a State that actually they do not obey the Laws of Reason, and morally speaking, cannot obey, are nevertheless in such a State as God intended they should be in, is not only making God the Author of Evil, but it is ascribing to him two inconsistent Intentions: For to argue that God gave Men Reason to be the Rule of their Obedience, is supposing that his original Intention is, that Men should obey Reason; to argue at the same time that those who live in Disobedience to this Law are in the State which God intended them to be in, is to suppose that God intended the Law should be obeyed, and not obeyed, at the same time. But to return: .

We are not now arguing in behalf of any particular Revelation, which may be true or false for any thing

thing that has hitherto been said: But this I urge, That Revelation is the surest Foundation of Religion; and this wants no other Proof than an Explication of the Terms: Religion, considered as a Rule, is the Knowledge of serving and pleasing God: Revelation is the Declaration of God, how he would be served, and what will please him: And, unless we know what will please God, better than he himself does, Revelation must be the best Rule to serve and please God by, that is, it must be the best Religion.

From hence then, I say, it is incumbent on every Man of Sense and Reason, upon every one who judges for himself in the Choice of his Religion, first to enquire whether there be a Revelation, or no: Nor can the Precepts of natural Religion singly be drawn into question, till 'tis first certain, that there is no Revelation to direct us: And therefore there can be no Comparison stated generally between natural and revealed Religion, in order to determine our Choice between them; because the Revelation must be first rejected, before natural Religion can pretend to the sole Direction.

And yet this is the beaten Path that Unbelievers tread: They consider in general, that Revelation is subject to many Uncertainties; it may be a Cheat at first, or it may be corrupted afterwards and not faithfully handed down to them; but in natural Religion there can be no Cheat, because in that every Man judges for himself, and is bound to nothing but what is agreeable to the Dictates of Reason and his own Mind: And upon these general Views they reject all Revelation whatever, and adhere to natural Religion as the safer Guide. But attend to the Consequence of this Reasoning, which is this; That, because there may be a false Revelation, therefore there cannot be a true one: For; unless
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this Consequence be just, they are inexcusable in rejecting all Revelations, because of the Uncertainties which may attend them.

But now to apply what has been said to the Christian Revelation: It has such Pretences, at least, as may make it worthy of a particular Consideration: It pretends to come from Heaven; to have been delivered by the Son of God; to have been confirmed by undeniable Miracles and Prophecies; to have been ratified by the Blood of Christ and his Apostles, who died in asserting its Truth: It can shew likewise an innumerable Company of Martyrs and Confessors: Its Doctrines are pure and holy, its Precepts just and Righteous; its Worship is a reasonable Service, refined from the Errors of Idolatry and Superstition, and spiritual like the God who is the Object of it: It offers the Aid and Assistance of Heaven to the Weakness of Nature; which makes the Religion of the Gospel to be as practicable, as it is reasonable: It promises infinite Rewards to Obedience, and threatens eternal Punishment to obstinate Offenders; which makes it of the utmost Consequence to us soberly to consider it, since every one who rejects it stakes his own Soul against the Truth of it.

Are these such Pretences, as are to be turned off with general and loose Objections? Because Miracles may be pretended, shall not the Miracles of Christ be considered, which were not so much as questioned by the Adversaries of the Gospel in the first Ages? Because there may be Impostors, shall Christ be rejected, whose Life was Innocence, and free from any Suspicion of private Design, and who died to seal the Truths he had delivered? Because there have been Cheats introduced by worldly Men endeavouring to make a Gain of Godliness, shall the Gospel be suspected, that in every Page declares
against

againſt the World, againſt the Pleaſures, the Riches, the Glories of it; that labours no one Thing more than to draw off the Affections from Things below, and to raiſe them to the Enjoyment of heavenly and ſpiritual Delights?

But, whether you will conſider it, or no; yet there is ſuch a Call to you to conſider it, as muſt render your Neglect inexcusable. You cannot ſay you want Inducement to conſider it, when you ſee it entertained by men of all Degrees. The Goſpel does not make ſo mean a Figure in the World, as to juſtify your Contempt of it: The Light ſhines forth in the World, whether you will receive it, or no; if you receive it not, the Conſequence is upon your own Soul, and you muſt answer it.

Were Men ſincere in their Profeſſions of Religion, or even in their Deſires of Salvation and Immortality, the Controverſies in Religion would ſoon take a new turn: The only Queſtion would be, whether the Goſpel were true, or no: We ſhould have no reaſoning againſt Revelation in general; for 'tis impoſſible that a ſincerely religious Man ſhould not wiſh for a Revelation of God's Will, if there be not one already: We ſhould then ſee another kind of Induſtry uſed in ſearching the Truths of God, which are now overlooked, becauſe Men have loſt their Regard for the Things which make for their Salvation. Were the Goſpel but a Title to an Eſtate, there is not an Infidel of them all, who would ſit down contented with his own general Reaſonings againſt it: It would then be thought worth looking into, its Proofs would be conſidered, and a juſt Weight allowed them: And yet the Goſpel is our Title, our only Title, to a much nobler Inheritance than this World knows; 'tis the Patent by which we claim Life and Immortality, and all the Joys and Bleſſings of the heavenly *Canaan*. Had any Man
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but a Pedigree as antient as the Gospel, what a Noise should we have about it? And yet the Gospel is despised, which sets forth to us a nobler Pedigree than the Kings of the Earth can boast; a Descent from Christ, who is Head over the whole Family; by which we claim as Heirs of God, and Co-heirs with Christ: And, did we not despise our Relation with Christ, and secretly abhor and dread the Thoughts of Immortality, we could not be so cold in our Regard to the Gospel of God.

I wish every Man, who argues against the Christian Religion, would take this one serious Thought along with him; That he must one Day, if he believes that God will judge the World; argue the Case once more at the Judgment-seat of God: And let him try his Reasons accordingly. Do you reject the Gospel, because you will admit nothing that pretends to be a Revelation? Consider well; is it a Reason that you will justify to the Face of God? Will you tell him, that you had resolved to receive no positive Commands from him, nor to admit any of his Declarations for Law? If it will not be a good Reason then, it is not a good Reason now; and the stoutest Heart will tremble to give such an impious Reason to the Almighty, which is a plain Defiance to his Wisdom and Authority.

DISCOURSE I.

PART III.

A Fairer Issue there cannot be for the Trial of any Religion: For, since eternal Life is the End that all Men aim at by Religion, that must necessarily be the best Religion, which most certainly leads us to this great and desirable Blessing. But the Difficulty is, how to apply this Rule, so as to form our Judgments upon it, and direct our Choice, since all Religions pretend *to have the Words of eternal Life*; which makes it necessary for us first to enable ourselves to determine which are, and which are not, *Words of eternal Life*, before this Rule can be of any Service to us in distinguishing true and genuine Religion from the specious Pretences of Counterfeits and Impostors. In order to this, we must consider, that there are some Principles which in all Religions are allowed, and from the Consideration of which we may possibly come to some fixed Determination in this Matter: Such are these; that Life eternal can be had only from God, who is the Author and Fountain of all Being: That from him the only Way to obtain it, is, by living and conversing in this World agreeably to his holy Will: From whence it evidently follows, That, since to do the Will of God is the only Way of obtaining eternal Life, the Words which instruct us in the Knowledge of God's Will, must needs be *the Words of eternal Life*. Thus far we can go upon mere Principles of Reason.

From hence the Way lies open and plain to another Consequence of some Importance in the present Question: For, since it is the Perfection of Religion, considered as a Rule or Institution, to direct us in all Things to act according to the Will of God, when we inquire from what Principle we ought to derive our Religion, we do in Truth inquire from what Principle we may best derive the Knowledge of God's Will; for the Knowledge of God's Will is universally acknowledged to be the true and proper Rule and Measure of our religious Obedience in all Things.

There are but two Ways by which we can possibly arrive at this Knowledge: One is, by following the Dictates of Reason and Nature; when from that Knowledge of God and his Attributes, which Reason and Nature furnish us with, we infer his Right of governing, and our Duty of obeying; and when from the Holiness and Purity of God, and the necessary Difference between Good and Evil, we infer wherein our Obedience must consist, namely, in serving an holy God in holy Things, and in keeping ourselves pure and undefiled from Evil, even as he is pure: And this is called natural Religion. The other Way by which we may possibly arrive at the Knowledge of God's Will, is, by having it declared to us, either immediately by God himself, or by others sufficiently authorised and commissioned by him to make such Declaration in his Name: And this is what we call Revelation. And, as Nature and Revelation are the only Ways by which we can come to the Understanding of God's Will; so, for that Reason, they are the only Principles from which Religion can derive itself.

Between these two, considered purely as Principles of religious Knowledge, it is no hard Matter

to judge, which is the safest and securest for us to rely on; it being a Matter that will bear no Dispute, whether our own Reason or God himself can best instruct us in the Knowledge of his Will; upon which single Point the whole Controversy between Nature and Revelation turns, as long as they are considered only as Principles of Religion, without drawing into the Question the Merits of any particular Revelation, or of any particular Scheme or System of Natural Religion: The Consequence of which is plainly this; That, as Nature is a better Guide than any pretended Revelation, so every true Revelation, as far as it goes, is a better Guide than Nature.

The last Consequence, and for the sake of which I have made this Deduction hitherto, is, That, when any particular Revelation is to be examined, when it lies before us to be received, or to be rejected, it is observed, in the very nature of the Thing, to put the Determination upon a Comparison between Natural Religion and Revelation; considered in themselves; since, if the Revelation be false there want no Arguments to make it yield to Nature; and, if it be true, no Arguments can be sufficient.

And thus it appears, that the very Topic itself is excluded, from which the Deists of the present Age fetch their main Support, and all the plausible Arguments by which they labour to explode the Gospel, and to render it useless and insignificant, and consequently vile and contemptible in the Opinion of the World.

Upon the same Principle we may proceed to examine other general Objections made use of in opposition to the Revelation of Christ Jesus. The Gospel is a Dispensation of Providence in regard to
Mankind,

Mankind, which the Reason of Man cannot fathom, nor his utmost Sagacity search into; which the Angels themselves *desire to look into*, and, after all their Inquiries, are content to reverence and adore at an awful Distance. These Methods of Salvation are Matter of great Complaint with Unbelievers: They think it highly unreasonable, that God should propose such Things as Objects of Faith; and from the Unreasonableness of the Imposition they argue, (which presupposed, they conclude not much amiss) that these Terms of Salvation were not of God's Contrivance, but are owing to the Guile and Deceit of cunning Impostors, who took Pleasure in abusing Mankind.

Tho' this Objection is levelled against the Christian Revelation particularly; yet it must conclude equally against Revelation in general, considered as a Principle of Religion, if it makes any Addition to the Things to be done or believed beyond what Reason teaches us. The Question then will be, Whether it can be reasonable for God to propose any Articles of Faith, or any Conditions of Salvation, the Reason and Propriety of which does not appear to Man? And this is a Question of great Importance, it being confessedly the Case of the Gospel.

In the Sense of the Gospel, whatever is the Effect of God's secret Counsels, in order to the Redemption of the World, is a Mystery. That Men ought to obey God in Truth and Holiness, that they may obtain his Blessing,—That Sinners ought to be punished,—are not, nor ever were Mysteries; because these Things were sufficiently published to the World, when Men were endued with Reason. But all the Methods of Religion beyond these were, and still are, mysterious: The Intention of God to redeem the World from Sin by sending his own Son in the Likeness of Man, is a Mystery unknown

to former Ages; 'tis a Myſtery ſtill, inasmuch as we cannot penetrate into the Depths of this divine OEconomy, or account by the Principles of human Reason for every Step or Article of it. But let it be remembered, That not human Reason, but the Will of God, is the Rule and Measure of religious Obedience; and, if so, the Terms of religious Obedience must be tried by their Agreeableness to the Will of God, and not measured by the narrow Compass of Man's Reason. If Reason can discover, either by internal or external Signs, the Conditions of Salvation proposed to us to be the Will of God the Work of Reason is over, and we are obliged to use the Means, which are prescribed by God, as we hope to obtain the End, which is the Gift of God: And, how little soever Reason can penetrate into the Myſteries of God; yet, if it can discover them to be indeed the Myſteries of God, and by him proposed to us as necessary to Salvation, it discovers plainly to us, that these Myſteries of God are *the Words of eternal Life*; which is all, I think, that a reasonable Man would desire to find in his Religion: For, since all that he desires to obtain by his Religion is eternal Life, what more has he to look for in his Religion, than *the Words, or Means, of eternal Life*?

This is true, you'll say, upon Supposition of God's requiring the Belief of Myſteries or the Practise of any positive Duties from us; then it will be our Duty to hearken to his Voice, and entirely submit our Wills and Understandings to him: But how does this prove it reasonable for him so to do, or remove the Prejudice that lies against the Gospel, because of its myſterious Doctrines?

To come then to the Point: It will, I suppose, be easily granted to be agreeable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God to reveal whatever is necessary to
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be revealed in order to perfect the Salvation of Mankind; as, on the other Side, it must be allowed, that it is not consistent with infinite Wisdom and Goodness to reveal Mysteries merely to puzzle the Minds of Men. These allowances being made on each Side, the Question is reduced to this; Whether it can be ever necessary to reveal Mysteries in order to perfect the Salvation of Mankind? Whenever it is necessary, it must be reasonable, unless it be unreasonable for God to save the World: And upon this Foot it will be found, That a Revelation cannot have *the Words of eternal Life*, without opening to us all necessary Truths, how abstruse and mysterious soever some of them may be.

With respect to infinite Wisdom, there is no such Thing as Mystery in Nature: All Things are equally clear in the Understanding of the Deity; all Things lie naked before his Eye, having no Darkness, Obscurity, or Difficulty in them. A Mystery therefore is no real or positive Thing in Nature; nor is it any Thing that is inherent or belonging to the Subjects of which it is predicated. When we say this Thing or that Thing is a Mystery, according to the Form of our Speech, we seem to affirm something of this or that Thing; but, in truth, the Proposition is not affirmative with respect to the Thing, but negative with respect to ourselves: For, when we say this Thing is a Mystery, of the Thing we say nothing, but of ourselves we say, that we do not comprehend this Thing. With respect to our Understanding, there is no more Difference between a Truth that is, and Truth that is not mysterious, than with respect to our Strength, there is between a Weight which we can lift, and a Weight which we cannot lift: For, as Defect of Strength in us makes some Weights to be unmoveable, so likewise Defect

of Understanding makes some Truths to be mysterious.

The Complaint then against Myſteries in Religion amounts to no more than this; That God has done ſomething for us, or appointed ſomething for us to do, in order to ſave us, the Reason of which we do not underſtand; and requires us to believe and to comply with theſe Things, and to truſt him that we ſhall receive the Benefit of them: For this is all the Faith, or poſitive Obedience, that is required of us; as will in its due Place appear.

But to return to the Queſtion, Whether it can be ever neceſſary for God to reveal Myſteries, or appoint poſitive Duties, in order to perfect the Salvation of Mankind; or, in other Words, to uſe ſuch Means for the Salvation of the World, the Agreeableneſs of which to the End intended the Reason of Man cannot diſcover? This is certain, That, whenever 'tis out of our Power by natural Means to ſave ourſelves, if we are to be ſaved at all, 'tis neceſſary that ſupernatural Means be made uſe of: And, how hard ſoever it may be to conceive this to be the Caſe of Mankind in general; yet of particular Men it will not, I preſume, be denied, but that they may ſin ſo far, and render themſelves ſo obnoxious to the Juſtice of God, that it ſhall not be in the Power of mere Reason and Nature to find an infallible Method of atoning the Juſtice of God, and conſequently, redeeming the Sinner from Death: And in this Caſe there is a plain Neceſſity that the Sinner muſt periſh, or be redeemed by ſuch Means as Reason and Nature are Strangers to; ſince, in the Means that Reason and Nature can preſcribe, there is confeſſedly no Help for him.

What may confeſſedly happen to one Man, or to many, may poſſibly happen to all: Suppoſe then
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(since there is no Absurdity in the Supposition) That all Men have so far sinned, as to have lost the Rights and Pleas of obedient Subjects: That an universal Corruption has spread through the whole Race, and rendered them incapable of performing the Duties of Reason and Nature, or, if they could perform them, precluded the Merit and Title of all such Works to Reward; for the Works of Nature, tho' they may prevent a Forfeiture, yet they cannot reverse a Forfeiture once incurred: In this Case what shall be done? Is it unreasonable for God to redeem the World? God forbid! and yet by the Means of Reason and Nature the World cannot be redeemed. Will you allow that God may freely forgive the Sins of the World, and remit the Punishment, and bestow even on Sinners the Gift of eternal Life? How mysterious would even this Grace be, and how far beyond the Power of Reason to comprehend? Could you, from any of the natural Notions of your Mind, reconcile this Method of Redemption with the Wisdom, Justice, and Holiness of God? Consider the essential Difference between Good and Evil, the natural Beauty of one and the natural Deformity of the other; compare them with the essential Holiness of the Deity; and then tell me the Ground upon which he reconciles himself to Sin, pities and forgives it, and decrees immortal Glory for the Sinner: Or, if this Way please you not, consider his Wisdom, by which he rules and governs the World, and try, by all the Notions you can frame of Wisdom, whether it be not necessary for the good Government of the rational World, that Rewards and Punishments should be divided with an equal Hand to Virtue and Vice; and then tell me, where is the Wisdom of dropping all the Punishment due to Sin, and receiving Sinners not only to Pardon, but to Glory? There may be Wisdom and Holiness in this, but not human Wisdom, nor Holiness that

human Reason can discern; but infinite mysterious Wisdom and Holiness. If from the notions of Wisdom and Holiness you can have no Help in this Case, much less will the natural Notion of Justice assist you; Is not Justice conversant in Rewards and Punishments? Is it not the Essence of Justice to distribute both where they are due? Is there not in Nature and Reason a Connection between Virtue and Reward, between Vice and Punishment? How then comes Nature to be reversed, and the Laws of Reason to be disturbed? and how, as if Justice were more than poetically blind, come Sinners to be intitled to Life and Happiness? Even in this Case therefore of God's finally forgiving the Sins of the World, which is the lowest that can be put, Religion would necessarily be mysterious, and not to be apprehended by Reason or Nature but to be received by Faith; and our only Refuge would be, not in the Reason and Nature of the Thing, but in the unfathomable Goodness and incomprehensible Mercy of God.

But should it really be, as to human Reason it appears, inconsistent with the Wisdom and Justice of God, so freely to pardon Sin, as not to leave the Marks of his Displeasure upon it, or to remit the Transgressions of Men, without vindicating in the Face of the whole Creation the Honour of his Laws and Government; in what a Maze must Reason then be lost in searching after the Means of Reconciliation and Redemption! How shall Sin be punish'd, and yet the Sinner saved? How shall the Honour of God's Government be vindicated in the Face of all the World, and yet in the Face of all the World the Rebels justified and exalted? These are Difficulties irreconcilable to human Reason and Nature; and yet they must be reconciled, or the World, once lost, must lie for ever under Condemnation. The Religion that can ad-
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just this Difficulty, and give us the Clue to lead us thro' these Mazes, in which human Reason must for ever wander, can only have *the Words of eternal Life*; which *Words of eternal Life* must necessarily abound with inconceivable Mysteries, but with Mysteries of Grace and Mercy.

So far is it from being an Objection against the Gospel of Christ, That it contains many wonderful Mysteries of the hidden Wisdom of God, that as our Case stands, without a Mystery 'tis impossible for us to be saved: For, since Reason and Nature cannot find the Means of rescuing Sinners from Punishment, and of making Atonement to the Justice of God; since they cannot prescribe a proper Satisfaction for Sin, in which the Honour of God and the Salvation of Men shall be at once consulted; since they cannot remedy the Corruption that has spread thro' the Race of Mankind, or infuse new Principles of Virtue and Holiness into the Souls already subdued to the Lust and Power of Sin; since, if they could procure our Pardon for what is past, they cannot secure us for the future from the same Temptations, which by fatal Experience we know we cannot withstand: Since, I say, these Things cannot be done by the Means of Reason and Nature, they must be done by such Means as Reason and Nature know nothing of; that is, in other Words, they must be done by mysterious Means, of the Propriety of which we can have no adequate Notion or Conception.

If you stand in need of no new Favour, if you aim not so high as eternal Life, Religion without Mysteries may well serve your Turn. The Principles of natural Religion tend to procure the Peace and Tranquillity of this Life; and the not distinguishing between Religion as a Rule of Life for our present Use and Well-being here, and as the Means
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of obtaining Pardon for Sin and eternal Life hereafter, may have in some measure occasioned the great Complaint against the Myſteries of the Goſpel: For Myſteries are not indeed the neceſſary Parts of Religion, conſidered only as a Rule of Action; but moſt neceſſary they are to it, when conſidered as a Means of obtaining Pardon and eternal Glory. And this farther ſhews, how unreaſonably Men object againſt the myſterious Wiſdom of the Goſpel, ſince all that the Goſpel preſcribes to us as our Duty is plain and evident; all that is myſterious is on God's Part, and relates entirely to the ſurprizing Acts of divine Wiſdom and Mercy in the Redemption of the World. Conſider the Goſpel then as a Rule of Action, no Religion was ever ſo plain, ſo calculated upon the Principles of Reaſon and Nature; ſo that natural Religion itſelf had never more natural Religion in it. If we conſider the End propoſed to us, and the Means uſed to entitle us to the Benefit of it, it grows myſterious, and ſoars above the Reach of human Reaſon; for God has done more for us than Reaſon could teach us to expect, or can now teach us to comprehend. Let us then do our Part, which we plainly underſtand, and let us truſt in God that he will do his; though it exceeds the Strength of human Wiſdom to comprehend the Length and Depth and Breadth of that Wiſdom and Mercy, which God has manifeſted to the World thro' his Son Chriſt Jeſus, our Lord.

DISCOURSE I.

PART IV.

AS, with respect to the Health of the Body, there is one Regimen proper to preserve and maintain a sound Constitution, and another to assist and restore a broken and distempered one; the one Case requiring little more than wholesome Food and Temperance, the other calling for all that the Help and Skill of the Physician can furnish: So it is in Religion. An innocent Man has nothing more to do than to preserve his Innocence, which is his Title to the Favour of God; and therefore his Religion is only a Rule of Life, directing him in all Things how to preserve his Integrity, and walk uprightly with his God. This is the first and the natural Notion of Religion; because the first and natural State of Mankind was a State of Innocence, and required no other Religion than this. Here indeed there is no room for any thing mysterious, this Religion being founded merely in the natural Notions of Justice and Equity, and the necessary Difference between Good and Evil: Nor is it at all to be wondered at, that, whilst Men consider Religion under this single View, and imagine that whatever is to be done for their Salvation is to be done by themselves, and that Religion is only the Rule directing them how to do it, they should see no use of Mysteries, nor consequently any Reason to admit them.

But,

But, upon Supposition of Men's becoming Sinners, and liable to the Displeasure and Wrath of God, Religion itself becomes a new Thing. Innocence, which once was all the Care Religion had, is now vanished, and with it all our Hopes of Glory and Immortality. The natural Attributes of God, which to the Eyes of Innocence afforded a pleasant Prospect, to the Eyes of Sinners are exceeding dreadful. What then shall the Sinner do? Shall he seek to natural Religion in this Distress? But if this Religion be nothing but a Rule of living well, what is that to him, who has already lived so ill as to be obnoxious to Condemnation? As well may you send the condemned Malefactor to study the Law by which he dies, in order to save his Life, as the Sinner to the perfect Rule of Life, which he has transgressed, in order to save his Soul. The more he studies the Rule by which he should have lived, and compares it with his own Transgressions, he will but the more fully comprehend how much he deserves Punishment, and how desperate the State is to which his Sin has reduced him. In a Religion, which is barely a Rule of Life, there is no sure Comfort or Support to be had against the Terrors of Guilt and Sin.

Unbelievers may think we ask too much of them to be granted, when we argue upon this Supposition, *That all are Sinners, and are fallen short of the Glory of God*: But as this is the Supposition upon which the Gospel uniformly proceeds, pretending to no more than to provide Means of Salvation for Sinners, whoever takes upon himself to question the Reasonableness of the Gospel, must consider it as being what it pretends to be; otherwise he will not argue against the Gospel, but against something else form'd in his own Imagination. If, upon Examination of the Gospel, it appears to be indeed, what it pretends

tends to be, a Means for saving Sinners, you must necessarily come to one or other of the following Resolutions: if you are conscious to yourself that you are a Sinner, you must gladly receive the Remedy provided for you, and which upon Examination you find to be proper for your Case; or, if you are satisfied with your self, and want no Help, you must reject it as unnecessary and improper in your Case, and trust entirely to your own Merit; and must appear before God, and demand Life and Immortality as due from his Justice and Equity, which you will not accept as a Gift from his Grace and Mercy.

Let us then consider what is necessary to be done for a Sinner, in order to restore him to eternal Life; and that will teach us the true Notion of that Religion mentioned in the Text, and which are *the Words of eternal Life*; and will enable us to judge what Weight there is in the Objection raised against such a Religion from the Additions which it makes to natural Religion.

First, then, 'Tis necessary, in order to restore a Sinner to eternal Life, That God be reconciled to him:

Secondly, That the Sinner be purged from the Impurity contracted by Sin:

Thirdly, That for the future he be enabled to obey the holy Laws of God, without which his Reconciliation to God would be fruitless and of no Effect.

I think there needs but little to be said to prove the Necessity of these Conditions: If the Sinner's Case be desperate, because God is provoked by his Iniquity, and justly angry at his Offences; there can be no Foundation for him to hope, till God be
reconciled

reconciled to him : If Sinners are impure and odious in the Sight of God, because of their Sins; their Impurity must be cleansed, before he can again take pleasure in them, and delight to do them Good: If the Transgression of the Laws of Reason and Nature, which are the Laws of God, was that which lost him the Favour of God; that he may not lose it again, after being reconciled to him, 'tis necessary that he sin no more, or, if he does, that a Remedy be provided to restore him.

Allowing then these Conditions to be necessary to the Salvation of a Sinner, and likewise that Religion must contain *the Words* or Means, *of eternal Life*; it necessarily follows, That the Sinner's Religion must contain the Means by which he may be reconciled to God; the Means by which he may be purified and cleansed from Sin; and the Means by which he may be enabled for the future to obey the Will of God: For these are the necessary Means by which a Sinner must be saved; and therefore they must necessarily be contained in the Sinner's Religion. How imperfect a Notion then have we of such a Religion, when we consider it only as a Rule of Action! and how weakly must we argue against it, when our Arguments are pointed only against this Notion or Idea of it!

A Rule of Action must be plain and intelligible, or else it is no Rule; for we can neither obey nor disobey a Law that we cannot understand: And therefore from this Idea of Religion, That it is a Rule of Action, there lies a very plain Objection against admitting Mysteries in Religion: And let the Objection have its full Force, the Gospel is secure from the Blow; for the Rule of Life contained in the Gospel is the plainest, as well as the purest, that ever the World was acquainted with. In the Precepts of Christianity, there is no Mystery, no
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Shadow of a Mystery, to be seen; they are all simple, and to Men of the lowest Understandings intelligible; the Duties which it requires us to perform to God, to Ourselves, and to our Neighbours, are such as, when offered to us, we cannot but in our Minds and Consciences approve: And therefore the Gospel, as far as it is a Rule of Life, is far from being mysterious, since both the Sense and the Reason of the Law are open and plain, and such as we cannot but see, and, when we see, consent to.

But, since this is not the only Notion or Idea of Religion, That it is a Rule of Life; let us consider whether, according to the other Ideas which belong to it, it be equally absurd to suppose it in some Points mysterious. Let us examine it then under this Notion, as containing the Means by which God is reconciled to Sinners.

And first, 'tis obvious to observe, that here is not the same Reason against Mysteries as in the other Case: For, tho' we cannot practise a Law without understanding it, yet God may be reconciled to us and we have the Assurance of it, without our being able to comprehend and account for every thing that was done in order to it. A Malefactor may receive a Pardon, and enjoy the Benefit of it, without knowing what it was that induced his Prince to grant it; and would, without doubt, be thought mad to stand out against the Mercy, merely because he could not dive into the secret Reasons of it. Could not a Sinner receive the Benefit of God's Mercy without understanding all the Methods of it, it would then be necessary indeed, that even this Part of Religion should be free from Mysteries, and made plain to every Man's Understanding: But, since a Sinner may be saved by a Mercy which he cannot comprehend, where is the Absurdity of offering Sinners Mercy, and
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requiring them to rely on it, or, in other Words, to believe in it, tho' it be never so incomprehensible or mysterious? Were it unreasonable or impossible to believe Things to be, without knowing how they came to be, Faith could never be reasonable in Religion, or in any thing else: But, since the Knowledge of the Essence of Things, and of the Existence of Things, are two distinct Kinds of Knowledge, and independent of one another; our Ignorance of the Essence of Things, and of the Relation they have to each other, can never be a good Argument against the Belief of their Existence: And yet this Objection contains all the Argument that Unbelievers bring against the Mysteries of Christianity. Why do they, for Instance, refuse to believe Christ to be the Son of God? only because they cannot comprehend how he can be the eternal Son of God: And, if they will be true to their Principle, and carry the Objection as far as it will go, they must in time come to deny the Existence of every thing in the World, themselves not excepted. Since then to comprehend the Reason and Nature of Things, is neither necessary to our believing the Reality of them, nor yet to our receiving Benefit and Advantage from them; how comes it to be necessary, that in Religion there should be nothing that we do not understand? Necessary it cannot be to our Salvation, for we may be saved by Means we comprehend not; nor yet to our Faith is it necessary, for we may, and do daily believe the Reality of Things without knowing any thing of the Nature and Reasons of them. And, if Mysteries may set forward our Salvation, and are not destructive of our Faith, upon what other Views they can be excluded from Religion, I cannot conceive.

Thus much then may serve to shew, that according to this Notion of Religion, That it contains the Means by which God is reconciled to Sinners, no

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Argument can be drawn to weaken the Authority of any Religion, because some Parts of it are mysterious: But, if you consider it farther, it will appear that this Part of Religion must necessarily be mysterious, and the Means of Reconcilement such as Reason and Nature cannot comprehend. This I partly observed to you in a former Part of this Discourse, and shall therefore the more briefly touch it now.

The Principles, from which this Consequence I think will follow, are these: That Men are Sinners: That God must be reconciled to Sinners in order to their Salvation: That Religion must contain *the Words of eternal Life*, or the certain Method by which we may obtain eternal Life. The Consequence of these Principles is evident, That Religion must contain the Means by which God is reconciled to Sinners; for, since this Reconcilement is necessary to eternal Life, Religion cannot have *the Words of eternal Life* without it. Now then, if there be no such Means of Reconcilement, which Reason and Nature can either discover or comprehend, this Part of Religion must necessarily be mysterious; since what Reason cannot comprehend, is mysterious. Now, from the natural Notion we have of God and his Attributes, there arises such a Difficulty in this Case, as Reason cannot get over: For 'tis certain, according to all the natural Notions of our Mind, That it is just for God to punish Sinners: 'Tis likewise certain, That God can do nothing but what is just: If therefore he forgives Sinners, and receives them to Mercy, and remits their Punishment; 'tis then certain, That 'tis just for God in this Circumstance not to punish Sinners. Now, Reason cannot comprehend how it should, with respect to the same individual Sinners, be just to punish, and just not to punish them. If it be not just to punish Sinners, there wants no Reconcilement for

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Sinners; and, if it be not just not to punish them, no Reconcilement can be had, for 'tis contrary to the Nature of God to do what is not just. The same Argument lies from all the Attributes of the Deity, which are at all concerned in the Redemption of Mankind: His Wisdom and Holiness and even his Mercy, are as indiscernible as his Justice. Now try how far Reason can go towards discovering the Means of Reconcilement: Lay down first these certain and allowed Principles; That it is just for God to punish Sinners,—That God can do nothing but what is just: And try how you can come at the other Conclusion, which must be the Foundation of a Sinner's Reconcilement to God; namely, That it is just for God not to punish Sinners, and righteous in him to receive them to Favour. If Reason cannot discover nor comprehend how both these Propositions should be true at the same time with respect to the same Persons, 'tis impossible that it should discover or comprehend the Means which God makes use of to reconcile himself to Sinners; that is, it is impossible for God to make use of any Means that are not mysterious, that is, above the Reach and Comprehension of human Wisdom.

This Difficulty must for ever remain, as long as we attempt to scan the divine Justice by our narrow Conceptions of it: And this is the very Difficulty that makes many Things in the Gospel to be mysterious. The Scripture tells us, *That God has been reconciled to Sinners by the Death of Christ.—That he made Atonement for the Sins of the whole Worlds.* These are great Mysteries: We cannot see that there is any Proportion between the Sufferings of one and the Sins of all; or, if there were, we cannot see the Justice of laying the Sins of the Wicked upon the innocent Head. If we could see the Reasons upon which the Justice of God proceeds in this Case, here would be no Mystery: And therefore
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the Myfteriousness of the whole Proceeding arises only from hence, That our finite Minds cannot comprehend the Reasons and Limits of the divine Justice. Most certain it is, That, if God be reconciled to Sinners, Satisfaction must be made to his Justice; for he may as well cease to be God, as to be just. Whatever Satisfaction is made, it must be founded in the Reasons of his own Justice, that is, of Justice directed by infinite Wisdom. The Reasons of such Justice we cannot comprehend; and therefore we must either be saved by Means that are mysterious to us, or God must give us infinite Wisdom to comprehend the Reason of his Justice. You see then, that from this Notion of Religion, considered as containing the Means by which God reconciled himself to the World, 'tis so far from being absurd to suppose it in some Parts mysterious, that it is not possible it should be otherwise.

To redeem the World is the Work of God; He only could find the Means of Reconciliation, and he only could apply them: 'Tis our Part merely to accept them, and to obey the Terms and Conditions upon which he offers them. Religion therefore, which is founded upon Redemption, must needs consist of these two Parts; An Account of the Redemption wrought by God, and Instructions to Men upon what Terms they may reap the Benefit of the Redemption. As far as our Part goes in the Gospel, there is nothing mysterious; we have nothing to do for ourselves, but what we very well know how to do. As to the other Parts of the Gospel, we are not required to comprehend and account for God's Methods of Salvation, but only to accept them; which, as I before observed, are two distinct Acts of the Mind, and not dependent upon each other. As for the Work of God in our Redemption, 'tis indeed wonderful and mysterious: And why should it seem strange to you, that it is so?

Are there any other Works of God which are not mysterious? Consider the Creation and Formation of this World? consider the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars, the Works of his Hand; tell me by what secret Power they move, by what Rule their different Motions were at first impressed, and by what Secret in Nature or Providence ever since preserved. Or, if you think it hard to be sent to consider the Heavens at a Distance, do but consider the Earth, and the meanest Creatures of it: Can you tell how they are formed? how they *live and move, and have their Being?* Nay, can you name that Work of God, which is not mysterious? Is there any Thing in Nature, the first Principles of which you can discover and see into? If in all the Works of God there is no such Thing, why should we think it strange, That in his Work of Redemption he has appeared so like himself, and that in this, as in every thing else, *his Ways are past finding out?* We live by the Preservation of Providence, and enjoy the Comforts and Pleasures of this Life; and yet how mysterious is our Preservation! How little do we know of the Methods by which we are preserved! and yet the Benefits of it we enjoy, notwithstanding our Ignorance of the Means: And why is it a greater Absurdity to suppose that Men may be redeemed, without comprehending all the Means made use of in their Redemption? In all other Instances whatever, the Miraculousness of an Escape adds to the Pleasure and Joy of it, and is always remembered with a kind of Ecstasy in the Relation. Salvation is the only Instance in which Men demur upon the Means, and are unwilling to receive the Mercy, because they cannot understand the Methods of obtaining it. In any other Case a Man would be thought beside himself, who should act in the same Manner.

As to the two other Points, The cleansing Sinners from their Iniquity, and enabling them to live virtuously for the future; or, in other Words, the Sanctification and Grace promised in the Gospel; I shall not enter into the Consideration of them particularly, because the same Way of Reasoning is applicable in these Cases, *mutatis mutandis*; and therefore I shall leave them to your own Reflection.

Upon the whole; The only true and fair Way of judging of the Gospel is, to consider what is the true State of Mankind in the World. If Men are in a State of Purity and Innocence, no Redemption is wanting, and the Methods prescribed in the Gospel bear no Relation to their Circumstances: But, if Men have every-where sinned, and come short of the Glory of God, the Law of Nature cannot help them to those Blessings, which by the Law of Nature are forfeited; and there is manifestly a Necessity to have recourse to other Means to obtain Salvation.

It may be said, for it often is said, That whatever Degree of Light Men have, it will make little Difference in the Case; since an equitable Judge will consider Men and their Merits in proportion to their Abilities. Allowing this Maxim to be true, yet it plainly goes no farther than this; That God will not punish Men for not doing the Things which their natural Powers enabled them not to do. The Argument cannot go farther: You cannot argue from the Weakness or Stupidity of Men, that they shall be rewarded. It may be a good Reason not to beat a Man when he does amiss, because he is a Fool, and knows not what he does; but it is no Reason to honour or to advance him. And therefore a Religion founded in this favourite Principle

cannot be said *to have the Words of eternal Life*; for no Plea, no Claim for eternal Life can possibly be raised out of it.

Considering therefore Religion under the Character given in the Text, *That it has the Words of eternal Life*; we shall have Reason to conclude with St. Peter, That our only Hope is in God, and in him whom he hath sent, our blessed Lord and Redeemer; and with him to say, *Lord, whither shall we go? Thou, Thou only, hast the Words of eternal Life. And we believe, and are sure, that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.*

DISCOURSE II.

HEBREWS vii. 25.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make Intercession for them.

WHEN we consider the great and wonderful Work of our Redemption, though we cannot account for every Step of it to our own Reason and Understanding, yet neither can we imagine it to be the Effect of mere Will and arbitrary Appointment, and void of all Foundation in the Reason and Propriety of Things. All the Works of God are Works of Wisdom; and, as far as our Capacities give us leave to judge, we discern evident Marks of Wisdom in them all, and discover a Fitness and Propriety in every thing with respect to the End which it is intended to serve or promote. If this be so in every Instance in which we are able to make any Judgment, it is a great Presumption that it is, and must be, so in all other Instances, which are too high and great to be viewed and measured by human Understanding: And we have one positive Argument that it is so, arising from the natural Notion we have of God, and of his Attributes of Wisdom and Justice. It is impossible to suppose such a Being

to do any Thing by Chance, or in Compliance to mere Will and Humour. No: Every Act of God is the Act of infinite Wisdom, and is founded in the necessary Reason and Propriety of Things: And it is as true of the Works of Grace, as it is of the Works of Nature, *That in Wisdom he has ordained them all.*

It is one Thing not to be able to discern the Reasons of Providence, and another to suppose there is no Reason in them. The Reasons, that made it either necessary or proper for Christ to die for the Sins of Mankind, may be removed out of our Sight: But to suppose that Christ really did die for the Sins of the World, and yet that there was no Reason or Propriety in his so doing, is to found Revealed Religion upon a Principle destructive of Natural Religion; for no Religion can subsist, with an Opinion that God is a Being capable of acting without Reason.

The Publication of the Gospel has made an Alteration in the Scheme of Religion, by revealing to us the Son of God, *whom God hath appointed Heir of all Things, by whom also he made the Worlds; who is the Brightness of his Glory, and the express Image of his Person; who upholdeth all Things by the Word of his Power.* Heb. i. 2, 3.

The Knowledge of the Son of God, of his Power and Dominion in the creating and upholding all Things, became necessary, as the Foundation of the Faith required to be placed in him as our Redeemer. The Character of Redeemer would be but ill supported by any Person who had not Power equal to the great Undertaking. The New Testament Doctrines therefore, relating to the Dignity and Authority of Jesus Christ, are relative to his

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Office of Redeemer; and therefore there was no explicit Declaration of them either before or under the Law of *Moses*.

Natural Religion leads us by certain Conclusions to the Acknowledgement of one supreme intelligent Being, the Author and Creator of all Things, and can by no Reasoning whatever discover any other Being concerned in the making, framing, or governing the World: And therefore all the Hopes and Fears, in a Word, all the religious Acts of Man, in the State of Natural Religion, are necessarily and immediately relative to this one supreme Being. But put the Case, that Natural Religion could possibly discover that this one supreme Being had an eternal Son, to whom he had communicated all Power and Authority, who was the immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge of Mankind? I beseech you to consider, whether upon this Supposition, there would not necessarily arise an Alteration in Natural Religion? whether the Hopes and Fears, and all other religious Acts of Mankind would not relate immediately to this their immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge. Can it be reasonably supposed that we were created by the Son of God, that we are now under his Government, and shall be finally under his Judgment, and at the same time maintained that no Service, Obedience, or Regard is due to him from us his Creatures and Subjects? If this cannot be maintained consistently with this Supposition, the Conclusion will be, That the Religion of a Christian is a natural and reasonable Service, arising from that Relation between Christ and Mankind, which the Gospel has revealed and made known to the World.

When we consider what Expectations we have from our Redeemer, and what great Promises he has made to us in his Gospel, we cannot possibly avoid
inquiring

inquiring who this Person is: When we hear his Promise to be always present with us to the End of the World, to support us under all our Difficulties, 'tis but a reasonable Demand to ask by what Authority he does these Things: And when we are told that he liveth for ever, and is the Lord of Life and of Glory, there is no room to doubt of his being *able to save us*. St. Paul tells us, that the Lord Jesus Christ *shall change our vile Bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious Body*: A great Expectation this! But consider what the reasonable Foundation of this Expectation is: St. Paul tells us, it is the Energy of Power with which Christ is endued, *whereby he is able even to subdue all Things to himself*. Our Saviour puts this Article upon the same Foot: Hear his Declaration; *Verily verily I say unto you The Hour is coming, and now is, when the Dead shall bear the Voice of the Son of God; and they that bear shall live*. In the next Verse the Reason follows; *For, as the Father hath Life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have Life in himself*. John v. 25, 26. If the Son has Life in himself, even as the Father has Life in himself; if he is really endued with Power to which all Nature submits and obeys, a Power sufficient for the Creation of the World at first, and for the Preservation ever since; we have Reason to conclude, that he is now as able to restore Life, as he was at first to give it; to call Men from the Grave into Being, as well as to call them out of nothing at the first Creation.

The Relation of Christ to Mankind as Creator and Governor considered, the Work of Redemption could not properly have been undertaken by any other Hand: For, if Christ was the immediate Creator and Governor of the World, what Reason can you imagine why God should resume this Authority out of the Hands of his Son, or set up another
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to have Dominion and Authority over any Part of the Creation, which by natural Right belonged to him who made all Things? Were we to consider one Person as our Creator, and another as our Redeemer, it would be extremely to the Diminution of the Honour and regard due to the Creator, inasmuch as the Blessings of Redemption would greatly outweigh the Benefit of Creation; and it would be natural to us to prefer the Love that delivered us from the Evils and Miseries of the World to that which placed us in them. In the daily Service of our Church we praise God for creating and preserving us, but above all for his inestimable Love in the Redemption; which is very consistent with Respect to one great Benefactor, who both made us and redeemed us: But, had any other Hand redeemed us, such Expression of Gratitude to him would have reflected Dishonour upon the Creator.

St. *Paul* tells us expressly, That Christ is Head of the Church; a Title founded in the Right of Redemption, *that in all Things he might have the Pre-eminence*; that as he was the Head of all Creatures in virtue of having created them, so he might be the Head of the Church, the elect People of God, in virtue of having redeemed them: *For it pleased the Father, that in him should all Fulness dwell*; that is, that Christ should be all in all, the Head of the second as well as of the first Creation. *Coloss. i. 18.* According to St. *Paul's* Reasoning here, if any other Person had redeemed the World, or if the World had been redeemed without Christ, he would not *have had the Preeminence in all Things*; which yet he had before Sin came into the World; and, consequently the Sin of the World would have been the Diminution of the Headship and Power of Christ. Upon these Principles of the Gospel-Revelation we may discern some Propriety
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in Christ's coming to redeem the World: The Work was such, that no Person of less Power could undertake it; and his Relation to the World was such, as made it fit and proper to commit the Work to him.

The Redemption of Mankind is a Work which in the Event seems to concern Men only: But, considered as a Vindication of the Justice and Goodness of God towards his Creatures, it is a Work exposed to the Consideration of every intelligent Being in the Universe. Whether they may be supposed to inquire into God's Dealings with the Children of Men, we may judge by ourselves. 'Tis little we know of the Fall of Angels; yet how has that employed human Curiosity! For every Man considers himself as having an Interest in the Justice and Equity of that supreme Being, under whose Government he lives, and by whose Judgment he must finally stand or fall. If we doubt whether the superior Orders of Beings have the like Inclination, *St. Peter* will tell us, *That the Sufferings of Christ and the Glory that should follow, — are Things the Angels desire to look into.* I Pet. i. 11.—12. And indeed the Method of God's dealing with any rational Creature is a common Concern to all; and it is for the Honour of God's Government to be vindicated in the Sight of every intelligent Being, *that he may be justified in his Saying, and overcome when he is judged.*

If this be so, it must necessarily follow, That the Redemption by Christ, though it relates immediately to Men, must be agreeable to all the Reason and Relation of Things known or discoverable by the highest intellectual Beings, and, need I add, that there are many such not discoverable by us?

'Tis certain that we are but a small Part of the intellectual World : What Relation we bear to the other Parts, or to the Whole, we know not ; and yet undoubtedly the common Governor of the Whole must in his Dealings with every Part have regard to this common Relation, whether we understand it, or no. The Author of the Epistle to the *Hebrews* tells us, *That Christ took not on him the Nature of Angels, but he took on him the Seed of Abraham.* Angels sinned, and Men sinned : Men only are redeemed. If God is just, there must be a Reason for this, though not within our Reach at present ; and, when we come to know it, perhaps we may be no longer at a Loss to know that the Sacrifice of *Christ* was necessary to the Salvation of Men.

That there are many Orders of Beings superior to Man, is a Proposition so agreeable to Reason, that there is little room to doubt of it. All these Orders are in Scripture comprehended under the general Name of *Angel*. What Relation these Beings stand in to us in many Respects, I will not now inquire ; but that they are not unconcerned Spectators in the Work of our Redemption, is evident. Our Saviour tells us, *That there is Joy in the Presence of the Angels of God over one Sinner that repenteth.* Luke xv. 10. Again ; *He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white Raiment ; and I will not blot out his Name out of the Book of Life, but I will confess his Name before my Father, and before his Angels.* Rev. iii. 5. Here the Angels are mentioned as Witnesses of the Justice of the Judgment, and not merely as Attendants to make up the Pomp and Ceremony of Judicature.

Since then the Justice and Equity of God in redeeming Men are Things which the Angels desire
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and are concerned to look into; it is evident, That his Justice and Equity, and the Reasons of Providence in this great Affair, may be discernible to the highest Order of intellectual Beings, though not discoverable by us, the lowest.

That this is probably the Case, may be learnt from hence; That, where the Gospel has revealed to us any of these Relations, not discoverable by human Reason, so far we can see the Reason and Propriety of this great Work of our Redemption.

But let us consider how well these Principles and Doctrines of the Gospel agree together, and how naturally the one flows from the other. When we view the sad Condition of Mankind, the Sin, Folly, and Misery which are in the World; and then turn to contemplate the Perfections, the Wisdom, and the Goodness of him who made us; Nature raises some Hopes in us, that this Confusion will some Day find a Remedy, and ourselves a Release, from the Goodness and Wisdom of Him who formed us. I blame not these Hopes; they are just, they are natural. But, if Nature had the Knowledge of the Son of God, and could discover that the World was made and is upheld by his Power, that we are his immediate Creatures and Subjects; would it not be altogether as natural to found some Hopes upon this Relation? Should we not be willing to believe, that this great Person, who made us, would have some Compassion upon the Work of his own Hands? Should we not hope to find in him at least an Intercessor on our behalf, an *Advocate with the Father*? Should we not be inclined to recommend to him all our Pleas, to put all our Interest into his Hands, trusting that he could not want Bowels of Affection towards the Creatures whom he formed after his own Image and Likeness?

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I think this would be but natural; and what more does the Gospel require of us? It has discovered to us this Relation between Christ and the World, between Christ and the Church, and requires from us such Hope and Faith, and such Obedience, as naturally flow from this Relation; and could it possibly require less? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that Christ is Lord of the World that is, and of that which is to come, and not to require us to have Hope and Confidence in him? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that he is the Lord of Life and Glory, and to bid us expect Life and Glory through any other Hands than his? Would it not be absurd to tell us, that all Judgment is committed to the Son, and yet no Obedience due to him? or that God has appointed him to be Head over all, and yet no Honour to be paid him?

From these and the like Considerations we may discern, how reasonable, how natural the Religion of the Gospel is. It has indeed opened to us a new Scene of Things, discovering to us the ever blessed Son of God, the Creator and Governor of the World: What else it proposes to us results naturally from this Relation between Christ and the World. The mysterious Work of our Redemption itself seems to have arisen from the original Relation between the only Son of God, and Man the Creature of God; and our Christian Faith, in every Article and Branch of it, has a just Foundation and Support in the Power, Authority, and Preeminence of the Son of God. We may well believe he has redeemed us, since we know he made us. And, though all Nature seems to frown on us, and to threaten Death and Destruction, from which no human Power or Cunning can deliver us; yet our Hope is stedfast and unmoveable, being placed in Him who is *able to subdue all Things to himself.*

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This Belief, That the Dead shall hear the Voice of the Son of God, and arise to Life, is the fundamental Article of a Christian's Faith : If this be not well established, our Hope and Confidence are vain, and the preaching the Cross of Christ is Foolishness.

Let us reflect a little how our Case stands with respect to the Prospect beyond the Grave; let us consider what Hopes Nature furnishes, and how they are supported, confirmed, and enlarged, by the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

When we view the World in its present Circumstances, and see the Misery and Oppression that are in it; when we consider that the Distresses and Sorrows arising from the Weakness and Wickedness of Men are in Number and in Weight ten times more than all the Sufferings to which we are exposed by the mere Frailty of our Condition; we can hardly imagine that a wise and just God made the World to be what we find it is. When we look farther, and find that the best Men oftentimes fare worst; that even the Desire and Endeavour to please God frequently exposes them to infinite Sorrows in this World; we stand amazed, and are ready to doubt whether these Appearances can be reconciled with the Belief that God governs the World. But, since all Nature proclaims the Being and the Power of God, and the visible Things of the Creation declare in every Language of the World the Wisdom and Goodness of Him who made them; under the Force and Conviction of this Evidence that there is a God, we can find no possible Way to account for his Justice and Goodness towards the Children of Men, but by supposing that *he has appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness*: And since this World evidently

evidently is not the Scene of this Judgment, we conclude there must be another in which we shall stand before this Tribunal. Thus far Nature goes: All beyond this is vain Philosophy and Imagination, founded in Conceits which are in vogue to-day, and forgot to-morrow. Scholars may Reason of the Nature of the Soul, and the Condition of it when separated from the Body; but the Common Hopes of Nature receive no Support from such Inquiries. But yet something farther seems necessary to give Ease to Nature in this painful Search after Life and Happiness. The numberless Instances of Mortality which we hear and see, the Remains of those who left the World Ages before we came into it, and are still mouldering in their Tombs, is undeniable Evidence that Death destroys this compound Being which we call Man. How to revive this Union Nature knows not; and as for those who make the Spirits of Men in the divided State to be perfect Men, they seem to have got a Conclusion without consulting the Premises.

Look now into the Gospel; there you will find every reasonable Hope of Nature, nay every reasonable Suspicion of Nature, cleared up and confirmed, every Difficulty answered and removed. Do the present Circumstances of the World lead you to suspect that God could never be Author of such corrupt and wretched Creatures as Men now are? Your Suspicions are just and well-founded: God made Man upright; but thro' the Temptation of the Devil Sin entered, and Death and Destruction followed after.

Do you suspect, from the Success of Virtue and Vice in this World, that the Providence of God does not interpose to protect the Righteous from Violence or to punish the Wicked? The Suspicion

is not without Ground. God leaves his best Servants here to be tried oftentimes with Affliction and Sorrow, and permits the Wicked to flourish and abound. The Call of the Gospel is not to Honour and Riches here, but to take up our Cross and follow Christ.

Do you judge from comparing the present State of the World with the natural Notion you have of God, and of his Justice and Goodness, that there must needs be another State in which Justice shall take place? You Reason right; and the Gospel confirms the Judgment. God has appointed a Day to judge the World in Righteousness: Then those who mourn shall rejoice; those who weep shall laugh, and the persecuted and afflicted Servants of God shall be Heirs of his Kingdom.

Have you sometimes Misgivings of Mind? Are you tempted to mistrust this Judgment, when you see the Difficulties which surround it on every Side; some which affect the Soul in its separate State, some which affect the Body in its State of Corruption and Dissolution? Look to the Gospel: There these Difficulties are accounted for; and you need no longer puzzle yourself with dark Questions concerning the State, Condition, and Nature of separate Spirits, concerning the Body, however to Appearance lost and destroyed; for the Body and Soul shall once more meet to part no more, but to be happy for ever. In this Case the learned cannot doubt, and the Ignorant may be sure, that 'tis the Man, the very Man himself, who shall rise again: For an Union of the same Soul and Body is as certainly the Restoration of the Man, as the dividing them was the Destruction.

Would you know who it is that gives this Assurance? 'Tis One who is able to make good his
Word;

Word; One who loved you so well as to die for you; yet one too great to be held a Prisoner in the Grave: No; he rose with Triumph and Glory, the first-born from the Dead, and will in like manner call from the Dust of the Earth all those who put their Trust and Confidence in him.

But who is this, you'll say, who was subject to Death, and yet had Power over Death? How could so much Weakness and so much Strength meet together? That God has the Power of Life, we know; but then he cannot die: That Man is mortal, we know; but then he cannot give Life.

Consider; does this Difficulty deserve an Answer, or does it not? Our blessed Saviour, lived among us in a low and poor Condition, exposed to much ill-treatment from his jealous Country-men: When he fell into their Power, their Rage knew no Bounds: They reviled him, insulted him, mocked him, scourged him, and at last nailed him to a Cross, where by a shameful and wretched Death he finished a Life of Sorrow and Affliction. Did we know no more of him than this, upon what Ground could we pretend to hope that he will be able to save us from the Power of Death? We might say with the Disciples, *We trusted this had been he who should have saved Israel*; but he is dead, he is gone, and all our Hopes are buried in his Grave.

If you think this ought to be answered, and that the Faith of a Christian cannot be a reasonable Faith, unless it be enabled to account for this seeming Contradiction; I beseech you then never more complain of the Gospel for furnishing an Answer to this great Objection, for removing this Stumbling-block out of the Way of our Faith. He was a Man, and therefore he died: He was the Son of God, and therefore he rose from the Dead, and will give Life

to all his true Disciples. He it was who formed this World and all Things in it, and for the sake of Man was content to become Man, and to taste Death for all, that all through him may live. This is a wonderful Piece of Knowledge which God has revealed to us in his Gospel; but he has not revealed it to raise our Wonder, but to confirm and establish our Faith in Him to whom he hath committed all Power, *whom he hath appointed Heir of all Things.*

Had the Gospel required of us to expect from Christ the Redemption of our Souls and Bodies, and given us no Reason to think that Christ was endued with Power equal to the Work, we might justly have complained; and it would have been a standing Reproach, That Christians believe they know not what. But to expect Redemption from the Son of God, the Resurrection of our Bodies from the same Hand which at first created and formed them, are rational and well-founded Acts of Faith; and it is the Christian's Glory, That he *knows in whom he has believed.*

That the World was made by the Son of God, is a Proposition with which Reason has no Fault to find: That He who made the World should have Power to renew it to Life again, is highly consonant to Reason. - All the Mystery lies in this, that so high and great a Person should condescend to become Man, and subject to Death, for the Sake of Mankind. But are we the fit Persons to complain of this transcendent mysterious Love? Or, does it become us to quarrel with the Kindness of our blessed Lord toward us, only because it is greater than we can conceive? No; it becomes us to bless and to adore this exceeding Love, by which we are saved from Condemnation, by which we expect to
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be rescued from Death; knowing that the Power of our blessed Lord is equal to his Love, and that he is *able to subdue all Things to himself.*

DISCOURSE III.

PART I.

 MATTHEW xi. 6.

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

IN the Beginning of this Chapter we read, that the Baptist sent two of his Disciples to Christ, to inquire of him whether he was indeed the great Prophet so long expected by the People, and foretold by the Prophets, or whether they were still to expect and wait the Coming of another. Our Saviour detained the Disciples of *John*, till he had made them Eye-witnesses of the mighty Power that was in him. They saw, at the Command of his Word, the Blind receive Sight, the Lame walk, the Lepers cleansed, the Deaf restored to Hearing, and the Dead raised up to Life again: They saw likewise, that these mighty Powers were exercised without giving the least Suspicion of any worldly Design; that no Court was made to the Great or Wealthy by singling them out either for Patients or for Disciples. The Benefit of the Miracles was chiefly the Lot of the Poor; and as they were better disposed to receive the Gospel, so were they preferred before the Rich and Mighty to be the Disciples of Christ. When the

the Baptist's Disciples had seen and heard these Things, our Saviour thought them sufficiently enabled to satisfy *John* in the Inquiry upon which he had sent them: *Go, says he, and shew John those Things which ye do bear and see: The Blind receive their Sight, and the Lame walk; the Lepers are cleansed, and the Deaf hear; the Dead are raised up, and the Poor have the Gospel preached to them.* Then follow immediately the Words of the Text: *And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.*

The close Connection of the Text with the last Words of the fifth Verse, shews us what sort of Persons our Saviour had in his Eye, when he spoke of the Offence taken at him in the World: *The Poor,* says he, *have the Gospel preached to them: And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.* As if he had said, The Poor are ready to embrace the Gospel, and happy are in this, yea happier far notwithstanding their present uncomfortable Condition, than the Honourable and the Learned, who are too great, and, in their own Opinion, too wise, to hearken to the Instructions of the Gospel,

The Words thus explained lead us to inquire,

First, What are the Offences which are generally taken at the Gospel of Christ:

Secondly, From what Source these Offences come.

The Poverty and Meanness in which our Saviour appeared, was the earliest, and may probably be the latest, Objection to the Gospel. He came from God to convert and to save the World, to declare the Purposes and the Commands of the Almighty, and to exact Obedience from every Creature; but he came with less Attendance and Show than if he had

been an ordinary Messenger from the Governor of a Province. Hence it is, that we so often find him upbraided either with the Meanness of his Parentage, the Obscurity of his Country, or the present Necessity of his Circumstances: *Is not this the Carpenter's Son?* says one; *Can any good come out of Nazareth?* says another; *or any Prophet out of Galilee?* says a third. And when they saw him oppressed with Sufferings, and weighed down with Afflictions, they openly insulted his Sorrow, and triumphed over his fond Pretences to save the World: *Thou, say they, that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three Days save thyself: If thou be the Son of God come down from the Cross.* And so blinded are Men with the Notions of worldly Greatness, and so apt to conceive of the Majesty of God according to their own Ideas of Power and Dignity, that this Prejudice has prevailed in every Age. The Apostle to the *Corinthians* preached *Christ crucified*; but he was to the *Jews* a *Stumbling-block*, and to the *Greeks* *Foolishness*: For the *Jews* required a *Sign*, a visible temporal Deliverance, and had no Notion, much less any Want, as they could apprehend, of such a Saviour as Jesus. The *Greeks* sought after *Wisdom*, and thought that, if God were indeed to redeem the World, he would act more suitably to his Power and Wisdom: Whenever they made their *Jupiter* speak, his Voice was Thunder, and Lightning was his Appearance, and he delivered Oracles not to be communicated to Vulgar Ears. So in the Old Testament, when God speaks, *Clouds and Darkness* are round about him, and his Presence and his Voice are terrible. But here every thing had a Different Turn: The Appearance was in the Likeness of a Man, and in the Form of a Servant; and, as he came in like a Servant, he went out like a Slave, *he was esteemed stricken, and his Departure was taken for Misery.* His Doctrine was framed rather to pu-
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rify the Heart, and to give Wisdom to the Simple, than to exercise the Head, and furnish Matter for the Curious and Learned; to be a general Instruction and a common Rule of Life to all Men, and not to satisfy the Vanity of worldly Wisdom in Inquiries above its Reach. With Him the Precepts of Virtue are the Principles of Wisdom and Holiness, the greatest Ornament of the Mind of Man.

But these Things the wise and the great Men of the World find hard to reconcile with the Wisdom and Majesty of God, according to their Notions of Wisdom and Power. Why did not Christ, say they, appear in the Power and Majesty of his Father? Would not the Embassy have been more worthy both of God and Him? Would any Prince, who had a mind to reclaim his rebellious Subjects to Obedience, not rather chuse to send a Person of Honour with a suitable Retinue, whose Appearance might command Respect and Credit, than an Ambassador clothed in Rags and Poverty, fit only to create in the Rebels a greater Contempt both of himself and his Prince? If it was the Purpose of God, that the World through Faith should be saved, would not the World more securely and readily have confided in one whose very Appearance would have spoke his Dignity, than in one who seemed to be even more miserable than themselves, and not able to rescue himself from the vilest and most contemptible Death?

But let us now, in the second Place, consider what Foundation there is in Reason for this great Prejudice.

It is no Wonder to hear Men reason upon the Notions and Ideas which are familiar to them. Great Power and great Authority are connected with the Ideas of great Pomp and Splendor; and, when
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we talk of the Works of God, our Minds naturally turn themselves to view the great and miraculous Works of Providence: And this is the Reason why Men are slow to discern the Hand of God in the ordinary Course of Nature, where Things, being familiar to us, do not strike with wonder and Admiration.

When *Naaman* the Syrian came to the Prophet of *Israel* to be cured of his Leprosy, *Elisha* sent a Messenger unto him, saying, *Go and wash in Jordan seven Times, and thy Flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean.* The haughty Syrian disdained the easy Cure, and scorned the Prophet: Is this your Man of God, and this his mighty Power to send me to a pitiful River of *Israel*? Behold, says he, *I thought he will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the Name of the Lord his God, and strike his Hand over the Place, and recover the Leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, Rivers of Damascus, better than all the Waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a Rage.* But his Servants, not a little wiser than their Master, thus reason the Case with him: *My Father, if the Prophet had bid thee do some great Thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith unto thee, Wash and be clean? Upon this gentle Rebuke his Stomach came down, and he condescended to follow the Prophet's Direction; and his Flesh came again, like the Flesh of a young Child, and he was clean.* Not unlike to *Naaman's* Folly is theirs, who take offence at the Poverty and Meanness of the Author of our Redemption. His Sentiments and theirs agree: He expected to have seen some surprising Wonder wrought for his Cure; and, when he was bid only to wash, he thought there could be nothing of God in so trifling a Remedy. And is not this their Sense, who think that so obscure, so mean

a Person as Jesus, could never be the Messenger of God upon so great an Errand as the Salvation of the World? who thus expostulate, Why came he not in a Majesty suitable to his Employment, and then we would have believed him; but how can we expect to be raised to the Glory of God by him who was himself the Scorn and Contempt of Men.

If we search this Prejudice to the Bottom, we shall find that it arises from a false Conception of the Power and Majesty of God, as if the Success of his Purposes depended upon the visible Fitness of the Instruments he made choice of. With Men we know the Case is so; they must use Means which they can judge to be adapted to the End they aim at, if they intend to prosper in what they undertake: But with God it is otherwise. To stop the Current even of the smallest River, Banks must be raised, and Sluices cut, when the Work is done by Man: But in the Hand of God the Rod of *Moses* was more than sufficient to curb the Rage of the Sea, and force it to yield a Passage to his People. *The Foolishness of God,* says the Apostle, *is wiser than Men, and the Weakness of God is stronger than Men:* Teaching us that we should not presume to sit in Judgment upon the Methods of Providence; since, how foolish or how weak soever they may seem to us, they will be found in his Hand to be the wisest and the strongest. And this Reasoning the Apostle applies to the Case now before us: *The Cross of Christ was a Stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks Foolishness; but unto all them which are called, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God; because the Foolishness of God is wiser than Men, and the Weakness of God stronger than Men.* However the Jews, or however the Greeks conceived of the crucified Jesus, yet to every Believer he is the mighty *Power of God to Salvation,* because God ordained him so to be; and this Ordinati-

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on gives full Efficacy to the Crofs of Christ, however in itfelf contemptible, and to all human Appearance unfit for the Purpofe. The Waters of *Jordan* had no natural Efficacy to cleanse a Leper; in the Rod of *Moses* there was no Power to divide the Sea: But, when ordained by God to thefe Purpofes, the Sea fled back at the Touch of *Moses's* Rod, and the Leprofy of *Naaman* was purged by the fo much defpifed Waters of *Israel*. If we would judge truly, the more fimple and plain the Methods of Providence are, the more do they fpeak the Power of the Almighty. When God faid, *Let there be Light, and there was Light*, his uncontrollable Power more evidently appeared, than if all the Angels of Heaven had been employed to produce it. When our Lord faid, *I will: be thou clean*, and the Perfon was cleansed, his Divinity fhone forth more brightly, than if he had commanded all the Powers above vifibly to affift him. So likewise, when God committed the Redemption of the World to *Jesus*, a Man of Sorrow and Affliction, and of no Form or Comelinefs, and gave him the Power of doing fuch Works as never Man did, in Confirmation of his Commiffion, he appeared as plainly in him, as if he had clothed him with vifible Majesty and Power. If we confider him afflicted and tormented, and given up to a cruel Death, it proves indeed that he was weak and mortal; but ftill God is ftrong, and not the lefs able to eftablifh the Word which he fpoke by this weak, this mortal Man.

As to this Part of the Offence then, fo far as the Majesty and Power of God are concerned, it proceeds from very wrong Notions in both Cafes, and fupposes that the Majesty of God wants the fame little Supports of outward Pomp and Grandeur as that of Men does, and that his Power depends upon the Fitnefs of instrumental or material Caufes, as human Power plainly does; whereas the Majesty and
Power

Power of God are never more clearly seen, than when he makes choice of the *weak Things of the World to confound the Things which are mighty.*

Let us then in the next Place consider, with respect to Men, whether the Advantages on their Side would have been greater, had Christ appeared in greater Splendor and with more visible Power and Authority.

How far the Imaginations of some Men may rove upon such Inquiries as these, or what Degrees of Splendor and Glory they would judge sufficient for their Purpose, I cannot tell. This we are sure of, That the Majesty of the Almighty is not to be approached by human Eyes; that therefore, whenever it descends to treat with Men, it must be veiled and obscured under such Representations as Men can bear. This is true, you'll say; but is there no Medium between the immediate Presence of God, and his appearing in the Form of a Servant, and dying, not as the Children of Men commonly die, but as the vilest and most profligate Criminal? Many Degrees there are, no doubt, of visible Glory, in any of which Christ might have appeared, but in none with greater Advantage to Religion than that in which he came. Suppose he had come, as the *Jews* expected, in the Form of a mighty Prince, and in that Situation had propagated his Faith and Doctrine; what would the Unbelievers then have said? How often should we have been told before now, that our Religion was the Work of human Policy, and that our Prince's Doctrine and Dominions were extended by the same Sword? Was ever any Religion the better thought of for having been preached at the Head of an Army? This is certain, That, to make Religion a rational Act of the Mind, it cannot be conveyed to us in too easy and familiar a Manner: The less Awe we have of our Teacher, the more Freedom we shall exercise in weighing and examin-

examining his Doctrines. And upon this Account our Saviour's Appearance was in the most proper Form, as it gave to Men the greatest Scope and Liberty of trying and searching into his Doctrines and Pretences: And therefore his Meanness and Poverty should least of all be objected by those who seem to contend for nothing more than to clear Religion from Fears and Prejudices.

But perhaps they will say, We wanted him not to appear in worldly State and Glory, or to exercise temporal Dominion on Earth; we would have been contented with a visible, though an inferior kind of Manifestation of his divine Authority. *O Fools, and slow of Heart to believe all that the Prophets have written!* What thing ye of giving Sight to the Blind; of opening the Ears of the Deaf; of loosening the Tongue that was dumb; of restoring Health to the Sick; of raising the Dead to Life again; of raising even himself from the Grave, and abolishing the Scandal of the Cross by a visible Victory and Triumph over Death? What do ye call these Things? What do they manifest to you? Are these the Works of that mean Man, that wretched, that crucified Mortal, of whom we have been speaking? Do Slaves and Servants, nay, do Princes and the greatest of the Children of Men, use to perform such Works? If not, these are the very Manifestations of divine Power and Authority which you require. Nor can it, I believe, enter into the Heart of Man to contrive any greater Signs to ask of any Person pretending to a divine Commission, than these which our Saviour daily and publickly gave the World of his Authority. Had he appeared with all the visible Power and Glory which you can conceive, yet still you cannot imagine what greater Works than these he could possibly perform: And therefore the Evidence now, under all the Meanness of his Appearance, is the same for his divine Authority and
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Commission, as it would have been, had he come in the greatest Pomp of Glory and Power.

As to us, I think who are removed at a Distance from the Scene of this Action, the Evidence is much greater. Had he come in surprizing Glory, we might have suspected the Relations of Men, who, we might well think, saw and heard every thing under the greatest Astonishment, and, like *St. Paul* when he was caught up to the third Heavens, could hardly tell whether they were in the Body, or out of the Body. But now we have the Evidence of Men who lived and conversed with him familiarly, who saw all his mighty Works, and saw them without Surprize or Astonishment, being reconciled to them by daily Use, and the long-experienced Gentleness and Love of their Master; and therefore they very justly introduce their Accounts with this Assurance, *That they relate that only which they had heard, which they had seen with their Eyes, which they had looked upon, and which their Hands had handled, of the Word of Life.* So far are we then from having any just Cause of Offence in the Poverty and Meanness of our blessed Lord, that from those Circumstances arises the great Stability of our Faith, and this comfortable Assurance, That our Faith standeth not in the Words or in the Works of Man's Wisdom and Power, but in the Power and in the Wisdom of the Almighty, who knows how to produce Strength out of Weakness.

DISCOURSE III.

PART II.

I Have already examined the first and great Prejudice against the Gospel, arising from the Poverty and Meanness of our blessed Lord, and the low Condition of Life in which he appeared in the World, and the wretched Circumstances which put an end to it; and shewed it to be so far from being a just Offence against the Gospel, that, when fairly considered, it serves to recommend Religion to us with all possible Advantage, and the more eminently to set forth the Love of Christ, and the Wisdom and Goodness of God, in the Gospel.

It was from the Offence taken at the mean Condition of our Lord, that the Cross became a *Stumbling-block to the Jews*. It became also, as the Apostle says, *Foolishness to the Greeks*: For they sought after *Wisdom*; and, not finding the Wisdom they sought after in the Gospel, it was esteemed by them as Foolishness.

The great Articles upon which all Religion depends, are the Nature of God, the Immortality of the Soul, and the Certainty of future Rewards and Punishments in another Life after this. These Things have ever exercised the Wit and Learning of the considering Part of Mankind, and Philosophy

phy has furnished Difficulties on every Side; and were they well cleared up, 'tis thought Religion would want no other Support. But in vain do you search the Gospel of Christ for a Solution of these Difficulties: He has not so much as entered into them, or once attempted to give an Account of the Nature or Essence of God, or of an human Soul, or to consider the Difficulties that are urged by the Schools against its separate Existence from the Body. Future Rewards and Punishments he has indeed fully asserted; but, as to the Nature and Manner of them, and the Soul's Existence in each State, he has left them involved in the same Intricacies in which he found them. And yet, say the Disputers of this World, who would not expect from a Person sent from God to have all his Difficulties solved which affect the Belief and Practise of Religion? We are bid to be good and holy, and are promised Immortality: So far 'tis well. But did he not know what Doubts exercise the most learned Men concerning the Nature of God and of the Soul and its Passage to another World, and concerning the Place and Condition of that other World? Why were not these Doubts cleared? Had he opened to us this dark Scene of Nature, and made us to understand the Contexture of the Soul, and its Manner of subsisting out of the Body; had he taught us to comprehend the State and Nature of the other World; such Doctrines, such Discoveries would have been sufficient Evidence of the divine Wisdom: But now we are only taught the plain Doctrines of Morality, and are bid to take his Word for our Immortality.

To clear up this great and unreasonable Offence against the Gospel, I desire you would consider with me the following Particulars:

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First,

First, That the Objection does not lie properly against the Gospel of Christ; but, if there be any Sense in it, it must rise higher, and strike at the Wisdom and Goodness of God in the Creation: For, if any Fault is to be found in this Matter, it is not with Christ for not teaching us more Wisdom than we are capable of, but with God for not making us wiser than we are. And hence it will appear, that the Objection is both impious and senseless.

Secondly, That this Objection, allowing it its full Force, does no way affect the Belief or Practise of Religion; because Religion depends entirely upon the Certainty of the Soul's Immortality, and of a future State of Rewards and Punishments; which Certainty no way depends upon the Knowledge of the Nature of the Things themselves, since we are and may be certain of many Things, the Nature of which we neither do nor can know. And hence it will appear, That the Difficulties arising from the Consideration of the Nature of these Things cannot affect our Belief of the Certainty of them, if it be supported by proper Evidence; and consequently, that Religion is no way concerned to remove these Difficulties. And,

Thirdly, That the Gospel has given us the greatest Evidence for the Certainty and Reality of these Things, that can be thought on or desired. And hence it will appear, That the Doctrines of the Gospel are such as are adapted to the Service of Religion, and as might be expected from a Teacher divinely inspired.

And first, Let it be considered, That this Objection does not lie against the Gospel of Christ;
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but if there be any Force in it, it strikes immediately at the Wisdom and Goodness of God in the Creation.

As long as Men keep to the plain simple Points in which Religion is concerned, there is no Danger of their splitting upon these insuperable Difficulties. If they seek after God, the whole Creation will lead them to him; *for the invisible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the Things which are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.* If they search after the Immortality of the Soul, and the Certainty of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, these Truths will be suggested to them from their own natural Sense of Good and Evil, and the Notions of God's Wisdom and Justice and Goodness, compared with the present unequal Distributions of Rewards and Punishments; which can be accounted for upon no other Foot, nor reconciled to the natural Sense God has implanted in us of the Difference of Good and Evil, and the Notions we have of his Excellency and Perfection. But, if they launch out into philosophical Inquiries, and, not content to know that God is, without knowing what he is, endeavour to pry into the Nature and Manner of the Existence of the Almighty; or if, not satisfied with the moral Certainty of a future State, they want to look into the Contexture of the Soul, and to see there the natural Seeds of Immortality; 'tis no wonder if they make shipwreck both of their Reason and their Faith at once: For this Knowledge is too high for Men. God has not given us Faculties to enable us to comprehend these Mysteries of Nature; and therefore we must always of necessity wander out of the Way, and be bewildered, when we search after them. For let any Man consider whence it is that the Difficulty of these Inquiries ariseth: 'Tis not

for want of Teaching, for all the Teaching in the World will not enable Men to comprehend the Things of which they can form no Notions or Ideas. And this is the Case: The Seeds of this Knowledge are not implanted in our Nature, and therefore no Cultivation can ever produce it. There is nothing which ever fell under the Notice of our Senses, to which the Existence and Being of God can be likened, nothing that bears any Proportion of Similitude to the natural Frame and Make of our Souls: And therefore 'tis impossible to represent these Things to the Mind of Man; for 'tis not in the Power of any Sound of Words to create new Notions or Ideas in our Mind, or to convey new Knowledge without them. God has set Bounds to our Knowledge by limiting our Faculties beyond which our utmost Care and Diligence, however assisted, cannot advance. Whatever Wisdom or Excellency of Knowledge may be in our Teacher, 'tis impossible he should infuse more into us than we are capable of receiving; as a Vessel can never receive more than its Measure, though it be filled out of the Sea.

This being the State and Condition of Men, it had been to little Purpose, if our blessed Lord had attempted to let them into the Knowledge of those great Secrets of Nature, which the Curious and Learned are so desirous of prying into. His Business was to instruct them in the Ways of Virtue and Holiness, to awaken their Sleepy Souls and rouse their stupid Consciences to a sense of Goodness, to shew them the Way to Peace and Happiness, by setting before them the Precepts of God and Nature in their true uncorrupted Purity: And this he has done, even by the Confession of his greatest Enemies, who in this Part have nothing to object, but that his Laws are too good and too holy for their Observance. 'Tis the great Excellence of a
Teacher

Teacher to speak to the Sense and Understanding of the People; and, whenever he rises above them, he is lost in the Clouds, and his Words are mere Air and Sound: And therefore, whatever Wisdom and Knowledge were in our blessed Saviour, 'tis Folly to expect from him any greater Degrees of either, than we are capable of comprehending. As he was our Prophet and Teacher, it was his Business to be understood; and he forbore teaching us the deep Mysteries of Nature, for the same Reason that we do not teach Children Algebra, not that we envy them the Knowledge, but that we know they are incapable of it. Instead of improving the Nature of Man, he must have destroyed it, and new created him, to have made him capable of a clear Insight into all the Mysteries which the Curious seem desirous of Knowing. And could he have given us all the Knowledge we thirst after, yet still the Way to Happiness would be the same, and we could do nothing to set forward our Salvation, which he has not already both instructed and enabled us to do: And therefore, as the Case stands, he has fully performed the Office of a divine Teacher, having fully instructed us *in the Things which make for our Peace.*

If you will press the Argument any farther, you must plead the Cause with God, and not with Christ: He has taught you all that you were capable of knowing; and you must inquire of God, why he made you no better and no wiser. And had it not, you'll say, been better, if God had given us such enlarged Faculties, as might have enabled us to surmount all Difficulties of this Kind? If you ask me I can readily answer, That I had rather I were an Angel than a Man; but I Know of no Right I had to be either; and that I am either, is owing purely to the Goodness and Beneficence of my

Creator. Had he left me still in the Lump of Clay out of which I was formed, he had done me no Injury, nor could any complaint have been formed against him on my behalf. For what I have, I have Reason to be thankful; for what I have not, I have no Reason to complain.

Had God indeed given us only the Faculties of Men, and required of us the Service of Angels, we might then with some Justice have lamented the unequal Weight: But now that he requires nothing of us but what we are able to perform, and what, according to our present Degree of Understanding, it is highly reasonable we should perform, it is great Perverseness to hang back for want of more Light, and a greater Capacity to understand what it is no way necessary for us to understand. Our present Faculties, if rightly applied will lead us to a Certainty of the Being of a God, to the Knowledge of his Excellency and Perfection, and will instruct us wherein our reasonable Service to him does consist: And shall we, when we know there is an all-sufficient Being, and that it is our Duty, to serve him, shall we, I say, suspend our Duty, because we meet with great Difficulties in trying to comprehend his Nature and Manner of Existence? As weak as we are, we may assuredly know, *That God will one Day judge the World in Righteousness and reward every Man according to his Doings*: And shall we not listen to this great Motive to Obedience, because we are not able to know how the Soul can act distinctly from the Body, or how it can be united to it again? It would be altogether as reasonable for a Merchant not to trade to the *Indies*, though he is sure there is great Wealth and Riches there, till he can account to himself for the Nature of all the surprising Objects in that other World; or for a Man not to eat, though he is sure it would nourish and support

support his Life, till he can see the Reason of Nutrition, and give an Account of all the secret Ways by which Nature performs the Work.

God has given us Knowledge sufficient to be the Foundation of our Duty; and, if we will use the Light we have, we shall be happy. The great Mistake which Men commit in reflecting upon these Matters, is, That they suppose they should have better Evidence for the Things of another World, could they overcome these Difficulties, which cross them perpetually in the Search after Nature: And this would indeed be a real Advantage to Religion, if it were so; but that it is not, will appear in the following Considerations; For,

Secondly, The Difficulties which arise in considering the natural Properties of Things, do no way affect the Certainty and Reality of their Existence: If they did, we could be certain of the real Existence of no one Thing; since there is nothing but what affords us very great Difficulties, when we come to account for the Nature and Properties of it, Let what will be the Subject, I think, there cannot be two more different Inquiries, than when we examine whether the Thing really is, and when we examine what it is: They are Inquiries which do not at all depend one upon the other. We can examine the Properties of some Things, without so much as reflecting whether there ever were such Things, or no. When the Mathematician considers the Properties of an exact Circle or Square, it matters him not whether there be such perfect Figures in the World, or no; nor does he trouble himself to inquire. So, on the other hand, we can examine and come to the Certainty of the Existence of Things, without knowing, or attempting to know their Natures and Properties. The Peasant knows

there is a Sun and a Moon, as well as the Astronomers; and his Certainty, as to their Existence, is as great and as well-grounded as theirs. Nor is this only true in Things which are Objects of Sense, but will hold likewise with respect to such Things, the Existence of which we collect from Reason. From visible Effects to invisible Causes the Argument is conclusive; though in many Cases it extends only to the Reality of the Cause, and does not in the least lead us to the Knowledge of the Nature of it. When we see Distempers cured by the Use of Plants or of Drugs, some Virtue we are sure there is in them, upon which the Effect depends, though what we seldom or never can tell. This being the Case then, That we can arrive at the Knowledge of the Existence of Things, when we are perfectly ignorant of their Natures and Properties; and can, on the other side, examine and know the Properties of Things, without considering whether they exist, or no; 'tis plain that these are distinct Acts of Knowledge, which do not depend on each other, and that we may be certain as to the Reality of Things, however we may be puzzled and confounded when we enter into the Consideration of their Nature.

And now pray consider, as to the Case before us, what sort of Knowledge it is that is necessary to support Religion in the World. If we are sure there is a God who will judge the World, is not that a sufficient Foundation for Holiness? Does it signify any thing, as to the Necessity of our Obedience, to inquire into the Matter or Nature of his Being? Does not the whole of Religion evidently depend on this Question, Whether there certainly be a God who will judge the World? And, if it appears there is, is it of any Consequence to say there are great Difficulties in conceiving how these Things can be? For, if they certainly will be, they will be some Way or other,

other, no doubt; and it concerns not us to know which Way. Since therefore our Saviour has given the greatest Evidence that can be of the Certainty of a future State, and the Soul's Existence after Death, 'tis impertinent and unphilosophical to confront this Evidence with Difficulties arising from our Conceptions as to the Nature and Manner of these Things: It is in truth to set up Ignorance against Knowledge; for our Difficulties spring from our Ignorance of Nature, which is an Argument we ought rather to be ashamed of, than to bring into Competition with the clear Evidence we have for the Certainty and Reality of the Things themselves. Were this duly considered, it would set the great Controversy of Religion upon the right Foot, which ought to turn on this single Point, Whether there be sufficient Evidence of a future State, or no? For, if such a state there be, let our Conceptions concerning it be clear, or not clear, most certainly we shall be brought to account for all we do; which is enough, I think, to make us careful what we do. And this is the main Concern of Religion, and that which will secure whatever is necessary to it.

Since then Religion evidently depends upon the Certainty and Reality of a future State of Rewards and Punishments, and other the like Articles, and not in the least upon the Knowledge of the Nature, or the philosophical Account of these Things; it had been absurd in our Saviour, who was a Preacher of Religion only, a Teacher sent from God, to have entered into those Difficulties, which did not at all belong to his Province. And, since neither the Practice of Religion would have received any Advantage by the Discussion of these Doubts, for, if we had the Knowledge of Angels, and saw the Heavens as plainly as they do, yet the same Virtue
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and Holiness, without any Change, would be necessary to carry us thither; nor the Motives of Religion would have gained any new Strength, since the Evidence for the Reality of a future State is not affected by these Doubts; it is ridiculous to expect the Solution of them in the Gospel, when, if solved, they would not serve any one Point in which the Gospel is concerned, but would end in mere Philosophy and Speculation.

But perhaps it may be said, That all this is true indeed, where the Existence of Things is out of doubt: In that Case no Difficulties can destroy the Evidence of their Existence, But, where the Existence of Things is doubtful, there the seeming Contradictions which arise in considering the Nature of the Things, do mightily shake the Presumption of their Existence. This is a fair State of the Case, and we ought to join Issue on it.

Let us then proceed, in the third Place, to shew, That the Gospel has given us the greatest Evidence of our own Immortality, and of a future State, that can be thought on or desired. There are two Things upon which our Resurrection to Life depends as we learn from our Saviour's Answer to the *Sadducees*: *Ye do err*, says he, *not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of God*. Which Answer is a very clear one; for we can desire no more than to know that God certainly can raise us, and that he certainly will. The first is to be learnt from our natural Notions of God; the second from the Scripture, which is the Declaration of his Will to Mankind. As to the Power of God, it cannot be brought into question without throwing off all Pretence even to natural Religion: For, if you allow God, that he made the World, and formed Man into a living Soul in the Beginning; you
cannot

cannot deny but that He who made Man out of Nothing at first, can as easily make him again after Death has dissolved the vital Union. It remains then to inquire after the Will of God, Whether He, who certainly can, certainly will raise us at the last Day? The Time will not permit me to enter largely into the Argument; and therefore I shall rest it upon one, but that a very Clear Point. It will not be denied but that we have our Saviour's Promise and Word for our Resurrection often repeated in the Gospel: And consider, pray, did not he raise many dead to Life again? Did he not at last raise himself from the Grave after he had been three Days buried? Is it not plain then upon the Gospel Account, that he had the Power of raising the Dead? and is it not as plain, that he has promised to raise us? Take both Propositions together then, and they will amount to this; That He who was the Power of raising the Dead? has promised and declared that he will raise us from the Dead. God, we know, cannot lye, and therefore must ratify every Word which *he spoke by his holy Child Jesus*: And hence arises a Security which no doubts can shake. Besides, as to Difficulties in Nature and Philosophy, he has not indeed taught us to answer them; but he fully answered them himself, when he came from the Grave; as he who got up and walked, baffled all the Philosopher's Arguments against Motion.

Tis true you'll say, this is very good Evidence, but you find it hard to believe: And perhaps you might have been as hard of Belief, if our Saviour had reasoned never so philosophically. The Question is, Whether any Objection lies against the Gospel for overlooking the Difficulties which learned Men raise? I have shewed that none can lie, and that the Gospel has given a much better Evidence than

than that which is desired : And this is sufficient to remove the Offence taken upon the Account of this supposed Defect in the Gospel. If you believe not the Gospel, that alters not the Case : The Evidence is not the worse for that ; for neither would you believe perhaps, *though one rose from the Dead.*

DISCOURSE III.

P A R T III.

THE Prejudices which Men are apt to conceive against the Gospel, are of different Kinds, according to the different Views under which they consider it. When they set themselves to examine the Pretences it has to be a divine Revelation, they stumble at the Meanness and Poverty of its Author; imagining that, if God were to send a Person into the World upon so considerable an Errand, he would clothe him with a Majesty becoming one immediately commissioned by himself, and which might better support the great Undertaking: Or, if they consider the Gospel as the Word of God, given to Men for their Instruction in all Things pertaining to the Service of God, they expect to find all their Doubts and Difficulties removed, which are any way related to the Cause of Religion; such, for Instance, as relate to the Nature of the Soul, its Manner of subsisting out of the Body, and to the Nature and Condition of the future State which we are bid to expect: And, not finding these Difficulties considered and removed, they are apt to conclude that this Revelation has not all the Marks of Wisdom which are to be expected in one coming immediately from God.

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These Offences have been already considered: But, as some are offended at the Gospel for not clearing the Doubts and Difficulties which encumbered the Notions of Religion before, so others take offence at the new Doctrines introduced into Religion by the Gospel, and complain of the Hardship put upon them in requiring them to believe Things which are not suggested to them by natural Reason, nor are to be maintained by it. Even of our Saviour's Disciples we find many offended at his Doctrine, and complaining to each other, *This is an hard Saying; who can hear it?* And so far did their Prejudice prevail, *that they went back, and walked no more with him.*

The Gospel, it is said, contains many mysterious Truths: And what Purpose of Religion can be served by our receiving Articles of Faith which we do not understand? Shall we be the better Men for it? Will it make us more just or holy, or beneficent to our Brethren? Will it promote the Honour of God to represent him as requiring such Conditions from us, the End or Use of which we cannot discern? Or, will it recommend Religion to the World? Will Men be the more forward to submit, when they must first renounce their Sense and Understanding, and cease to be rational, in order to be religious?

This is a very heavy Charge, and, were it as true as it is heavy, might possibly shake the Foundations of the Gospel. But, to set this Matter in a clear Light, I must desire you to observe the different Notions which belong to the Word Mystery in the Use of the Gospel, and in vulgar Use among Men at this Time: And, by thus distinguishing the Use or Sense of the Word, it will appear,

First,

First, That the Objection does not reach the Gospel Sense or Use of the Word, nor can affect the Mysteries contained in the Gospel: And,

Secondly, That the Use and Sense of the Word which is liable to this Objection, does not any way belong to the Gospel; nor are there any such Mysteries in the Gospel as may justify the Complaint made against them.

First then, If you look into the sacred Writers, you will find, that the whole Design of the Gospel, the Dispensation of Providence in the Salvation of Mankind, is styled a Mystery; *the hidden Wisdom of God, which was kept secret since the World began*: A Mystery 'tis called, because it was kept secret since the World began, God not having opened or declared his gracious Purposes before the Coming of Christ. With respect to this Time of Secrecy and Silence the Gospel is called a Mystery; but, upon the Revelation of it by Christ Jesus, it is no longer looked upon as a Mystery, but as the Manifestation of God's Will and Goodness to Men. Thus you will find St. Paul speaking in the last of the *Romans*: *The Mystery which was kept secret since the World began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the Prophets, according to the Commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all Nations for the Obedience of Faith*: That is, This great Work was a Mystery in all Ages, being kept secret in the Counsels of God, but, since the Coming of Christ, 'tis no longer a Mystery, but is manifest and made known to all Nations and People. Here then, you see plainly, the Opposition is between Mystery and Revelation: What God has reserved to himself, without communicating the Knowledge of it to the World, that is a Mystery; what he has revealed, is no longer a Mystery, but a Manifestation of his Will and Purpose. In this Sense, I presume,

presume, there lies no Objection against the Gospel: That it was once hidden in the secret Counsels of Providence, but is now, by the Revelation of Christ Jesus, made known to all Men, can afford us no Matter of Complaint, but may administer to us great Joy, and be a Subject of Praise and Glory to God; inasmuch as our Eyes have seen, and our Ears heard, those Things, which many righteous Men and Prophets have *desired to see, and have not seen them, and to hear, and have not heard them.*

As the Gospel itself is in this Sense styled a Mystery, so are the several Parts of it likewise: *I shew you a Mystery,* says St. Paul; *we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.* He did not mean that he would shew them what they could not comprehend, but that he would declare to them the Purpose of God, which they were ignorant of. The same Use of the Word you may meet with in our blessed Saviour himself: When he had described the future State of the Church in Parables to the *Jews*, and came afterwards to explain them to the Disciples, he tells them the Reason of his Proceedings: *Because,* says he, *unto you it is given to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, but unto them it is not given.* All Futurities, because known only to God, are Mysteries; but, when revealed, they are no longer so, being made known and manifest. Thus 'tis plain, St. Paul uses the Word in 1 Cor. xiii. where he joins the Gift of Prophecy and the Knowledge of Mysteries together: *Though I have,* says he, *the Gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries and all Knowledge:* Where 'tis plain what he means by Mysteries, since they are to be understood by the Gift of Prophecy. In the fourth Chapter of the same Epistle he shews what Account we are to make of our Pastors and Teachers: *Let a Man,* says he, *so account of us, as of the Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the Mysteries*
of

of God. His meaning is not, that they were Preachers of Mysteries in the Vulgar Notion of it, that is, of Things which no-body can understand; but that God had entrusted them with his Purposes and Intentions in the Salvation of Mankind, which they, like good Stewards, were to dispense to the whole Family, by declaring and revealing the whole Will of God.

The same Apostle says, Chap. ii. 7. *We speak the Wisdom of God in a Mystery;* and in the next Words explains what he means by Mystery, *even the hidden Wisdom which God ordained before the World to our Glory:* And in the Tenth Verse he tells us, this is no longer hidden, but the Mystery is laid open; *God having revealed it unto us by his Spirit.* In the same Sense we read of the *Mystery of Faith:* Where we are not to understand the Apostle to mean incomprehensible Articles of Faith, but the Revelations of God's Purposes and Designs, which through Faith we receive, and are therefore styled the Mysteries of Faith.

In this Sense the Gospel is full of Mysteries, as containing the secret Purposes of God's hidden Wisdom in the Redemption of the World, which were made manifest by Christ Jesus, *who brought Life and Immortality to Light.* Against this Gospel Sense of Mystery the common Objections have no Force; since Mysteries here are not understood to be such Things as Reason cannot receive, but such Things as proceed from the hidden Wisdom of God, and are made manifest in the Gospel of Christ.

Let us then, in the second Place, proceed to shew That the Notion of Mysteries, against which they Objection lies, does not belong to the Gospel. The Objection represents a Mystery as a Thing inconceivable, and altogether irreconcilable to hu-

man Reason. But such Myſteries there are none in the Goſpel of Chriſt. If Men, learned or unlearned, have run themſelves into Contradictions by endeavouring to explain the Myſteries of God farther than he has explained them, be that to themſelves: Let not the Goſpel be charged with their Errors and Miſtakes. Nothing indeed has proved more fatal to Religion, than the vain Attempts of Men to dive into the unrevealed Myſteries of God, and to account for, upon Principles of human Reason, the Things which proceed from the hidden Wiſdom of God. All the ſecret Purpoſes of Providence are, in the Senſe of the Scripture, Myſteries; as likewise all Knowledge which God has not revealed. Of ſuch Myſteries are there many: But then they concern not us to inquire after; if they did, God would reveal them to us. God has declared to us, That he has an only-begotten Son, and that he was the Perſon who came down from Heaven for our Deliverance: That he has an holy Spirit, who ſhall ſanctify our Hearts, and be aſſiſting to us in working out our Salvation. This, and agreeable to this, is the Scripture Doctrine: And a Man would be put to it to fix any Abſurdity, or ſo much as ſeeming Contradiction, upon this Doctrine, or any thing ſaid concerning it in Scripture. Concerning theſe Perſons there are indeed exceeding great Myſteries, which are not revealed: God has not told us, or enabled us to conceive, how his Son and his Spirit dwell in him, or how they came from him. Theſe therefore are properly Myſteries which are hidden in the ſecret Wiſdom of God, and which we are no-where called upon to inquire after. It is eaſy, I think, to take God's Word, that he has a Son and a Spirit, who dwell with him and in him from all Eternity; a Son who came to our Aſſiſtance, a Spirit, who is ever with us to guide us into Truth: Theſe Things, I ſay, are eaſy to be believed, without entering into the Difficulties ariſing

sing from natural and philosophical Inquiries, which the Scripture nowhere encourages us to seek after: And, as long as Men keep close to the Rule and Doctrine of Scripture, they will find no Cause to enter into the great Complaints raised against Mysteries. The Scripture has revealed indeed wonderful Things to us, and for the Truth of them has given us wonderful Evidence; so that they are well qualified to be the Objects of our Faith: For such God designed them, and not for the Exercise of our Vanity and Curiosity, or, as you call it, of our Reason. If it is not reasonable to believe God upon the Gospel Evidence, there is an End of all Mysteries; but, if it is reasonable, there must be an End of all farther Inquiries: And I think common Sense will teach us not to call God to Account, or pretend to enter into the Reason of his Doings.

DISCOURSE IV.

PART I.

I COR. i. 21.

For, after that, in the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe.

I*N the Wisdom of God, the World by Wisdom knew not God.* There is some Difficulty in ascertaining the precise Meaning of the first Words; *In the Wisdom of God.* Some understand the Meaning to be, That, since the World, *in the Wisdom of God*, i. e. by contemplating the Wisdom of God in the great Works of the Creation, had not *by Wisdom*, i. e. by the Exercise of their Reason, arrived to the true Knowledge of God, it pleased God to take another Method, and *by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe.* But since this Difficulty does not affect the main Assertions of the Apostle in the Text, I will not spend Time in inquiring what has been, or may be, said upon this Point.

The main Assertions of the Apostle in the Text are two :

First, That the World by Wisdom knew not God.

Secondly, That it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save Believers.

The Language made use of here by St. *Paul* may want explaining; for it may seem strange, that the Preaching of the Gospel should by an Apostle of Christ be called *the Foolishness of Preaching*. But the Meaning and Language of St. *Paul* will be accounted for by considering what led him to this kind of Expression.

The Doctrine of the Cross, and of the Redemption of the World by the Death and Passion of Christ, was received by the great Pretenders to Wisdom and Reason with Scorn and Contempt: *The Greeks*, says the Apostle, *seek after Wisdom — and Christ crucified is to the Greeks Foolishness*. The Pride of Learning and Philosophy had so possessed the polite Parts of the Heathen World, that they could not submit to a Method of Salvation which was above the Reach of their Philosophy, and which refused to be tried by the Disputes and Subtilties of their Schools. The Apostle, Ver. 17. says, *Christ sent him to preach the Gospel, not with the Wisdom of Words*. The Wisdom of the World, thus discarded, took its Revenge of the Gospel, and called it *the Foolishness of Preaching*. Be it so, says the Apostle; yet by this *Foolishness* of Preaching God intends to save them who believe: For this Method is of God, and not of Man; and *the Foolishness of God is wiser than Men*. You see what led St. *Paul* to use this Expression, and to call the Preaching

of the Gospel the Foolishness of Preaching. The Great and the Learned so esteemed it, and so called it: The Apostle speaks to them in their own Language, and calls upon them in the Text to compare their much-boasted Wisdom with this Foolishness of Preaching, and to judge of them by their Effects: The World by *Wisdom knew not God*; but the *Foolishness* of Preaching is *Salvation* to every Believer.

Whether this Charge of Ignorance imputed to the Gentile World be true, or no, is a Matter depending on the Evidence of History: If it be not true, there can be no Difficulty in disproving it: The Time and Place may be named, when and where the true Knowledge of God prevailed, and Religion in its Purity was professed by the People. But this has not been attempted, nor will it be, by any one who is acquainted with the History of the antient World.

It may be hard perhaps to account for the general Corruption of Religion which prevailed in the World; especially when we consider how absolutely absurd, and contrary to common Sense, many of the superstitious Rites were, which had spread themselves over the Heathen World. We can scarcely conceive what should move Men to consecrate Birds and Beasts, Stocks and Stones, and to fall down and worship them. But, these Follies being once introduced, and propagated from Father to Son, it is easy to account for the great Difficulty of removing them. Custom and Education, and the Reverence which Men naturally have for what they esteem to be Religion, were Foundations too strong to be removed by the Reasoning and Speculations of a few who were something wiser than the rest, and saw perhaps many and great Absurdities in the common

mon Practise: And, though there did appear in the Heathen World some such great and good Men, who were as Lights shining in a Dark Place; yet was there not one found able to extricate himself from all the Superstition of his Country, much less to reduce the People to a Practise consonant to the pure Principles of natural Religion. And it is an Observation true in itself, and of Great Weight in this Case, That not one Country, nay not one City, ever embraced the Principles of pure natural Religion upon the Strength of their own Reason, or upon Conviction from the Reason and Wisdom of others. And, since the World continued under Idolatry for many Ages together before the Coming of Christ, notwithstanding that they had as much Sense and Reason in those Days as we have in ours, what Pretence is there to imagine that they would not have continued in the same State to this Day, if the Light of the Gospel had not appeared?

Whoever considers this Matter seriously and fairly, cannot but be convinced of the Truth of the Apostle's Assertion, That *by Wisdom the World knew not God.*

As to the second Proposition, *That it hath pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save them that believe;* as far as true Notions of God and Religion are necessary Means of Salvation, the Truth of the Assertion will be admitted.

The Enemies of Revelation will of themselves, and in spite of themselves, bear witness so far to this Truth. They now see clearly the great Truths of Religion; they can now demonstrate the Being and Attributes of God, and from the Relation we bear to him deduce the Duties owing to him, the Worship, and the Purity of the Worship, that is to be paid him. Are they wiser than all who lived before

them? or do they owe this new Degree of Light and Knowledge to some Advantage which others before them had not? They will hardly say they are wiser than all who lived, when Learning and Arts and Sciences flourished in the *East*, in *Greece* and at *Rome*; and, should they say it, it will be harder still to believe them: And yet what one Advantage have they above the others, this only excepted, That in their Days the Light of the Gospel has been spread over the World?

But, however, this Comparison between the Wise and Learned of different Ages will not determine the Case before us; for Religion is not made for Scholars only: The Use of it is to govern and direct the World, and to influence the Practice of Mankind. And the great Question lies between the Religion of the World in general before the Coming of Christ, and since; and the Influence which Religion in one State and the other naturally had, or may be supposed to have had, by just Consequence, on the Morality of Mankind. To give you an account of the Religion and Divinity of the Vulgar in the Days of Heathenism, would be to entertain you with an History of Folly and Superstition; some Parts of which for the Barbarity of them, and some for the Lewdness of them, are very unfit to be related in a Christian Congregation. The People thought of their Gods much after the rate that the Poets write of them; and their sacred History was an Account of the Battles and Quarrels, and of the Loves and Amours of their Deities. Their Practise in Religion was agreeable to their Articles of Belief: Their impure Deities were worshipped in Acts of Impurity or Barbarity: And how could it be otherwise? for, when Vice itself was consecrated and had Temples dedicated to it, how could the Worshipers be untainted?

But consider now how the Case stands in Countries where the Gospel is preached in any tolerable Degree of Purity. The common People now are no greater Reasoners then they were formerly: Yet go into our Villages, you will find there a firm Persuasion of the Unity of God, who made Heaven and Earth, and all Things in them: The meanest of the People will tell you, that an honest Heart is the only acceptable Sacrifice to God, and that there is no Way to please him but by doing justly and righteously.

Let me ask now, whence comes this Change? Is it for the better, or no? If it is, surely the World is greatly indebted to the Hand that wrought this Change, that rooted out all the false Notions destructive of Virtue and the Happiness of Mankind, and planted in the room thereof Principles which do so much Honour and Glory to God, and are full of present Peace and future Hopes for the Children of Men.

I am aware that it will be said, That the common People now are no more able to give a Reason of the Faith that is in them, than their Heathenish Ancestors were before them; and that Custom and the Prejudices of Education have influenced both equally; and that these Christians, had they been born Heathens, would have been Heathens, or, if Mahometans, they would have been still Mahometans.

Suppose the Case to be so, and consider whether we are not extremely obliged to Revelation even upon this Foot.

If Men are naturally influenced by Custom and the Force of Education to follow the Opinions and Practices of their Country, and are, after all that has been said to exalt human Reason, incapable to
deliver

deliver themselves from popular and national Errors by the Strength of their own Reason; two Things must, I think, be admitted.

First, That it was a great Undertaking, and the Work of a very extraordinary Power, to root out ancient Errors, which had for many Ages had Possession of the whole World: And,

Secondly, That it was an act of great Wisdom and Goodness, as well as Power to introduce just Principles and Notions of Religion, and, by giving them at first a firm Establishment, to throw the Weight of Custom and Education on the Side of Virtue and true Religion, in opposition to Superstition and Vice.

The first Proposition cannot be disputed; for, if the Power of Custom and Education be as great as it is represented, the Power must be very great that gets the better of it: And I believe it will be hard to shew from History, that ever a Nation was reasoned out of their religious Errors: It has been done by the Power of Miracles, and by the Power of the Sword; but in this last Method the Nation and its Errors have been commonly destroyed together. However, the Gospel was not introduced by external Force; and therefore the Work must necessarily be ascribed to a Power of another kind.

As to the second Proposition, it may be thought dishonourable to true Religion to suppose it to be at all beholden to Custom and Education for its Support; dishonourable to God, to suppose that he can make use of any thing to propagate Religion, but the Reason and Understanding of his Creatures; and, consequently, that true Religion is no longer Religion, when it stands by the Force of Custom and Education.

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I know how much has been said of the Use of Reason in Religion, to the Exclusion of all other Helps: But I know too that the holy Writers frequently call on us *to train up a Child in the Way he should go*, and give this Reason for it, *That when he is old he will not depart from it*: I know too that God called *Abraham*, and made of him a great Nation, *because he knew him, that he would teach his Children after him to keep the Commandments of the Lord*: Which Precept to instruct Children betimes, and which Declaration on God's Part in relation to *Abraham*, cannot stand with a Supposition that true Religion is the worse for the Support it has from Example and Education.

But to consider this Matter a little farther: If we know any thing with Certainty of Mankind, it is this; That their Principles, Opinions, and Practices are strongly influenced by Custom and Education. I will ask any Man, whether he thinks it possible to alter this State of Things, and to make all Men as much Philosophers, and as much above Prejudices, as some pretend to be? I believe no Man in his Senses ever thought this possible. If then Men are, and ever will be as long as they continue Men, greatly governed by Custom and Education, the single Question is, Whether it was an Act beneficent to Mankind, and becoming the Wisdom of God, to direct this Influence to the Side of Virtue and true Religion in order to make Men happy, rather than to leave them to be miserable under the strong Influence to Vice, Superstition, and Idolatry, which had Possession of the World?

The true End of Religion is to make Men better, to lead them to a due Discharge of their Duty to God and to Man. True Principles and right and just Notions of God will lead Men to a just Performance of their Duty, independently of this Consideration,

ration, Whether their Principles are the Result of their own Reasoning, or instilled into them by Education. If this be so, the common People, whose Religion is always treated as their Prejudices, are as capable of performing the Duties of Religion, and as acceptable in the Sight of God, as the greatest Reasoners and Philosophers.

Let us suppose, That some wise Man had fully convinced himself by Reason of the Being of God, of the Holiness of his Nature, and that he is a Rewarder of all those who diligently seek him: Suppose too, That a plain Countryman, not able to make Deductions in a Course of Reasoning, was yet fully persuaded of the same Truths from his Bible, or the Instruction of his Parish-Priest: I say, in this Case, That the Countryman's Principles are as good a Foundation for all the Duties and Purposes of Religion as the Philosopher's; that they will be as beneficial to the World in making a good Father, Husband or Master, and as beneficial to the Man in making him happy here and hereafter: and, though his Instruction, compared with the Philosopher's deep Knowledge, may, in the Language of *St. Paul*, be called the *Foolishness of Preaching*, yet will it, if duly attended to, *make him wise unto Salvation*.

I am not placing Religion upon Prejudice as its proper Foundation: No: the Gospel was at first introduced by the strongest Appeal to reason, when it was introduced by the Hand of God in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works, which the Apostle calls the *Demonstration of the Spirit*, and opposes it to the *Wisdom of the World*: And the Gospel stands upon the same Reason still. But this is a Reason which, the wise ones of the World think, can produce nothing but Prejudice, or such Faith as differs but little from it. This then I say, That it was
worthy

worthy of God, by a strong Hand and outstretched Arm, in Signs and Wonders to beat down Superstition and Idolatry, and the corrupt Notions of the World; and to plant in the room of them, not by the Arts of Man's Wisdom, but by these Demonstrations of the Spirit, true Principles of Reason and Religion; to give them Possession in the World, that they might be delivered down from Generation to Generation, and maintained under the natural Influence which Custom and Education have, and always will have, upon Mankind.

And, if we consider Revelation in this Light only, as removing false Principles of Error and Superstition, and introducing just ones of Truth and Religion, independently of the Reason and Evidence on which the Gospel stands, it must appear to be an Act of divine Love and Goodness, which we ought to receive with Thankfulness. If Men were supposed to be quite incapable of entering at all into the Reason of Things, and to be wholly guided by Prejudice and Custom, yet surely even then it would be an Act of Love to draw out of their Minds Principles full of Mischief to themselves and others, and place in their room Principles of Love and Benevolence to make themselves and others happy. And surely this at least must be allowed to the Gospel, That it did in fact expel the false and pernicious Notions of Heathenism, and introduce Principles upon which Men may be at Peace and in Friendship with God and with each other. And from thence perhaps we may see the Reason why Miracles were so frequent in the Beginning of the Gospel, and why they ceased afterwards. They were necessary till Truth had Possession of the World; but Truth, thoroughly established, was left to be propagated by the natural Means of Instruction and Education.

Every body sees what Mischief and Wickedness are often produced by false and corrupt Opinions and Principles; which owe not their Strength to Reason, for with Reason they have no Alliance, but to the Possession they have of the Mind. Good Principles, with the same Advantage of Possession, will be as powerful to good Purposes, though the Mind discerns not the Reason from whence they flow. There are but few Workmen, perhaps, who know they Reason, and can demonstrate the mechanic Powers of the Instruments they use; but, being perfect in the Use and Application of these Powers, they are able Workmen and Master-builders; which is all that is required of them. In like manner, if true Religion is so introduced into the Mind, as to work in the Heart of Man, and make him upright and honest, the End and Purpose of Religion is answered.

To answer this End of Religion were the Preachers of the Gospel sent into the World: The Errand was worthy of Him who sent them; whose Goodness and Mercy inclined him to teach Men the Way to Happiness, but not to flatter their Vanity and Pride of Knowledge. The Doctrines of the Gospel are not the worse for being *Foolishness to the Greeks, and a Stumbling-block to the Jews*; since they are, and on Experience appear to be, *the Power of God to Salvation to all who believe.*

DISCOURSE IV.

PART II.

IN treating on this Subject, I have already observed to you, that there are two Propositions or Assertions contained in the Words of the Text:

First, That the World by Wisdom knew not God.

Secondly, That it pleased God by the Foolishness of Preaching to save Believers.

It being allowed in general, that the World was grossly ignorant and superstitious, and unacquainted with the true Notion of God, and the Religion that was to be paid him; yet it will still be said, that there were some, some few at least, who had extricated themselves from these popular Errors; who saw and acknowledged one supreme Being, the Cause of all Things; who had clear and distinct Notions of Morality, and of the Duties owing from Man to Man. The Writings of some of these great Men are still extant; and, if we consult only *Plato*, *Aristotle*, and the *Roman* Philosopher *Tully*, we may see how far Reason and Philosophy could and did carry these Men in Matters of Religion and Morality.

From these and such-like Instances we are apt to form a general Notion of the Powers of human Reason; and the Argument appears undeniable; Thus far human Reason did go without the Help of the Gospel, thus far therefore it certainly can go.

It may be worth our while to consider this Case, not with an Intent to depreciate the Worth of these, the best and greatest Men of Antiquity, but to state it clearly and fairly, as far as it does, or may be supposed to affect the Argument for the Necessity of Revelation.

Supposing then, in the first Place, all that is said of these wise Men to be true, and that they did arrive at a clear and distinct Knowledge of God, and of the Religion that was due to him; yet it will weigh but little in the present Consideration, for this plain Reason; because Religion, if it is of any use at all, is equally of use to all Men: For, since all Men live under the Impression of natural Conscience, and the Sense of being accountable for their Actions, they all equally want Direction; and, as the Experience of the World shews, all Men will have some Religion, either good or bad. To say therefore that Reason was sufficient for the Purposes of Religion before the Publication of the Gospel, and to prove it by shewing that it served this Purpose in four or five Instances in an Age, whilst Millions and Millions had no Help from it, is quite mistaking the Point; We want something to be of use to all Men, and which all Men stand in need of to their Well-being; You have found something that will serve perhaps one in a Million, and think that you have discovered an adequate Supply for the general Want. But what must become of the many Thousands who are incapable of being the better for your Method? If the whole Nation were infected with the Plague, it
would

would be worth while to send even to the *Indies* for a Man who could cure them: but, if his Remedy could cure only two or three in the Kingdom, it would be of no great Consequence whether he came, or staid away.

But it may be said, that what Reason did for a few, it was capable of doing for all, if it had been duly attended to; and, consequently, that Reason was a sufficient Foundation for true Religion, notwithstanding that true Religion was lost in the World; which was not through a Defect in Reason, but through the Abuse and Misapplication of it by the generality of Mankind.

I agree the Case to be so; but we are still where we were before: For this general Abuse of Reason, or Inattention to the Voice of it, which had spread over the whole World, had certainly a Root in some general Evil and Corruption that had infected Mankind: And, whatever Reason was in itself, yet it stood in great Want of a Remedy for this Evil, that had so universally darkened and obscured it. Suppose I should say such a Man was blind; will it be a proper Reply to say, No, his Eyes are sound and good, excepting only that there is a very thick Film over them, which intercepts all Sight? or would it be proper to insist that the Man wanted no Cure, because he had sound Eyes? What shall we do with this Film then? for, till it is removed, the Man might as well be without Eyes. This was the very Case of the Heathen World. You say they had Reason sufficient for all the Purposes of Religion: Be it so; yet, in fact, it is certain they were not able to make this Use of it for Ages together. Since the Coming of Christ the World has been able to make this Use of their Reason: And now, at last, it is become a great Question, whether a Cure has been wrought, or no.

But consider farther, when we talk of Reason abstractedly as a Principle of human Actions, it is right to say that Reason can do whatever we see any Man perform by the Help of his Reason; and therefore it is true that Reason can measure the Magnitude and Distances of the heavenly Bodies: But is it also true that every Man's Reason can do this? by no means; and therefore to consider all Men as capable of doing what we see some great Geniuses able to do, is absolutely absurd. Now, the few whom you suppose to have attained to a just Notion of God and of Religion in the Heathen World what were they? Men brought up in Retirement and Study, of great Industry and Application, who spent their Lives in searching into the Causes of Things: And, even of those many who followed this Method of Life and Study, there are but few who can with any Pretence be said to have discovered the Truth: The Croud of Philosophers talked much more, but knew as little as the People. But the People themselves, what must become of them? They have no Time for study, and they must have true Notions of Religion at a cheaper Rate, or not at all. As Religion is a Thing in which all Men are concerned, it must be conveyed in a Manner that suits Men of all Conditions. Supposing therefore that you have found a Way by which some few thoughtful Men obtained true Notions of Religion, you are far from having found a Way of propagating true Religion in the World. Reasoning will not do the Business: And therefore the Gospel set out in another Manner by proposing the great Truths of Religion in the plainest and simplest Manner in an authoritative Way, but by an Authority supported by the plainest and the strongest Proof, the Proof of Miracles; an Argument that was adapted to Men of all Conditions, and made its Way to every Understanding.

It is become a Fashion to dress up the great Doctrines and Proofs of Religion in Axioms and Theorems and Demonstrations; and those who have taken Pains in this Way may have done great Service to Men of thought and Contemplation: But, had the Gospel set out at first with this Air of Mathematics, it had lost one strong Proof of its divine Original, arising from the Plainness of its Doctrine, and the Simplicity of the Evidence which was offered in its behalf; which made the Gospel to be a proper Tender to all Mankind. All Mankind are concerned in the great Truths of Religion; and nothing can be more absurd, and contradictory to the Notion of God's Wisdom and Goodness, than to suppose God to intend to establish true Religion in the World, and yet to offer it in a Method which could possibly have an Influence but on very few. Whoever will reflect seriously on the Nature and Condition of Mankind in general, will be able to give himself a clear Reason why God did not call in the Assistance of the *Wisdom of the World* to propagate the Gospel, but chose rather to establish it by the *Foolishness of Preaching*, as it is called, and by the *Demonstration of the Spirit*, manifested in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works.

I have hitherto considered this Plea, drawn from the Case of some great Men in the Heathen World, upon supposition that what is said of them is true, and that they had indeed extricated themselves from the Superstitions of their Country, and attained just Notions of true Religion: But this Thing, which has been often said, has never been proved, and I am afraid never will.

I do not wonder that those who have been conversant in the Writings of the Antients, and have been entertained with the just and fine Reflections

to be met with on the Attributes of God; considered as Maker and Governor of the World, and of Mankind in particular, should conclude that those who thought and talked so clearly of the great Attributes of the Deity, and of his Providence over the World, had also as clear Notions of the religious Service due to him, and to him only. What has led to this Conclusion I conceive to be this: There is so plain a Connection between the Relation we bear to God, and the religious Duty owing to him, and the Argument is so familiar to us, that we almost naturally suppose that every Man, who maintains the Principle, cannot fail of seeing the Conclusion.

The Conclusion indeed is so natural, that, if it were overlooked, nothing can more sensibly prove the Weakness of human Reason in opposition to inveterate Errors and Superstition; and nothing can more effectually shew us how unable these wise Men were to reform the World, since with all their Wisdom they were not able to reform themselves. Yet this was the Truth of the Case; and it was not at random and without Knowledge of the Fact, that St. *Paul* lays this to the Charge of the wise Men of the World, *That, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God; neither were thankful, but became vain in their Imaginations, and their foolish Heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became Fools; and changed the Glory of the uncorruptable God into the Image made like to corruptible Man, and to Birds, and four-footed Beasts, and creeping Things.*

To prove the Truth of the Apostle's Assertion, that even the wise Men, who *knew God*, did *not glorify him as God*, by an Induction of particulars, would be undertaking a Work which could hardly be well discharged in this Place. But yet the Point
is

is too material to be passed over in Silence. Let us then consider the Case of one only, but of one, who among the good Men was the best, and among the wise ones the wisest. I shall easily be understood to mean *Socrates*, the great Philosopher of *Athens*: And, were the wise Men of Antiquity to plead their Cause, in common, they could not put their Defence into better Hands.

We have an Account of the speculative Opinions of many of the wise Men of *Greece* preserved to us in Authors of great Credit; but of their Practise, and personal Behaviour in Life, little is said: Which makes it hard to judge how far their own Practice and Conduct was influenced by their Opinions, or how consistent they were in pursuing the Consequences of their own Doctrines. The Case might have been the same with *Socrates*, had not a very particular Circumstance put him under a Necessity of explaining his Conduct and Practice with respect to the Religion of his Country. He had talked so freely of the Heathen Deities, and the ridiculous Stories told of them, that he fell under a Suspicion of despising the Gods of his Country, and of teaching the Youth of *Athens* to despise their Altars and their Worship. Upon this Accusation he is summoned before the great Court of the *Areopagites*, and happily the Apology he made for himself is preserved to us by two of the ablest of his Scholars and the best Writers of Antiquity, *Plato* and *Xenophon*: And from both their Accounts it appears, that *Socrates* maintained and asserted before his Judges, That he worshipped the Gods of his Country, and that he sacrificed in private and in public upon the allowed Altars, and according to the Rites and Customs of the City. After this public Confession, so authentically reported by two so able Hands, there can be no Doubt of his Case. He was an Idolater, and had not, by his great Knowledge and

Ability in Reasoning, delivered himself from the Practice of the Superstition of his Country. You see how far the Wisdom of the World could go: Give me leave to shew you what the Foolishness of Preaching could do in the very same Case.

St. *Paul* was in the same Case; He was accused in the same City of *Athens* of the same Crime, That he was a Setter-forth of strange Gods; and before the same great Court of *Areopagites* he made his Apology, which is likewise preserved to us by St. *Luke* in the seventeenth Chapter of the *Acts*. We have then the greatest and the ablest among the wise Men of *Greece*, and an Apostle of Christ, in the same Circumstance. You have heard the Philosopher's Defence, That he worshiped the Gods of his Country, and as his Country worshipped them. Hear now the Apostle: *Ye Men of Athens*, says he, *I perceive that in all Things ye are too superstitious: For, as I passed by, and beheld your Devotions, I found an Altar with this Inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you: God that made the World, and all Things therein. This God, he tells them, is not worshipped with Men's Hands, as though he needeth any thing:—Nor was the Godhead like unto Gold, or Silver, or Stone graven by Art and Man's Device.* He then calls upon them, in the Name of this great God, to repent of their Superstition and Idolatry, which God would no longer bear: *Because he hath appointed a Day in which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given Assurance unto all Men in that he hath raised him from the Dead.*

Which of these two now was a Preacher of true Religion? Let those who value human Reason at the highest Rate determine the Point.

The Manner in which *Socrates* died was the calmest and the bravest in the World, and excludes all Pretension to say that he dissembled his Opinion and Practise before his Judges out of any Fear, or Meanness of Spirit; Vices with which he was never taxed, and of which he seems to have been incapable.

Consider then, was it possible for any Man, upon the Authority of *Socrates*, to open his Mouth against the Idolatry of the Heathen World, or to make use of his Name to that Purpose, who had so solemnly, in the Face of his Country, and before the greatest Judicature of *Greece*, born Testimony to the Gods of his Country, and the Worship paid them?

But to proceed: The City of *Athens* soon grew sensible of the Injury done to the best and wisest of their Citizens, and of their own great Mistake in putting *Socrates* to Death. His Accusers and his Judges became infamous; and the People grew extravagant in doing Honours to the Memory of the innocent Sufferer: They erected a Statue, nay a Temple, to his Memory; and his Name was had in Honour and Reverence. His Doctrines upon the Subjects of Divinity and Morality were introduced into the World with all the Advantage that the ablest and politest Pens could give; and they became the Study and entertainment of all the considerable Men who lived after him. It is worth observing too, that from the Death of *Socrates* to the Birth of Christ were, if I remember right, near four hundred Years; which was Time sufficient to make the Experiment, how far the Wisdom of *Socrates*, attended with all the Advantages before-mentioned, could go in reforming the World. And what was the Effect of all this? Can you name the Place where Religion was reformed? Can you name the

Man who was so far reformed; as to renounce the Superstition of his Country? No; none such are to be found? and how should there? since, the greater the Credit and Reputation of *Socrates* were, the more strongly did they draw Men to imitate his Example, and to worship as their Country worshipped.

Consider, on the other side, what was the Consequence of preaching the Gospel. *St. Paul* entertained the *Athenians* with no fine Speculations; but he laid before them, in the plainest Dress, the great and momentous Truths of Religion; he openly rebuked their Idolatry, and condemned their Superstition. The Gospel was published in the same Manner every-where. The first Preachers of it were enabled to support it by Miracles; and most of them shed their Blood in defence of its Truth. By these Means they came likewise to have Credit and Authority in the World. But in these two Cases there was this great Difference: The corrupt Example of *Socrates* was a dead Weight upon the Purity of his Doctrine, and tended to perpetuate Superstition in the World: The Authority and Example of the Apostles went hand in hand, and united their Force to root out Idolatry. There was this farther Difference too: The Doctrines of *Socrates* could go only among the Learned: The Doctrines of the Gospel were artless and plain, and suited to every Man's Capacity.

For near four hundred Years the Disciples of *Socrates* had the World to themselves, to reform it if they could; in all which Time there is no Evidence remaining that the Religion of the World was the better for their Wisdom. But in much less Time the Gospel prevailed in most Parts of the known World: Wherever it came, Superstition and Idolatry fled before it; And in little more than three Centuries the

the Empire became Christian; which completed the Victory over the Heathen Deities. And, if we may judge by this Comparison between the wisest of Heathens and an Apostle of Christ, the Doctrine of the Text will be fully verified; *That the World by Wisdom knew not God, and that God by the Foolishness of Preaching has provided Salvation for them who believe.*

I have gone through the principal Points which the Text led me to consider, and shall add but few Words by Way of Reflection on the whole.

If then it appears from History, and the Experience of the World before us, that Men for Ages together lived in Ignorance of the true God, and of true Religion, and that Reason was not able to contend against inveterate Errors and Superstitions; let us not be so vain as to imagine that we could have done more in the same Circumstances, than all or any who lived in the many Ages of Idolatry. If we consider to what Height Arts and Sciences were carried in those Days, and the Politeness of *Greece* and *Rome* in all Parts of Learning, we shall have little Reason to imagine that Men have grown wiser as the World has grown older. If we have more Reason in Matters of Religion, and undoubtedly we have more, it should lead us to consider to whom we are indebted for the happy Change, and to give Praise to Him who set the Reason of Mankind free from the Chains under which it had been fast bound for Ages together by Superstition and Idolatry.

When we consider the Means made use of by God for Restoring true Religion in the World, and pretend to judge of the Fitness of them to attain the End proposed, we should be aware of being misled by the Conceits of some who think themselves wise enough to give Directions in a Manner
of

of so great Moment. Some may imagine it might be better, if the Gospel had reasoned more philosophically on the Nature of the Deity, or more fully explained the Nature of the human Soul; and others may wish that other abstruse Points of Reason and Divinity had been cleared to their Satisfaction. But this was not the Errand Christ came on: He came to teach true Religion, and to teach it to all Men: and therefore what was not fit for all was no Part of his Business. The *Greeks* sought after Wisdom, and the *Jews* required a Sign: But the Preachers of the Gospel had no Commission to satisfy the Curiosity of one or of the other; but to teach the Doctrines of God in such a Manner, and to prove them by such Means, as might influence and affect as well the lowest as the highest. If then the Means made use of to introduce the Gospel into the World, were such as were proper and necessary to subdue antient Errors and Prejudices; if the Truths taught by Christ are a proper Foundation for all the Duties of Religion in which Man can have any Concern; if they are left to be supported in the World, and propagated from Age to Age, by Methods which by Experience have been found effectual, and which, human Nature considered, must be effectual to preserve the Profession of Religion amongst Men: - If, I say, we discover these Marks in the Gospel, we see enough to convince us, that the Gospel is the Power of God and the Wisdom of God unto Salvation; which is seeing all that we are concerned to look after, or have any Pretence to expect from Him who came to save and to redeem us.

Lastly, Since we have the Experience of many Ages before us to shew us how unable human Reason is to struggle against the Errors and Follies of Superstition, when once they have got Possession; since from our own Experience we know how much

Reason

Reason is indebted to the Light of the Gospel; we should be careful to preserve this Light for fear of falling back again into the wretched State from which we have been delivered, or into a worse. Reason was once, what the Light of the Gospel is now, a sufficient Guide in Religion: But, when Men grew corrupt and vain in their Imaginations, Superstition and Error prevailed over the World, and false Religion led Reason in Triumph for Ages together. As Reason was subdued, the Light of the Gospel may be, and will be, when the same Causes meet to work together: A Consideration that should make Men, who have any Sense of Religion, think seriously of the Treatment the Gospel every Day meets with. If we use it no better, it may soon leave us; and, when once we get rid of this Foolishness of Preaching, we know, by sad Experience, what is to be expected from the Wisdom of the World.

DISCOURSE V.

JOHN iii. 16.

God so loved the World, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life.

IN this Passage of Scripture, and in many others, the Redemption of the World by Christ Jesus is ascribed to the Love and Goodness of God towards Mankind. Whatever other Difficulties Men may find in the Gospel, one would suppose that it might be admitted to be, at least, a good Representation of the divine Mercy towards Mankind, and fully to display that Tenderness and Compassion to our Weaknesses and Infirmities, which we all hope for, and with some Reason expect to receive, from our great Creator, whose *Mercy is over all his Works.*

The Case being so, who would expect to hear any Objection against the Gospel derived from the Topics of divine Mercy and Goodness? Yet some there are, who think the Mercy of the Gospel to be imperfect, and that Nature gives far better Hopes to all her Children. They conceive the Infirmities of human Nature to be unavoidable, and the Mercy of God to be infinite; and from these Considerations
they

they raise Hopes as unbounded as they conceive the Mercy to be. As they derive these strong Assurances from natural Reason, they conceive all Promises of Mercy to be unnecessary, and therefore to be suspected; and the Argument is worked up not only to be an Objection against the Gospel Revelation, but against all Revelations, either past or to come.

There is nothing of more Consequence to the Credit and Authority of Revelation, than to reconcile it to the natural Notions and the natural Hopes and Expectations of Mankind; and indeed the Promises of the Gospel and the Hopes of Nature are founded on the same common Principles. Ask a Christian, why did God redeem Mankind by sending his Son into the World? he must answer, because Men were Sinners, weak, and miserable, and unable to rescue themselves from their wretched Condition. Ask him, what moved God to express so much Concern for such worthless Objects? he must resolve it into the Goodness, and Tenderness, and paternal Affection of God, with which he embraces all the Sons of Men.

Ask the Deist, upon what Grounds he has Hope and Confidence towards God? he will reply, That he conceives it impossible for a beneficent Being to be rigorous and severe towards the Crimes and Follies of such weak, foolish, and impotent Creatures, as Men: That their Iniquities, though against the Light of Nature, yet flow from a Defect in the Powers of Nature; since 'tis no Man's Fault that he is not stronger, or wiser, or better than he was made to be: And therefore, though the Light of Reason renders him accountable for his Actions, yet his Want of Power to do what his Reason approves, will make his Defects excusable in the Sight of his equitable Judge.

You see how nearly Natural Religion and the Gospel are allied in the Foundation of their Hopes and Expectations. 'Tis pity such near Friends, who have one common Interest, should have any Disputes. But Disputes there are.

Far be from us to weaken the Hopes of Nature. The Gospel is no Enemy to these Hopes; so far otherwise, that all the Hopes and Expectations of Nature are so many Preparations to the Gospel of Christ, and lead us to embrace that Mercy offered by Christ, which Nature so long and so earnestly has sought after.

But the Question is, whether these natural Hopes can give us such Security of Pardon, and of Life and Immortality, as will justify us in rejecting the Light of Revelation? Now, whoever depends on the Forgiveness of God, admits himself to be in a Case that wants Pardon; that is, admits himself to be a Sinner. This being the Case of Mankind in general, let it be considered,

First, That Natural Religion could not be originally founded in the Consideration of Man's being a Sinner, and in the Expectation of Pardon.

Secondly, That the Hopes which we are able to form in our present Circumstances, are too weak and imperfect to give us entire Satisfaction.

Thirdly, That the Coming of Christ has supplied these Defects, and has perfected and completed the Hopes of Nature.

It must be allowed, That the original Religion of Nature was agreeable to the original State of Nature: And consequently, if Natural Religion is
founded

founded in the Consideration of Man's Sin and Weakness, it follows, That Man was originally formed a Sinner and weak. But farther.

Supposing Men made originally to what we see they are, upon what Grounds are we to hope for an Alteration for the better? For, if it was consistent with God's Goodness to put Men into this State originally, how is it inconsistent with his Goodness to continue that State, which was at first his own Appointment? He could no more act inconsistently with his Goodness at the Beginning of the World, than he can at the End of it. If Reason therefore admits the present State of the World to be of God's Appointment, it must never afterwards pretend to entertain Hopes of being delivered from it; and without such Hopes all Religion is vain and useless.

It may be thought perhaps, That supposing the present State of Things to be of God's Appointment, we cannot be answerable for what we do; for why should he blame us for doing the Work he has appointed? Allow this Reasoning; yet no Religion can be built on it; for it can go no farther than to say that we ought not to be punished for our Doings: It can never shew that we have any Title to be put into a better State: The utmost it can pretend to prove, is, that we are absolutely unaccountable; and, if so, there is nothing we can do to less Purpose, than to trouble our Heads about Religion.

Farther, if the Laws of Nature are the Precepts of Natural Religion, as without all doubt they are, it follows, That Natural Religion can be nothing else but Obedience to the Laws of Nature; and consequently, the genuine Hopes of Natural Religion must be founded in Obedience. This must necessarily

necessarily be the Case; for all Laws are made to be obeyed. No Prince was ever so absurd as to make Laws with this View, that his Subjects might break them, and he shew his Goodness in pardoning their Transgressions: And yet this must have been the Scheme of Providence, if Natural Religion was nothing else from the Beginning but an Expectation of Pardon for Sin.

Secondly, Let us take a View of our present State, without inquiring whether any and what Change has happened to put us into this Condition; and let us consider what may be expected from our present Circumstances. Two Things may be affirmed with Certainty of the present Condition of Mankind: One is, That they have a Sense of their Obligation to obey the Laws of Reason and Nature: which is evident from the Force of natural Conscience: The other is, That very few do in any tolerable Degree, and none perfectly, pay this Obedience.

Let us examine then how Religion will stand upon these Circumstances. It is impossible to found the Hopes of Religion on Innocence and Obedience; for Obedience is not paid. On the other hand, absolute Impunity cannot be claimed for all Sins; much less can any Degree of Happiness, either present or future, be claimed in Behalf of Offenders. The utmost Probability to which human Reason can arrive in this Case, is, That the Goodness of God and the Weakness of Man considered, God may favourably accept our Endeavours how imperfect soever our Attainments may be. But is this Reasoning built on infallible Principles? Can any Certainty or Security arise out of this? any that can give Rest or Peace to the Mind of Man, ever inquisitive after Futurity? Will you promise Impunity to Offenders upon Repentance? Impunity, mere Impunity,

is not the Thing that Nature seeks after: She craves something more. But can the Argument from the divine Mercy be carried farther? Is it not great Mercy to pardon Sinners? Can you with Decency desire a Reward for them? Our Saviour has told us, that when we have done our best, we must still own *that we are unprofitable Servants*: And, if we reflect that all our natural Powers are the Gift of God, and consequently, our best Services are but a debt paid to the Donor; if we consider that in all we do there is no profit to the Most High, that His Power and Majesty are not exalted by our Service, nor lessened by our Neglect; we shall find that our own Reason teaches us the same Lesson, and that, when we confess ourselves unprofitable Servants, we give greater Evidence of our Understanding than of our Humility. And if this be truly the Case, what are the Claims of Natural Religion? Are they not Claims of unprofitable Servants? the Claims of those to whom nothing is due.

Thirdly, Let us now take a View of the Conditions and Promises of the Gospel, and see whether we have any Reason to be offended at them. As to the Laws which are made the Conditions of our Happiness, they are not new Impositions, but as old as Reason itself, and the very same which Natural Religion stands bound to obey. Here then can be no Complaint, at least no just one. So far then we are quite safe, that we can be no Losers by the Gospel, since it lays no new Burden on us. In all other Respects our Case is extremely altered for the better. We feel ourselves easily tempted to do wrong and unable to pay the Obedience we owe to Righteousness. Hopes therefore from our Innocence we have none, but are forced to have Recourse to the Mercy of God. Now this Mercy, which we hope for, the Gospel offers us in the Name of God.

Have we any Reason to suspect the Offer? or to reject that very Mercy, when promised by God, which our own Reason teaches us to expect at his Hands?

If we sin, Nature has no Refuge but in Repentance; and how far that will go, we know not: Nature has not, cannot teach us this Knowledge. From the Gospel we learn, that true Repentance shall never be in vain; shall not only protect us from Punishment, but shall also set open to us the Doors of Life and Immortality. There you may view Religion once more restored to its native Hope of Glory and Life for evermore. You will be no longer obliged to wander in the Mazes and Intricacies of human Reason, and to speculate upon the Attributes of Divine Mercy and Justice; the Limits and Boundaries of which are not to be determined by the Wit of Man, and the Contemplation of which abounds with Terrors as well as Hopes. But you may see the clear and immutable Purpose of God to give Salvation to all who, with penitent Hearts, and a firm Reliance on his Word, endeavour after Righteousness.

One would imagine the Gospel should easily find Credit with Men, when all its Promises do so exactly tally and correspond with the Hopes of Nature. Has Nature any Reason to complain of this? Is it an Objection to the Gospel, that it has confirmed all your Hopes and Expectations, that it has given you the Security of God's Promise to establish the very Wishes of Your Heart? You trust, you say, that He who made you still retains some Love for you: To convince you that he does, *he has sent his well-beloved Son into the World to save Sinners.* Though you offend, yet you hope on Repentance to be forgiven: The Gospel confirms this Hope; the

the Terms of it are more beneficial, and convey to true Penitents not only Hope, but a Claim to Pardon. But Pardon only will not satisfy: There is still something farther that Nature craves, something which with unutterable Groans she pants after, even Life and Happiness for evermore. She sees all her Children go down to the Grave: All beyond the Grave is to her one wide Waste, a Land of Doubt and Uncertainty: When she looks into it, she has her Hopes, and she has her Fears; and, agitated by the Vicissitude of these Passions, she finds no ground whereon to rest her Foot. How different is the Scene which the Gospel opens! There we see the heavenly *Canaan*, the new *Jerusalem*; in which City of the great God there are Mansions, many Mansions, for receiving them, *who through Faith, and patient Continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and Immortality*. Our blessed Master has abolished Death, and redeemed us into the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God, that we may dwell in his Presence as long as Time itself shall last.

If we were to form a System of Religion for our selves that should answer to all our Wishes and Desires, what more could we ask for ourselves than what the Gospel has offered? The Obedience required of us is the same to which we are antecedently bound in virtue of that Reason and Understanding which make us to be Men. The Promises of the Gospel extend to more than Nature could ever claim; they take in all her Wishes, establish all her Hopes; and they are offered by a Hand that is able to make them good.

The Conclusion of the whole is, That since the Religion of a Sinner must necessarily be founded in the Hopes of Mercy; since these Hopes have at best but uncertain Foundation in Natural Religion, and

are liable to be disturbed and shaken by frequent Doubts and Misgivings of Mind; we have great Reason to bless and adore the Goodness of God, who has openly displayed before our Eyes the Love that he has for the Children of Men, by sending *his well-beloved Son into the World, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting Life.*

DISCOURSE VI.

2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

—*And hath brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel.*

THESE Words being spoken of our blessed Saviour, and affirming that he through the Gospel brought Life and Immortality to Light, are thought by some to be exclusive of all Arguments for a future Immortality, drawn either from the Light of Reason and Nature, or from the Writings of *Moses*: For if the Hopes of Immortality were so supported before the Coming of Christ Jesus, it could not be truly asserted of him, *that he brought Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel*. And so far at least they must be allowed to argue justly, that, if the Text is to be understood in this exclusive Sense, it will affect the Proofs and Authorities of any former Revelation equally with those of Sense and Reason. But then, on the other Side, 'tis certain, that, if this Argument does not impeach the Authority of *Moses* with regard to this fundamental Article of Faith, neither will it shut out the Proofs of Natural Religion; since it must destroy the Evidence of both, or of neither. Now, that it does not set aside the Authority of *Moses* is evident from our Saviour's Argument to the *Sadducees*: *Now that the Dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the Bush,*

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when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Luke xx. 37. From whence it appears, that our Saviour thought the Law of *Moses* afforded good proof of a future Life; which is inconsistent with the Supposition that there was no Evidence for Life and Immortality till the Publication of the Gospel.

But, supposing *Moses* or the Law of Nature to afford Evidence for a future Life and Immortality, it remains to be considered, in what Sense the Words of the Text are to be understood, which do affirm *that Life and Immortality were brought to Light through the Gospel.* To bring any Thing to Light may signify, according to the Idiom of the *English* Tongue, to discover or reveal a Thing which was perfectly unknown before: But the Word in the Original is so far from countenancing, that it will hardly admit of this Sense. The Greek runs thus; φωτισαντος δε ζωνν κ' α'φθαρσίου. Now φωτισειν signifies (not to bring to Light, but) to enlighten, illustrate, or clear up any Thing. You may judge by the Use of the Word in other Places. 'Tis used in *John* i. 9. *That was the true Light, which lighteth (or enlighteneth) every Man that cometh into the World;* ο φωτισεις πάντα ανθρωπον. Jesus Christ did not by coming into the World bring Men to Light; but he did by the Gospel enlighten Men, and make those, who were dark and ignorant before, wise even to Salvation. In like manner our Lord did enlighten the Doctrine of Life and Immortality, not by giving the first or only Notice of it, but by clearing up the Doubts and Difficulties under which it laboured, and giving a better Evidence for the Truth and Certainty of it, than Nature or any Revelation before had done. There is one Place more where our Translators render the original Word as they have done in the Text: *1 Cor.* iv. 5. *Therefore judge nothing before the Time, until the Lord come, who both will bring*

bring to Light the hidden Things of Darknefs, and will make manifest the Counfels of the Hearts; and then fhall every Man have Praise of God. But in this Place it had been more properly rendered, *who will caft Light upon the hidden Things of Darknefs; and, fo rendered, it better fuits what follows, and will make manifest the Counfels of the Heart.* The hidden Things of Darknefs, which fhall be brought to Light at the Coming of the Lord, are the Actions and Practices of wicked Men; which, though they are of a certain and determinate Nature, are yet hard to judge of, becaufe we cannot difcern the Springs and Motives from whence they arife: Perfectly unknown to us they are not; if they were, there was no Occafion for the Apoftle to forbid us judging of them; for Men do not, cannot judge at all of Things which do not at all fall under their Notice: But they are fo dark and obfcure, that 'tis hard to judge rightly of them: and therefore 'tis but prudent to fufpend our Sentence till the Day comes which will make all Things clear, which will hold fuch a Light to thofe hidden Things of Darknefs, that we fhall manifefly difcern them, and be able to view them on every Side. So that in this Cafe, the hidden Things of Darknefs are not fupposed to be perfectly unknown; but only to be fo dark and involved, that we cannot fafely pafs our Judgment on them; and *to bring them to Light* imports no more than to fet them in a clear Light, and to make them plain and manifef to the Eyes of all the World. According to the Ufe then of the Original Word, *to bring Life and Immortality to Light*, fignifies to illuftrate and make plain this great Doctrine of Religion, to difpel the Doubts and Uncertainties in which it was involved, and to give evident Proof and Demonftration to the World of the Certainty of a future Life and Immortality.

The Text, thus explained, leaves us at Liberty to make the best both of the Evidence of Nature and of *Moses* for a future Life and Immortality, and asserts nothing to the Gospel but this Prerogative, That it has given a surer and fuller Proof of this fundamental Article, than ever the World before was acquainted with. The true Point then now before us, and which takes in the Whole View of the Text, is, to consider the Evidence which Mankind had for the Doctrine of Immortality before the Coming of Christ, and the Evidence which the Gospel now affords; and to shew where the former Evidence failed, and how it is supplied by the latter.

It would take up too much Time to examine minutely the several Arguments for the Immortality of the Soul, which are to be found in the Writings of Heathen Authors; nor would it perhaps answer the Purpose of our present Inquiry: For the natural Evidence in this Case is not so much to be estimated by the Acuteness of this or that Writer, as by the common Sense and Apprehension of Mankind: And this, and all other Opinions which have any Pretence to derive themselves from Nature, owe their Authority, not to the abstracted Reasonings of any School, but to some general Sense and Notion which is found in all Men, or to some common and uncontroverted Maxim of Reason. The Unbelievers of this Age have Abused their Time and Pains in their Endeavours to expose the natural Evidence of Immortality, by confronting the different Sentiments of the Antient Philosophers, and by shewing their Uncertainty and Inconsistency: For what if *Plato*, if *Aristotle*, if *Tully*, are inconsistent with one another, or with themselves, in their abstracted Arguings upon this Point? What is this to the Evidence of Nature, which is not the single
Opinion

Opinion of *Plato*, or any other Philosopher, but the united Voice of all mankind? This was the common Belief of the World, derived from some common Sense, or Principle of Reason, before any Philosopher had so much as thought of an abstracted Reason for the Proof of it: And, had not the common Sense of Nature dictated this Truth to them, I am very confident the philosophical Reasons had never been thought of. That the common Belief and Persuasion was the Foundation of the philosophical Inquiry, is evident from hence, That all the antient Writers upon this Subject appeal to the common Notion and Consent of Mankind, as one great Argument for the Truth of the Doctrine: Which certainly proves this at least, That the World was possessed of this Belief long before there were Writers, or ever the philosophical Reasons were thought of. If the Notion was common, that alone is a sufficient Proof that it did not arise from abstracted Reasoning; for no common Opinion ever did, or ever can: And the Reason is plain: for a common Opinion is that which is received by the generality of Men, who never were, who never will be, capable of attending to abstracted Reason. Now this natural Evidence, distinguished from the Intricacies of Philosophy, is the Thing which we inquire after, and which will stand its Ground, whatever becomes of the private Notions of learned Men: For Nature may be in the right in giving Notice of a future Life, however Men may be mistaken, when they come to consider and ascertain the Nature and Cause of it: which to do is the Mark and Aim of Philosophy.

But the common Consent is the Voice and Law of Nature; for what all agree in must needs derive itself from something that is common to all; and what is so, but the Sense and Instinct of Nature? When Men come to Speculation, they differ as much in
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the Cast and Turn of their Minds, as they do in the Features and Lineaments of their Faces; and therefore speculative Reasoning will never produce a common Persuasion.

This Belief and Persuasion of the Certainty of a future Life arose from the common Sense that Men have of the Difference of Good and Evil, and of every Man's being accountable for the Things done in this World; which Account not being taken in this World, as the least Degree of Observation will enable Men to see, they concluded or rather they felt from the very Force of Reason and Conscience, that there was an Account to be given hereafter. Such an internal Argument as this, which springs up in the Heart, and from the Heart of every Man, has a greater Weight in it, than all the Reasonings of Philosophy put together, and will tie Men down, if not to hope for, yet at least to fear a future Immortality; either of which is the silent Voice of Nature testifying the Reality of a Life to come.

That this is the true Foundation of the universal Belief of a future Life, may be learnt from hence, That the Persuasion of another Life was always connected with the Supposition that there were different States for good and bad Men; so that you cannot any-where trace the Notion of Immortality, but you find Evidence also for the different Conditions of Men in another Life, according as they have behaved themselves in this. Now, these two Opinions being thus inseparably united, it is easy to judge which is the natural Sense, and which the Consequence: Let any Man try, and he will find, that it is not the Expectation of living, that makes Men infer the Reasonableness or Necessity of a Judgment, but it is the reasonable and natural Expectation

tation of Judgment, which makes them infer the Necessity and Reality of a future Life.

Into what great Absurdities this natural Notion grew under the Management of Poets, is well known: They named the Princes and the Judges, and described the Tortures of the Wicked, as their Fancies led them; and their Inventions became the vulgar Theology. But this still shews the Truth of what I have asserted; for neither would the Poets, whose Business it is to raise fine Scenes upon the Plan and Probability of Nature, have so painted the Torments and the Enjoyments of Men departed, neither would the World have received their Inventions, had there been no Foundation in Nature to support the Romance.

As to such as imagine that the Notion of a future Life arose from the Descriptions and Inventions of Poets, they may e'en as well suppose that Eating and Drinking had the same Original, and that Men had never thought of it, but for the fine Feasts and Entertainments which are described in such Writers. The Poets were the Papists of Antiquity, who corrupted the genuine Sentiments of Nature, and obscured the Light of Reason, by introducing the wild Conceits of Folly and Superstition: And, when once they had grafted the Slips of Superstition upon the Stock of Nature, they throve so fast, and grew so rank, that the natural Branches were even starved by the Luxuriancy of this wild Olive. But still the Root was natural; though the Fruit was wild. All that Nature teaches is, That there is a future Life, distinguished into different States of Happiness and Misery, in which Men will be rewarded or punished, according as they have pursued or neglected the Rules of Virtue and Honour, And this Notion prevailed where the Fables of *Greece* had never been heard of; and wicked
Men

Men felt in themselves the Fear of the Wrath which is to come, though they had never so much as learnt the Name of *Tantalus* or *Sisyphus*, or any other Sufferer in the Poets' Scene of Hell.

The natural Evidence then of Life and Immortality stands equally clear of the Inventions of Poetry, and the Subtilties and Refinements of Philosophy; and, though it be allied to both, yet it arose from neither. The Truth of the Case with regard to both is this: The Poets found Men in possession of the Doctrine of a future State with Rewards and Punishments for good and bad Men: Upon this Foundation they went to work; and the plain Draught of Nature was almost hid under the Shades and Colours with which they endeavoured to beautify and adorn it. The Philosophers found the same Persuasion in themselves and others; and, as their Profession led them, sought out for physical Reasons to support the Cause. This Inquiry has furnished us with the various Opinions of Antiquity concerning the Nature and Operation of the Soul, its Manner of acting in the Body and out of it, its Eternity and Immortality and many other curious Pieces of Learning. How far any or all of these Inquirers into Nature succeeded in their Attempt to prove the Immortality of the Soul from physical Causes, is another Question. As to the present Point, 'tis plain the natural Evidence is not concerned in their Success, whatever it is; for the natural Evidence is prior to their Inquiries, and stands upon another Foot, upon the common Sense and Apprehension of Mankind: And the Schools may determine the Soul to be Fire, or Air, or Harmony, or what else they please; yet still Nature will make every Man feel, that the Grave will not secure him from appearing before the great Tribunal, to which he is accountable.

So true isth is, that, had it not being for Philosophy, there had remained perhaps no Footsteps of any Unbelievers in this great Article: For the Sense of Nature would have directed all Right: but Philosophy misguided many. For those who denied Immortality, did not deny the common Sense of Nature which they felt as well as others; but they rejected the Notice, and thought it false, because they could not find physical Causes to support the Belief, or thought that they found physical Causes effectually to overthrow it. This Account we owe to *Cicero*, one of the best Judges of Antiquity; who tells us plainly, That the Reason why many rejected the Belief of the Immortality of the Soul, was because they could not form a Conception of an unbodied Soul. So that infidelity is of no older a Date than Philosophy, and a future State was not doubted of, till Men had puzzled and confounded themselves in their Search after the physical Reason of the Soul's Immortality. And now consider how the Case stands, and how far the Evidence of Nature is weakened by the Authority of such Unbelievers. All Mankind receive the Belief of a future Life, urged to it every Day by what they feel transacted in their own Breasts: But some Philosophers reject this Opinion, because they have no Conception of a Soul distinct from the Body; as if the Immortality of the Soul depended merely upon the Strength of human Imagination. Were the natural Evidence of Immortality built upon any particular Notion of an human Soul, the Evidence of Nature might be overthrown by shewing the Impossibility or Improbability of such Notion: But the Evidence of Nature is not concerned in any Notion; and all the common Notions may be false, and yet the Evidence of Nature stand good, which only supposes Man to be a rational Creature, and, consequently, accountable: And, if any Philosopher can prove the contrary,

trary, he may then, if his Word will afterwards pass for any thing, reject this and all other Evidence whatever.

The natural Evidence, I say, supposes only that a Man is a rational, accountable Creature: And this being the true Foundation in Nature for the Belief of the Immortality, the true Notion of Nature must needs be this, That Man, as such, shall live to account for his doings. The Question then, upon the Foot of Nature, is this, What constitutes the Man? And whoever observes with any Care, will find that this is the Point upon which the Learned of Antiquity divided. The vulgar spoke of Men after Death, just in the same Manner as they did of Men on Earth: And *Cicero* observes, that the Common Error (as he calls it) so far prevailed, that they supposed such Things to be transacted, *apud Inferos, quæ sine Corporibus nec fieri possent, nec intelligi*; which could neither be done, nor conceived to be done without Bodies. The generality of Men could not arrive to abstracted Notions of unbodied Spirits: And, though they could not but think that the Body, which was burnt before their Eyes, was dissipated and destroyed; yet so great was the Force of Nature, which was ever suggesting to them that Men should live again, that they continued to imagine Men with Bodies in another Life, having no other Notion or Conception of Men.

But with the Learned nothing was held to be more absurd, than to think of having Bodies again in another State: And yet they knew that the true Foundation of Immortality was laid in this Point, That the same Individuals should continue. The natural Consequence then was from these Principles to exclude the Body from being any Part of the
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Man: And all, I believe, who asserted an Immortality, agreed in this Notion. The Platonists undoubtedly did; and *Cicero* has every-where declared it to be his Opinion: *Tu habeto*, says he, *te non esse mortalem, sed Corpus: Nec enim is es quem Forma ista declarat; sed Mens cujusque is est quisque.* 'Tis not you, but your Body, which is mortal: For you are not what you appear to be; but 'tis the Mind which is the Man. This being the Case, the Controversy was necessarily brought to turn upon the Nature of the Soul; and the Belief of Immortality either prevailed or sunk, according as Men conceived of the natural Dignity and Power of the Soul. For this Reason the Corporealists rejected the Opinion: For, since it was universally agreed among the Learned that all that was corporeal of Man died, they, who had no Notion of any thing else, necessarily concluded that the whole Man died.

From this View you may judge how the Cause of Immortality stood, and what Difficulties attended it, upon the Foot of Natural Religion. All Men had a natural Sense and Expectation of a future Life. The Difficulty was to account how the same Individuals, which lived and died in this World, and one Part of which evidently went to decay, should live again in another World. The Vulgar, who had no other Notion of a Man but what came in by their Eyes, supposed that just such Men as lived in this World should live in the next; overlooking the Difficulties which lay in their Way, whilst they ran hastily to embrace the Sentiments of Nature. This Advantage they had however, that their Opinion preserved the Identity of Individuals, and they conceived themselves to be the very same with respect to the Life to come, as they found themselves to be in regard to the Life present. But then, had they been pressed, they could not have stood the Difficulties arising

arising from the Dissolution of the Body, the Loss of which, in their Way of thinking, was the Loss of the Individual.

The Learned who could not but see and feel this Difficulty, to avoid it, shut out the Body from being any Part of the Man, and made the Soul alone to be the perfect Individuum. This engaged them in endless Disputes upon the Nature of the Soul; and this grand Article of Natural Religion by this Means was made to hang by the slender Threads of Philosophy; and the whole was entirely lost, if their first Position proved false, That the Soul is the whole Man: And 'tis an Assertion which will not perhaps stand the Examination. The Maintainers of this Opinion, though they supposed a sensitive as well as a rational Soul in Man, which was the Seat of the Passions, and, consequently, the Spring of all human Actions; yet this sensitive Soul they gave up to Death as well as the Body, and preserved nothing but the pure intellectual Mind. And yet 'tis something surprizing to think that a mere rational Mind should be the same Individual with a Man, who consists of a rational Mind, a sensitive Soul, and a Body. This carries no Probability with it at first Sight, and Reason cannot undertake much in its behalf.

But, whatever becomes of these Speculations, there is a farther Difficulty, which can hardly be got over; which is, That this Notion of Immortality and future Judgment can never serve the Ends and Purposes of Religion, because it is a Notion which the generality of Mankind can never arrive at. Go to the Villages, and tell the Ploughmen, that, if they sin, yet their Bodies shall sleep in Peace; no material, no sensible Fire shall ever reach them, but there is something within them purely intellectual which shall suffer to Eternity; you will hardly find that

that they have enough of the Intellectual to comprehend your Meaning. Now Natural Religion is founded on the Sense of Nature, that is, upon the common Apprehensions of Mankind; and therefore abstracted metaphysical Notions, beat out upon the Anvil of the Schools, can never support Natural Religion, or make any Part of it.

In this Point then Nature seems to be lame, and not able to support the Hopes of Immortality which she gives to all her Children. The Expectation of the Vulgar, that they shall live again, and be just the same Flesh and Blood which they now are, is justifiable upon no Principles of Reason or Nature. What is there in the whole Compass of Beings which yields a Similitude of Dust and Ashes rising up again into regular Bodies, and to perpetual Immortality? On the other side, that the intellectual Soul should be the whole Man, how justifiable soever it may be in other Respects, yet 'tis not the common Sense of Nature, and therefore most certainly no Part of Natural Religion.

But it may be worth inquiring how Nature comes to be thus defective in this material Point. Did not God intend Men originally for religious Creatures? and, if he did, is it not reasonable to expect an original and consistent Scheme of Religion? which yet in the Point now before us seems to be wanting. The Account of this we cannot learn from Reason or Nature; but in the sacred History the Fact is cleared beyond Dispute. The Absurdity upon the common Notion of Immortality arises from the Dissolution of the Body at Death; and the great Difficulty upon the Foot of Nature is how to preserve the Individuals for Judgment which are evidently destroyed by Death. Now, if this Death was really a Breach upon the State of Nature, 'tis no wonder it should be a Difficulty in the Religion of Nature;

for the Religion of Nature was most certainly adapted to the State of Nature. And the wise Man tells us, *That God made not Death: For he created all Things that they might have their Being; and the Generations of the World were healthful; and there is no Poison of Destruction in them; nor the Kingdom of Death upon Earth; for Righteousness is immortal. But ungodly Men with their Works and Words called it to them.* If Immortality was the Condition of the Creation, if Death came in as a Surprize upon Nature, no wonder if she stands mute and astonished at the fatal Change, and seems neither willing to part with her Hopes of Immortality, nor yet able to maintain them. Upon the Plan of Nature the common Notion of Immortality was the true one: For take Death out of the question, which is the only Separation of Soul and Body that we know any thing of, and there is no Pretence for distinguishing between the Man and the intellectual Mind. The Vulgar certainly retained the true original Notion of Nature; but, when the original State of Nature was lost, the Notion grew absurd; and it could not be otherwise. God made Man immortal, and gave him consistent Hopes and Fears: Man made himself mortal by Sin: Must not then those Hopes, which were consistent Hopes upon the Foot of Immortality, become very absurd, when joined to a State of Mortality? And thus the Coming in of Death obscured the Hopes of Immortality.

Lastly, If we consider how our Saviour has enlightened this Doctrine, it will appear that he has removed the Difficulty at which Nature stumbled. As Death was no Part of the State of Nature, so the Difficulties arising from it were not provided for in the Religion of Nature. To remove these was the proper Work of Revelation: These our Lord has effectually cleared by his Gospel, and shewn us that
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the Body may and shall be united to the Spirit in the Day of the Lord, so that the complete Man shall stand before the great Tribunal to receive a just Recompence of Reward for the Things done in the Body. This Account is given in the Words preceding those of the Text: *Who hath abolished Death, and brought Life and Immortality, to Light through the Gospel.* Now, in the abolishing of Death was the bringing to Light Life and Immortality, it is plain that the Coming in of Death was that which darkened Nature in this great Point of Religion.

There are two Things, as we learn from our Saviour's Answer to the *Sadducees*, necessary to confirm us in the Belief of a Resurrection to come; namely the Knowledge of the Power of God, and of the Will of God: *Do ye not therefore err,* says our Lord, *because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the Power of God?* The Scriptures contain the Revelation of the Will of God; and therefore the Words, I reckon, are to be understood as if he had said, Ye err, not knowing the Will of God and the Power of God. If we are satisfied in these two Points, that God both can and will raise the Dead, we shall want nothing to assure us of the Certainty of a Resurrection. The Power of God we may learn from Reason and Nature: For what should make us doubt but that He, who at first formed Man out of Dust and Ashes into a living Soul, should be able to call him into Life again out of the same State? But the Gospel has declared both his Will and his Power, which he confirmed in the raising his own Son from the Grave; and better Evidence we could not have for the Possibility and Certainty of the Resurrection. This Evidence of the Gospel has reinstated Nature in all her Hopes, confirmed her Right to Immortality, and taught her to triumph

umph over Death and the Grave, which seemed before to be unmoveable Bars to all her Expectations. This has restored Religion, which had hardly one sound Foot to stand on, and made our Faith and our Reason consistent, which were before at too great Distance, Nature indeed taught us to hope for Immortality; but it was in Spight of Sense and Experience, 'till the great Prince of our Peace appeared, *who brought Life and Immortality to Light through his Gospel.*

DISCOURSE VII.

ROMANS IV. 25.

Who was delivered for our Offences, and was raised again for our Justification.

THE Manner of Expression here used is different from what is generally to be met with in other Parts of the New Testament upon the like Occasion. Here we are told that Christ was *delivered* for our *Offences*, and *raised* for our *Justification*; as if the Remission of our Sins was to be ascribed peculiarly to the Passion and our Justification in the Sight of God to the Resurrection of Christ: Whereas in the Chapter before this, Ver. 25. the Apostle tells us in general, that God hath set forth Christ to be a Propitiation *through Faith in his Blood*; and in his Ch. v. Ver. 9. particularly and expressly, *that, being justified by his Blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him; and Ver. 10. that we are reconciled to God by the Death of his Son.* In the twentieth of the Acts, the Apostle, in his Exhortation to the Elders of the Church, warns them *to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own Blood*, Ver. 28. To the same Purpose both St. Peter and St. John speak; the one telling us, *that the Blood of Jesus Christ cleansed us from all Sin*, 1 John i. 7; the other, *that we have been redeemed with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without Blemish and without Spot*, 1 Pet. i. 19.

It is the constant Tenor of Scripture, that Atonement for the Sins of the World was made by our great High-Priest upon the Cross; that his Death was our Redemption, and his Blood the Price paid for us. So that, when we consider the Redemption (which includes our Justification) with respect to Christ, the Author and Finisher of it, it must be ascribed to his Death and Passion: But, as to ourselves, our Title and Interest in this common Salvation being grounded on Faith, our Justification, though purchased by the Blood of Christ, must be appropriated to ourselves through Faith in that Blood: For the same Apostle who has told us that we are *justified freely through the Redemption which is in Christ Jesus*, hath likewise told us *that God hath set him forth to be a Propitiation through Faith in his Blood*. For this Reason we are said to be justified by Faith; not that our Faith is the Purchase of Justification, which we owe to the Blood of Christ alone; but because through Faith we obtain the Benefit of the Redemption wrought by Christ Jesus. Now, though the Death of Christ was the reconciling of the World to God, yet the Resurrection of Christ is the great and solid Foundation of our Hope and Faith in him, even of our Faith in his Blood, by which he made the propitiation for our Sins: And therefore, although Christ died for our Offences, and by his precious Blood made Atonement for our Sins; yet, since our Faith in his Death, our Hope in his Blood, by which Hope and Faith we are justified, are built upon the Truth and Credit of his Resurrection, it is very properly said that *he rose again for our Justification*: For the Death of Christ would have been no Justification to us, nor could we have had Hope or Faith in it but for the Power and Glory of the Resurrection; which has wiped away the Scandal and Ignominy of the Cross, and made

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it a rational Act of Faith to hope for Life and Immortality from Him, who himself once died upon the Tree.

For the Truth of this Exposition I appeal to St. Paul who 1 Cor. xv. 17. has told us, *that, if Christ be not risen, our Faith is vain; we are yet in our Sins.* So that Faith in the Death of Christ, not grounded on the Assurance of his Resurrection, is a vain Faith, and such an one as cannot deliver us from our Sins. Nay, that the Death of Christ could not have been a Propitiation for Sin without his Resurrection, he expressly teaches in the next Verse, saying, *that, if Christ be not raised, then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished.*

The Power of the Resurrection, together with the Atonement for Sin made by the Death of Christ, is very beautifully expressed by St. Paul, Rom. viii. 34: *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right Hand of God, who also maketh Intercession for us.* The Death of Christ freed us from Condemnation; but then was our Freedom made manifest, when he came from the Grave in Triumph, and led Captivity Captive; when he ascended to the right Hand of his Father to be our perpetual High-Priest and Mediator: For, as the Apostle argues, *if when we were Enemies, we were reconciled to God by the Death of his Son, much more being reconciled, shall we be saved by his Life;* i. e. by his Resurrection to Life and to Glory.

This Account as it gives the true Interpretation of the Text, so likewise does it shew of what great Moment the Resurrection of our Lord was, which was to be the Basis and Support of the whole Christian Institution, and the Ground of our Hope and

Faith in him. That Christ died the Death of a common Malefactor after a Life spent in Innocency, and a constant and Laborious Teaching of the great Duties of Religion and Morality, was but common to him, and others before him, whom God had raised up to be shining Lights of the World. Thus the Prophets of old were persecuted and destroyed by sundry kinds of Death: But in their Blood there was no Expiation for Sin: The Blood of *Abel* and of the Prophets spoke no such Language, but cried to God for Vengeance against a cruel and a guilty World. Had Christ died like one of them, and been no more heard of, how should we have believed that his Death had atoned for all the rest of the Blood that had been spilt from the Foundation of the World? or that the whole Earth had obtained Remission of Sin from God by destroying one more, and him the greatest of all the Prophets, in the most cruel Manner? But, when our Lord rose from the Grave, and brought back with him the Pardon which he had sealed with his own Blood; when, instead of executing Wrath upon his Enemies, he sent again the Offer of Peace and Reconciliation, and took upon himself to be their Mediator and Intercessor, as he had already been their Sacrifice; what Room was there to doubt of the Efficacy of his Death, the Efficacy of which was so undeniably confirmed by his Resurrection? or what Reason to mistrust the Salvation he offered others, when by saving himself from the Power of Death, he had given the fullest Evidence how able he was to save others also? The most incredulous of his Enemies desired him only *to come down from the Cross, and they would believe him*: But how much better Reason had they to believe him, when he came, not from the Cross, but from the Grave, which was by much the surer Hold, and from which before no Mortal, had ever escaped! How undeniable was this

this Testimony of God's Love to Mankind, that after the ill Reception his Son had found among them, after all the cruel Usage he had experienced, and the ignominious Death he had suffered, he yet sent him once more from the Grave to convince Unbelievers, and to proclaim and confirm the Pardon he had purchased for them!

His first Coming was attended with a Mean Birth and narrow Fortune, his Education was suitable to his Condition, and the greatest Part of his Life spent in Obscurity; *He had no Form or Comeliness that we should desire him; he was a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with Grief;* And, when he fell a Victim to the Malice and Rage of the People, his best Friends, the constant Companions of his Sorrow, gave him over for lost; *they esteemed him stricken and smitten of God:* All their Hopes died with him, and the Remembrance of his Miracles and mighty Works was buried in the same Tomb with himself; and nothing less was thought of than that *this was he who should redeem Israel from all his Sins.* But, when he came again from the Bosom of the Earth, having subdued the Powers of Darkness and of Death, then was he declared to be the Son of God with Power; and the Glory as of the only-begotten Son of God shone clearly through the Veil of Flesh which had so long obscured it. And from thenceforth our Faith has stood, not in the Words which the Wisdom or Cunning of Man teacheth, but in the Power and Demonstration of the Spirit of Life; And we can with Assurance say, *We know in whom we have trusted,* expecting Life and Salvation from Him alone, who is the Lord of Life and Glory. But, after all, if the Resurrection of Christ is the Support of all other Articles of the Christian Faith, how is itself supported? To our common Apprehension

sion nothing more incredible than that a Man dead and buried should be restored to Life again.

To go into the Particulars of the Evidence of this great Event, recorded in Scripture and the oldest Writers of the Church, would open too large a Field of Discourse at present: And indeed there are some Objections which naturally arise in the Minds of Men, which ought previously to that Inquiry to be removed; for the great Difficulty at which Men stick, does not arise so much from the Nature of the Evidence we propose, as from the Nature of the Thing itself. The Presumptions against the Possibility of a Resurrection operate so strongly in the Minds of some, that they think it needless to inquire what Evidence there is for it, being persuaded that the Thing itself is not capable of being supported by any Evidence. This Prejudice was a very early one; for the Apostle exostulates this Case with the *Corinthians*, *Why should it be thought a Thing incredible with you that God should raise the Dead?*

Let us consider the Force of this Exostulation, and see whether it is strong enough to encounter the Prejudice.

Now, nothing can be said to be incredible, if there is a Power in any Person able to effect it; for if there is such a Power, that Power may bring into Existence that very Thing which you doubt of, and it cannot be incredible that a Thing should exist, which may possibly really exist. If we consider only the Strength of Children, it is incredible that they should build Castles; but, if we consider the Strength and Ability of Men, it would be ridiculous to doubt whether they could, or no. So that the Credibility or Incredibility of any thing depends on

on knowing whether there is, or is not, a Power adequate to the Undertaking. The Resurrection of the Dead is in truth a very stupendous Work: But neither you nor I am to undertake it: If it depended on us, it would be incredible indeed. It is the Work of God, and of Him only: And surely I have named One of Credit and Power sufficient to be trusted in this great Affair. And this is St. *Paul's* Argument, Why should it be thought incredible that God should raise the Dead? Whoever therefore affirms that a Resurrection is in itself a Thing incredible, must affirm that it is incredible that God has Power to raise the Dead. And now consider who it is that can consistently with the common and allowed Principles of Reason and Nature deny this Power to God. No one certainly, who admits that God made the World, can entertain this Doubt: For, if God has given us the Life we now enjoy, what should hinder him from restoring Life again, after this is lost? Can there be more Difficulty in giving Life the second Time, than there was at first? If there be any Contradiction therefore in the Notion of a Resurrection, there must be the very same in the Notion of Creation. And therefore Natural Religion is just as much concerned in this Point as Revelation: For, though the Belief of the Fact, that the Dead shall be raised, depends on Revelation; yet our Belief that God has Power to raise the Dead depends not on Revelation, but on the clear Dictates of Reason, of that Reason by which we discover him to be our Creator. And, if you doubt even of this his Power of Creation, you must bid adieu to all Religion at once: For, if God created not the World, how are you at all related to him? If he did not make us, what right he has to govern us, or what Pretence to our Obedience, neither you from Nature, nor we from Revelation, can ever be satisfied.

The Power of God being admitted to be equal to this Work, the Question of the Resurrection of Christ comes to be a Question of Fact: And, though I propose not to enter into the Evidence of the Fact, yet it may be proper to observe, That a Resurrection, considered as a Fact, is a Fact as capable of Evidence as any whatever; it is an Object of Sense, of every Sense by which we judge of the Reality of Things without us.

We are told, *that Christ died, and rose again.* Of his Death, I suppose, there is no great Doubt: Die he certainly did: And surely there could be no more Difficulty to see and know that he was dead, than in knowing when others were dead, from *Adam* to this Day. One would think therefore, that those about him, who saw him crucified and buried, might be trusted when they report that he died.

But he came to Life again: Very true; and it was very easy for those who conversed with him to know whether he was alive, or no. There was no more Difficulty in judging of his being alive, than of judging, in any other Case, whether those we converse with are alive, or no. His having been dead and buried could not possibly alter the Case, or create any Difficulty in judging whether he was really alive or no. So that the Resurrection, considered as a Fact, was in every Part of it an Object of Sense, and as capable of being well attested as any other Object of Sense whatever. Lay these Things together, the Promise of God to give us Life eternal, his Power to make good his Word, the Confirmation he he has given us of our Hope by the Resurrection of Christ; and what is wanting to
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make the Belief of this Article a rational Act of Faith?

The Promises of God have never borrowed Help from moral Probabilities. The Promises to *Abraham* were not of this kind; so far otherwise, that it is said of him, that, *against Hope, he believed in Hope*; that is he hoped, were, humanly speaking, there was no ground for Hope. There was no Probability that his Seed, who was a Stranger and Pilgrim on Earth, should inherit the Land of *Canaan*, possessed by great and powerful Nations.

The Promise of a Son to him, when he and his Wife were both too far advanced in Years to expect one in the ordinary Course of Nature, was contrary to Experience and to natural Probability. But what says the Apostle? *Abraham, not being weak in Faith, considered not his own Body, now dead, when he was about an hundred Years old, neither yet the Deadness of Sarah's Womb.—But he staggered not at the Promise of God.—being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform.* This Reliance on the Promises of God, against all the Presumptions of human Experience and Probability, was the very Thing, as *St. Paul* tells us, that *was imputed to him for Righteousness.*

Compare now this Case with the Case of Christians. We have great Promises made to us by God in *Christ Jesus*, the Promises of a Resurrection to Life. Inquire of the World; they know of no such Thing, the Ages past have afforded no Instance of this kind, and, as far as they can see and judge, daily Experience is a Witness against this Hope. Under these Difficulties, whither shall we go for Refuge and Support? whither! but to the Promises of God, and to this full Persuasion, *That what he has promised*

promised he is able to perform. If we hold fast this Persuasion; and stagger not through Unbelief, then shall we indeed be the Children of the Faith of *Abraham*, whose Faith was imputed to him for Righteousness: For as *St. Paul* tells us, this Testimony of *Abraham's* Faith was not written for his sake alone, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up *Jesus* our Lord from the Dead. Here then is the great Article of Christian Faith, even of that Faith which will be imputed to us for Righteousness: It is a firm Confidence and Reliance upon God, under this peculiar Character, That he is the Raifer up of the Dead, and will, according to his Promise, raise us to Life eternal.

For the Confirmation of this Hope and Faith God raised his own Son from the Grave; who for that Reason is said to be raised for *our Justification*, since upon the Authority and Credit of his Resurrection depends that great Article of Faith by which alone we are to be justified.

As the blessed Fruit of this Faith is to all true Believers Life and Immortality, so it highly concerns us to consider what the Event of Unbelief must be. Many would perhaps content themselves without the Hopes of Glory and future Happiness, if that was all. But that is not all: *For the Dead shall be raised*, whether you like it, or like it not; *all who are in the Grave shall come forth*, some to Life, some to Condemnation, according to the Things done in the Body. Nothing can secure to us more effectually an happy State in Futurity, than a constant and steady Belief and Expectation of the Resurrection of the Dead. This will convince us that what we are now doing are not such trifling Things as to be soon forgotten, or attended with Consequences only for to Day or To-morrow; but they are
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Things long to be remembered, Things noted down in God's Book, and will be exposed to View at the great Day in the Presence of Men and of Angels, and be attended with Consequences through all the Ages of Eternity, to our great Honour and Happiness, or to our great Confusion and Misery.

DISCOURSE VIII.

ROMANS viii. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.

TO be the Children of God is the greatest Privilege under the Gospel, and, consequently, implies in it all the Advantages that belong to, and all the Qualities necessary to make, a good Christian. Thus our Apostle argues: *If Children, then Heirs; Heirs of God, and Joint-Heirs with Christ.* As this is a new State, which belongs not to us by Nature, so our Entrance into it is styled a new Birth; and we are said *to be born again, and to be begotten again*, to these Hopes: He, from whom we receive these Hopes, is the Father that begets us, and his Children we are: And therefore, as we receive our spiritual Life from the Gift and Mercy of God, he is our Father, and we are his Children. Thus St. Peter tells us, *that we are born again, not of corruptible Seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever,* 1 Pet. i. 23. This new Life we received by the Ministration of the Spirit: The Powers which belong to this Life, and in which it consists, depend upon the Influences of the Spirit: And therefore we are said *to be born of the Spirit.* He is the Earnest
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of our Inheritance, the Pledge and Security which we receive from God of our future Immortality: Our Right of Inheritance depends upon the Relation we bear to God of Sons and Children: And therefore the Spirit of Adoption, by which we are born to God, is the Pledge and Security of our Inheritance, as he is styled by our Apostle.

But the Difficulty is, how to make the first Step, and to know assuredly that we are the Children of God. When once we are sure of this, it will not be hard to believe that God will provide for his own Children, and secure to them an Inheritance that fadeth not away. And here the Apostle tells us, *that the Spirit itself*, that is, the same Spirit by which we are made Children, *beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* 'Tis Matter of great Dispute, what sort of Evidence the Apostle here means, and what kind of Certainty arises from it. Some have placed this Evidence among the Gifts of the Spirit, and supposed it to be given on purpose to assure the Elect of the Certainty of their Salvation. Others maintain, That no Man, unless it be specially revealed to him by God, can ever know that he is in a State of Security in this Life: And this Opinion was received and confirmed by the Council of *Trent*, as may be seen at large in the sixth Session. It will not be worth my Pains or your Patience to enter into the Niceties of this Controversy: And therefore I shall confine myself to St. *Paul*, and endeavour to shew you his Meaning in the Text, which will go a great way towards giving us right Notions and Apprehensions in this Matter. In order to this, I propose three Things to be considered:

First, How many Witnesses St. *Paul* points out to us in the Text, and who they are.

Secondly, What kind of Evidence each of them gives in this Case.

Thirdly, What the Result of their Evidence is, and with what kind of Certainty we know *that we are the Children of God.*

First, We are to consider how many Witnesses St. *Paul* points out to us in the Text, and who they are. As our Translators have represented St. *Paul's* Meaning, there is no Room for Dispute concerning the Number of the Witnesses, which are evidently two: *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit:* The Spirit itself, that is, the Spirit of Adoption, which Christians receive, is one Witness; and our own Spirit is the other Witness. But the vulgar *Latin*, and several other Translators, render the Words to this Effect: *The Spirit itself beareth witness to our Spirit.* According to this Sense, which is maintained by *Grotius* and *Crellius*, and some others, there is but one Witness, the Spirit of Adoption, who bears evidence to our Spirit. But the Words in the Original evidently imply the Sense which our Translators follow: Ἀλλ'ὃ πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν. Συμμαρτυρεῖν signifies to be a Fellow-witness, or to witness the same Thing that another does: And so the Word constantly signifies in Scripture, and is never used but where there is a concurrent Evidence of two Witnesses. We meet with the same Word in *Rom. ii. 15.* *Which shew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their Conscience also bearing witness, and their Thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* And to this Place *Grotius* sends us, to shew that the Word is used of one single Witness only; as here the Conscience only is said to bear witness. But a little Attention will shew us in this Place another Witness: The Apostle proves from the Evidence of Conscience, that the Gentiles had the Work or Matter of the Law written in their Hearts:

Hearts: The Law testifies to Men what is good, and what is 'evil: If Conscience testifies the same Thing to be good and just which the Law does, then Conscience proves the Matter of the Law to be written in the Heart; if it testifies any thing else, so be it: But no other Evidence will prove the Apostle's Assertion, that the Gentiles have the Work of the Law written in their Heart. And therefore the Apostle's Argument stands thus: The Gentiles shew the Work of the Law to be written in their Heart by the Testimony of their Conscience, which agrees with the Testimony of the Law; their Conscience and the Law both allowing and forbidding the same Thing. So that the Apostle's Argument plainly supposes the concurrent Evidence of the Law and of Conscience. And therefore even here the Word *συμμαρτυρεῖν* points out two Witnesses to us. The same Word is used by St. Paul in the first Verse of the ninth Chapter of the *Romans*: *I say the Truth in Christ, I lye not, my Conscience also bearing me witness, συμμαρτυροῦσός μοι.* But here evidently are two Witnesses to the same Thing. When a Man does not speak the Truth, 'tis certain that he witnesses one Thing, and his Conscience witnesses another, and are therefore two distinct Witnesses: So are they likewise when a Man speaks Truth; for the same Evidence will not make two Witnesses to be one Witness. And therefore here also there are two Witnesses; St. Paul, who witnessed his Affection to his Countrymen, and his Conscience, which witnessed for his Sincerity. The Word is used but once more in the New Testament, and that is in the last Chapter of the *Revelations*; and there it is used with respect to Testimony, in which Christ, and his Angel whom he sent to the Churches, and even St. John, were concerned. So that the Word is every where used of the concurrent Evidence of two or more Witnesses. And, this being the constant Use of the Word, there can be no Reason given why it should

not be taken in the same Sense here, and rendered, *The Spirit itself beareth witness, not to, but with, or together with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God.* Here then are two Witnesses; and who they are, is next to be considered.

Who the first Spirit is, must be learnt from what goes before. In the second Verse of this Chapter we read of *the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus, which hath made us free from the Law of Sin and of Death*: In the ninth Verse he is called *the Spirit of God and of Christ*; in the eleventh Verse, *the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the Dead*; in the fifteenth Verse, *the Spirit of Adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father.* In the Verse of the Text Reference is had to this Spirit: *The Spirit itself*, that is, the Spirit which has made us free in Christ Jesus, the Spirit by which we have received Adoption, does itself bear witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God. But the Question then is, whether Spirit in all these Places be the Name of a Person, or whether it denotes only a Quality and Temper belonging to Christians; so that the Spirit of Christ shall signify no more than the Mind of Christ does in another Place, *Let the same Mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus*; that is, the same Temper and Disposition. This Sense *Crellius* maintains, and others after him; and thus he explains the Text: Our Evangelical Spirit, that is, as he explains himself in another Place, our Evangelical Temper, is a sufficient Argument to our own Minds that we are the Children of God. I mean not to dispute this Point with *Crellius*, and his Brethren, the Socinians; which would be to run into a great Controversy: But, since the Spirit of Christ may and does sometimes signify both Ways, I shall endeavour to point out to such as have no private Prejudices to be maintained, which Sense is here to be followed. First then, This Spirit is the Spirit of Life, by
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which we are made free; that is, by which we are regenerated in Christ Jesus and set at Liberty from the heavy Yoke of Sin, which the Apostle had been describing in the foregoing Chapter. Now, an Evangelical Temper is not the Cause, but the Consequent of this Freedom. The Spirit of God is the efficient Cause; of whom we are said, for that Reason to be born. Secondly, 'Tis the Spirit of him who raised up Christ; that is, the Spirit by which he wrought that great Wonder and Miracle, as is evident by taking the whole eleventh Verse together: *If the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the Dead dwell in you. he that raised up Christ from the Dead shall also quicken your mortal Bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* So that the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the Dead; is the Spirit by which he raised Christ from the Dead; that is the Holy Spirit, who is mighty in Works and Wonders. Lastly, 'Tis the Spirit of Adoption, by which we are made Sons: The Spirit of Adoption is the Spirit of which we are born in Christ; of which Birth an Evangelical Temper is not the Cause, but the Effect. So that, by the whole Tenor of the Apostle's Arguing, it appears, that the Spirit which beareth witness with our Spirit, is the Holy Spirit of God, which works together with our Spirit to enable us to perform the just and holy Will of God. As to the second Witness our own Spirit, I need not spend much Time to tell you who it is, since most are agreed that it is our own Mind. *Who knoweth the Things of a Man, save the Spirit of a Man which is in him?* that is, save his Mind and Conscience. So then the Faithful Christian has two Witnesses of his being the Son of God; the Holy Spirit of God, and his own Mind and Conscience.

Let us therefore in the second Place, inquire, what Evidence each of them gives in this Case.

In order to this, we must look back to the latter Part of the foregoing Chapter, to which this Verse of the Text relates: For in all this eighth Chapter there is not one Word said before of our own Mind or Spirit, nor the least Hint of any Evidence that it gives of our being the Children of God. Our crying Abba, Father, in the fifteenth Verse, is very improperly pitched upon by some as the Evidence proceeding from our own Mind; since 'tis said expressly, that we cry Abba, Father, by the Spirit of Adoption; So that our crying Abba, Father, is an Evidence coming not from our own Minds but from the Holy Spirit. The Power to do Good comes from the Influence of the Holy Spirit; and therefore the Good we do is such an Evidence of our being the Sons of God, as we stand obliged to the Spirit of God for: *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God*, Ver. 14. To be led by the Spirit, is through the Spirit to mortify the Deeds of the Flesh, Ver. 13. So that our Victory over the Flesh is the Effect of our having the Holy Spirit to assist and strengthen us, and is consequently as it is a great Evidence and Assurance to us of our being the Children of God, the Evidence of that Spirit from whence it proceeds; that is, not our own Spirit, but the Spirit of God. So that the great Privileges mentioned in this Chapter, such as being made free from the Law of Sin and Death, of walking not after the Flesh, but the Spirit, being such as we receive from the Spirit of God, are therefore Evidences of the Spirit for our Regeneration.

But where then must we look for the Evidence of our own Spirit? since all the Marks and Signs of Regeneration mentioned in this eighth Chapter manifestly belong to the Evidence of the Holy Spirit. This Difficulty put the *Greek* Commentators upon a very forced Interpretation of this Place; for observing that all the Signs of Adoption mentioned by the
Apostle

Apostle proceeded from the Power and Working of the Holy Spirit, in effect they made the two Witnesses of the Text but one. Thus *Chrysoſtom* by the Spirit itself understands the Holy Spirit; and by our Spirit he understands the Gift of the Holy Spirit within us: "What is this?" says he: "*The Spirit beareth Witness with our Spirit.*" To which he answers, "The Comforter beareth Witness to the Gift bestowed on us; for, the Voice, that is, of crying "Abba, Father, belongs not only to the Gift or Grace, but likewise to the Spirit who bestows the Grace." The Gifts of the Spirit are sometimes called by the Name of Spirit. The Gift of Prophecy is styled the Spirit of Prophecy. But I do not remember that the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are ever styled *our Spirit* in sacred Writ. Besides, as I observed before, this reduces the two Witnesses to one; for how does the Spirit bear Witness but by the Gifts and Graces bestowed on us? and, if so, then the Evidence of the Gift, and the Evidence of the Spirit, are one and the same Evidence.

Keeping therefore to the Sense already laid down, let us consider what *St. Paul* had in his View when he penned the Place now before us. Those who are conversant in *St. Paul's* Writings, need not be told that they must not always search for the Connection within a Verse or two of what they read. The Apostle often looks back to what went before at some Distance, and, after a long Chain of Consequences, returns to his point without giving his Reader Notice. This might be made plain by Instances were it our Business at present to examine the Manner or Way of *St. Paul's* Writing. But as to the Place before us: In the latter Part of the seventh Chapter *St. Paul* describes the State of an unregenerated Jew, or Heathen; for what he says equally belongs to both. This he does in order to shew them the Necessity of Redemption through

Christ, inasmuch as neither the Law of *Moses*, nor of Nature, could free them from the Power and Dominion of Sin, nor, consequently, from Death, which ever follows close at the Heels of Sin. That this was the Apostle's Intent, appears from the Lamentation he makes over the State of Nature, and the Remedy he immediately proposes of Faith through Christ: *O wretched Man that I am, who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death? I thank God through Jesus Christ Our Lord.* And then in this eighth Chapter he sets forth the Power of Redemption, shewing in every Part, how it supplies the Weaknesses and Infirmities both of the Law and of Nature. The unregenerate Man *was brought into Captivity to the Law of Sin, Chap. vii. 23. But the Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the Law of Sin and of Death, Ver. 2.* In the unregenerate Man *dwelleth no good Thing, Ver. 18: But in the Christian dwelleth the Spirit of Christ, Ver. 9.* So that the Apostle's main Design here is, I think, pretty evident, but, to clear the Matter before us, we must more particulary examine what he says of the unregenerate Man's Condition. He describes him as under the most wretched Slavery, obeying Sin, with the greatest Reluctance to his own Mind and Reason: *That which I do, I allow not: For what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.* Ver. 15. His Mind he allows to be uncorrupted, and to stand firm to the Law of God, approving the Things which are good; but then the Lusts and Appetites of the Flesh are too strong for it, and force it into the Obedience of the Law of Sin, which it hates and condemns: *I find a Law, says he, that when I would do Good, Evil is present with me: For I delight in the Law of God after the inward Man. But I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to*
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the Law of Sin, which is in my Members, Ver. 21, 22, 23. See then the divided Empire of Sin and Reason: Reason approves what is just and holy, consents to, and delights in the Law of God; but Sin captivates and enthral's it, and makes the Man the Slave of Sin, though the Admirer and Approver of Virtue. The Upshot of the whole Matter is, as St. Paul in the last Verse expresses it, *With the Mind, or Spirit, I serve the Law of God, but with the Flesh the Law of Sin*. And now consider what Assistance this Condition requires: The Man's Spirit is right and pure; it loves, it delights in, it approves the Law of God; and, could he follow the Dictates of his Reason, and obey the Law of God as well as love it, and practise Holiness as well as approve it, he would want no other Evidence of his being the Son and Servant of God: *His Servants ye are,* says the Apostle, *to whom ye obey*. The Man who is taken captive, and carried into Slavery, obeys by Force his Tyrant's Law; but he loves his own Country and King, and longs to come under the Obedience of his natural Prince again. As to his own Mind, he knows whose Subject he is, and would be; but outward Necessity shews him that he is a Slave by the constrained Obedience he yields to the foreign Law. Take off Force, and the Man's own Inclinations will return him soon to his natural Obedience. And this is not unlike the Case St. Paul puts the unregenerated Man in: He loves God, and his Law; but he obeys the Tyrant, Sin. Destroy the Power of Sin, and Reason will return him to the Obedience of God, and soon shew whose true Son and Servant he is. So that the Evidence of Reason, even in the State of Nature, shews us that we are the Servants and Sons of God: But Power constrains us, Lust and Appetite rule over us, and woful Experience shews us that we are the Slaves of Sin. Now, to complete this Evidence of our Minds and to render it convincing

vincing to ourselves and others, that we are indeed the Children of God, what more is wanting, than to destroy the Power of Sin, and to give us up to follow the Dictates of Reason in obeying the just Laws and Commands of God? For this is a complete Evidence that any Man is the Son and Servant of God, that he loves him, that he obeys him, and keeps his Commandments. You see then what the Evidence of our own Spirit is; It loves and delights in the Law of God, and is restless to obey the Law it loves: *With the Mind I serve the Law of God, but with the Flesh the Law of Sin:* Which Words I desire you to bear in your Memory, whilst I set forth to you the Evidence of the Spirit of God.

In the eighth Chapter St. *Paul* tells us, that the Redemption by Christ Jesus has put an End to the wretched Captivity we lived under: *The Law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the Law of Sin and Death.* Law here signifies Power; for Power is a Law to those who live under it. Now then the Power of the Spirit has destroyed the Power of Sin. The Power of Sin was opposite to the Mind and Reason of Man; so that Man, whilst he lived under that Power, was a Slave. But the Power of the Spirit is on Reason's Side, and works together with it; so that to be under this Power is a State of Freedom and Liberty: And therefore 'tis justly said, that the Law of the Spirit of Life hath made us free. The consequence of our being under the Power of the Spirit is, *that we walk not after the Flesh, but the Spirit, Ver. 4; that we mind the Things of the Spirit, Ver. 5; that we mortify the Deeds of the Body, Ver. 13; that we are the Sons of God, Ver. 14; that we cry Abba, Father, Ver. 15.* These are the Fruits of the Spirit. Now, to walk after the Spirit, and to do the Deeds of the Spirit, is to walk according to our own Mind and Reason; for

for Reason approved the Things of God, and the Things of the Spirit are the Things of God. To cry Abba, Father, proceeds from a settled and undisturbed Mind, from filial Duty and Reverence. Children, who live in Disobedience to their Parents, are not apt to meet them with these endearing Expressions: But, when the Child loves, and is under no Rebukes of Conscience for Misbehaviour towards his Parent, he meets him with these Words of Love and Confidence. This therefore we owe to the Spirit: For before, however our Minds consented to his Laws, yet still we were Sinners, and Conscience stood between us and our Father; so that we could not approach without Fear and Trembling, our Minds still representing him to us rather as an injured Lord, than as a tender Father. But, since the Power of the Spirit has stilled the horrid Contest that was in us between Reason and Sin, and that we both love and obey him, we now no longer fear his Presence; but, like Children longing for the Return of a kind Father, we run out to embrace him, with Words of Friendship and Affection in our Mouths, crying Abba, Father: And by this Means, says St. Paul, *the Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God. With the Mind, says the Apostle before, I serve the Law of God: And now, says he, by the Spirit you obey the same Law; and the Spirit of God and your Spirit agree to give you the utmost Assurance of being the Children of God. You are no longer in the sad Condition before described, the Mind leaning one Way, and the Flesh another; so that you desired to do one Thing, but yet did the contrary, and were always restless and uneasy, rebuked within, and constrained without: For the Spirit, by which you are now ruled, consents to your Mind, and is bent to perform the same Things which the Mind approves; from whence you may have the greatest Confidence towards God: For what*

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more perfect Obedience can there be, than that to which both the outward and inward Man consent? or what plainer Signs can you have of a good Son and Servant, than to know that he loves the Law of his Father, and obeys it? Love the Law indeed you did before; but obey it you could not: But now by the Spirit you obey it, and have the greatest Satisfaction, both from within and without, that you are the Children of God. This may suffice to shew the Apostle's Meaning, and to explain the Nature of the Evidence which each Spirit gives.

We must now, in the last Place, consider, what the Result of this Evidence is, and with what kind of Certainty we may know that we are the Children of God.

And first, you must take Notice, that these two Evidences strengthen and support each other, and must both meet to give us the Assurance we expect. We must have the Evidence of our own Spirit that we do indeed love and approve the Law of God; and we must have the Evidence of the Spirit of God working in us by Obedience: And, when we both love and obey the Commands of God, we want nothing farther to assure us that we are the Children of God; but, where either of these is wanting, the Evidence of the other avails nothing. If you love and approve the Command, but do not obey, you are self-condemned, you are in your Sins; Lust has Dominion over you, and not the Spirit of God. If you obey the Law, and conform outwardly to it, but do not love and like it, you are an Hypocrite, no Servant of God, but of the World; and your outward Compliance is fleshly Wisdom and not the Work of the Spirit.

So then you have two Ways of judging yourselves, which must both concur; you have inward and outward Signs of Grace: The inward Signs are a pure Conscience, a sincere Love for God and Religion, and whatever tends to the Glory and Honour of your Maker: The outward Signs are Acts of Obedience conformable to the inward Purity and Love of your Mind. These are Fruits by which you may judge yourselves. Our Saviour tells us, *that we may know Men by their Fruits*: Much rather may we know ourselves by our own Fruits; especially when we may know the Stock too from whence they grow, the Motions and Workings of our own Heart.

Hence it appears, that the Evidence of the Spirit is not any secret Inspiration, or any Assurance conveyed to the Mind of the Faithful; but 'tis the Evidence of Works, such as by the Spirit we perform: And therefore the only Sign of Sanctification is Holiness; and the only Mark of Grace is to obey from the Heart the Word of God: And therefore they err, not knowing the Scriptures, who from this or the like Passages imagine, that the Spirit ever gives, or was ever designed to give, inward Assurance or Certainty to Men of their final State.

Hence likewise 'tis certain, that some go too far on the other Side, by denying that any Man may know himself to be in a State of Grace: For all the Children of God are in a State of Grace; and the Evidence of the Spirit of God and our own Spirit may make us certain, where they concur, as they ought to do, that we are the Children of God. *If our Hearts condemn us not, then have we Confidence towards God*: Which is St. John's Rule, and comprehends both the Evidences in the Text; for our Heart judges both of our inward and outward Obedience:

dience: And therefore, where our Hearts condemn us not, we have the Evidence of both Spirits, the End of which is Confidence.

But, lastly, this Certainty does not extend to our future and final Salvation: For to be in a State of Grace is to be Heir of Salvation: But an Heir may be defeated, if by any After-act he incapacitates himself to inherit. In a Word, a State of Grace may be lost; he that is the Child of God may cease to be the Child of God: And therefore being certain and confident that you are now in a State of Grace cannot make you certain of your Salvation; but you must still *work out your Salvation with Fear and Trembling*. This we may learn from our Apostle's own Arguing here: *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the Children of God*. The Consequence of this is, *if Children then Heirs*, Ver. 17. *But now are we Heirs through Hope*, he tells us in another Place; and at the twenty-fourth Verse of this Chapter, *We are saved by Hope: But Hope that is seen is not Hope*. Certainty shuts out Hope: And, since being Children makes us only Heirs through Hope, 'tis plain, being certain that we are now the Children of God can give us no absolute Certainty of our Salvation: And therefore 'tis great Presumption to talk of Security. Our Certainty reaches to our present Condition, which is enough to keep our Minds easy and contented. Other Certainty than this might make us remiss: This may encourage us *to run with Patience the Race that is before us, and to labour in the Lord, knowing that our Labour shall not be in vain*.

DISCOURSE IX.

JOHN XX. 30, 31.

And many other Signs truly did Jesus in the Presence of his Disciples, which are not written in this Book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have Life through his Name.

THESE Words stand towards the Close of St. John's Gospel, and are by some thought to be the last of his own Writing. They give us an Account of the Nature of his Gospel, and of his End and Design in publishing it to the World. The Apostle does not pretend his Gospel to be a perfect and complete Narrative of all that our Lord did whilst he conversed among Men, not even of all the Miracles and Wonders which he wrought in Confirmation of his Doctrine: *Many other Signs truly did Jesus,—which are not written in this Book.* He adds farther, that the Signs omitted in his Account were done *in the Presence of his Disciples*, and were, consequently, of as good Authority as those related by himself. This was but a necessary Piece of Caution; for St. John wrote his Gospel late, towards the End
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of his Life, after the Apostles and Disciples of Christ had spread the Gospel far and near, and had both by Preaching and Writing published the great Works and Signs done by their Master. To prevent therefore the Suspicions which some might be apt to entertain of their Teachers, when they found the great Evidences insisted on by them not mentioned by St. *John*, who, being the last Writer of the Apostles, would naturally, for that Reason, be supposed to be the most accurate; he declares that he had not recounted all the Signs done by Jesus, but that there were many others, which, having been wrought in the Presence of the Disciples, might very well be taught and published by them, though omitted by himself.

But why does St. *John*, speaking of the Miracles of Jesus, take Notice only that *they were done in the Presence of the Disciples?* whereas in truth they were done in the Face of the Sun, in the most open and publick Manner, in the Sight of Friends and Foes; which is so advantageous a Circumstance, and which adds so much to the Credibility of the Signs, that it ought ever to be remembered. St. *John* knew this very well, having in the course of his Gospel often taken notice of this very Thing: Particularly in the Story of *Lazarus* he tells us, that *many Jews were with Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their Brother, who followed Jesus to the Grave, and saw Lazarus come forth to Life upon his Call: Many of which, says St. John, Chap. xi. 45. 46. having seen the Things which Jesus did, believed on him: But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what Things Jesus had done.* But the Reason why this is not insisted on in the Text is, that it was not to St. *John's* Purpose: He is there speaking of the authoritative Promulgation of the Gospel, as is evident from the last Verse, *These Things are written that ye might believe:* And this led him no farther than to observe that the Preachers and Publishers

lishers of the Gospel were Eye-witnesses of the Things they attested, and therefore unexceptionable Witnesses. This is the true Foundation of the Apostles Authority considered as Promulgers of Christianity; which depended upon what they themselves had seen or heard, and not upon what others had seen or heard, whether Friends or Foes. Other Circumstances may be good collateral Evidence; but the Testimony of the Apostles rests upon this, That they themselves saw and heard what they have reported. And therefore the same Apostle in first his Epistle sets forth this Evidence in the very same Manner: *That which was from the Beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our Eyes, which we have looked upon, and our Hands have handled of the Word of Life — That which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have Fellowship with us.*

You have also the Reason assigned which moved St. *John* to publish his Gospel, which extends likewise to all the other Writings of the New Testament: *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have Life through his Name.* This Reason is not so strictly to be urged, as if Writing were the only Way of publishing the Gospel, which we know was effectually published to great Multitudes, before any Book of the New Testament was written, by the Preaching and Working of the Apostles. But thus far perhaps we may justly argue, That Writing is the best, if not the only Method of perpetuating the Testimony, and delivering down the Doctrines of Christ uncorrupted to distant Ages: And this Way has had the Consent and Approbation of all civilized Nations; from whence it is that *scripta Lex* is used in the best Writers to signify an instituted Law, as distinguished from the Law of Nature arising either from Instinct or Reason.

The Gospels then were published that they might be a standing Evidence to all Ages of God's Purpose to redeem the World by sending his Son to take our Nature on him, *that he might die for our Sins, and rise again for our Justification*: And it was absolutely necessary to convey this Knowledge to the World by a proper Authority; for Revelation cannot obtain the Force and Authority of Law, or any way oblige the Consciences of Men, till it be sufficiently published and declared. This is universally true of all Laws whatever, both human and divine: And the Reason of it is plain; because otherwise Men would be bound to an Impossibility, to obey a Law before they knew what the Law was. For the same Reason also it must be allowed, that the Promulgation of the Law is the proper Care and Concern of the Lawgiver: For the Law must come from the Governor to the Governed; and the Subject, till he knows the Law, that is, till it is promulged and sufficiently declared to him, can have no Concern in it. Apply this to Revelation, and you will perceive, that it is absurd to suppose that God has given any Law to the World which he has not sufficiently promulged and declared; for that would be to suppose that God intended to give, and not to give, a Law to Mankind at the same time. An insufficient Promulgation is no Promulgation; and therefore all Powers and Qualities necessary to give Credit and Authority to the Publishers of a Revelation are always supposed, when we speak of the Truth and Authority of Revelation. God may reveal what he sees fit to one or two or more Men; but unless such Men are commissioned and duly qualified to satisfy others that such Things have been made known to them, others are no more concerned in the Revelation, than if it had never been made. It would take up too much of your Time
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to inquire particularly what are the necessary Qualifications to constitute a proper Witness to Revelation. It may suffice to observe, that no Man is naturally qualified for it, for this plain Reason, because all natural Qualifications are easily counterfeited to serve a Purpose. Honesty, Sincerity, and Religion may be put on in Appearance; and a Man may bear himself so well in the Disguise, as not to be discovered. Things in common Life are easily believed upon the Report of honest Men: But then it must be considered, that the moral Probability of such Things goes a great way in rendering them credible. 'Tis no Shock to our Minds to believe that such a Thing happened at such a Time, which we know often does happen in the Course of Things, and probably might happen then. In such Cases a small Weight inclines the Mind to assent: But it requires other kind of Evidence to make the Mind submit to the Belief of Things which are supported by no moral Probability, but are quite out of the ordinary Course and Nature of Things. This shews that no Revelation can be sufficiently promulged and declared to the World by Men, unless they are extraordinarily qualified and commissioned to that Purpose. We do not therefore rely merely upon the Honesty or moral Character of the first Preachers of the Gospel, but on their Authority proved and supported by many wonderful works which God enabled them to do, and on their Integrity sufficiently established by what they did and suffered for the sake of the Gospel.

But here the Question is asked, How shall we distinguish between the Pretences to Revelation, which are so many and various, all of which have an equal Right to be heard, that 'tis endless to look for Religion in such a Croud of Pretenders to it, and difficult to determine the Merit of the several Claims? So that the only sure Way is to take up with Natu-

ral Religion, which is every-where uniformly the same, and in-which there is no danger of being deluded and misled by Imposture; for Natural Religion admits of no Counterfeit: And, since every Man's Reason is Judge in this Case, no Man can be cheated but by himself: And all Men are so much their own Friends, that in a Matter of so great Moment, which so nearly concerns their present and their future Happiness, they may securely trust themselves.

Now, to form a true Judgment upon this Case, it will be necessary first to state the Question right upon the Foot of this Objection, and then to examine what Weight of Reason there is in it.

First then, The Question must relate to Revelation considered only as the Rule and Measure of Religion: For the Dispute between Nature and Revelation is confined to this one Point, Which is the best and safest Guide in Religion? 'Tis absurd therefore to bring Instances of any Revelations in this Case, which do not pretend to this Property, that were never given, or pretended to be given, as a Rule of Religion: For, when Men talk of the various Revelations that have been in the World, and the Difficulty of determining which they ought to obey, they cannot take into their Consideration the Answer of the Oracle to *Cræsus*, or the several other Answers on particular Occasions recorded in the *Greek* and *Roman* Histories, nor yet the particular Messages which God sent by the Hands of different Prophets to the People of *Israel* for these Revelations, whether true or false, being confined to particular Occasions, are out of the present Question, and have no Relation to the Inquiry concerning a Rule or Measure of Religion. This Observation will in a great Measure overthrow the Truth of the Fact upon which the Objection is built; for upon this

this View there are not many Revelations that can come into Competition: In the Heathen World I know of none; for, though there were sundry Pretences to Revelation, yet none was set up as a common Standard for the Religion of Mankind. The Religion of *Rome* was chiefly introduced by *Numa*, who pretended a Revelation for the Foundation of his Authority; But 'tis plain he aimed at nothing farther than modelling the Religion of his City, and had no thought of the rest of the World in what he did. Nor had the *Romans* any Sense that their Religion concerned any but themselves: And therefore, when they extended their Conquests, Religion was their least Concern; they left the World in that Respect as they found it, and Men were not so much as invited to take their Religion. Now 'tis evident, that no Law, either human or divine, extends farther than the Lawgiver intends. Suppose then, if you please, *Numa's* Religion to be a Revelation; yet, since it was given and declared only to the People of *Rome*, the rest of the World can have no concern in it, that no System of Religion in the Heathen World claimed as a general Law, is evident from the Answer returned by the Oracle, when the Inquiry was, Which Religion was best? The Answer was, That every Man should worship according to the Custom of the Country where he was. So that all Religions were esteemed equally good, and the most any Religion pretended to was a local Authority, which reached no farther than the Laws of the Country did: And, unless Men are for giving more to the pretended Heathen Revelations, than ever they claimed for themselves, or was claimed for them by those who introduced them and lived under them, they cannot be brought into this Question, since they have no Relation to us, any more than the many civil Laws and

Constitutions of the same Countries had: And Men may as reasonably complain of the great Variety of civil and municipal Laws that distract their Obedience, and then instance in the Laws of the *Medes* and *Persians*, as they now complain of the Variety of Revelations, instancing in such as, if they were true, concern them as little as the Laws of *Persia* do.

But perhaps it will be said, That though these Religions do not oblige us, yet nevertheless, if any of them were true, they effectually overthrow all others; for God cannot contradict himself, whether he speaks to one Nation, or to all the World: And upon this Foot these several Pretences come within our Inquiry. This Reasoning may be good; but then it does most effectually exclude all these Pretences: For the Voice of Nature is the Voice of God, and therefore cannot be contradicted by God. No Revelation therefore can intitle itself to be considered, if it contradicts any one plain Principle of Natural Religion: And there is not any one Form of Religion, within the Period mentioned, that does not split upon this Rock; and therefore there is no Danger of your being oppressed with Labour and Study in examining their several Claims.

But farther; Which of them all so much as pretends to the Essentials necessary to constitute a Law, either human or divine? Where was it published and declared? by whom, and how qualified? Can you name the Persons, or produce the Gospel of such Religion? Take the Instance of *Rome*: What was *Numa*? a King and therefore submitted to in the Innovations of Religion: But what one Mark of a divine Commission can you produce? and yet without such Marks even a true Revelation could be of no Authority. Try all other Instances, and you will

will still see how weakly the Objection against Revelation is supported by any Pretences of the Heathen World.

But still it will be urged, That the many Pretences to Inspiration, which have been received and admitted, are so many Instances of the Weakness of Men, and their Inability to distinguish between true and false in the present Case. And how can we ever trust ourselves in examining Revelation, and be secure in our Judgment, when we see all the World has erred before us, and Men as wise as ourselves, who thought too, it may be, that they acted as rationally as we do, mistaken in every Instance of this Kind? Is it not easily supposed, that the World is misled now, as formerly it has been? Why then should we expose ourselves to almost certain Error by following the same Steps, and pursue those Principles which have never yet produced ought but Deceit and Falshood? Whatever Force there is in this Argument, it must recoil upon the Cause of Natural Religion; for certain it is from the History of all Ages, both past and present, that Men have erred grossly and universally in many principal Points of Natural Religion. How then shall we ever trust ourselves in examining the Dictates of Nature, since the Attempt has in all Ages produced Folly, Ignorance, and Superstition? What Security have we that we shall not follow our Fore-fathers in all their Errors and Mistakes, if we guide ourselves by the same Clue of Thread which directed them? Nay, in truth, the Errors and Superstitions of the Heathen World, even those which pretended to derive themselves from Oracles and Revelations of the Gods, are chargeable upon this Blindness and Ignorance of Nature. Had Nature but done her Part, Men could not have been imposed on by such gross and palpable Superstition: Had the natural Notion of the Deity been preserved entire and uncor-

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rupted, no one Form of the Heathen Worship could have stood before it; but they must have all dispersed, as the Clouds fleet away before the Sun.

What is it now that discovers to you these Impostures, which were not seen by those before you? Is it not manifestly that true Sense of Reason and Nature which have been new kindled and lighted up in the Mind of Man by the Gospel of Christ? Was it not then the Want of this Sense that darkened the Old World? But, be the Cause what it will, if you judge rightly in supposing yourself able now to discern the Dictates of Reason and Nature, without which you ought not to pretend even to Natural Religion, 'tis absurd to pretend that you are in the same Danger of being deceived by pretended Revelations as the Old World was, since you have, and claim to have, that Light, the Want of which was the very Thing that exposed them to all their Errors and Superstitions. And, to shew that this Objection is a mere Feint, ask any one who makes it, whether he thinks any Man could impose one of the Heathen Forms of Worship, or any think like it, on him? No Man, I believe, but would be angry to be suspected of so much Weakness. Yet these very Forms were imposed on your Forefathers; and you are confident, and with good Reason, that they cannot be imposed on you. 'Tis evident then, that you are not in the same Case with them, that their Danger is not your Danger; and, consequently, their Errors about Revelation are no Objection against hearkening to Revelation now, when we know ourselves effectually secured against their Errors.

From these Pretences let us turn to view the true Revelations belonging to same the Period, and see how far they relate to the present Case. Those given to particular Men upon particular Occasions
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are out of the Question, for Reasons already mentioned.

The Law of *Moses* was published and declared with great Solemnity, and by Persons every way qualified: It contains a Rule or System of Religion, and is still maintained by its Disciples in opposition to the Gospel. Here then perhaps may seem to be some Difficulty, when two Revelations, that have equal Pleas to Truth, are set in competition one against the other. This Question must be argued upon different Principles with *Jews*, and with other Men: For the Law was given and declared to the *Jews*, and they were under the Obligations of it: They therefore are concerned to inquire, not only of the Truth of a subsequent Revelation, but also whether it does sufficiently abrogate their Law, or whether it is to subsist with it; as likewise whether their Law has any-where precluded them from admitting any farther Revelations. But to us the Question is how we are concerned with the Law, and whether there can be any Competition with respect to us between the Law and the Gospel. From the Principles already mentioned we may soon determine this Question: For 'tis plain that no Revelation can oblige those to whom it is not given; that Promulgation is so far of the Essence of the Law, that no Man in Reason or Equity owes any Obligation to a Law till 'tis made known to him; that the Obligations therefore of a Law are limited by the Terms of the Promulgation. Apply this to the Law of *Moses*; you will find that Law in the very Promulgation of it confined to the People of *Israel*: *Hear, O Israel!* is the Introduction to the Promulgation; which it could not have been, had the Law been designed for the whole World, And this was known to be the Case under the Law. *Moses*, who best understood the Extent of his own Commission, says thus to the People of *Israel*: *What Nation*

Nation is there so great, that hath Statutes and Judgments so righteous, as all this Law which I set before you this Day? Deut iv. 8. The holy Psalmist expresses the same Sense in these Words: *He sheweth his Word unto Jacob, his Statutes and his Judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any Nation: And, as for his Judgments, they have not known them.* Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. From all which 'tis evident, that the Law of Moses has no Claim to our Obedience. The moral Part of the Law, when understood, will oblige every rational Creature; but this is not the Obligation we are now speaking of. The Law of *Moses* then cannot add to the Number of Revelations which create us any Difficulty in determining ourselves: For, let the Case happen as it will, we are free from the Law. But the Law affords even to us abundant Evidence for the Truth of the Gospel. The Proofs from Prophecy are as convincing to us as to the *Jews*: For it matters not whether we are under the Law or not under the Law, since Conviction in this Case arises from another and different Principle. But I hasten to a Conclusion.

Let us then consider briefly, what Alteration has happened since the Coming of Christ to disturb and unsettle our Judgments in this great Affair. A Man perhaps, who is a great Reader, may be able to produce many Instances of Impostors since that Time, and imagine that they are all so many dead Weights upon the Cause of Revelation: But what is become of them, and their Doctrine? they are vanished, and their Place is not to be found. What Pretence is there then to set up these Revelations? Is God grown so weak and impotent, that we may suppose these to be his Revelations, and intended for the Use of the World, had he not been baffled at first setting out? If God intends a Law for the Use of the World, he is obliged, If I may use the Expression, to publish the Law to the World: And therefore

fore Want of such Publication evidently shews that God was not concerned in them, or at least did not intend that we should be concerned in them: And therefore 'tis absurd to instance in such Pretences as Difficulties in our Way, which in truth are not in our Way at all.

And thus the Case of Revelation stood, and the Gospel had no Competitor, till the great and successful Impostor *Mabomet* arose: He indeed pretends a Commission to all the World, and found Means sufficiently to publish his Pretences: He asserts his Authority upon the Strength of Revelation, and endeavours to transfer the Advantages of the Gospel Evidence to himself, having that Pattern before him to copy after: And, should we say that the Alcoran was never promulged to us by Persons duly commissioned, it may be answered perhaps that the Alcoran is as well published to us as the Gospel is to them; which has some Appearance of an Answer, though the Fact is indeed otherwise; for even the Alcoran owns Jesus for a true Prophet.

But with respect to this Instance, I persuade myself it can be no very distracting Study to find Reasons to determine our Choice. Go to your Natural Religion: Lay before her *Mabomet* and his Disciples arrayed in Armour and in Blood, riding in Triumph over the Spoils of thousands and tens of thousands, who fell by his victorious Sword: Shew her the Cities which he set in Flames, the Countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable Distress of all the Inhabitants of the Earth. When she has viewed him in this Scene, carry her into his Retirements: Shew her the Prophet's Chamber, his Concubines and Wives; let her see his Adultery, and hear him alledge Revelation and his divine Commission to justify his Lust and his Oppression. When she is tired with this Prospect, then shew her the blessed

bleſſed Jeſus, humble and meek, doing Good to all the Sons of Men, patiently inſtructing both the Ignorant and the Perverſe. Let her ſee him in his moſt retired Privacies: Let her follow him to the Mount, and hear his Devotions and Supplications to God. Carry her to his Table to view his poor Fare, and hear his heavenly Diſcourſe. Let her ſee him injured, but not provoked: Let her attend him to the Tribunal, and conſider the Patience with which he endured the Scoſſs and Reproaches of his Enemies. Lead her to his Croſs; and let her view him in the Agony of Death, and hear his laſt Prayer for his Perſecutors: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

When Natural Religion has viewed both, aſk, Which is the Prophet of God? But her Answer we have already had; when ſhe ſaw Part of this Scene through the Eyes of the Centurion who attended at the Croſs; by him ſhe ſpoke and ſaid, *Truly this Man was the Son of God.*

DISCOURSE X.

ACTS ii. 22.

Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by Miracles and Wonders and Signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.

THE great Evidence of Christianity, to which our Saviour and his Apostles constantly appeal, are the Miracles, Wonders and Signs, which God did by the Hand of Jesus to confirm the Authority and Commission he gave him to publish and declare his Will to the World. This being the only reasonable Evidence that he could give of his coming from God, our Saviour says expressly, *If I had not done among them the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin,* John xvi. 24. If he had not given these undeniable Proofs of his being a Teacher sent from God, they would have been acquitted, not only in Reason, but even out of his own Mouth. *If I do not the Works of my Father, says he, believe me not,* John x. 37: *If I bear witness of myself, my Witness is not true,* John v. 31: And he adds, Verse 36. *The Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same Works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father sent me.* Thus, when St. John sent to him to inquire expressly whether he were

were the Christ, or no, he shewed the Messengers his Works, and bade them relate to *John* what they had seen; referring it to him to judge by his Works, which were the only proper Evidence, whether he were the Christ, or no.

The Truth then of Christianity resting upon the Authority of Miracles, I shall endeavour in the following Discourse to shew,

First, Wherein the true Force of this Argument from Miracles consists, and what it is that they prove.

Secondly, What sort of Works are to be admitted for Miracles in proving the Truth of any Religion.

First, I shall endeavour to shew wherein the true Force of this Argument from Miracles consists, or what it is that they prove.

Miracles are not intended to prove the Being of God, nor the Doctrines of Morality: For Natural Religion is supported by Natural Reason, and has for its Evidence the Works of Nature. Thus *St. Paul* argues in his first Chapter to the *Romans*, declaring that what was to be known of God was manifest to Men, God having shewn it unto them: *For the invisible Things of him from the Creation of the World are clearly seen, being understood by the Things that are made, even his eternal Power and Godhead.* And in the most corrupt and degenerate Times God did not leave himself without Witness, continuing to do Good, to give Rain from Heaven and fruitful Seasons, filling the Hearts of Men with Joy and Gladness. These are the standing Proofs of the Being and Goodness of God: And Men need but open their Eyes, and look round them, to see the wonderful

derful and stupendous Works of Nature, which lead directly to the Knowledge of God. And what greater Evidence can Man have than this? For, if the making one World will not prove the Being of a God, the making of ten thousand will not. And therefore this is a Principle of Religion not learnt from Revelation, but which is always supposed as the Foundation of Revelation: For no Revelation can bring greater Works to prove his Authority, than the Works by which the clear and unexceptionable Dictates of Natural Religion are proved: For the Distinction between Miracles and Works of Nature is no more than this, That Works of Nature are Works of great Power produced constantly and in a regular Course, which Course we call Nature; That Miracles are Works of great Power also, wrought in an unusual Way: But they are both considered in the same Light, and with equal Advantage, as Effects leading to the Knowledge of a great, though invisible, Power. Thus we must acknowledge great Power to be shewn in the Sun's constant Rising and Setting; and as great in his standing still, should we see him stopped in his Course for the Space of a whole Day. That we have all Eyes to see, and Ears, to hear, is an Effect of as great Power, as giving Sight to one born blind, or Hearing to one born deaf. Upon this Account 'tis impossible that any true Revelation should contradict or evacuate any clear Dictate of Natural Religion, which stands at least upon as good a Bottom as any Revelation can do. And therefore the Principles of Natural Religion must be supposed for the Foundation of Revealed: Which is intimated by the Writer to the Hebrews: *He that comes to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him*; that is, he must bring this Belief with him; For a Revelation is not to prove the Being of a God, or that he loves Virtue, and hates Vice, God never wrought Miracles for this Purpose,

Purpose, having sufficiently evidenced himself from the Beginning of the World by the visible Things of the Creation: And had any one asked our Saviour to shew a Proof that there was a God, I am apt to imagine he would have turned him over to the Works of Nature, as he did the rich Man's Brethren to *Moses* and the Prophets for a Proof of a future State.

But, to ascertain the Use of Miracles, it will be proper to consider when and for what Purpose they were introduced. In early Times we meet with none: Nor was there any Occasion for them so long as Men preserved a right Notion of God as Maker and absolute Lord of the Universe, and were acquainted with him, (I had almost said, personally acquainted with him) and knew his Voice when he spoke to them; for so long they received his Commands without Doubt or Hesitation: And, being perfectly satisfied that the Command came from God, what Weight or Authority could the multiplying Signs and Wonders add to their Persuasion? For Signs and Wonders could only shew that the Command came from God, to whom all Nature obeyed and was subject: And, as they wanted no such Proof, there was no Room or Occasion for the introducing of Miracles.

But, when Idolatry prevailed in the World, and every Nation had its peculiar Deity, to whom they gave the Name of God, it became necessary, in order to preserve true Religion in the World, to distinguish between the true God, and the pretended Deities adored by the Heathen. The great Works of the Creation were standing Proofs of the Being of a God, and common to all Nations; and therefore the Belief of a Deity was the common Persuasion of the World: For, though Men in general were become Idolaters, yet they were not Atheists:

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But then the true God was forgotten or almost lost in the Multiplicity of false Gods, to whom the Blindness of the World ascribed the Honour and Power due to the one Supreme only.

In this State of Things God thought proper to exert himself in such Acts of Power as should demonstrate his Superiority above all Gods of the Heathen, and to assume a Character of Distinction, that the Hand might be certainly known from which the mighty Works proceeded: And it is very observable, that God did publickly assume such a Character, and Work Miracles, at one and the same Time. The first Miracles, of which we have any Account, were those wrought by *Moses* in *Egypt*; and at the same Time God declared himself to be the God of the *Hebrews*. And this was the first Declaration of himself to the World under such a Character: For we do not read he ever styled himself the God of *Noah*, or the God of *Shem*, or of any other Person, till after the call of *Abraham*; for to him he appeared at first, and said, *I am the Almighty God*, Gen. xvii. 1. And though in the Family of *Abraham* he was known by the Name of the God of *Abraham*, yet was not that Relation understood in the World, till *Moses* had express Command to make it known to *Pharaoh* and his People. And the Accuracy with which the Message was delivered, is observable: For, though God commanded *Moses* in speaking to the Children of *Israel* to say, *The Lord God of your Fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me*; yet in speaking to the King of *Egypt*, who probably might know little of *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, his Orders are to say, *The God of the Hebrews hath met us*, &c. Exod. iii. 15, 18. and v. 3.

It may appear strange to us to hear the great God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth assuming to himself a Character that seems to limit the Right of his Dominion: For why does He, who is God of all the World, style himself *the God of the Hebrews*? Is he not the God of all Nations? Or why does he appeal to Miracles wrought under the Character of God of the *Hebrews*, when the great Works of the Creation (of all Miracles the greatest) are a constant and perpetual Evidence of his almighty Power and universal Dominion?

To account for this, you must consider the State of Religion in the World at the Time when God assumed this Character, and sent *Moses* to shew Signs and Wonders in the Land of *Egypt*. All the Nations of the Earth had at that Time their several local Deities; and, as every Nation is naturally inclined to think their own the best, a Message delivered in the Name of the Deity of any one People could have no Effect upon another. And therefore, when *Moses* delivered a Message to *Pharaoh* in the Name of the God of *Israel*, *Pharaoh's* Answer was, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his Voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go.* *Exod. v. 2.* Now the Way which God made choice of to convince *Pharaoh* was by multiplying Signs and Wonders in the Land of *Egypt*, that the *Egyptians* might know that he was the Lord; when he stretched forth his Hand upon *Egypt*. *Exod. vii. 3, 5.*

Here the Question plainly was between God under the Character of the God of the *Hebrews*, and the God of the *Egyptians*, which of them was Supreme: And this Point could only be determined by a Superiority of Power shewn in Miracles. And, if we attend to the Nature of the Miracles wrought
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by *Moses*, they will appear to be such as plainly pointed out the Hand of the Almighty Creator. The Author of the Book of *Wisdom* tells us, *That the Egyptians, being deceived by the foolish Devices of their Wickedness worshipped Serpents void of Reason*, *Wisd.* xi. 15: And the most antient Account we have of that People from profane History confirms the Observation. And therefore the first Miracle performed by *Moses* was a direct Conquest over the Deities of *Pharaoh*: For, when his Rod was changed into a Serpent and devoured all the Serpents produced by the Magicians, what could *Pharaoh* reasonably conclude, but that the God, in whose Name *Moses* spoke, was *God of Gods, and Lord of Lords*? And, when the Magicians were compelled to acknowledge the divine Power of *Moses*, and openly to declare to *Pharaoh* that the Finger of God was in it, one would imagine that this Triumph over the Deities and Magicians of *Egypt* should have furnished a complete Answer to that Demand of *Pharaoh*, *Who is the Lord, that I should obey his Voice*? But he continued obstinate.

But the Purpose of God in sending *Moses* to shew his Wonders in the Land of *Egypt* was intended not only for the Deliverance of the *Hebrews*, but to make his Name known over all the Nations of the Earth: For, as *Egypt* was at that Time a great and flourishing Kingdom, and was notoriously the Seat of Superstition and Idolatry, from whence the Infection spread to all the Nations round about, it was of all others the properest Scene for God to exert his Power and Authority for the Conviction of all People. And for this Reason God had connived at the Wickedness and Idolatry of *Egypt*, and suffered the Kingdom to grow very great, that their Punishment might be the more exemplary: *In very deed for this Cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee*

my Power, and that my Name may be declared throughout all the Earth, Exod. ix. 16.

The Miracles wrought in *Egypt* were such as all the World had a Concern in: For they were so near akin to the Works of the Creation, that by a just Comparison they might be known to come from the same Hand: For who but the Author of Nature could stir up Things animate and inanimate to punish Offenders? When God slew all the First-born in *Egypt* in one Night, and preserved the People of *Israel* in Safety; when he led the People of *Israel* through the Red Sea by commanding the Waters to open them a Passage, and drown *Pharaoh* and all his Host by bringing the Waters back upon them; did not God by these Signs plainly speak to them, and say, *See now that I, even I am He, and there is no God with me. I kill, and I make alive; I wound and I heal: Neither is there any that can deliver out of my Hand?* Deut. xxxii. 39.

This Use of Miracles appears throughout the History of the *Jews*. Thus, in the Contest between *Elijah* and the Priests of *Baal*, the Prophet laid before the People this Choice: *If the Lord be God, follow him; but, if Baal, then follow him,* 1 Kings xviii. 21. The People were silent: The Dispute was referred to be determined by Signs and Wonders: And, when the People saw the Hand of God made manifest they fell on their Faces, and said, *The Lord be is the God! the Lord be is the God!* Ver. 39.

The Case of the Destruction of the Army of the *Assyrians* in the Reign of *Hezekiah*, when an hundred and fourscore and five thousand Men were destroyed in one Night by the Angel of God, seems to carry with it a Severity hard to be accounted for. The King of *Assyria* with his great Host laid Siege

to *Jerusalem*; and so had other Princes done without falling under so great Calamity; But the Case of *Sennacherib* had this peculiar in it, That he sent a Defiance to God, and boasted himself of many Victories obtained against him. Hear the Message he sent to *Hezekiah*: *Thus said the great King, the King of Assyria, What Confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Hearken not unto Hezekiah: For thus saith the King of Assyria, Hath any of the Gods of the nations delivered at all his Land out of the Hand of the King of Assyria? Who are they among all the Gods of the Countries that have delivered their Country out of my Hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my Hand?* 2 Kings xviii. You see here the King of *Assyria* acting the same Part with the King of *Egypt*; and, if his Power was broken all at once, he suffered but in the same Way that the King of *Egypt* did; and this Judgment was brought upon him with the same View, to make him an Example, and to vindicate and assert the Supremacy of God in the Eyes of all the Nations.

This appears to be the first and original Use of Miracles; and they are an immediate and direct Proof of what they are brought to assert, the Supremacy of God: For, when the single Question is, who is the Mightiest, must it not be decided in his favour who visibly exerts the greatest Acts of Power? In this Case no Difficulty can arise from the Supposition that others Beings as well as God are able to work Miracles. The Miracles performed by the Magicians in *Egypt* were so far from lessening the Authority of the Works done by *Moses*, that they added to it; For, the greater the Powers were which God humbled and subdued, the greater Evidence did he give of his own Superiority. So that, whether you suppose that Evil Spirits have natural Powers to do such and the like Works, or are sometimes employed and permitted by God, for the Punishment of

Men, to deceive them by such Appearances, in both Cases they are equally subject to the Power of God.

With respect to the People of the *Jews* Miracles had a double Use: For by their long Continuance in *Egypt* they became infected with the Errors and Superstitions of the Country, and served their Idols. So that they wanted a Proof that the God of their Fathers was indeed the Supreme Being, as much as the *Egyptians* themselves. Thus the Prophet *Ezekiel* says in the Name of God, *In the Day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine Hand unto the Seed of the House of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the Land of Egypt; when I lifted up mine Hand unto them, saying, I am the Lord your God; then said I unto them, Cast ye away every Man the Abominations of his Eyes, and defile not yourselves with the Idols of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against me; they did not cast away the Abominations of their Eyes, neither did they forsake the Idols of Egypt. Ezek. xx. 5, &c.* Which Account given by the Prophet shews plainly their corrupt State in *Egypt*, which was not easily worn off, as appears from their frequent Acts of Disobedience in their Passage through the Wilderness, and their great Propensity to fall back into Idolatry: So that God was frequently provoked to destroy them; and, had they been chosen for their own sake, they would have been destroyed: But, God having made choice of them to be his own peculiar People, and intending to manifest himself to the Heathen World by the Protection of that People, *he saved them for his own Name's sake:* Which is the Account the Prophet *Ezekiel* gives, speaking in the Name of God, *I said, I will pour out my Fury upon them, to accomplish my Anger against them in the midst of the Land of Egypt. But I wrought for my Name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose Sight I made myself known unto them in bring-*

bringing them forth out of the Land of Egypt. Ver. 8, 9.

But there was another Use of Miracles peculiar to the *Jews*, in which the *Egyptians* had no Concern: For *Moses* was sent not only to be their Deliverer, but also to be their Lawgiver. With the *Egyptians* he had no Covenant to make, nor new Statutes to give: He required of *Pharaoh* to let the Children of *Israel* go; which in justice and Equity he ought to have done, considering how his Country had been saved by one of that Family, and how highly he offended against the Laws of Hospitality by detaining them as Slaves, who came into his Country upon the Hopes and Promise of Protection. But the *Jews* were called out of *Egypt* to be the peculiar People of God, and to be put under a new Covenant and new Laws, under the immediate Government of God; Blessings which they had no right to expect, and for the Accomplishment of which *Moses* could give them no Assurance, but by the Evidence of such Works as plainly proceeded from the Hand of God, and proved the Commission which *Moses* had to speak in his Name.

The *Jewish* Government, being a Theocracy, leads us to expect a Series of Miracles in the Administration by the immediate Hand of Providence; and so indeed we find the Case to be: And the wonderful Preservation of that People, when obedient, and as wonderful Punishments, when they were disobedient, were standing Proofs to themselves, and to all the Nations round about them, that their God was the only Lord and Governor of the World, But *Moses* had no Successor as a Lawgiver: Prophets and righteous Men were often sent by God to reprove and admonish the People for their manifold Transgressions of the Law given by *Moses*, but

without any Authority to add to, or diminish from it. And so the Case stood, till the Great Prophet, like unto Moses, came in the full Power and Authority of God to make a new Covenant, not with one People, but with all the Nations of the Earth, *Jesus of Nazareth a Man approved of God by Miracles and Wonders and Signs.*

It has been before observed, That the great Doctrines of Natural Religion have for their Evidence the Works of Nature, and want not the Support of Miracles. But, when any new Doctrine is published to the World, or any new Command, of which Nature has given no Notice, it is of Necessity that such new Doctrines should be established by new Proofs. One Thing indeed we learn from Natural Reason, That God is to be trusted and obeyed in whatever he promises or commands: But still a Proof is required, that such new Doctrine or Command does really proceed from God. And this shews how necessary Miracles are to the Introduction of a new Revelation: Not that Miracles can prove the Truth of any Doctrine; but they directly prove the Commission of the Person who does them, to proceed from Him by whose Power alone they could be performed. This Distinction between Miracles considered as a Proof of the Doctrine, and as confirming the Authority and Commission of the Person who reveals it, will plainly appear, upon considering what the Case would be, should any Man openly perform unquestionable Miracles, and then retire in Silence, without declaring any Purpose he had: The great Works might astonish and confound us; but we could not possibly make any Use of them; We might indeed conclude, that some great and invisible Power assisted and enabled the Man to perform the Works; but what that invisible Power had to do with us, or we with it, we could by no just Inference conclude. But, should such

such a Man declare himself to be a Messenger from God commissioned to publish his Will to the World, and appeal to the great Works which he did as a Proof of the Authority he had received; the Miracles, though, considered in themselves, they do not directly prove his Doctrine, yet do they establish his Authority, and give the Force of a divine Command to what he publishes in God's Name.

The Law of *Moses* then requiring Submission and Obedience to Commands and Doctrines which have no Establishment in the Light of Reason and Nature, it was necessary to found them upon the Authority of God, to which no Submission could be due, till sufficient Evidence was given of it, to guard Men against Imposition and Deceit either from wicked Men or wicked Spirits: And this made Miracles to be a necessary Proof in the Establishment of a new Revelation,

We see then to what Purposes Miracles were originally introduced, and in what Manner applied, by *Moses*: And, whoever considers of what Consequence it was to the Happiness of Mankind to have a standing Evidence always before their Eyes of the Unity and Supremacy of God manifested in his Government of the *Jewish* Nation, and how far the *Mosaic* Dispensation prepared the Way, and laid the Foundation, for the Accomplishment of his great Work in the Salvation of the World by Christ Jesus, will see Reason to think that the End proposed was worthy of God, and fully accounts for his Interposition by Signs and Wonders, which were Acts not only of great Power, but of great Goodness and Benevolence towards Mankind.

If we consider the Miracles of the Gospel, we shall find that they had the same Ends in View. If *Moses* withstood the Magicians of *Egypt* and manifested

feſted a ſuperiority of Power over them, and the falſe Gods whom they ſerved, our Saviour did much more in oppoſition to the Power of Satan, and the wicked Spirits who had taken poſſeſſion of Men, and tormented them in divers Manners: In ſubduing them he ſhewed ſuch an uncontrollable Power, that they were obedient to his Command; and, when he ſaid Go, they were forced to go, yielding a ready, though unwilling Obedience. And, as the Goſpel ſpread, Idolatry fled before it, the Heathen Deities became dumb, and their Oracles were ſilenced. And, if we look abroad into the World, and take a View of the Nations where Idolatry and Superſtition once prevailed, and where the Knowledge of the Unity and Supremacy of God is now eſtabliſhed, which happy Change can only be aſcribed to the Propagation of the Goſpel, we ſhall ſee how fully and perfectly this great End was answered by the Miracles wrought by Chriſt.

If Moſes had a Commiſſion from God to publiſh his Will to the People of the *Jews*, Jeſus had a far more ample Commiſſion to publiſh the Terms of God's Salvation to all Mankind: And, as theſe Terms were of God's Appointment, and not ſuch as human Wiſdom could ſuggeſt, they ſtood in need of the Evidence of Miracles to ſupport them.

It has been obſerved before, That no Miracles can alter the clear Dictates of Natural Religion. The ſame may be ſaid with reſpect to any former divine Revelation: For to ſuppoſe a Revelation to come from God, and to be fully eſtabliſhed by Miracles, and that a later Revelation upon the like Proof and Authority ſhould abrogate and render the former void, would be ſetting up Miracle againſt Miracle, and deſtroy the Authority of both: And therefore, admitting the *Mosaic* Revelation and the
Chriſtian

Christian to be both of divine Original, they must necessarily be consistent, and each be in its proper Place to carry on the great and ultimate Views of Providence. This evidently was the Case of *Moses* who came to prepare the Way for the full and perfect Declaration of God's Will, reserved till He should come who was the End of the Law: And to this Purpose are the Words of our blessed Saviour, *Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till Heaven and Earth pass, one jot or one Tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled.* Matt. v. 17, 18. And during the whole Course of his Ministry he constantly appealed to the Testimony of the Law and the Prophets: *Had you believed in Moses,* says he to the *Jews,* *you would have believed me; for he wrote of me.* And his Apostle *St. Paul,* in his Defence before King *Agrippa,* gives this Account of the Gospel he preached: *Having obtained Help of God, I continue unto this Day witnessing both to Small and Great, saying none other Things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come.* And indeed one Revelation admitted to be of divine Authority, must be a Touchstone to try all succeeding Revelations by: For God cannot contradict himself; and the great Works done by *Moses* and by *Christ* are not only an Evidence of their divine Authority, but are a Bar to all succeeding Pretenders. The Miracles reported to have been done in the Heathen World are unworthy of God, considered either in themselves, or the End proposed by them: For let it be observed, that God never works Miracles merely to astonish and surprize People, but always to serve some great Ends of Providence: And though he has in favour of his People, and sometimes even of particular Persons, wrought a Miracle, yet when he published the Law and the Gospel, he did not rest the Authority upon one or

more single Miracles, but upon a long Series of Miracles exhibited from Day to Day for Years together. And, if Miracles are properly applied as a Proof of the Purposes and the Will of God, Miracles wrought without being attended with any Declaration of God's Will in which we have any Concern, are very improper Instances to be set up in opposition to those of *Moses* and Christ, upon which the Happiness of Mankind depends in this Life, and that which is to come. This Consideration gives Weight and Authority to the Miracles of the Gospel: For it was a Design worthy of God to restore Mankind to that Happiness which they had forfeited: And it was a Work in every View of equal Dignity and Benevolence with the Creation: For, if God is adorable in the Work of the Creation, he is equally so in the Work of Redemption; and there is at least as much Goodness in making Men happy, as in making them at all.

With what Colour of Reason can the pretended Miracles of the Heathen World be brought into this Question, which were done upon trifling Occasions, unworthy of the Interposition of God? Look into all the antient Oracles; see to what mean Purposes they are applied, and how often they prove destructive to those who relied on them; and then tell me what Marks you see of divine Wisdom or Goodness in them, that should set them upon an equal Foot with the Miracles of Christ Jesus.

We read in the Old Testament of some Miracles wrought in behalf of particular People, and for particular Purposes; But neither are these, though of divine Authority, to be set in competition with the Miracles of the Gospel: For they were not introductory to any Scheme of Religion, or new Declaration of God's Will, but are rather to be considered as Acts of Government
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and suitable to the Character of God as King of *Israel*; for, where the Government itself was divine, no wonder to see the Measures of the Government to be of the same kind. And this Character of God being peculiar to the *Jews*, is the Reason why such Miracles were frequent under the *Jewish* Law, and are very rarely to be met with under the Gospel.

Secondly, I am to consider what sort of Works are to be admitted for Miracles in proving the Truth of any Religion.

The first Suspicion that Men naturally have of any one who pretends to Prophecy or Inspiration, is, that he has contrived the whole Matter himself: For we have seen many Visions and Inspirations imposed on the Vulgar by Men of very bad Heads or very bad Hearts. And therefore the first Inquiry is, whether the Miracles might not proceed from human Art or Cunning.

And shall I undertake to prove, that it exceeds the Power of Man to raise the Dead to Life, to give Sight to the Blind, and to cure all Diseases by the Word of his Mouth? No: Never was any such Attempt set up. But perhaps no such Miracles were ever really done, and the People were deceived by false Appearances. As for Instance; When the Man born blind was restored to Sight, he did not indeed recover his Eyes, but all the rest of the People lost theirs, which I think would be the greater Miracle of the two: For it is as easy to believe that the Word of Christ should make one Man see, as that it should make a thousand blind.

But must they, you will say, of necessity proceed from God, because they could not be wrought by
Men?

Men? Were they Effects of nothing else but infinite Power?

The Miracles of the Gospel, being such Works as neither human Wisdom or Power can perform, force us to have recourse to a superior invisible Cause. But still you will say, can the Wit of Man discover all the different Orders of Beings between himself and his Creator; their Powers and Properties, so as with Security to affirm, that no Being but the All-wise and All-mighty God could perform these wonderful Things; especially considering that no Effects, neither the Miracles of the Gospel, nor the Works of Nature, can prove directly an infinite Power or Wisdom? For who will be bold to say that the Wisdom and Power of God were exhausted in the visible Works of the Creation, so that there is nothing either wiser or greater that infinite Wisdom and Power can contrive to execute?

Let this Matter be rightly stated, and thus it will stand: The Works of Nature are certain Proofs of an All-powerful Cause; not because they appear to be Works of infinite Power, and such as cannot be exceeded, but because of necessity they prove in course of Argument a First Cause of all Things; which First Cause being unlimited, nothing is or can possibly be done, that the Power of the First Cause cannot do. And therefore the Works of the Creation must be and are admitted as an infallible Proof of the Being of a God; Let it then be remembered, that a Revelation is not introduced to prove the Being of a God; That the Miracles of our Saviour were not wrought to that Purpose, but, supposing the Being of a God; to prove God the Author of the Revelation: And then it must be allowed, That, if we bring as good Arguments to prove God the Author of the Revelation, as can be brought to prove the Being of a God, all who believe.

lieve the Being of a God are equally obliged to believe the Divinity of the Revelation.

The first and most natural Notion of God is, that he is the Maker of the World, and all things in it. This was the Notion the *Jews* had of God; and, when they distinguished the true God from the Heathen Gods, they defined him to be the Maker of the World and Mankind. Look then into the Miracles of the Gospel, and you will see this Attribute of God as clearly demonstrated by them as by the Works of Nature: For there you will find, that the Author of the Christian Miracles is the Maker of Mankind; for by him Men were made; that is, dead bodies were made into living Men: For to raise a Dead Man, and to make a new Man, are much the same Thing. Any Matter may be formed even by human Art into the Shape of a Man; but it is adding Life that makes the Man. If we believe we received our Senses, our Reason, our Natural Strength and Vigour, from the true God at first; look into the Gospel, and you will find the Miracles of Christ are from the same Hand: For to the Blind he gave Sight, to the Deaf Hearing, to the Lame and Sick Strength and Soundness, to Demoniacs and Lunatics he gave Reason and a right Mind. Or, if you chuse rather to look into the material World for the Proof of a God; if you think the Beauty, Order, and Regularity of the World speak God to be both Author and Governor of Nature; search the Gospel, and you will find the Miracles of Christ derive themselves from the Governor of the World, and speak the same Language with the Works of Nature: For at his Word the stormy Winds were laid; the Sea obeyed his Voice: When he suffered, all Nature trembled; the Earth shook, the Veil of the Temple was rent, the Sun and the Moon were darkened: Which drew from the Centurion attending

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ing at his Execution the Confession, *Truly this was the Son of God.* If you appeal to the natural Sense and Notions of Mankind for the Idea of the true God, and thence collect his essential Attributes, Justice, Righteousness, Holiness, and Goodness; let the Voice of Nature be still, and the Gospel shall speak more plainly, how just, how righteous, how holy and good God is, who is Author of the Salvation and Redemption which is by Christ Jesus. Take what Way you will to prove the Being or the Attributes of God, and in the same Way with equal Advantage we will prove the God of the World, that is, the only true God, to be the Author of Christianity; which all who believe the Being of a God are bound to admit for a Proof of the Truth of Christianity: For either the Works of Nature are not a good Proof of the Being of a God; or the Works of the Gospel, being of the same kind, and Effects of equal Power, must be allowed to prove God the Author of the Gospel. And, when our Saviour styled the Wonders that he performed, *the Works that the Father had given him to finish*, he plainly appealed to the Power of the Creator as manifested in the Works that bore witness to him: For, if any one else could have done the same Works, there would have been no Reason for calling them the Works of the Father, nor would there have been any Room for the Inference which our Saviour draws from it, *The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me,* John v. 37.

There is a Question commonly asked upon this Occasion, to which it may be proper to give an Answer: That is, How we know that these Miracles did not proceed from an evil Power, since we have Instances, as some think, of Miracles so wrought? The Answer is, We know this the same Way that any Man knows the Works of Nature to proceed from

from a good Being: For how do you know that the Creator of the World has a good Being? If you answer, that the Maker of Mankind, the Author of Nature, must of necessity be a good and holy Being, because he has woven into the Nature of Man the Love of Virtue and Hatred of Vice, and given him distinct Notions of Good and Evil, by which Reason unerringly concludes the Author of this Nature and these Principles to be himself good and holy, I answer the same for the Gospel of Christ: The Love of Virtue, and Hatred of Vice, is as inseparable from the Gospel of Christ, as from the Reason of Man; and the Gospel of Christ more distinctly teaches to know and acknowledge the Holiness and Goodness of God, than Reason, or the Works of Nature, can do: And therefore those who acknowledge the Author of Nature to be a good Being, have much more Reason to acknowledge the Author of the Christian Miracles to be a good Being. But then we are told this is arguing in a Circle; proving the Doctrines first by Miracles, and then the Miracles, again by the Doctrines. But this is a great Mistake, and it lies in this; That Men do not distinguish between the Doctrines we prove by Miracles, and the Doctrines by which we try Miracles; for they are not the same Doctrines. God never wrought Miracles to prove the Difference between Good and Evil: And I suppose, if any Man were asked how he proves Temperance or Chastity to be Duties, Murder or Adultery to be Sins, he would not recur to Miracles for an Argument. These and the like Duties are enforced in the Gospel, but we are always Truths and Duties before our Saviour's Coming: And we are in possession of them without the Help of Miracles or Revelation. And these are the Doctrines by which we try the Miracles.

But the Doctrines which are to be proved by Miracles are the new revealed Doctrines of Christianity, which were neither known or knowable to the Reason of Man: Such are the Doctrines of Salvation and Redemption by Christ, of Sanctification and Regeneration by the Spirit of God: And who ever yet brought these Doctrines to prove the Truth or divine Original of the Miracles?

I shall only add, that what has been said it concerns those chiefly to consider, who hold fast and admire the Principles of Natural Religion, but despise or overlook the Proofs of Christianity. If they will but consider the Tendency of their own Principles, they are not far from the Kingdom of God: For the same Reasons, that oblige them to believe in God, oblige them to believe in Christ also. And, as we have one God the Father of all, so should we have one Faith, and one Lord, even Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of us all. And let them take heed, that, having been made Partakers of so much Grace, to the Acknowledgment of the one true God, they fall not the more irrecoverably under Condemnation by obstinately refusing to acknowledge his only and eternal Son, Jesus Christ the righteous.

DISCOURSE XI.

PSALM viii. 4.

*What is Man, that thou art mindful of him? and
the Son of Man, that thou visitest him?*

WHEN we consider the Care of Providence over the Children of Men, as it is manifested either in the Works of Nature or of Grace, we Naturally fall into the Reflection of the Text, and wonder to see so much done for Men, who seem to have no Merit or Desert equal to the Concern shewed for them. If we look up to the Heavens, and view the Sun, Moon, and Stars, and consider the Power by which these mighty Bodies were formed, the Wisdom and Contrivance by which their Motions are regulated and adjusted, we see plainly, by the Benefit we receive from them, that they were intended for our Service: And yet what are we, that we should be so served? If we look round this Earth, the Place of our Habitation, we find it filled with many kinds of Creatures, and adorned by the bountiful Hand of Nature, as if it were meant to be a Seat of Pleasure and Happiness; and we are sure that this Part of the World, at least, was made for the Benefit of Man: Here he is Lord, and has Dominion over the

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Works of God; for on Earth there is no Creature to rival him in Power or Wisdom, or that can challenge any Share of Authority with him. But this Lord of the Earth, does he not come into it helpless? Is he not wretched whilst he is in it, and oftentimes miserable when he is to go out of it? What must we say then? That this noble Palace was erected and adorned merely to be turned into an Hospital to receive the Blind and the Lame, the Diseased in Body and Mind; to be the Seat of him *who is like a Thing of nought, and his Days like a Shadow that passeth away?*

If we go on from the Works of Nature to the Works of Grace, the same Reflection will pursue us still. One would imagine, that Man, who had received so much from God, should at least continue to serve and obey his supreme Lord, and to acknowledge the Author of these great and good Gifts: So far from it, that God was in a manner expelled from his own Creation, and Stocks and Stones and the Beasts of the Field were exalted and set up to receive the Honour and Worship due to the Creator. The Morality of the World became answerable to the Religion of it; and no Wonder: For why should he not turn Brute himself, who can be content with a brute for his God? The Wonder lies on the other Side, that God should continue his Care and Concern for such Creatures; that he should be willing not only to forgive their Iniquities, but that he should contrive the Means of their Redemption; and that in so wonderful a Manner, as to send his own Son into the World, not only to instruct and reform them, but to redeem them by making Atonement for their Sins by his own Blood. Who that considers this can help saying with the Psalmist, *What is Man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of Man, that thou visitest him?*

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Though these Reflections should naturally lead us to admire and adore the Goodness of God, who has done so much, when we deserved so little; for what stronger Motive can there be for Gratitude, than undeserved Favour? yet have they oftentimes another Effect: For, when Men consider that God does nothing without Reason, and at the same time see so little Reason why God should do so much for them, they begin to suspect whether he has done it or no, and to imagine that the whole History of the Redemption is a cunningly devised Fable. To consider the Son of God coming down from Heaven, living among Men, and at last shedding his Blood for them, fills them with Wonder and Astonishment: And when they look on the other Side, they can see nothing in Man that bears any Proportion to this Concern shewed for him, or that yields any Argument to justify the Wisdom of God in this Method of his Redemption.

It must be owned, there is something plausible in this Way of reasoning; and the more so, as it pretends to do Justice to the Wisdom of God, and cannot be charged with any great Injustice done to the Character of Man. But this Prejudice, be the Foundation of it good or bad, lies as strongly against the Works of Nature, as it does against the Works of Grace: For it is as hard to conceive that God should create this World for the sake of placing in it such Creatures as we are, as it is to conceive that he should send his Son to redeem us. If you can justify the Wisdom and Goodness of God in making such Creatures, it will be no hard Thing to justify his Wisdom and Goodness in redeeming them: For to open a Way for Men to escape out of a State of Misery is a more divine and beneficent Act, than the putting them into it. If you stumble at the Dignity of the Redeemer, and think that the Son

of God was too great a Person to be concerned in saving Men; for the same Reason you should think that God, or the Son of God, was too great a Person to be concerned in making such Creatures as Men; And from these and the like Considerations you may as well conclude that God never made the World, as you do that he never redeemed it. But, in spite of all these Reasons, you see plainly, that this Earth was made for the Habitation of Men, wicked and inconsiderable as they are. Since therefore your Consequence will not hold in this Case, you have no Reason to depend on it in the other; but rather to think that, since it was agreeable to the Wisdom and Goodness of God to exert his Power to make such Creatures, it was also consistent that he should exert his Power to save and to redeem them.

It can serve to no good Purpose to give Men a great Opinion of themselves, and of the considerable Figure they make in the Universe; nor can it be done with Truth and Justice. Experience, which shews us daily our own and the Follies of those about us, will be too hard for all Reasonings upon this Foot; and the Mind of Man, conscious of its own Defects, will see through the Flattery, which ascribes to it Perfections and Excellencies with which it feels itself to be unacquainted. Or, could a Man, in spite of his own Experience, be persuaded to think himself very considerable, and worthy of all that God has done for him; this Opinion could tend only to make him proud and conceited, and to think the Dispensations of Providence with regard to himself to be rather Acts of Justice, and due to his Merit, than the Effects of Goodness and Benignity in the Governor of the World. Such an Opinion would in a great measure exclude a Sense of Dependence, and in a greater still a Sense of Gratitude; which are vital and fundamental Principles in Religion.

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But, if we set out with taking a proper View of ourselves in the first Place, and with considering the many Imperfections and Follies to which we are liable as rational Agents, the many Weaknesses and Infirmities which surround us as animal Creatures: and then survey the Works of Providence, and the great Care of God over us, manifested in his various Dispensations in the natural and moral World; we shall easily enter into the true Spirit of the holy Psalmist's Reflection, *What is Man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of Man, that thou visitest him?* It is a Reflection naturally proceeding from the Sense of our Dependence on God, and leading to the highest Degree of Gratitude, whilst we contemplate with Admiration the greatest of his Favours, and consider ourselves as unworthy of his least.

This is the natural Sense which the Reflection in the Text suggests to us: Yet has it, as I observed before, been used to other Purposes; and some have thought it unworthy of God to suppose that in the great Works of Providence he had any special Regard to so inconsiderable a Part of the whole, as the Race of Men appears to be. The Objection, they think, grows stronger, when the Scheme of Providence displayed to us in the Gospel of Christ for the Salvation of Man is laid before them; and it appears to them astonishing, that God should interest himself so particularly in an Affair, which seems, when compared to the whole, of so little Importance. If we ascribe this great Work to the Divine Love and Goodness, it cannot be controverted that they are strongly and evidently expressed and manifested in this Proceeding: too strongly, it may be thought; since Divine Love and Goodness must be bounded by Divine Wisdom, and can never degenerate into Fondness and Partiality; consequently,

his Love and Goodness can never do what his Wisdom does not approve as fit to be done.

Upon this Foot it may be asked, Where is the Wisdom of erecting such a Building as this for the Service of such a Creature as Man? The Works of Nature are so immense and wonderful, that, if they are formed for the sake of providing a proper Habitation for Man, the House seems to be of far greater Dignity than the Master, and the End proposed by no means to answer and justify the Means made use of. So again, in the Work of our Redemption, if the only Son of God came down from Heaven, and did and suffered all that is reported of him in the Gospel; what is there in Man, considered in the most advantageous Light, that bears any Proportion to this wonderful Method made use of to save him, or to justify the Wisdom of God in sending the Lord of Power, and of the whole Creation, to die for the meanest, perhaps, of all intelligent Beings belonging to it?

Now, whether these Reflections upon our own weak and infirm Condition, and the low Rank we hold in the Order of intelligent Beings, be a sufficient Ground for calling into question the Credibility of the great Things said to be done for us, is a Matter deserving serious Consideration. And,

The first Question we should ask ourselves, is, whether we are proper Judges in this Matter? It is a great Undertaking to judge of the Wisdom of God, and to say what is fit, or not fit for him to do; especially where the Subject of the Inquiry is the Counsels of God in governing the natural and moral World; Points, not only of the highest Consequence, but of all others the most removed out of our Sight.

In human Affairs we pretty well know the Powers and Abilities of Men, and can oftentimes judge of the Ends they propose to themselves; and this Knowledge of their Powers, and this Ability to judge of the Ends they propose, qualifies us in many Cases to estimate comparatively the Means and the End, and to discern whether the Thing aimed at is worth the Expence or Labour employed in obtaining it. This Judgment cannot be made merely by considering and comparing the Means and the End together; but Consideration likewise must be had of the Power and Ability of the Agent. The End of building a House is for the Habitation of Men: But, whether the House be too big, or too little, too magnificent, or not magnificent enough, can never appear from considering merely the End of building of an House, which is for Men to dwell in; but you must take into the Account the Power, Station, Wealth, and other Circumstances of the Builder, and then you may reasonably say whether too much or too little Pains and Cost have been bestowed on it. To apply this to the present Case: When you view the Works of Nature, you think them too great and too magnificent to be intended for the Use of Man: But consider a little, Who is the Builder? Is it not One of whose Power and Ability you cannot possibly judge? How do you know then that it was not as easy (and doubtless it was as easy) to God to produce this beautiful and wonderful Order of Things, as to have produced a much worse, and more adapted, as you may imagine, to the Circumstances of Man, the Inhabitant of this World? You cannot say, too much Pains, or too much Cost, has been bestowed: For all these Considerations are relative to the Power of the Agent; and when the Agent has infinite Power, this Consideration is wholly excluded,

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But farther; In order to judge rightly in the Case before us, we ought perfectly to comprehend the End proposed. If you see a great Building, but know not for what Use it was intended, nor what Use is made of it, it is impossible to judge whether it be too large, or too confined; for that Judgment must arise necessarily from knowing to what Purpose and to what Use it was erected. And where is the Man, who will pretend to know all the Ends of God in the Creation of the Universe? What relates to ourselves we know tolerably well from Sense and Experience: We feel the Influence of the heavenly Bodies, and are sure that we are the better for them; but, that no others are besides ourselves, we can never be sure.

Since then we know nothing of the Power of God but that it is infinite; the true Consequence from which is, that all possible Things are equally easy to be effected by his Hand; since the Purposes of God to be served in the Creation of the Universe are various, and more than we can discover, probably more than we can even imagine; we act the absurdest Part in the World, when we pretend to judge of the Works of Providence by comparing the Greatness of the Works of Nature with such Ends and Purposes as we can discover to be served by them. For, with respect to the infinite Power of God, we talk childishly, when we call his Works great, or little; and, with respect to the Ends and Purposes of Providence, supposing a just Measure of his Works were to be taken from thence, yet it is a Measure of which we are not Masters.

As this Reasoning must necessarily hold in the Works of Nature; so is it equally strong, when applied to the Works of Grace. It is indeed a surprizing and wonderful Event, the Coming of the
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Son of God into this World, being made Man, and born of a pure Virgin, living and dying as a Man, to redeem Sinners. But what is there that shocks your Faith in this? You think perhaps the Means too great and too considerable to be made use of for the sake of the End proposed, which might have been obtained at a cheaper Rate. But, when you say or think this, do you pretend to know by what other Way all the Purposes of God in sending his Son into the World might have been answered? If you do not, possibly this was the only Way to answer all the Ends and Intentions of Providence in this great Work; and, if it was, the Means used were necessary, and therefore, without doubt, proper: And, supposing them proper, you will not surely be surprized, that God should design, and his blessed Son undertake to perform what was proper to execute the wise Ends of Providence. It was indeed a very great Thing for a Man to be born of a Virgin: But in what Sense was it great? only as being unusual, and contrary to the established Course, in our Eyes: With respect to God, I see no Reason to call it so: Were God to form a new Race under this new Law of Nature, that all should be born of Virgins, I conceive, there would be nothing in it more wonderful than in the present established Course of Nature.

It is more wonderful still to think of the Son of God living on Earth in the Form and Fashion of a Man: And, if we speak in relation to our own Abilities of searching into this mysterious Work, it is, and it ever must continue to be, a Wonder: But, with respect to God, have you any Reason to think this wonderful and mysterious, or a Thing difficult to be performed? God has united our Spirits, our Souls, to these Bodies: A wonderful, and a mysterious Thing it is to us: But can you imagine there is any Thing in the Works of God, that is wonder-

wonderful, mysterious, or difficult in the Execution to Him? If not, how weakly do we amuse ourselves, when we set ourselves with great Wisdom to weigh the Works of God in our Scales, and to judge which are great and difficult in the Performance?

But this is not the only Mistake Men are liable to, when they set themselves up for Judges in this Matter. That the Redemption and Salvation of Men is the End of Christ's Coming into the World, is certain, and is revealed in the Gospel: But whoever shall say God had no other Purpose in view than this only, will judge hastily, and I doubt, rashly. What relates to us immediately in this great Dispensation, God has been pleased to reveal to us distinctly; but he has no-where told us that we are the only Persons concerned: That others probably are, may be collected from many Intimations in Scripture. Our blessed Redeemer has *all Power given him in Heaven* as well as in Earth: *Principalities and Powers, the invisible Powers, are made subject to him*: And he cannot be thought to be unconcerned in that Work, for the sake of which their King was exalted, and *every Knee made to bow to him*. How they are concerned, we know not: But this we know, that we are but a small Part of the natural World. That there are many intelligent Beings besides ourselves, we know: That they may be numberless, we have Reason to believe: That God is the common Governor of all, is out of question; That all his Dispensations in the moral Government of the World regard the whole, and will finally appear in the Eyes of every rational Creature to be just and equal, we have great Reason to conclude; and that God *will be justified in his Sayings, and clear when he is judged*. If this be so, the great Work of our Redemption, however immediately it relates to us, must be supposed adapted to answer
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the general Ends and Purposes of God's Government in the universal moral World. And this plainly shews, that we cannot judge of the Propriety of the Means made use of for redeeming the World by considering only the Relation they have to Men; for probably they relate to others, and to other Purposes, and are, upon the whole, in every Respect proper and fit: But the Propriety cannot be discerned by us, nor will it, 'till we come into a clearer Light, and see the whole Scheme of Providence together.

You see then, upon the whole, that the Objections against God's Government in the natural and moral World, founded upon the Disproportion between the Means made use of, and the Ends proposed, are really the Effects of Short-sightedness, and of that great Propensity which Men have to judge, though they want proper Materials to form a Judgment upon.

But let us consider, whether the Observations, which have given rise to these perverse Reasonings, will not, if duly attended to open a Way to far other and far juster Conclusions. That Men are weak and wretched, and not worthy of the Care of Providence over them, we know by sad Experience; and have Reason enough, in this View, to fall into the Psalmist's Reflection, *Lord! what is Man, that thou regardest him?* But still most certain it is, that God does regard Man: All Nature bears witness to the Truth of this; for he is served by the Works of Nature: And, though the Works of Nature may serve an hundred Purposes more, yet it cannot be doubted but that they were made to serve Man, though not him alone. This must appear upon the strictest Inquiry: For, considering this Solar System, of which we are a Part, we have no Reason to think but that it bears as great Proportion to the whole,

whole, as any other System: In this System our Earth is one considerable Part; and this Part was manifestly prepared for Man, who has Dominion over it. So that the human Race is no inconsiderable Part of the Creation in this Way of reckoning; And it is reasonable to say, that the World was made, if not for him only, yet as much and as truly for him, as for others.

Being then possessed of this Fact, That, weak and infirm as we are, God has abundantly provided for us in this Life; and that, considered as Part of the natural World, we have a very full Proportion of good Things allotted to us; what Conclusion does it lead us to, if we consider ourselves as Part of the rational and moral World? Is it reasonable to imagine, that God has taken so much Care of us in his natural Government of the World, and that he will neglect us in the moral Part of it? that he regards us as Animals, but has no Regard to us as rational Agents? Can any Man think seriously of God, as a reasonable, just, and upright Being, and suppose this to be the Case?

Now, these Considerations lay a Foundation for a just Expectation from the Goodness of God of his Assistance in our Case, where it is most wanted; that is, for his Assistance to us as rational and moral Beings, as capable of being happy or miserable by Virtue or by Vice.

There is a Similitude and Proportion in all the Works of God: And it is reasonable to infer, from the visible Regard shewed to us in one Respect, the Regard had for us in all, especially in the principal and most concerning Relation in which we stand towards him; that is, as rational Agents. And this leads us directly to suppose that God will provide

provide for our Well-being as moral and religious Creatures, with a Care, at least, equal to that shewn for us in our natural Capacity in this World.

Join now to this Presumption what the Gospel has expressly revealed to us, and see whether the whole is not of a piece, and consistent.

The Gospel tells us, that God has sent his Son to redeem us: You wonder he should take so much Trouble for such Creatures: But is it not as becoming his Goodness to redeem us, as it was to make us? You will say perhaps, we are since that become Sinners. True; and yet ever since that he has preserved us, and afforded us the Blessings of this Life: And is it not of a Piece to open to us the Hopes of a better? Mistake not my Meaning: I do not mean to infer from what God does for us in this World, that he is bound in Justice to do as much for us in respect to another. I know of nothing that he is bound in Justice to do for us. But surely it is safest Reasoning upon the Ways of Providence from the manifest Works of Providence: And, by seeing how God has dealt with the Children of Men as Part and as Inhabitants of this natural World, it is reasonable to conclude in what manner he will treat them as Part of the moral World. And, if we consider what we see and know of the Works of Nature, and of the Good we enjoy from them, and compare them with the greater Works of Grace, as manifested in the Gospel of Christ Jesus, we may easily discern the Consistency and Harmony of God's Dealings in both Cases; and see too, at the same time, that the Methods of Providence by which we hope to be saved, and which we have from Revelation, are liable to no other Objections, than the Methods of Providence by which we live, and which we see daily

daily with our Eyes. In both Cafes the Works of God are indeed wonderful, and we unworthy of the leaft of them: And we may juftly fay of both, *Lord! what is Man, that thou regardeft him? and the Son of Man, that thou vifiteft him?*

DISCOURSE XII.

ACTS x. 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his Mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no Respector of Persons: But in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him.

TH E S E Words, if not carefully attended to, may seem to carry a Sense contrary to, the Meaning of the Apostle in delivering them. St. Peter in the Text declares, that God, without respect to any national or personal Privileges, was ready to admit all People into the Covenant made with Christ Jesus, provided they were duly prepared for such Admission. Some from his Words have concluded that there is no Necessity of becoming Disciples of Christ, but that it is sufficient if we live according to the Principles and Light of Nature; so far as *every one who feareth God, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him*: And thus supported, as they think, by one Passage of Scripture, they have been emboldened to despise and reject all the rest as of no use to them, and to put their Salvation upon their own Strength, in opposition to the Method revealed and declared by the Son of God. This Er-

ror is common, as well as dangerous: And, since the great Regard which some pay to moral Virtue is purely Opposition to the Gospel, it is worth while to examine this Passage of St. *Peter*, and to place his Meaning in a true Light, that the Doctrine of the Gospel may not be over-thrown by its own Authority.

The *Jews* had a Notion that the Blessings of the promised *Messias* were to be peculiar to themselves, and not to be extended to any other Nation or People whatever, whom they looked on as Aliens from God, and not under his Care and Protection, as they were. Hence in the Prophets they plead their Privilege, and tell God, that he is not God of the Heathen, but of the People of *Israel*: Which Conceit of theirs St. *Paul* refers to and confutes in his Epistle to the *Romans*: *Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? yes, of the Gentiles also.* The Disciples of our Lord, and especially St. *Peter*, were as deep in this Opinion as others; and, during our Saviour's Abode on Earth, they were confirmed in it by what they observed in him: He declared, *he was not sent but to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel*: And, when he sent out his Disciples to preach, he expressly charged them *not to go into the Way of the Gentiles, nor to enter into any City of the Samaritans; but to go rather to the lost Sheep of the House of Israel*: And after his Resurrection, when he enlarged their Commission, and bade them *Go teach all Nations*; they understood him not, but were inquisitive about *his restoring the Kingdom to Israel*. After the Ascension the Apostles continued at *Jerusalem* preaching to their own Nation, till, upon the Persecution of St. *Stephen*, many fled into other Parts; and, though they went as far as *Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch*, yet they preached the Word to none but *Jews only*, Acts xi. 19. And when St. *Peter*, admonished by an heavenly Vision, had admitted some Gentiles into the

the Church of Christ through Baptism, he was called to an Account for it by the Apostles and Brethren who were in *Judea*, Chap. xi. 1: Nor were they satisfied, till he told them what Vision he had seen, what also *Cornelius* had seen, and in what a miraculous Manner the Holy Ghost was poured forth on the Gentiles, before he ventured to baptize them: And then, under the Astonishment of this Conviction, they held their peace, blaming his Behaviour no longer; but glorified God, saying, *Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life*, Acts xi. 18. St. Peter himself was equally surprized, when he found, by comparing *Cornelius's* Vision with his own, that God had determined to admit the Gentiles as well as the *Jews*, into the Church of Christ; and he expresses himself in the same Manner, though not just in the same Words, with the Apostles and Brethren. They say, *Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life*. St. Peter says, *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of Persons: But in every Nation he that feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted with him*. These two Reflections, as they are made upon the same Case, one by St. Peter when he was with *Cornelius*, the other by the Apostles and Brethren, when St. Peter related the Story of *Cornelius*, so are they in substance the same: And St. Peter, when he says, *that in every Nation he that feareth God—is accepted with him*, and the Apostles and Brethren, when they say *that God hath granted to the Gentiles Repentance unto Life*, mean one and the same Thing: And therefore, in the Text, *to be accepted with God*, means no more than to have from God the Offer of *Repentance unto Life*; and both certainly mean our having Admission into the Covenant with God through Christ Jesus. So that the whole of what St. Peter says in the Text amounts to this: “I now at length perceive that God has not confined his Mercies to a particular Nation only; but that all are capable of inheriting the

“Promises in Christ Jesus, who are duly prepared
“by Righteousness, and the Fear of God.”

This will farther appear to be the true Interpretation, if we examine the Case of *Cornelius*, and what the Acceptance was that he found. *Cornelius* was a Gentile, and one of the best of them; a devout Man, and one who feared God with all his House, which gave much Alms to the People, and prayed to God alway: And yet his Goodness did not make it unnecessary for him to become a Christian. The heavenly Vision was not sent to satisfy him that his Righteousness was sufficient, and that he had no need to look out for farther Assistance or Direction: On the contrary, it was sent to inform him where he might seek and find a proper Instructor. *St. Peter* had also a Vision to prepare him to do the Duty of an Apostle to the Gentile Centurion; and when this devout Man came to him, in obedience to the heavenly Warning, he instructs him in the Faith of Christ Jesus, and baptizes him with Water: Upon which *St. Peter* says, he finds that Men of all Nations, who do righteously, are accepted with God. He could not possibly mean, That those who did their best upon the Light of Nature, had no need of any other Teacher: That Reflection could never rise from the Case before him: For why did he then instruct *Cornelius* in the Knowledge of Christ, and baptize him in his Name? *St. Peter* therefore certainly meant, That all Gentiles duly prepared were capable of the Blessings of the Gospel through the Mercy of God; in opposition to his former Error, That none but *Jews* had such a Privilege. And the Apostle undoubtedly understood that the best of the Gentiles had need of the Gospel; or else his Commendation of the Goodness of God amounts to this only, That he perceived that God would give to the honest-minded Gentiles, who feared him, and did

did righteously, that which they had no occasion to receive.

From the Words and Circumstances of the Text thus explained, we learn what is the True Notion of that Acceptance, which St. *Peter* says the Gentiles of all Nations are intitled to through the Mercy of God.

But then there arises a Difficulty from the Terms to which St. *Peter* has limited this Privilege: For he does not say that Men of all Nations are accepted of God; but that in every Nation *he that feareth God, and worketh Righteousness*, is accepted of him. Now, one great End of the Christian Religion being to instruct us in the Fear of God, and in Works of Righteousness, it may seem strange, that, in order to the obtaining of this Benefit of being duly instructed in the Fear of God, and in Works of Righteousness, it should be required, as a previous Condition, that we should fear God, and do righteously: Which Condition supposes us already in possession of the main Thing for which the Privilege itself is granted; and, consequently, the Privilege becomes in a manner useless by our having the Qualifications necessary to the obtaining it. To clear this Matter, we must consider what the Apostle to the *Hebrews* teaches us, Chap. xi. 6. *Without Faith it is impossible to please God: For he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* The Meaning of which is, that a Man cannot offer himself to God, much less enter into the Covenant of his Mercy, without a firm Persuasion of his Being, and a due Notion of his Attributes. He must know *that he is*; otherwise he can never move or advance towards him: He must know also *that he is a Rewarder of them who diligently seek him*; or else he cannot be encouraged to move towards him: Which

two Articles of Belief infer a just Fear of God as the supreme Governor of the World, and a desire to please him as the Dispenser of Rewards and Punishments, according to the Good or Evil which Men do. This is the Faith, without which, the Apostle to the *Hebrews* says, 'tis impossible to please God: This is the Faith, with which, *St. Peter* says, the Men of every Nation are accepted with him. And in truth these Qualifications are so necessary to a Man's being accepted with God, and admitted into the Covenant of his Grace through Jesus Christ, that without them the Gospel cannot be so much as tendered to him: For upon what Foot would you press Men to become Christians in order to obtain the Mercy of God, who have no Sense of the Fear of God, and, consequently, no Concern about pleasing or displeasing him? The Gospel does not teach, but suppose this Doctrine: And, was even an Apostle to preach to a Nation perfectly ignorant of God, he must lay by the Gospel, and first convince the People from Reason and Nature of the Being of God, and the Necessity of Righteousness in order to deserve his Favour, before he could invite them to embrace the Gospel as the perfect Rule of Righteousness prescribed and ordained by God himself. And therefore, when *St. Peter* says, *that in every Nation he that feareth God, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted of him*, he is not to be understood as limiting the Mercies of God to certain Persons of the best Character, but rather as declaring the natural order of Things. It is frequently taught, that our Lord came to save Sinners; and therefore he began his Preaching with an Exhortation to Repentance in the same Words that *John* the Baptist had done before him, *Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*: Which is as much as if he had said, Turn to God, and fear him, working Righteousness, that ye may be made Members of the Kingdom of his Son, which now approaches.

But,

But, should the Case of *Cornelius*, who was a devout Man, fearing God with all his House, giving much Alms and praying alway, from which Case St. Peter makes the Reflection contained in the Text, incline us to believe that he means a greater Degree of Goodness by fearing God, and working Righteousness, than was commonly to be found; and, consequently, that what St. Peter says can be applied only to the most virtuous and best-disposed Heathens; upon this Supposition, both the Case of *Cornelius*, and the Declaration of St. Peter, evidently prove, that the best of Men stand in need of the Assistances of the Gospel of Christ, to make themselves secure of obtaining the End of their Hopes, Glory and Immortality, from God, who is the Rewarder of them who diligently seek him. I would desire those who are of a different Opinion, and think that they have no Reason to trouble their Heads about the Christian Religion, provided they lead good moral Lives, to consider the Character of *Cornelius*: He was devout and feared God with all his House: He was very charitable, and gave much Alms to the People, and prayed to God, continually. This, I suppose, they will allow to be a Description of such a moral Man as they mean: And I would ask then, For what Purpose did God send a Vision to *Cornelius*, and another to St. Peter, that *Cornelius* might be made a Christian? Was all this Care thrown away upon a mere unnecessary Point, that might as well have been let alone? Was *Cornelius* thus called to the Profession of the Gospel, and was it of no Consequence whether he had been called, or no? If God made Choice of *Cornelius*, one of the best of the Gentiles, to shew that some of them were capable of his Grace, he did at the same time demonstrate that all had need of it: For, if the best, with all the Light they enjoyed, wanted this Assistance, what could the worst do without it?

It may be asked perhaps, What would have become of *Cornelius*, had he died, as he had some time lived, a devout Gentile, in the Fear of God, full of Alms and of Prayers, without having been called to the Knowledge of Christ Jesus? Which Question, if pursued through all its Views, would open a large Field of Discourse, but such as would afford rather Speculation than Profit; since the Case, however determined, could no way affect us, who have been called to the Knowledge of Christ Jesus. Let it then be taken for granted, that *Cornelius* had he died in the Circumstances before described, would have found Rest to his Soul from the Mercy and Goodness of God: And let this other Question be considered, which is much more to our Purpose, What would have been the Case of *Cornelius*, if he had rejected the Call, refused to hearken to *St. Peter*, and had insisted on his own Merit and Virtue, in opposition to the Grace that was offered him through the Gospel? Would such a Refusal have been a pardonable Error? Could he have maintained the Character of one fearing God with all his House, after such an open Contempt of the Divine Call? Could he ever have prayed more to God to guide and direct his Way, after he had absolutely denied to be guided and directed by Him? Would even his Alms have been an acceptable Offering to the Almighty, after he had renounced that Obedience which is better than Sacrifice, and which is the only Thing that can sanctify our imperfect Works? If Reason and Natural Religion teach us that it is our Duty to please and obey God, what Part even of Natural Religion could this Centurion have exercised, after he had solemnly rejected the Counsel of God, and followed his own Will in opposition to that of his Maker declared in the heavenly Vision? As bad as this supposed Case of *Cornelius* would have been, it is the very Case of those who, having been betimes instructed in the
Knowledge

Knowledge of the Gospel, and called to the Faith and Obedience of Christ Jesus, do despise and reject that Faith under the Colour of preserving the Purity of Natural Religion, and living according to the Dictates of Reason and Morality. It makes no Difference in the Case, that their Call has been through the ordinary Administrations of the Church, and that *Cornelius's* was by a Vision directed to himself: The Voice of God is the same, whether he speaks by his Apostles or by his Angels: Whoever acts by the Appointment of God, speaks with his Authority: And, the regular Powers of the Church being ordained by him, when the Church speaks to her Children conformably to the Commission received, 'tis the Voice of God calling Men to Repentance unto Life through Christ Jesus. And, whatever the Condition of those may be who have never heard of the Lord who bought them, ours is certainly very bad, if, having heard of him, we reject and despise him. 'Tis one Thing not to believe in Christ, because we know him not; 'tis another to know him, and to disbelieve him. Though such Ignorance may be an Excuse, yet such Knowledge must be Condemnation.

DISCOURSE XIII.

MATTHEW xxii. 40.

On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

THE two Commandments here referred to are set down in the Verses immediately preceding the Words of the Text. At Verse 37. we read, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart, and with all thy Soul, and with all thy Mind. This is the first and great Commandment,* Verse 38. At Verse 39. follows, *And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* Then come the Words of the Text, *On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets:* The Meaning of which Saying is plainly this, That, the whole Reason of Religion lies in these two general Commandments; That in these all particular Duties and Precepts are founded; That nothing can be of any Obligation in Religion, but as it relates either to the Love we owe to God, or the Love we owe to our Neighbour. In speaking to these Words, I shall,

First, Shew you the true Meaning and Import of them; and,

Secondly, Make some useful Remarks on the whole.

In St. *Mark's* Gospel the same Thing is said in different Words, though to the same Effect. The Words parallel to the Text are these; *There is none other Commandment greater than these*, Mark xii. 31: That is, there is nothing in Religion of an higher Obligation than these two Precepts; All the Duties of Religion must be governed by these two Principles: Beyond them there is nothing greater, nothing to limit or restrain them; but by them must every thing else be limited and restrained. The Reason of this, is plain: For, the Relation between God and Man being once known, the first Conclusion is, *That we ought to love the Lord our God with all our Hearts, with all our Souls, and with all our Minds*; that is, to the utmost of our Power: And, until this general Principle be established, the particular Duties owing to God cannot fall under our Consideration. There is no room to inquire after the proper Instances of expressing our Love to God, till the general Obligation of Loving God be known and admitted. The same Reason holds likewise as to the other general Head of Religion, *the Love of our Neighbour*: For, the Relation between Man and Man, and the common Relation of all to one great Master, being supposed, the Result is, *That we ought to love our Neighbour as ourself*; that is, to do all we can to promote the Happiness of each other: And, unless we have this general Sense, we cannot be concerned to know in any particular Case, what is the proper Instance of Love which we ought to shew towards our Neighbour.

But, these general Principles being once established, the particular Duties flow from them naturally. The Love of God, and the Love of our Neighbour, if carefully attended to, will easily grow into a complete System of Religion. The Duties of Religion are all relative, regarding either God or Man; and there

there is no relative Duty that Love does not readily transform itself into, upon the mere View of the different Circumstances of the Persons concerned. Love, with Regard to a Superior, becomes Honour and Respect, and shews itself in a chearful Obedience and a willing Submission to the Commands of Authority: Love, with respect to our Equals, is Friendship and Benevolence: Towards Inferiors 'tis Courtesy and Condescension: If it regards the Happy and Prosperous, 'tis Joy and Pleasure, which Envy cannot corrupt: If it looks towards the Miserable, 'tis Pity and Compassion; 'tis a Tenderness which will discover itself in all the Acts of Mercy and Humanity.

In negative Duties this Principle is no less effectual than in positive. Love will not permit us to injure, oppress, or defraud our Brother: It will not give us leave to neglect our Betters, or to despise our Inferiors: It will restrain every inordinate Passion and not suffer us either to gratify our Envy at the Expence of our Neighbour's Credit and Reputation, or our Lust by violating his Wife or his Daughter; but it will preserve us harmless and innocent: For *Love worketh no ill to its Neighbour*. This Deduction of particular Duties from this general Principle was made by St. Paul long since: *Owe no Man, says he, any Thing, but to love one another: For he that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law. For this, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false Witness, Thou shalt not covet: And, if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self. Love worketh no Ill to his Neighbour: Therefore Love is the fulfilling of the Law.* Rom. xiii. 8, &c.

This Notion of Love, as being the Fulness of the Law, and of all the Commandments being comprehended

hended in this Saying, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self*, will lead us to the true and natural Interpretation of a Passage in St. *James*, which, as it is commonly understood, is liable to great Difficulties and Objections, and to those who have plain Sense, and can follow it, must appear absurd: *Who-soever*, says he, *shall keep the whole Law, and offend in one Point, he is guilty of all*, Chap. ii. Ver. 10. This is a Position something strange, that an Offence against one Law should be a Breach of all Laws, however different they are in kind and Degree; that he who commits Adultery, for Instance, should therefore be guilty of Murder and Robbery, and other the like heinous Offences nothing related to the Sin of Adultery. But let us consider the Apostle's Reason in the next Verse: *For he that said, Do not commit Adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law.* This Reason, as Interpreters commonly expound it, amounts to this: All Laws are founded upon one and the same Authority of God; therefore every Offence against any Law is a Contempt of the Authority upon which all Laws depend; and therefore every Act of Disobedience is a Breach of the whole Law, because subversive of that Authority upon which the whole Law stands. But there are many Objections against the Reason thus stated: First, 'Tis liable evidently to all the Difficulties of the *Stoic's* Paradox, That all Offences are equal: For, if the Guilt of Sin depends, not upon the Nature and Circumstances of the sinful Action, but upon the Authority of the Law-giver, then every Sin, being an Offence against the same Authority, is of the same Guilt and Heinousness; and there will be no Difference between killing your Neighbour and your Neighbour's Horse; for he that has forbid you killing your Neighbour, has likewise forbid you doing any Act to the Hurt and Detriment of your Neighbour. Secondly, The Apostle's

postle's Inference in the latter Part of the Verse does not answer to the Principle laid down in the former Part: *He that said, Do not commit Adultery, said also Do not kill.* This is his Principle; and he infers, *Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law:* No doubt of it; because there is a Law against Murder as well as against Adultery. But what is this towards shewing that the Breach of one Law is the Breach of all? The Inference therefore should have been upon this Foot: *Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art guilty of all the Laws by disobeying the Author of all Laws.*

But this Passage of St. *James* will have another Appearance, when fairly examined. In order to it, we must look back to that which gave occasion to it, and follow the Apostle's Argument step by step. The whole depends upon the Notion, which is common to the Writers of the New Testament, That *Love is the Fulfilling of the Law.* St. *James* considers the whole Duty of Man to Man as contained in one Law, namely, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself:* And then he argues rightly, he who offends in one Point is guilty of the whole Law: For, whether it be Theft, or Murder or Adultery, that you commit, it matters not; for any of these Crimes is inconsistent with the Law, which contains and is the Whole, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* But hear the Apostle's own Words: in the eighth Verse you read thus, *If ye fulfil the Royal Law according to the Scripture, thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself, ye do well:* Where, First, you are to observe, that he calls this the Royal Law, not because given by Christ the King, as some tell us, for all Laws are in that Sense Royal Laws; but because 'tis the first supreme Law, from which all others proceed, as distinct Branches, and by which they must all be governed.

governed. Secondly, you must take notice what Stress the Apostle lays upon their *fulfilling* this Royal Law; *If ye fulfil the Royal Law, — ye do well:* That is, if ye attend to it in all Instances, so as not to offend against it in any Case, ye then will do well. The Apostle proceeds in the next Verse, *But, if you have respect to Persons, ye commit Sin, and are convinced of the Law as Transgressors.* The Law in this Verse is the same Law, that was mentioned before, that is, the Royal Law: If, says he, you have any partial Regards, you will not then fulfil the Law of Love, but will be found to be Transgressors of that Law: *For, as it follows in the tenth Verse, whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all.* In this Verse he considers the Royal Law, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself, as the whole Law, and all particular Commandments, as Points of that Law.* And what he says amounts to this: Whatever Regard you may have to the Law of Loving your Neighbour, which all profess to walk by, yet assure yourselves you cannot keep that Law, if you offend against any one Rule of Charity; for every such single Offence is a Breach of that whole Law, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* In the eleventh Verse he gives the Reason of his Assertion: *For he that said, Do not commit Adultery, said also, do not kill.* The Words in the Original, here translated *for he that said*, are of doubtful Interpretation. The Sense followed by Interpreters and Translators has misled People in the understanding of this whole Place. Instead of *for he that said*, it should be rendered, *for the Law which said, Do not commit Adultery, said also, Do not kill.* The Place thus rendered contains a clear Reason of what went before: If, says he, you offend in any Point of Charity or Duty, you become a Transgressor of this whole Law, — *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself:* For this Law of loving thy Neighbour, which says to thee, *Do not commit Adultery,*

says likewise to thee, *Do not kill*. And now, if you go to the latter Part of the Verse, you will find it exactly suited to the whole Thread of Discourse which went before: For thus it follows, *Now, if thou commit no Adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law*; that is, of that general Law of loving thy Neighbour, which said as well to thee, *Thou shalt not kill, as, Thou shalt not commit Adultery*.

How this Royal Law speaks to us in the Language of all particular Laws and Precepts, is easily understood, and is distinctly explained by St. *Paul* in the Place already produced: *For this, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false Witness, Thou shalt not covet: And if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself*. Rom. xiii. 9.

As to the different Version of the eleventh Verse in St. *James*, which I have made choice of, our own Translators plainly saw the Propriety of it, and have given that Version in the Margin of the Bible. To them therefore, and their Reasoning, I refer you.

This Place in St. *James* being thus understood and explained, there is no Occasion for any Niceties or Distinctions to support the Reason and Equity of his Doctrine, or to shew how a Man, by offending against one Law, may become guilty of all; since this Assertion will no longer be found to be Part of the Apostle's Doctrine. What he teaches is plainly this: The great and fundamental Law of the Gospel is this, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself*. The Force of this all see, and all acknowledge; and, whilst they pretend to be Christians, all must pretend at least to obey. But, says he, whoever in

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any Manner offends, injures, or oppresses his Brother, it matters not in what Way, whether it be by undue and partial Preference of one to another, by Contempt, or Slander, by Theft, Adultery, or Murder: Whoever, I say, in any of these Instances sins against his Brother, will be found to be a Transgressor against this great, this vital Principle of Religion, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself*. For this Reason he tells them, the Way to do well was *to fulfil the Royal Law*; that is, to observe all the Points of it; because no Point could be transgressed, but the Transgressor must be found guilty of the whole Law, which is a general Law of Love extending to all Points. There is nothing hard in this Sense, nothing but what any Man may see the Reason of: For certainly to injure our Neighbour in any Way makes us guilty of the Breach of the Law, which commands us to love our Neighbour; for one injurious Action is as inconsistent with Love as another; and in this respect injurious Actions have no Difference, for they are all equally inconsistent with the Great Law.

The giving Light to this Passage in St. *James* has not misled us from the main Purpose of this Discourse; for we have seen at the same time the true Extent and Meaning of the Text, with respect to one of the Laws referred to in it and which is easily applicable to the other. St. *James* has fully taught us our Saviour's Meaning, when he said, *On these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*.

But let us turn to consider the other general Head referred to by our Saviour in the Text, namely, *the Love of God*. This, says our Lord in the thirty-eighth Verse, *is the first and great Commandment*. From this Head are to be deduced all the Service, Worship, and Honour, which we owe and pay to

our Creator. I observed to you before, that all the Duties of Religion are relative: Which is true in that Part now under Consideration; for the Duties we owe to God are founded in the Relation between God and us. Were there no such Relation, the Perfections of God might be Matter of Admiration, but could not be the Ground of Duty and Obedience. I observed likewise to you, that Love naturally transforms itself into all relative Duties, which arise from the Circumstances of the Persons related. Thus, in the present Case, if we love God, and consider him as the Lord and Governor of the World, our Love will soon become Obedience: If we consider him as wise, good, and gracious, our Love will become Honour and Adoration: If we add to these our own natural Weakness and Infirmitiy, Love will teach us Dependence, and prompt us in all our Wants to fly for Refuge to our great Protector: And thus in all other Instances may the particular Duties be drawn from this general Principle. Prayer and Praise, and other Parts of divine Worship, which are the Acts of these Duties, are so clearly connected to them, that there is no need of shewing distinctly concerning them, how they flow from this general Commandment.

Having thus given you an Account of the Text with respect to both the Principles of Religion referred to in it, *the Love of God*, and *the Love of our Neighbour*, I would now, in the second Place, lay before you some Observations which seem to arise naturally from the whole.

The first is, That these two Principles, from which our Lord tells us all Religion flows, must be consistent with one another; otherwise they could not both be Principles of the same Religion. The Love of God therefore can in no Case oblige us to act contrary to the Love of our Neighbour.

Saviour

Saviour has told us indeed, that the Time would be, when some should think they did God good Service by destroying their Brethren: But I don't find the Religion or the Zeal of those Persons much commended; but this very Character is given of them to shew how little they knew or understood their Duty. And yet, could such a Case ever happen, in which it might become our Duty to hurt our Neighbour in order to promote the Honour of God, it could not be a just Character of false Zeal, to say that it made Men think they did God good Service by destroying or abusing their Neighbour; because, upon this Supposition, it might happen to be the Character of true religious Zeal.

There is one Thing in our Saviour's Argument which may perhaps mislead Men in judging upon this Case, and which therefore may deserve to be particularly considered. Of the Love of God our Saviour says, *it is the First and Great Commandment*: The Love of our Neighbour he styles *the Second, like unto it*. Now from hence perhaps it may be inferred, That the Love of God, which is the First and Great Commandment, is a Law of a superior Obligation to that which is only the Second, and may therefore in some Instances controul and over-rule it. From whence it would follow, That we might lawfully overlook the Love of our Neighbour, in obedience to the superior Obligation we are under to love God. Now, upon supposition that our Duty to God and our Neighbour could ever interfere, I should readily allow that we ought to love God rather than Man: But our Saviour's saying the Love of God is the first Commandment, is no manner of Reason to think that it ever is, or can be, inconsistent with the Second.

The Love of God is properly styled the First Commandment, in respect to God who is the Object

of the Love, and because it is indeed the Foundation of all Religion, even of that Commandment which is styled the Second. But this is so far from shewing that the Love of God may ever clash with the Love of our Neighbour, that it proves the contrary; for, if the Love of our Neighbour is deducible from the Love of God, it must ever be consistent with it.

I know very well that the antient Writers of Morality have not gone higher for Principles to build their Precepts on, than to the common Desires of Nature, and the several Relations of Man to Man: But that is their Fault; for they might have looked farther with very good Success: For, if we consider God as the common Father of Mankind, and (as from his Goodness and Impartiality we must needs judge) equally concerned for the Welfare of all his Children, we shall have a very sure Foundation for all the moral Duties. No Man, who thinks himself bound to love and obey God, can think himself at liberty to hurt or oppress those whom God has taken under his Care and Protection: No Man, who believes it his Interest as well as his Duty to please God, but must likewise believe it his Interest and Duty to be kind and tender towards those who are the Children of God, and in whose Happiness he is not an unconcerned Spectator. For this Reason the Love of God is called the First and Great Commandment; and for this Reason it never can be inconsistent with the Love of our Neighbour, which is the Second. In all Cases therefore where your Duty to your Neighbour is plain and clear, depend upon it your Duty to God concurs with it. All Scruples to the contrary are wicked: Perhaps wicked Hypocrisy; for it is the greatest Indignity to God to use his Name, and pretend his Honour, to cover the Injuries you are doing to his Creatures, and your own Brethren.

The second Observation I would make from the Text is, That, our Saviour having declared *that on these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*, 'tis certain that nothing is or ought to be esteemed Religion, that is not reducible to one or other of these Principles.

But what then, you will say, must become of the Institutions of Religion, which, considered in themselves, and according to their own Nature, are not properly to be referred either to the Love of God, or our Neighbour? For, if all that is Religion may be so referred, it should seem that these Institutions, which cannot be so referred, are no Part of Religion. It is certain that mere positive Institutions are not founded upon any moral Reason of the Actions themselves: If they were, they might easily be drawn from these general Precepts without the Help of a positive Command: For the whole moral Reason of Religion is either the Love of God, or the Love of our Neighbour; and to make any Thing else to be Religion, strictly speaking, that does not partake of this moral Reason, is Ignorance and Superstition. But then there is a very manifest Difference between Religion and the Means of Religion: And whatever is part of our Religion, and yet not so upon the account of the moral Reason, can only be esteemed as a Means of Religion; not ordained for its own sake, but for the sake of that Religion which is founded upon moral Reason.

This Distinction between Religion and the Means of Religion would be of use, if carefully attended to: It would teach Men where to point their best Endeavour, and where to place their Hopes and Expectations: For, if your Zeal and Fervor be spent only upon the Means of Religion, and goes no farther, ye are still in your Sins.

And from hence it is plain; that there can be no Competition between the Duties called Moral, and those called Positive: For, if the positive Duties are the Means and Instruments appointed by God for preserving true Religion and Morality, true Religion and Morality can never be at variance with the Means appointed to preserve them. And, as to the Obligation of observing these Duties, 'tis on all sides equal: For, since we are bound to obey God by all the Ties of moral Duty, and since the Institutions of Religion are of God's Appointment, whatever the Matter of the Institution be, the Obligation to obey is certainly a moral Obligation: Which, duly considered, will shew, that the Text extends to all Parts of Religion, and that *on these two Commandments hang all the Law and the Propbets.*

DISCOURSE XIV.

PART I.

HEBREWS iii. 12.

Take heed, Brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief in departing from the living God.

THE Words of the Text contain an earnest Exhortation, as is evident upon the first View: And the Subject of the Exhortation is Faith towards God; for Faith is the Principle destroyed by an *evil Heart of Unbelief*. But Faith, as some think, is no proper Subject for Exhortation: For, if Faith is a mere Act of the Mind judging upon Motives of Credibility, 'tis as reasonable to exhort a Man to see with his Eyes, as to judge with his Understanding; and the warmest Admonition will not enlarge the Sight, which will still depend upon the Goodness of the Eye, and the Distance and Position of the Object. In Faith the Case is much the same: If the Affections are thoroughly raised, and made eager to embrace the Faith, they may chance indeed to step

in between the Premises and Conclusion, and make Men profess to believe, without knowing or considering the Reasons of Belief; which is to destroy the Foundation of Faith: Or, if they keep their due Distance, and leave the Cause to be decided by Reason and Understanding, their Influence will be nothing, and they might as well have been left out of the Case; since Faith will follow the Judgment the Mind makes upon the Motives of Credibility.

But then, if this be the true Notion of Faith, That it is merely an Act of the Mind assenting to a Truth upon Motives of Credibility, how comes it that in every Page we find the Praises of it in the Gospel? What is there in this to deserve the Blessings promised to the Faithful? Or, whence is it that the whole of our Salvation is put upon this Foot? *Abraham*, we are told, *was justified by Faith, and by Faith inherited the Promises: By Faith we become the Sons of Abraham, and Heirs together with him of the Hope which is through Christ Jesus: By Faith we have admittance to God, and are intitled through the Spirit of Adoption to cry Abba, Father: By Faith we are delivered from the Bondage of Corruption into the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God: By Faith we wait for the Adoption, to wit, the Redemption of our Body.* But how come all these Prerogatives to belong to Faith, if Faith be nothing else but believing Things in themselves credible? Why are we not said to be justified by Sight, as well as by Faith? for is there not the same Virtue in seeing Things visible, as in believing Things credible? is not the Understanding as faulty when it rejects Things credible, as the Eye when it does not perceive Things visible? Tell me then, what is Faith, that it should raise Men above the Level of Mortality, and make them become like the Angels of Heaven?

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But farther; If Faith be only an Act of the Understanding formed upon due Reasons and Motives, how comes it to be described in Scripture as having its Seat in the Heart? The Apostle in the Text cautions against *an evil Heart of Unbelief*: And the same Notion prevails throughout the Books of Scripture, and is as early as our Saviour's first Preaching. In explaining the Parable of the Sower to his Disciples, *Luke viii.* he tells them, *Those by the Way-side are they that hear: Then cometh the Devil, and taketh away the Word out of their Hearts, lest they should believe, and be saved, Ver. 12.* So again, *That on the good Ground are they which in an honest and good Heart hear the Word, and bring forth Fruit with Patience, Ver. 15.* The first sort are those who had an *evil Heart of Unbelief*: The second are those who, as the same Apostle to the *Hebrews* expresses it, *Chap. 10.* had a *true Heart in full Assurance of Faith*. In the Acts of the Apostles, *Philip* tells the Eunuch, That, if he *believed with all his Heart*, he might be baptized, *Chap. viii. 37.* And *Barnabas* exhorts the *Antiochians*, *That with Purpose of Heart they would cleave unto the Lord*; which is only a Periphrasis for Faith, *Chap. xi. 23.* The Apostle to the *Romans* has *expresso* determined this Matter: *If thou shalt confess, says he, with thy Mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine Heart that God hath raised him from the Dead, thou shalt be saved, Chap. x. 9.* In the following Verse he gives this general Reason for his Assertion: *For with the Heart Man believeth unto Righteousness, and with the Mouth Confession is made unto Salvation.*

Since then the Scripture, read to you for the Text, contains an Exhortation to Faith, which supposes a Man's Faith to be influenced by his Affections and Inclinations; which is not always true, if we consider Faith merely as the Assent of the Mind

to a credible Proposition: Since there are also such Things ascribed to Faith in Scripture, such Promises made to it, as cannot belong to it in this Acceptation: Since Faith, thus considered, is a bare Act of the Mind; but the Faith of the Gospel is described as, having its Seat and Operations in the Heart of Man: It is necessary, for the right Understanding of the Text, to inquire,

First, What is the true Notion of Faith.

From whence, in the second Place, it will appear, That it is a proper Exhortation, *Take heed, lest there be in us an evil Heart of Unbelief.*

The first Thing to be inquired after is the true Notion of Faith.

Every Step by which we advance to the last Degree of Perfection in Faith, is an Act of Faith, though of a different kind, and not entitled either to the Praises or Rewards of the Gospel. And hence has arisen great part of the Confusion which has obscured and darkened this Question concerning Faith: For, when Men, not distinguishing between the intermediate Acts of Faith, and that Faith which is the ultimate End and Perfection of the Gospel, ascribe that to one, which only and properly belongs to the other, no wonder if they are found inconsistent with themselves, and Destroyers of Reason and Religion, whilst they seem to themselves to labour for the Promotion of the Doctrine of Righteousness.

To render what I mean plain and intelligible, I desire you to consider the Degrees and Steps of Faith by which Men arrive at Gospel Righteousness. It is one Degree of Faith to believe the Gospels to be true and faithful Accounts; and it is a
Degree

Degree that leads to great Perfection: He that wants this Faith is at a stand, and can never proceed farther. But this is not the Faith we seek after. It is a farther Degree of Faith to believe the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles to be true and real Miracles, and wrought by the Power and Spirit of God. But neither is this Faith complete: For the Miracles were wrought, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of something else: And therefore to believe the Miracles, without believing what the Miracles were intended to prove, is not Christian Faith. Farther still; It is another and a more advanced Degree of Faith to believe that the Spirit of God was given to the Apostles in a large Measure, and to Christ, the Author of the Salvation, without measure. But neither is this the Faith which Christ came to propagate: For, should I ask you, Why are we taught, and why are we to believe, that God gave the Spirit to his Son without Measure, and to the Disciples in a very wonderful manner and degree? would you not easily answer, that these heavenly Endowments were both given and declared to make them fit Teachers, and us ready Disciples, of the Doctrines of God? It is evident then, that these Gifts were subservient to a farther End, and that Christian Faith does not terminate here. But, if, notwithstanding this, you will apply all that you read of Faith in holy Scripture to these or any of these Kinds of Faith, and then imagine that Faith is a very strange Principle of Religion, and of foreign Growth, repugnant to the Sense and Reason of Mankind, and disclaimed by the Light of Nature, which are the usual Compliments bestowed on it in the World; you may thank yourself for the Delusion: the Doctrine of the Gospel of Christ is clear of the Reproach.

Faith, which is the Principle of the Gospel, respects the Promises and Declarations of God, and includes

includes a sure Trust and Reliance on Him for the Performance. Beyond this there is no farther Act of Faith. We are not taught to believe this in order to our believing something else: But here Faith has its full Completion, and leads immediately to the Practice of Virtue and Holiness, the Conditions in which all the Promises of God are founded. For this End was the Son of God revealed, to make known the Will of his Father, to declare his Mercy and Pardon, and to confirm the Promises of eternal Life to Mankind: He that believes and accepts this Deliverance from the Bondage of Sin, and through Patience and Perseverance in Well-doing waits for the blessed Hope of Immortality; who passes through this World as a Stranger and Pilgrim, looking for another Country, and a City whose Builder is God; this is He whose Faith shall receive the Promise, whose Confidence shall have great Recompence of Reward.

If these are hard Sayings, what Defence shall we make for Natural Religion, which requires almost the same Faith, but without giving the same Evidence? Is it not the Profession of every Religion to believe God to be a Rewarder of them who diligently seek him? Could you have any Natural Religion without this Principle? This the Gospel requires of you: And, if Jesus Christ has given you more Evidence for this Faith than ever Nature could afford her Children, forgive him this Injury. Is it become less credible that God will reward the Righteous, because he has sent his Son into the World to declare his full Purpose so to do? Is it harder to trust him now, since he has appeared to us in Signs and in Wonders and in mighty Works, than it was before, when we saw him only by the glimmering Light of Nature? Are the express promises of God, confirm'd to us in Christ Jesus, of less Weight than the general Suggestions of Nature?

ture? If these express Promises, these clear Evidences of the Purpose of God, are not the Things complained of in the Gospel, what are they? Faith has ever been the Principle of Religion, and must ever continue so to be: For, when all other Gifts shall cease, Faith, Hope, and Charity will be the only Gospel Graces which Time shall not destroy.

Religion is a Struggle between Sense and Faith. The Temptations to Sin are the Pleasures of this Life: The Incitements to Virtue are the Pleasures of the next. These are only seen by Faith: Those are the Objects of every Sense. On the side of Virtue all the Motives, all the Objects of Faith engage: On the side of Vice stand the formidable Powers of Sense, Passion, and Affection. Where the Heart is established in the Fulness of Faith, the heavenly Host prevails, and Virtue triumphs over all the Works of Darkness: But, where Sense governs, Sin enters, and is served by every evil Passion of the Heart. If this be the Case; if Religion has nothing to oppose to the present Allurements of the World, but the Hopes and Glories of Futurity, which are seen only by Faith; 'tis no more absurd to say Men are saved by Faith, than it is to say they are ruined by Sense and Passion; which we all know has so much of Truth in it, that it can have nothing of Absurdity.

To this Account of Faith the Definition which the Apostle has given of it (in the eleventh Chapter to the *Hebrews*) exactly agrees: *Now Faith is the Substance of Things hoped for, the Evidence of Things not seen.* Things hoped for are the Things of Futurity, Things which are not seen, as we learn from St. Paul, *Romans viii. 24: We are saved by Hope: But Hope that is seen is not Hope: For what a Man seeth why doth he yet hope for?* Now without Faith there can be no Hope: For, if we do not believe Things
future,

future, we cannot possibly hope for them. Hope therefore is indebted to Faith for all its Objects: For these Things with respect to Hope would be mere Non-entities, were it not for Faith. Considered therefore as Things hoped for, they owe their Substance and their Being to Faith. *Faith then is the Substance of Things hoped for, the Evidence of Things not seen.* The Things not seen are those good Things which God has prepared for them who love him, the Rewards of Virtue and Holiness, which Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither hath the Heart of Man conceived. And that these Things are chiefly meant by the Apostle, is evident from the great Number of Instances subjoined in this Chapter, in which the Thing not seen is generally the Promise of God, that is, the Thing promised by God. Now, the Promises of God being neither Objects of Sense nor Science, but such Things as are made known to us by his Declaration, the Evidence upon which they are received is the Evidence of Faith. The Reason why we believe there are such Rewards, is, because we believe the Word of God: The Reason why we hope to receive them, is because we judge *Him faithful who has promised.*

Since then all the Blessings of Holiness, all the Hopes of Religion, are founded in Faith, is it not very natural to say, that the Man who follows after Holiness and Piety, induced by the glorious Prospects of Futurity, is saved by Faith? that he who sacrifices the World and its Enjoyments to the Hopes of Eternity, depending entirely upon the Truth of God, that he will perform the Word which is gone out of his Mouth, is saved by his Faith, without which he could have had no Hopes, no Expectations, to place against the present Enjoyments of the World? Do but consider the Posture of Mind a Man is in, when he deliberates upon the Good and Evil of his own Actions, and is determining his

his Choice whether to follow the Pleasures of Sin or to endure the Hardships and Fatigues of Virtue: What are his Motives, what are his Deliberations? Is not the whole Contest between Things present and Things to come, the Realities of this Life, and the Uncertainty of the other? Most certainly this is the whole Debate: For, put the Things of this Life and the next upon the same Foot of Certainty and Reality, and there is no Man Fool enough to deliberate in his Choice. Were the Glories of Heaven the Objects of Sense; could we with the Eyes of Flesh look up to the Throne of God, the heavenly *Jerusalem*, and discern *the innumerable Company of Angels, the general Assembly and Church of the First-born, which are written in Heaven, and God the Judge of all, and the Spirits of just Men made perfect, and Jesus the Mediator of the new Covenant, and the Blood of Sprinkling, that speaketh better Things than that of Abel*: Could we have this View, a Man would no more part with his Inheritance above for the short Enjoyments of Sin, than he would sell the Reversion of an earthly Crown for one Morsel of Meat. The Cause of Sin therefore is never argued upon the Comparison between the Glories of Heaven, and the Pleasures of Life. No wicked Man was ever so weak as to say, 'Tis better for me to eat, drink, and be merry this Day and the next, than to reign in eternal Glory and Immortality. But thus he reasons; The Things about me are present and real: I see, I feel the World; and every Sense directs me to the Enjoyment of it; But for Heaven, where is it? Distant it is, I assure, and out of sight; and perhaps is only a Delusion of sickly Imagination. When this Reasoning prevails, as too often it does, tell me, I beseech you, is it not a Victory gained by Sense over the Power of Faith? Had Faith been strong enough to have placed in View the Substance of Things hoped for, to have made evident the Things not seen,

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could the World have so easily prevailed? I trust it could not; for the Things of Faith as much excel the Things of Sense, as the Heavens are higher than the Earth. But, where Faith is not strong enough to make a Competition between the Things of Futurity and the present Pleasures, the World must triumph, and the Sinner will be lost for want of Faith. On the other side, what is it that makes Men willingly endure Afflictions and Persecutions? Do you think the righteous Man so very silly, as not to know that Pleasure is better than Pain, Ease and Tranquillity to be preferred to Vexation and Torment? Can you imagine that he chuses Oppression for Oppression's sake? No certainly: But his Faith, his Trust and Confidence in God, make him esteem the Promises of God as if they were present before his Eyes; to the Hopes of them he sacrifices the World: and, after the Example of his great Master, the Author and Finisher of our Faith, *for the Joy that is set before him, he endures the Cross despising the Shame.* Thus Moses by Faith, when he was come to Years, refused to be called the Son of Pharaoh's Daughter, *chusing rather to suffer Affliction with the People of God, than to enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season.* Mark the Reason which follows, and the Power of his Faith: *Esteeming the Reproach of Christ greater Riches than the Treasures in Egypt: For he had Respect unto the Recompence of Reward.* By Faith also he forsook Egypt, *not fearing the Wrath of the King.* But what Confidence was this? What Forces, what Allies, had he to support him against the united Strength of Egypt? Thus Sense indeed would reason. But *through Faith he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible:* Though he had no visible Protector, yet through Faith he saw the Hand of God stretched out for his Deliverance. This was his Confidence, this his Support.

Towards

Towards the Close of this Eleventh Chapter the Apostle sings the Triumphs of Faith under all the Cruelties of Men: *Others, says he, were tortured; and others had Trial of cruel Mockings and Scourgings yea moreover of Bonds and Imprisonments: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the Sword; they wandered about in Sheepskins und Goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. All these persisted in Faith, not accepting Deliverance that they might obtain a better Resurrection.* The Resurrection was a State they had never seen; it was what they could only hope for: But the Promise of God was to them more than the Evidence of Sight; and to their Trust and Confidence in him they willingly gave up all that their Eyes beheld, and submitted to the Evils, which Sense is ever warning us against.

From this Account it will be easy to understand what the Scripture means, when it tells us *that Faith overcometh the World*: For Religion is a Contest between the World and Faith, between Things present and Things to come. Faith puts us under the Conduct of future Hopes, and Fears, exempts us from the Power and Influence of Things present; which present Things are the World: And therefore 'tis properly said of Faith, *that it overcometh the World*.

To this Notion of Faith agrees likewise what St. Paul has said concerning it in his Comparison between Faith, Hope, and Charity, and other spiritual Gifts, such as speaking with Tongues, Prophecy, and Healing of Distempers. These shall cease, *But now remaineth, says the Apostle, Faith, Hope, and Charity; and the greatest of these is Charity*: For Charity and universal Benevolence is the very Grace and Ornament of Heaven, the Em-

ployment and the Pleasure of blessed Spirits. Nor can Faith and Hope ever be parted from true Religion: For there is no Being so great as not to depend on Faith in God, and Trust in his Power and Wisdom, or to be above hoping any Thing from his Goodness and Benevolence. And therefore the Apostle says expressly of Faith and Hope, that they shall remain, with Charity, the greatest of the three. Other Gifts are bestowed for the Service of the Church, such as Tongues, Miracles, and the like; and they may well cease, when the Occasion which required them ceases: But Faith, Hope, and Charity are not occasional Gifts, but are essential to Religion, and must continue as long as Religion itself.

From this Account we may perceive likewise how the Heart comes to have such an Interest and Influence in the Faith of a Christian. 'Tis the Love of the World that is the Enemy of Faith: And is not the Heart of Man the very Magazine from which the World supplies itself with Arms? Where dwell Self-love, Lust, Envy, and Covetousness, are not these the evil Treasure of an evil Heart? and are not these the fiercest Combatants against Faith? and may not an Heart thus stocked be properly stiled *an Heart of Unbelief*.

In other Matters of Faith, which seem to be of a more abstracted Nature and to depend entirely on the Reason and Judgment of Men, the Heart often interposes with too much Success: For these are so nearly related to the Faith which subdues the World and the Heart, that the Heart, watchful for itself and the World, disturbs the Mind, and raises such Clouds of Passion, as intercept the Light of Truth. To believe Christ to be the Son of God, to have dwelt for ever in the Glory of his Father, from thence to have come to our Redemption, and to have
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published the Faith in Signs and Wonders and mighty Works, are such killing Blows to the Love of the World, that the Heart cannot be unconcerned whilst these Things are debating: And, though they can only be tried at the Bar of Reason, yet the Heart will be Counsel on one Side or other: And even in these Cases there is Reason to remember the Apostolical Admonition, *Take heed, lest there be in you an evil Heart of Unbelief.*

DISCOURSE XV.

PART II.

I PROCEED to consider the Character given in the Text of an unbelieving Heart; namely, That it makes us *depart from the living God*. What may be proper to be said on this Subject may be reduced, I think, under these three Heads:

First, To shew, that it is for want of Faith, considered as a Principle of Religion, that Men *depart from the living God*.

Secondly, That Faith cannot be a Principle of Religion, until it has its Effects and Operations in the Heart.

Thirdly, That the Motions and Operations of the Heart are in great measure under our own Power and Government.

And from hence it will evidently appear, how much it is the Business and Concern of a religious Life to be watchful over the Heart, to guard against all such Affections as will destroy the Influence of Faith, and render the Heart incapable of receiving the Impressions of the Spirit of God.

First then, We are to shew that it is for want of Faith, considered as a Principle of Religion, that Men *depart from the living God*. What is meant by departing from God, will appear by comparing this with the other equivalent Expressions made use of in this Chapter. In the eighth Verse the Apostle introduces the Holy Ghost speaking in the
Language

Language of the Psalmist, and thus forewarning the People, *Harden not your Hearts*. In the tenth Verse God complains of the rebellious *Israelites* in the Wilderness, saying, *They do always err in their Hearts, and they have not known my Ways*. In the Verse immediately after the Text the Apostle thus explains his Meaning: *But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin*. So then, to be hardened in Heart, to err in Heart, not to know or walk in the Ways of God, to be hardened through the Deceitfulness of Sin, are one and the same Thing as departing from the living God: And the Meaning of these figurative Expressions is clearly explained at the seventeenth Verse: *But with whom was he grieved forty Years? was it not with them that had sinned?* As sinners are said to depart from God; so those who forsake Sin, and are converted, are said, in the Language of Scripture, to *turn to God*. Of the holy Baptist, who came preaching Repentance from dead Works, it was foretold, That he *should turn many to the Lord their God*, Luke i. 16. And the Apostles Paul and Barnabas thus describe the Purpose and End of their Mission: *We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these Vanities unto the living God*, Acts xiv. 15.

The Propriety of these Expressions will appear, if we consider God, under the Representation made of him by our Saviour in the Parable of the Prodigal, as the Father of the Family; and Sinners as prodigal Sons, who, weary of their Father's Government, forsake his House, and, reduced by Luxury and Riot, enter into the Service of Strange Masters, till the Sense of Want and their own Misery brings them back to beg Admittance again into their Father's House. Thus the Nations of old forsook the Service of God, their heavenly Father, and fell under the hard Bondage of strange Deities:

They were Apostates from Him who had a Right to their Obedience, and Slaves to those who had no Dominion over them: When they received the Gospel, it was not putting themselves under a new Master, but returning to their old one, and yielding that Obedience which was always due, though never paid before. Since therefore by Faith in the Gospel of Christ we become the Servants of the living God, and are once more entered into his Family, it is easy to apprehend the Reason why the Apostle in the Text charges an unbelieving Heart with Apostacy from the living God: For, if Christian Faith be the Principal by which we are united to the living God, whatever destroys this Principle does at the same time dissolve the Union; and we cannot make Shipwreck of the Faith without departing from God. An unbelieving Heart therefore, that is, an Heart void of Christian Faith, is guilty of Apostacy.

But you may ask perhaps, may not the Heart possibly depart from God through the Solicitations of Vice and Pleasure, and Faith at the same time stand sound and uncorrupted? And there is this Ground for putting the Question, that we see many Men who are buried in Wickedness, whose Life is but one continued Scene of guilty Enjoyments, who sacrifice their Honour, their Faith, and their Religion, to Lust, Covetousness, or Intemperance; who yet profess to believe all the Doctrines of the Gospel, and do really believe them, for ought that any Man knows to the contrary. But, when I reflect upon the express Declarations of the Gospel, *That every one who believeth shall be saved, That all the Workers of Iniquity shall be destroyed*; if these Characters can subsist together, if the same Person at the same Time may be both a Believer and a Worker of Iniquity, there is a greater Contradiction in

in the Gospel than any that has yet been pretended by its keeneft Enemies.

How muft we then account for this Difficulty? The true Answer, I think, is, That the Difficulty arifes from confounding and blending together Ideas which are perfectly diftinct, from not feparating between Faith confidered as a Principle of Knowledge, and as a Principle of Religion. In common Life we know many Things upon the Evidence of Faith :: Such are the Things which we receive upon the Authority of historical Evidence, or upon the Report and Testimony of credible Witnesses: And fuch Influence has this Principle of Knowledge in the World, that there is hardly any thing of Confequence that is not determined by it. There is not a Trial that affects either our Lives or our Fortunes, the Ifsue of which does not depend upon this Principle of Knowledge, the Judge and the Jury not being fupposed to have the Evidence of their own Senfes in the Facts which come under their Determination. I mention this to put it out of Difpute that Faith is one of the Sources or Principles of our Knowledge. Now mere speculative Knowledge has nothing in it of moral Good or Evil: A Man is not better or worfe for what he knows, till he comes to act, or to be influenced to Action by his Knowledge. Bare Knowledge therefore is nothing akin to Religion; for Religion is not one of thofe very indifferent Things, which has neither Good nor Evil in it. The speculative Knowledge therefore of Truths depending upon divine Testimony is mere Knowledge, and not Religion: For there is no Difference in the fimple Act of the Mind, whether the Affent be grounded upon divine Testimony, or human Testimony; unlefs you think that every thing muft be Religion; that depends upon our Belief of the Being of God: Which is not true; becaufe there may be this Belief, where there can be no Religion; for St.

Jan. has told us, *that the Devils believe and tremble.* Now the wicked Man's Faith can be nothing more but this speculative Knowledge or Belief of divine Truths: For 'tis evident it has no effect, no Influence; and is therefore so far from being the saving Faith of the Gospel, that 'tis not in any degree religious. Our Lord in the Gospel, has given us a short Description of Religion, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy Heart and with all thy Soul, and thy Neighbour as thyself.* Now, in order to love God, we must know Him, and his Attributes; in order to love our Neighbour, we must know our Neighbour, and his Condition: And there is just as much Religion in knowing God without loving and obeying him, as there, is in knowing our Neighbour without loving or regarding him. The Man who believes God, and pretends to a right Faith in divine Matters, and lives in the Neglect of God in Contempt of his Commands, and sins in defiance of Knowledge, has just as much Faith, as the Priest and the Levite had Charity, who saw their Neighbour stripped, and wounded, and lying half-dead in the Road, and *looked on him, and passed by on the other Side.* The Knowledge of God is but like other natural Knowledge, as long as it has its Residence in the Head only: To become a Principle of Religion, it must descend into the Heart, and teach us to *love the Lord with all our Minds, with all our Souls, and with all our Strength:* And, if this be true of the Knowledge of God, which is the First and greatest of all divine Truths, it must be true in all other Instances whatever. The Faith then of the Gospel, and which the wicked Man is an utter Stranger to, is that Faith which makes us *cleave stedfastly to the Lord with full Purpose of Heart.* And this will farther appear under the second Head, which was to shew,

Secondly,

Secondly, That Faith cannot be a Principle of Religion, till it has its Effect and Operation in the Heart. If we consider Religion under the Notion of Action, this Proposition has, I think, nothing strange or surprizing in it: For 'tis not only true of Faith, but of every Principle of Knowledge and Action: 'Tis altogether as true of Sense, as 'tis of Faith. As Faith makes us cleave to God, so Sense makes us cleave to the World: But, till Sense has Possession of the Heart, it has no Power or Efficacy, and is of no Use and Service to the World. We learn from Sense the Existence and Reality of Things temporal: But this Assent of the Mind to the Evidence of Sense never made any Man wicked or worldly-minded: For, if it did, no Man would ever be righteous: for the best Man that ever was in the World had his Knowledge of external Things from the Evidence of Sense. But, when Sense stirs the Desires and Affections of the Heart, then it becomes a Principle of Action, and a fierce Combatant for the World against the Powers of Faith. If we remember what was said of the wicked Man with regard to his Faith and Persuasion about divine Truths, we shall find how exactly the righteous Man is in the same Case in respect to sensible Things: As the wicked Man has the Knowledge of Faith, but nothing religious, so has the righteous Man all the Knowledge of Sense, but nothing sensual: The Difference therefore between a sensual Man and a righteous Man does not consist in this, that one knows most of sensible Things, and the other most of divine Things, for this in both Cases may be, and often is false; but it lies in this, that one pursues the Objects of Sense, the other the Objects of Faith.

To trace this Parallel between Sense and Faith a little farther may give us perhaps a true Conception of the Nature of Faith, the Thing we seek after. Let us consider then how the Case stands between Sense and Faith, Things present and Things to come, between Sensuality and Religion. The Desires which God has planted in our Nature are the Springs of Action; and we always propose the obtaining some End, which is the Object of some Desire, in every thing we do. It is Evident then, that, where there is nothing to move and incite our Desires, we must be unconcerned and inactive. All Objects of our Desires are first Objects of the Understanding, according to the known Saying of the Poet, *ignoti nulla Cupido*. But there are many Objects of the Mind which are never Objects of the Passions, for the Mind must not only apprehend the Thing, but likewise apprehend it as a real Thing, and as having the relation of Good or Evil to a Man, before it can have any effect upon our Inclinations. From this Account it is plain, that, to make a Man perform the Actions either of Religion or of common Life, his Desires which are the Springs of Action, must be moved: And, since nothing can move the Desires, which is not first the Object of the Understanding, he must have the Knowledge of the Things of this Life, and of Religion, and consider them under the Notion of Good or Evil with respect to himself.

Now the Enjoyment of the Things of this World is the Business and Employment of the sensual Man: The good Things of Futurity and another Life are the religious Man's Care and Concern. As the Objects are of different Kinds, so the Means of obtaining the Knowledge of the Objects are likewise different. Things present are represented to our Minds by every Sense; the Things of Futurity

rity by no Sense: And in this single Point lies the great Advantage which the World has over Religion. The World has as many Ways of making itself familiar to us, as we have Senses: Religion has only the dark Glimpse of Futurity, such as Reason, in its present feeble and low Condition, can discover. The only Thing then that is wanting to set Religion upon as good a foot as the World, and to make it able to bear up against the Impressions of Sense, is a certain Principle of Knowledge with Respect to the Objects of Religion: For, could we as evidently possess ourselves of the Reality of the Things of another Life, as we are possessed of the Reality of the Things of this, there would be no more Competition between Sense and Religion, than there is Comparison between the Things of this Life and of Eternity. To supply this Darknes of our Knowledge in Religion is the very End and Design of Revelation: For, could we as plainly discern the good Things of Futurity, as we see and feel the good Things present, there would be no more Want of Revelation to make us acquainted with the other World, than there is to make us acquainted with this. Now, as Sense is evidently to be distinguished into a Principle of Knowledge, and a Principle of Action, so is Faith likewise. We never esteem a Man to be sensual or worldly-minded, merely because Sense has furnished him with a comprehensive Knowledge of sensible Objects: So neither is a Man to be accounted a religious Man, because of that Faith which flows from Revelation; considered merely as a Principle of religious Knowledge. This Distinction between Sense as a Principle of Knowledge, and a Principle of Action, may be seen in any or in every Instance. An honest Man knows the Use and Value of Riches, as well as a Thief. 'Tis not therefore the Knowledge of the Object, but the immoderate Desire of it, that makes the Difference:

And

And one Man may be justly hanged for stealing five Pounds, and another be very innocent who had seen and examined the Value of the Mines of *Peru*. In Religion the Case is just the same; Faith, as long as it continues to be a mere Object of the Mind, is no Principle of Religion; and one is no more a religious Man for knowing the Articles of Religion, than he is a sensual Man for walking with his Eyes open and seeing the World. An unbelieving Heart is the same Thing in Faith, that an Antipathy is in Sense, and supposes us rather to hate than not to know our Duty. Many Men are ruined by the Love of Wine and strong Liquors. Stop but the Passage to the Heart, and these Objects lose all their Force and Power, and a Man sees the Wine sparkle with less Concern than he sees the Moon shine. And this is the Case of all those who have a natural Aversion to strong Drinks, which is no uncommon Case. This Aversion affects Sense only as 'tis a Principle of Action, and leaves it free as 'tis the Principle of Knowledge: And in like Manner, the unbelieving Heart destroys that Faith which is the Life and Principle of Religion, though it may not, perhaps, disturb the Objects of Faith which have their Residence in another Place.

Upon the whole then; since Religion is not a mere Science and Speculation, but is to be the Work and Employment of our Lives, and to exert itself in the Love of God and our Neighbour, as our blessed Saviour has taught us, since the Knowledge of any thing, or the Belief of any thing, considered merely as Acts of the Mind, are no Principles of Action; but every Action proposes to itself some End, which is the Object of some Desire; it evidently follows, that Faith cannot be a Principle of Religion, till it becomes the Object of our Desires, that is, till it has its Effects and Operations in

the Heart. This Notion of Faith is not only probable, but necessary, upon the View of our own Nature, and the Origin of all our Actions, which arise in the same Manner, whatever the Principle of Action be. Even Sense works in the same Manner, and, powerful as it is, has no Effect, till it has made its way to the Heart, the Seat of all our Passions and Affections. There, and there only, it prevails as a Principle of Action. Sense produces no Sensuality, till it warms the Affections with the Pleasures of the World; and Faith produces no Religion, till it raises the Heart to love and to embrace its Maker.

The great Advantage the World has over Religion lies in the Certainty and Reality of its Objects, which flow in upon us at every Sense. To supply this Defect on the Part of Religion, Revelation was given to assure us of the Certainty and Reality of Things future; without which Assurance they could have no Effect or Influence on our Affections. The Objects of Faith then support Religion in the same Manner as the Objects of Sense promote and encourage the Love of the World: And, as there could be no sensual Love of the World, if there were no Objects of Sense; so neither could there be any Religion, where there are no Articles of Faith: For as, in general, there can be no Desire, where there is no Knowledge; so, in particular, there can be no Principle of Faith, where there are no Objects of Faith.

All the Articles of the Gospel tend to one of these Ends, either to assure us of the Certainty of the Revelation and Redemption by Christ Jesus, or to set before us the very Substance and Image of the Things hoped for. For this last Purpose our Lord rose visibly from the Grave, to give us the very Evidence of Sense for that Part of our Faith, which seemed to be most contradictory to the Experience

rience of Sense. For the first Purpose, to assure us of the Certainty of the Revelation and Redemption by Christ Jesus, *our Lord was declared to be the only-begotten Son of God, the Brightness of his Father's Glory, and the express Image of his Person; by whom the Worlds were made, and who upholdeth all Things by the Word of his Power;* that we, knowing in whom we have trusted, might hold fast the Confidence and Profession of our Faith without wavering: (*For He is faithful that promised.*) When Christ was declared by the Voice out of the Cloud to be the Son of God, the same Voice gave the Reason of the Declaration; *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him,* Luke xvii. 5. To reject therefore these Articles of the Gospel, is to reject the Revelation and the Redemption of Christ, and to set out purely on the Foot of Natural Religion. How reasonably you may do this, and how well it becomes your Condition, the Time will not permit me now to shew.

These Objects of Faith are our Motives and Incitements to Holiness and Righteousness; and, if we suffer them to have their due Influence on our Hearts, they produce that Faith, which is the Life and Spirit of a Christian, which unites him to God, and will entitle him to Glory at the great Day. How far 'tis in our Power to promote or obstruct this Influence, will appear under the last Head, which was, to shew,

Thirdly, That the Motions and Operations of the Heart are in great Measure under our own Power and Government.

I shall not spend much of your Time in a plain Case, and in which every Man's own Experience is his best Instructor. — We find daily, that we can check our Passions and Inclinations, to serve the Purposes of this Life; and, if we would do as much for

for that which is to come, we should answer all that the Apostle in the Text requires of us, when he exhorts us to *take heed of an evil Heart of Unbelief*. Were it not in our Power to suspend the Influence of our Passions, Man would have no more Freedom or Liberty than a Stone, and would, consequently be utterly incapable of Religion. 'Tis not in our Power to feel, or not to feel, the Impressions of Sense: Our Eyes, our Ears, and every Sense, present before us the Objects of the World, whether we will, or no; and, if these Objects can as uncontrollably take Possession of our Hearts, as they do of our Minds and Imaginations, all Men must as necessarily follow the Dictates of Sense as they admit the Objects of Sense: Which would destroy not only the Power of Faith, but all moral Virtue, all Distinction of Good and Evil. But this is not the Case: For, tho' we cannot see Things as we will, yet 'tis in our Power to pursue and court them as we please: We can supple our Inclinations, and make them yield to our Will; as is evident in the many Instances where Men sacrifice their present Enjoyments to the distant Prospects of Honour or Preferment: For the future Things of this Life are no more the Objects of Sense, than the Things of another Life; and 'tis not Sense but Judgment, that refuses the present Good for a distant Advantage: And 'tis but an Instance of the same Reason and Judgment to restrain the sensual Appetites, and to make room for the Hopes of Immortality to enter in and possess the Heart; and this is truly the Work of Religion. God has placed before us Life and Death, Things present, and Things to come. If things temporal have this Advantage, that *they are seen*, yet the Things which are not seen have this Prerogative to balance that Advantage, that *they are Eternal*. The Truth of these Things is founded both on Reason and on the Testimony of God. If we receive his Testimony, 'tis well: But,

if

if we interest our Hearts in the Cause, and act as Men resolved to secure to themselves these blessed Hopes, then is our Faith made perfect. And, since this depends upon the due Regulation of our Desires, which are subject to the Will and Judgment of Man, 'tis plain that the true Christian Faith is an internal Principle, a religious Habit and Disposition of Soul, which, like other good Habits, depends upon the Care we take to preserve the Innocence and Purity of our Hearts and Minds. And this sufficiently shews the Reasonableness and the Sense of the Apostle's Exhortation in the Text, *Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil Heart of Unbelief in departing from the living God.*

F I N I S.

